

WOMENFOLK



Cover image: Paper Amy

WOMENFOLK



INTRODUCTION
INTERVIEWS
RESOURCES

womenfolk.co

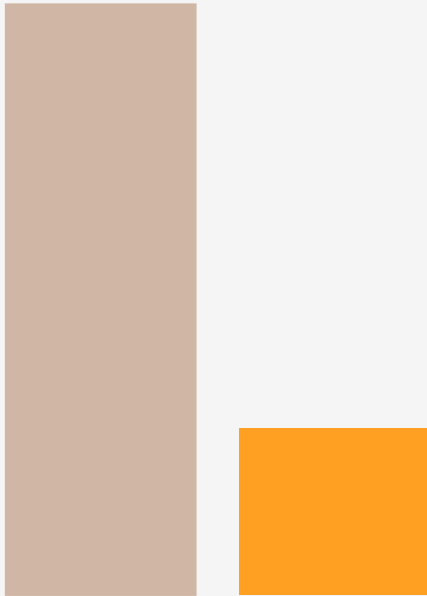
Womenfolk is a celebration of female design entrepreneurs in Northern Ireland. We started this project to celebrate existing design businesses and their achievements as well as encouraging and inspiring those thinking of starting something new.

Through interviews, events, exhibitions and resources, our community has grown over the past two years and we are excited to continue building our network of entrepreneurs in the years ahead.

Our first publication shares a selection of interviews with Northern Irish designers. We hope you enjoy the diverse stories, experiences and tips we have collected from those “in the know.”

THE DESIGN COUNCIL'S DESIGN ECONOMY 2018 REPORT FOUND:

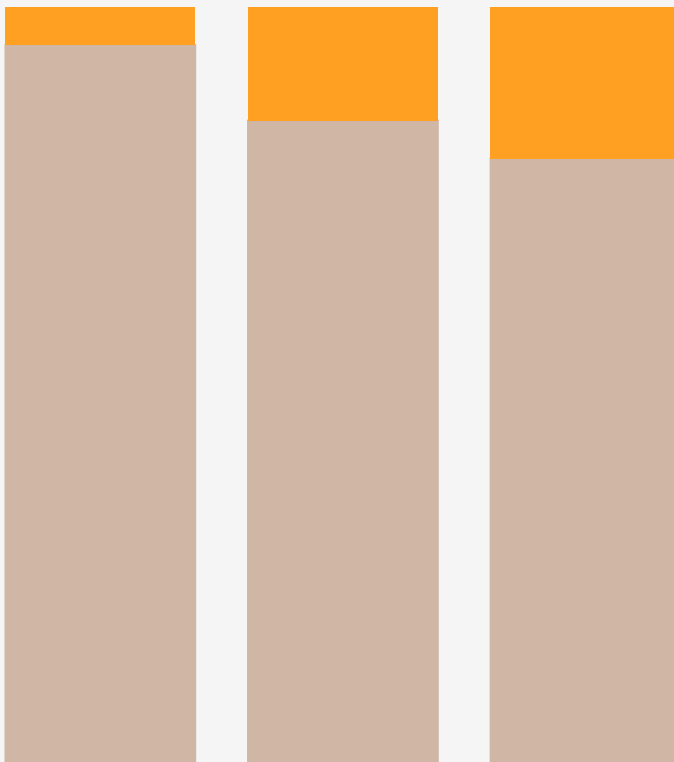
78% of the UK's design workforce is male.



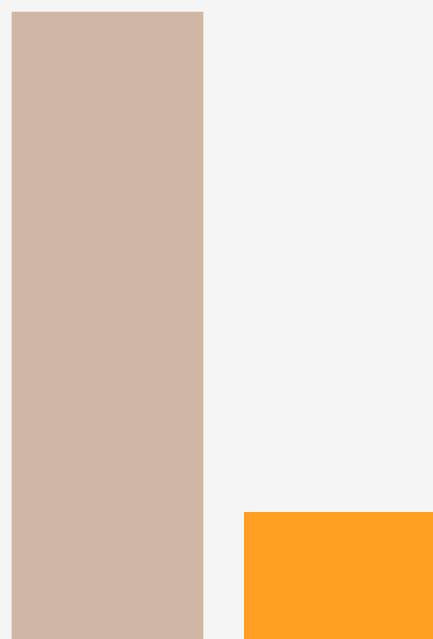
This is also despite women making up 63% of all students studying creative arts and design courses at university.



The overall ratio is skewed by the male dominated subsectors of product and industrial design (95%), digital design (85%), and architecture and built environment (80%).



Women are also less likely than men to be in senior roles, with only 17% of design managers being female.



 Male designers  Female designers

For a successful, thriving design industry in Northern Ireland, it's important to have more women involved in the sector especially within leadership roles.

A 2017 Morgan Stanley report found that more gender diversity led to increased productivity, greater innovation, better products, better decision-making and higher employee retention and satisfaction.

The 2018 PwC report, "Women in Work Index: Closing the gender pay gap", suggests government should focus on encouraging female entrepreneurship.

Countries with a larger share of female employers (self-employed with employees) tend to have smaller gender pay gaps, which suggests that promoting female entrepreneurship and women in decision-making positions can help promote gender equality.

Having more women in design is better for everyone.

JOBS & OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE SECTOR

Design is integral to the economy, innovation and learning and according to government statistics from 2014 is the fastest growing creative industries sector both in terms of new jobs and gross value added and is worth £3.2 billion a year to the country's economy (creativeindustries.co.uk)

The UK has the second largest design sector in the world and the largest design industry in Europe and also ranks fourth in the world for design exports and exports 50% more design than imports. (Design Council)

There is an emerging skills gap on the horizon that is already beginning to influence the economy. Skills shortages and gaps amongst those already working in design-skilled occupations cost the UK economy £5.9 billion in lost output in 2015. (Design Council)

Design jobs are available within the following sectors as well as non-traditional sectors including banking.

Communications design

Graphics, brand, print, information design and corporate identity

Digital and multimedia design

Website, animation, film and television idents, digital design and interaction design, IT business analysts, architects and systems designers, Programmers and software development professionals, Web design and development professionals, Publishing of computer games, Other software publishing, Computer programming activities

Fashion and textiles design

Fashion and textiles Tailors and dressmakers, Manufacture of other wearing apparel and accessories

Interior and exhibition design

Retail design, office planning/workplace design, lighting, display systems, exhibition design

Product and industrial design

Consumer/household products, furniture, industrial design (including automotive design, engineering design, medical products), mechanical engineers, design and development engineers, engineering professionals, manufacturers of other products of wood, consumer electronics etc.

Architecture & Built environment

Civil engineers, architects, town planning officers, Chartered architectural technologists, Architectural and town planning technicians, Draughtspersons, Gardeners and landscape gardeners

Craft design

Weavers and knitters, glass and ceramics makers, decorators and finishers, Furniture makers and other craft woodworkers. Other skilled trades, manufacture of ceramic household and ornamental articles and manufacture of jewellery and related articles

Service design

Service design can be both tangible and intangible, and can involve communication, environment and behaviours. Addresses the functionality and form of services from the perspective of the user.

Other

Including advertising including account managers and creative directors, aerospace design, building design, engineering design, landscape design, jewellery design, mechanical design etc.

(Taken from the Design Council definition at www.designcouncil.org.uk)



Christine James, Rosy James and Alice Muir of Blick Shared Studios at Blick Malone HQ

Womenfolk is a project close to our hearts.

Blick Shared Studios is an organisation founded and run by women. We host a variety of creative industry support and networking events and generally have more women than men in the audience, but sadly don't see that translated into female-led businesses using our workspace.

Currently just 37% of the workspace across our three properties is occupied by female-led businesses.

We know women are more than capable and don't believe they need special help, but we would like to see more women with a passion for running their own business make that dream a reality.

We have set up this project with the aim of inspiring those women who attend our events and dream of running their own business to follow the example of the many talented women design entrepreneurs currently working in NI.



atilla's

RAW HONEY

wild tea tree

100% Pure Organic Australian Honey

250g



DONE & DUSTED DESIGN

Dani McFerran is the founder of Done and Dusted Design. She believes in being honest and personal; creating a strong relationship with each client and following that through with solid design and marketing skills that best demonstrate how their business can truly prosper.

What made you decide to set up your business?

After working for many years in the design industry in the UK and in the USA, I wanted to start something new, something different in comparison to what was out there at the time. I had been working in a leading design studio for many years and loved the thrill of completing branding alongside some of the most talented designers in NI. I'd then departed for a design management job working between London and Belfast and after two years, I felt motivated to go out on my own. I wanted to really stay true to what I believed was the best way to work with clients - building a team that wasn't just based in the same studio, or even in the same country.

What's the hardest thing you've faced since setting up, and how did you overcome it?

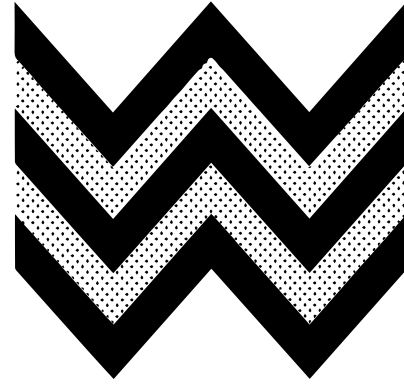
I think initially it was time management to get everything working smoothly - working with global clients means working 24/7 depending on timezones and deadlines. After getting into a good rhythm and building good relationships with our clients, I was able to plan better and schedule meeting times that suited the whole team. As I took on more people, it was easier to delegate 1:1's with clients to a member of the team who was in that time zone and have them report back to everyone. It gave each member a sense of really being a part of the whole turn around of the job at hand.

What are you most proud of so far in your career, any highlights you'd like to share?

I think opening the office in Manhattan, NYC. That was such an amazing journey. To be able to do that and make it successful, it was truly life changing. I was living in Hoboken, New Jersey with 3 girls who were also high flyers in their companies and we really bounced off each other so well - learning from each other and sharing our experiences of being female in the corporate world. My daily commute by train to the previous site of the World Trade Centre (twin towers) was daunting, at first. I got out on the street and made my way to Fulton Centre where I had taken office space. The view was spectacular. The office building itself was featured in the classic 80's film Wall Street - Michael Douglas' office was the very floor I was working from and that view... well, every day I felt truly grateful for the entire experience.

How have you found dealing with a new regime and having to separate work-life/home-life and do you have any advice?

Plan, plan and plan some more. This has been the best decision for my health, happiness and life balance. I would happily encourage anyone thinking of going out on their own to really just go for it - you won't look back. You move in different circles and what is really surprising is that the more people you engage with, the more help you receive. Other entrepreneurs know how tough it can be and people genuinely want to reach out and help. For me, it's meant more time for travel and seeing my family and friends all over the globe. It's helped with my celiac and lactose intolerance in that previously, I was in a very stressful job and it played havoc with my energy levels. Thankfully I don't have that at all now.



WHITEPOT STUDIOS

Vicky Potts is the co-founder of Whitepot Studios, a games development studio which she set up with her partner in 2016.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

I graduated from Queen's University Belfast with a First Class Honours in Computer Science MEng in 2015. During the final year of my degree I obtained an NVQ in Business Development and co-founded IVEA labs with three colleagues. I am now co-founder of an independent games development studio called Whitepot Studios, which I set up with my partner Adam in 2016. Whitepot Studios is a kickass Belfast-based games development studio. We have created games for Android, iOS, and PC using both HTML5 and Unity, building our portfolio and creating a variety of games for clients and bespoke use cases. Our primary goal is to create emergent core IP video game titles for the table-top and board-game savvy audience. We encourage emergent gameplay and narrative by using well-tested, fun and engaging mechanics found by modern board games that few video games take advantage of; social deduction, traitor elements, and roleplaying, to name a few.

What or who influences and motivates you?

Attending events and conventions where I get to showcase what I've been working on and see the faces of players is really fun. I'd like to make a game that hits household name status.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

a. biggest hurdle

Graduating and going straight into setting up my own business without a huge amount of normal industry experience under my belt. I think doing that and being able to set up a second, more successful business has been a massive challenge that my co-founder Adam and I have overcome.

b. proudest moment/accomplishment

Winning the MCV Women In Games Rising Star Award. That was a fantastic event at the Facebook headquarters in London, and there were other amazing women there. The whole day felt like a giant, welcoming hug. I really enjoyed it and hope that there are other NI women winning these sorts of awards in the future.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Make a portfolio! It's so important to have something to show for what you've done. Add to it, collaborate with others, take part in events like game jams or hackathons - keep it up to date, and don't sell yourself short.



ART
IS ANYTHING
YOU CAN
GET
AWAY WITH.

JACKY SHERIDAN

Jacky Sheridan is an illustrator, typographer and resident at UsFolk, Belfast. She creates controversial, topical and humorous illustrations focusing on sexuality, political activism and much more.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

I'm an Irish illustrator based in Belfast who works primarily in branding as well as typographic and editorial illustration often focusing specifically on the controversial - feminism, alternative music, political activism, sexuality, anything involving taking the piss and of course, dogs wearing fishnet suspenders. I am an active part of UsFolk illustration agency which is the only one of its kind in Northern Ireland, and is where I work from in our new home in the River House building in the city centre.

What or who influences or motivates you?

I love looking at other mediums for inspiration rather than just other illustrators - screen printing and letter press typography are massive influences on my work and have been from the start, I love painters and fine artists like David Hockney and David Shrigley, but to be honest I'd say the main inspiration behind my work actually comes from photography. It's the perfect art form for any illustrator to learn the basics of good illustration from - whether that be composition, focus, emphasis, colour, lighting etc. My favourite photographer of all time is probably Derek Ridgers.

What has been your biggest hurdle and your proudest moment or accomplishment?

a. biggest hurdle

It would be dishonest of me not to mention mental health here. Like God knows what percentage of creatives have suffered with bad mental health. It makes creating in general never mind creating something you actually LIKE, seem damn near impossible. It's a hurdle that unfortunately a lot of us have to jump over and over again, but the only advice I can give is that beating yourself up for falling at said hurdle isn't going to make it any fucking easier to jump over it the next time.

b. proudest moment/achievement

I'm lucky to say I've had a few in my career so far, from bagging dream clients like Facebook and Vice to getting asked back to teach on my old University course. But probably the one that's brought me the most pride and joy has been getting to be a part of my illustration agency UsFolk from the beginning. I swear, all the blood, sweat and tears to build up the illustration scene that Belfast had been crying out for has been worth it to get to work with such amazing people all the time that I'm very lucky to call friends.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Refer to art directors by name when cold emailing, don't have your images on your site that aren't sized for web (while you're at it, check how your site looks on mobile) and if you ever find yourself jealous of someone else's work, make damn sure to try and befriend them because you can probably learn something really worthwhile.



WENDY WARD

Wendy Ward Lighting was born from a fascination of the translucency of porcelain and its interaction with light. Over the last few years Wendy spent time working with a number of ceramic and lighting companies refining her craft including internationally acclaimed Belleek Pottery and the International Ceramic Research centre in Denmark.

What is the importance of craftsmanship in design?

I believe craftsmanship is the essence of great design. With great craftsmanship the design exhibits quality, passion and attention to detail telling the individual story of the maker and the hand. Through my practice I strive to create functional, desirable products that are lifestyle orientated- the ability to create beautiful objects, each bespoke and timeless are a result of craftsmanship and skill which has been built up over time. Our products are all hand crafted therefore each one is unique. The porcelain naturally diffuses the light therefore the design will not only bring character but a soft warm ambience to an interior. Craftsmanship is also key in enabling customisation options for clients to suit their brief and budget. Having spent some time as designer in residence at Belleek Pottery refining my craft I was delighted to be awarded an international award for exceptional ability to combine the qualities of handcraft into an industrial production process.

How do you showcase your making process?

When someone buys your craft or design they are not just buying the object but the story, passion and skill that defines it. An online blog and social media channels including Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, enable me to showcase my practice, process and story of how a design evolves from concept to finished piece. Having recently attended Ambiente, Frankfurt, international trade shows enable me to network with clients, designers and companies and build my brand.

Applying for international competitions and exhibitions has also given me opportunities to showcase and exhibit my designs and process. My work was part of the travelling exhibition 'Shaping the Future', run by Ceramics and its Dimensions. The exhibition toured six European cities - Selb, Belfast, Stoke-on-Trent, Berlin and Ljubljana and Prague.

In which direction do you see your design business developing?

It has been an exciting and rewarding journey so far and I look forward to what the future holds for the business. Having launched the Wendy Ward Collection at Belleek Living, I will continue to work with Belleek to extend the range over the next few years. I would love to work with interior designers and architects on bespoke lighting installation for hotels, restaurants and luxury homes. My ambition is to build an international lighting brand and therefore I wish to exhibit and build partnerships within the major design centres - London, Paris, Milan and New York.



MAVEN

At Maven, sisters Catherine and Patricia McGinnis have curated a selection of largely Scandinavian and Irish products. With a belief that everyday items should be enhanced by great design and that shopping should be all about the friendliness, Maven is a treasure trove that will make your heart beat a little faster and make you leave with a smile.

What motivated you to set up your own business with your sister Patricia?

Patricia and I got our heads together a few years ago, we were both at cross roads in our careers. Patricia had worked in the same job for 8 years after moving back from London and I had recently completed a Masters in Business, and with the recession in full force I was struggling to find the right job. We wanted a positive change, a better work life balance (not sure we have achieved that... yet...) and have a business we were passionate about. Our dad is self-employed so the idea of setting up on our own didn't seem completely bonkers. We've sat after many a family dinner chatting business and that's what Patricia and I do now – our family are always keen to chip in too... As business partners we complement each other perfectly.

Maven came about out of a love for design and a frustration that lots of the beautiful products we were sourcing for interiors clients (and ourselves) couldn't be purchased anywhere on the island, North or South. Seeing the gap in the market and after many conversations we decided to open Maven. We signed our lease in September 2013, pulled together our website and brand, blagged accounts with our suppliers and threw up a few shelves in our beautiful premises, Reid Memorial Hall. We raised a few eyebrows opening a store in 2013 (given the economic climate at the time) but we were confident in our products and brand. Not long after we opened we started the Maven Sessions, a series of taster workshops where you could learn a new skill or craft such as weaving or creative writing. We wanted to create a community and the sessions were a fun way of doing this.

What are some of the challenges and successes you have seen so far?

We are delighted and completely grateful that Maven has been a success so far. Retail can be a pain in the arse! BUT it's also amazing – we really do enjoy Maven and the community we have built. We have so many lovely regular customers. In our first year we were shortlisted in The Irish Times Best Shops and then again in 2015. Alongside our customer base, the store continues to grow and we have more larger pieces of furniture now on display. One of our biggest challenges is logistics – we all know about the ridiculous freight cost of furniture to Ireland! We work hard to bring these costs down so that they are not passed onto our customer. When we first opened we were first and foremost a small shop and interior design practice and now we offer personal shopping, commercial sales and commercial styling.

3 tips for designers looking to retail their work

Pricing, presentation and photography!

We absolutely love working with and being a stockist of Irish designers. Firstly the product needs to suit the ethos of Maven then we look at pricing and presentation. The advice we can offer is that the designer needs to make their product profitable for them so they can sell it at a realistic wholesale price. Presentation is key – if your product can be gifted then have well presented boxes or packaging, which makes it all that bit easier for the customer buying the gift. Maven is still a relatively small business and we don't have huge photography budget – it's easier for us to push your products if we have beautiful photography.



STUDIO IDIR

Aisling Rusk is the founder of Studio idir, a small, design-led architecture practice that flourishes in the in-between. Aisling is interested in the impact that the built environment can have on the negotiation of difference within societies that are in or moving out of conflict. She is also interested in liminality, or practices of locating in-between, particularly in divided and contested contexts where divisive binaries are rife.

What makes your architectural practice different?

Being unapologetically feminine in a very male-dominated industry. As a female architect, I design from a different perspective to my male contemporaries. I think my colourful branding embraces the feminine, as does the name of my practice, Studio idir (meaning in-between). As women, we often find ourselves operating in-between different roles - blurring the boundaries between personal and private, home and work. My other important job is being a mother to two little people, who have been known, on occasion, to join me for site visits and client meetings. For me, this focus on blurring boundaries, being in-between, extends to every corner of my practice. It influences the way I approach working with clients, combining my design skills with their unique expertise in their home and life. I also seek to play with the thresholds between inside and out and bring together the best of light-filled, expansive contemporary design with the irreplaceable character and charm of old buildings. And I enjoy collaborating and problem-solving with other makers - from the fellow creatives and design team members involved in a job to the skilled tradesmen on-site bringing our designs to life. With architecture, the end result is always a team effort.

Who are some of your design heroes?

I love the Scandinavian masters, such as Sverre Fehn and Alvar Aalto, for their sensitivity to context and materiality - the timeless ways in which their work references and sits within nature. Trees, lakes, rugged terrain - all are strongly represented in their projects. I admire Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue for their deeply symbolic, poetic, allegorical works such as the Igualada Cemetery and (love it or loath it) the Scottish Parliament Building. I also deeply admire Irish Modernist furniture-maker and architect, Eileen Gray, for her boldness and brilliance, blazing a trail for female architects right back in the early 20th century. And the person who introduced me to her - my former boss, Barbara Weiss, who showed me, by example, how a female architect can strongly lead a successful architecture practice.

What advice for someone wanting to set up an architectural practice?

Start by doing a project for yourself that really puts across what you're about as a designer. Even if it's only small. The process will give you invaluable experience, build your confidence, and provide you with useful contacts and material for marketing. I was fortunate to be able to extend my own house, which I then had professionally photographed and published in a couple of national magazines (free advertising). But it could be just be an item of furniture... when my super-talented friends Holly and Pete set up Board Grove Architects in Melbourne, their first project was a pair of coffee tables for themselves. They photographed them beautifully, exhibited them, and managed to get them featured on Dezeen - good going! Get branding done by someone who gets you and what you're about. And splash out on nice business cards. These things act as a statement of intent to show prospective clients, the world at large and - importantly - yourself, that you're serious about what you do. Take risks and follow random leads. But don't feel you have to take every job that comes your way - it's important to always reserve the right to say no when a job doesn't feel like a good fit, or the timing isn't right. Get a mentor. Approach someone you admire, and ask them to mentor you - they'll probably say yes. I have a great mentor I meet every month or so, who offers invaluable advice, encouragement and gentle challenge in the areas I need it. I get to benefit from his years of experience and expertise in practice, plus introductions to people I might not otherwise have the opportunity to speak to. This has been incredibly helpful during Studio idir's first year in business.



LITTLE DESIGNS

Kim Hetherington is founder of Little Designs, an online shop selling illustrated pins, prints and greetings cards. Kim is the designer, order processor and package-upper and started digitally doodling in 2017 and has been creating cute things ever since.

What inspired you to start designing pins?

Initially - when I first joined Instagram - I noticed that the majority of the big Etsy sellers I was following sold their designs as pins and people seemed to love collecting them. I noticed that quite a few of these small businesses were able to turn their 'side hustle' into a full time gig, partly through selling their enamel pins which in turn, allowed them to create a more extensive product range. The idea of someone being able to collect my own designs was something that had always really excited me and after buying a few pins from my favourite small businesses, I thought it was time to take the plunge myself! It's an expensive and slow process but I am so glad that I went for it. My pins have quickly become my best-seller on Etsy and at craft fairs.

Are there any new projects or designs you're currently working on?

I'm currently working on more pin designs! I love to keep one step ahead and gradually release new designs. I think it involves a lot of trial and error, but now I think I'm finally starting to grasp what works and what doesn't. My llama pin was received so well, that I've refreshed the design and sent it off to my manufacturer - so watch this space! I'm also in the middle of designing new greeting cards. I started off with greeting cards and that's definitely one area that I would love to keep working on too.

Do you have any advice for those looking to start their own small business?

My advice for anyone starting their own small business, or even thinking about it is to just go for it. If you have a passion or a flair for something, don't waste it. Do your research and start small, bringing out a few things at first to see what works. It's hard when you're just starting out to remember that that's exactly what you're doing - just starting out! You don't need to have a whole range of products and throw all your money into creating them. Another piece of advice that I think is so, so important is to not expect things to immediately fall into place overnight. There will be so many obstacles, setbacks and weeks of quiet spells. Good things take time and just because it happened quickly for someone on Instagram, doesn't mean it won't happen for you. I find that comparison is often the thief of joy and if you start to get wrapped up in how many sales or followers you have made in 'X' amount of time, you aren't going to enjoy the process. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there, and don't under-sell yourself just to make a few sales. People appreciate quality over quantity!

How have you found the art and craft scene within Northern Ireland?

I have been so surprised with the art/craft scene in Northern Ireland. I thought it would be an extremely hard community to become a part of, but everyone I have come across has been so friendly and genuinely want to see you succeed. I've done quite a few craft fairs that have been ran by the most fantastic bunch of people, who put their all into organising great events. I think the art scene is absolutely thriving, with some who have been doing what they love for years and some who are only starting to find their feet but are both accepted as equals, which is so refreshing. There are so many new opportunities out there for people in the creative field in Northern Ireland that I think didn't previously exist. Events like Belfast Design Week really help to promote small businesses and open the doors to other platforms. It's amazing to see how much people love to celebrate the creative industry. What I would say is don't worry, don't stress, life is too short and things will naturally come together with a little bit of effort but not caring too much! Do what makes you happy!



MARIE-CLAIRE FERGUSON

Marie-Claire is a milliner who started her career in archaeology and landscape architecture. Once her child was born she grew her hobby into a career by gaining millinery qualifications and started her business in England before relocating back to Northern Ireland.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

Millinery was not the initial career path I set out on. I studied both Archaeology and Landscape Architecture at University in England and worked in the field of heritage and archaeology for about 12 years, it was a great experience that enabled me to travel worldwide to some amazing places. It was only on the birth of my daughter that I realised the amount of travel and long hours associated with this line of work wasn't very compatible to bringing up a child. I had in the years previously, undertaken a night class in millinery, purely as a hobby - but had then got completely hooked on it. I loved the tactile, 3D, sculptural element to the craft. I then completed another few years of courses in order to gain some millinery qualifications and following that set up a millinery business in Yorkshire. I returned to Northern Ireland about 8 years ago now and have been running my millinery business from a studio on the edge of Strangford Lough ever since.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment?

a. biggest hurdle

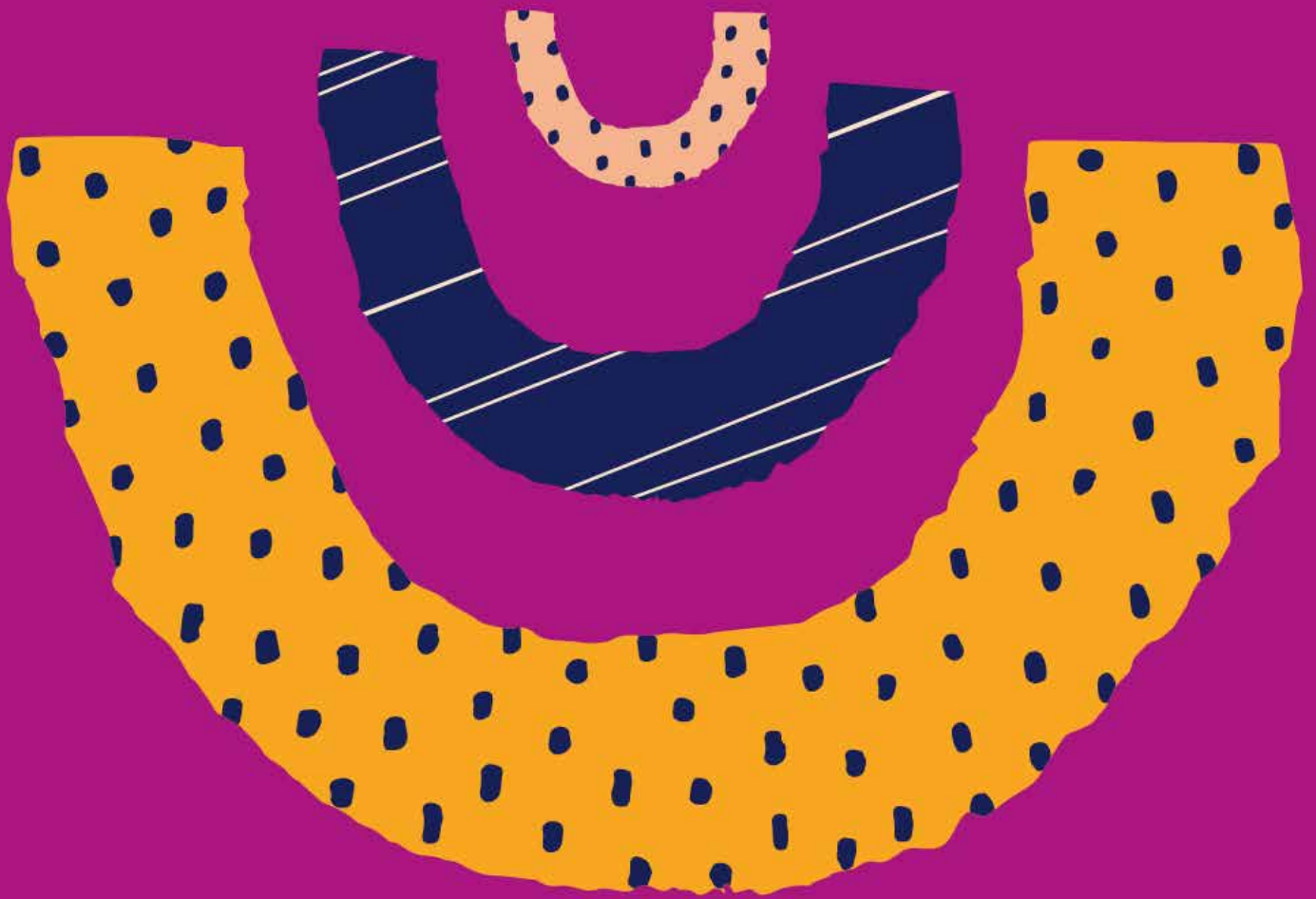
I suppose I'm lucky enough to not have seemed to face many major hurdles in my business (so far...!). The transition from working in England, where there is an established millinery network and an understanding of handcrafted pieces, to Northern Ireland where (at the time) there wasn't a great deal of demand for hat wearing or awareness of the craft of millinery posed a bit of a challenge. Thankfully I retained many customers from the UK and have also established a base of loyal clients internationally.

b. proudest moment/accomplishment

I suppose many people would see dressing a 'celebrity' or 'high profile person' as an accomplishment, but that doesn't really do it for me. I feel proudest when a customer who initially felt nervous about wearing a hat or had never bought one before, leaves my studio with a big grin on their face saying they'll definitely be back for 'the next one'. For me designing a piece for someone means taking the time to get to know them a bit over a coffee, finding out about their style, outlook and personality and then using that insight to create a piece unique to them, something they feel comfortable and happy in. I've made hats for a number of film productions and I enjoy the challenge of creating authentic looking period pieces to the strict deadlines imposed, (although it doesn't always feel terribly enjoyable at the time!).

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

My main piece of advice to give to young or graduate designers here would be to experience work and business as much as possible abroad. Travel as much as you can and try and work in as many different design environments as possible and don't be afraid to ask questions. Also trust your 'gut instinct', you know where your real skills and talent lie, hone them and make them your trademark. Don't get distracted by fashions and fads, what you do needs to be authentic, enduring and set you apart from the more fickle, throwaway high street market.



ALICE KEARNEY DESIGN

Alice Kearney is a Belfast based Graphic Designer and Illustrator and enjoys to work in the blurred lines where the two processes meet. Recently she has been working on several projects for the music industry in Northern Ireland.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

I live and work in lovely Belfast. I'm a bit of design chameleon; I'm a graphic designer and illustrator so my work isn't just put in one neat box. My work usually blurs the lines between the two. For me they work hand in hand. This can sometimes be tricky for getting work as I'm too "illustration-y" or too "design-y" but it hits the perfect sweet spot for my clients. A lot of my work nowadays is within the music industry. I have worked with the Oh Yeah Music Centre, the Northern Ireland Music Prize, a long list of musicians and Lowden.

What/who influences/motivates you?

I really love pop culture! The good and the bad. The more kitsch, themed or tacky, the better. Anything camp is also great too. Cher and Wham! tunes get me through a lot of late night grafting. I'm also obsessed with visuals that bring you into a different world. In the future I would love to work on branding spaces. Saying that, the designer Morag Myerscough and her work, 'Temple of Agape' is incredible and I'm a mega fan of Kate Moross's work too, I especially love her work for the amusement park, Dreamland in Margate.

What has been your biggest hurdle and your proudest moment or accomplishment?

a. biggest hurdle

Getting out of my own head! I was a lot more nervous and shy about my work when I first started out in the design world. It's easy to compare yourself to others, especially with a phone in your hand all day. I have realised that it's a waste of time to sit scrolling through Instagram and think about imaginary projects that I'll never do. By putting my pen to paper I have gained a lot more experience, less daydreaming and more confidence.

b. proudest moment/achievement

I'm so happy that clients keep asking me back to work with them and referring myself to others. Which means that I must have done something right? I especially love working with musicians. I got to work with the stroke city punk band, The Wood Burning Savages, while simultaneously; I was also branding the Northern Ireland Music Prize 2018. The Wood Burning Savages won NI Music Prize 'Best Album of the Year' and 'Best Live Act'. I stood back realising I had basically designed everything on the stage that night! Mad! I was really proud of them and happy to have helped them on their journey.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Keep actively learning about your craft and on the other hand don't take life too seriously. The sooner you get out of your own head the better!



PINK INC.

Pink Inc. are a design agency based in Belfast. They work across digital and printed media and create bespoke campaigns for their clients.

How would a typical campaign be developed by you?

There is no typical campaign but we love a challenge! A client would come to us with an idea for a service or product that they would like to promote. Firstly we listen, we hear what the client has to say and what they want to achieve. We ask, where are you? Where do you want to be? And how will we get you there? We have to look at the brand and positioning in the marketplace, there is no point in promoting a product or service without the backing of a good brand, excellent customer service and key communication materials in place. We also look at any information and stats we can access on previous campaigns. This information can be key in telling a story of what works. We then propose an online and offline campaign that will target the key demographic, achieve desirable outcomes and outline the timings for the campaign. We then develop the materials for the campaign with the agreed key message, creative and call to action. Once the campaign has finished it is vital that we work with the client to determine the results and learn from what we do for the next one.

What are some of the mistakes startups can make when promoting themselves and how can they avoid doing this?

In our experience the mistakes start ups can make when promoting themselves can be a lack of direction and clear messaging. They are not precise about what they do and why they do it. If they can't be clear then how is someone meant to understand what they are saying? As a business you should look at the points where you make contact with your customers and add value. Differentiate yourself from the crowd. Everyone in your company should be aware of your brand and brand values. Is everyone singing the same tune? It sounds a bit corny but sometimes it's that simple. Establish your brand, your key messages, your pricing, trust your instincts, keep an eye on finances and stick to your guns.

What are some of the upcoming trends in e-commerce design and digital design?

We've noticed a big shift towards mobile only builds. The desktop website for customers is becoming obsolete as more and more people shop, browse and interact on the go. With this comes it's own set of problems as all design starts to look like templates and individual character can be hard to establish. Watching how mobile technology, VR and social media develops will be key. There are lots of tools which now allow clients control over all aspects of their brand online but we have also seen is dilution of brands as responsibility for updating is handed down to junior team members of the team, who unfortunately have less established ideas of the brand voice. Make sure the everyone knows the tone of voice and visual language for the brand. Consistency is key across all online (and offline) materials.

G
R
A
N
T

A
N
D

L
I
S
A



KEADY ROW

Keady Row is a bespoke wedding stationery studio based in County Armagh created by founder Natalie Duke back in 2016. It was born from a love of graphic design and a frustration with how much better wedding stationery could be. Keady Row specialises in minimalist design, typography and layout as well as wedding stationery for design conscious couples.

How did you come up with the name Keady Row and what does it mean?

I knew I didn't want to start a wedding stationery business with a typical wedding stationery name. I settled on Keady Row after much brainstorming. Its the nickname of the street my mum and her 4 siblings grew up on in Gilford, Co. Down. The street got its name from the many people who moved from Keady to work in the local mill - my Gran was one of these. The street isn't there anymore but my family still have fond memories of living there.

Who are some of your design heroes / heroines and tell us a bit about them

Paula Scher - the typography queen obviously - she's a legend really.

Tina Roth Eisenberg - I'm so inspired by Tina. I love her entrepreneurial spirit, ambitious nature and enthusiasm for life.

Morag Myerscough - her installations are amazing and I love her use of bright colours.

These ladies are killing it!

Describe a typical workday at your business

I don't think I have a typical work day! Working for yourself, it can be a real mixed bag. I could be doing anything from admin work, emails, designing, meeting with printers/suppliers or meeting with clients (and even a little Instagramming). I don't even have a typical work place as I migrate between home, my studio and local coffee shops - I absolutely love this freedom.

What is it like being based in a more rural setting and what tips would you give creatives that are living away from a big city?

I find it really refreshing being based in a more rural setting. For me there are lots of benefits: cheaper rent, less commute time, being able to walk my dogs at lunch. I'm based in quite a central area so I'm actually only 40 mins from Belfast, so I just hop in the car when I need some city vibes. My advice for other creatives living in a rural setting is to make sure you stay connected with what's going on in Belfast - social media is a brilliant way to do this. Its also good to make regular visits to meet with pals and peers.



HAN*

CLOTHING

Han* was born in August 2017, the brainchild of Hannah Vail. A 2016 fashion and textiles graduate of Ulster University Belfast and resident designer in the Fashion and Textile Design Centre. Han* is now stocked as concession in TOPSHOP Belfast Victoria Square, Foyleside Derry and in the coming months Arndale Manchester and Glasgow Argyle St. Their focus is to create beautiful minimal pieces with embroidery or print developed from original and abstract illustrations, for all sexes.

What made you decide to get into fashion?

I don't think it was a conscious decision, I've always been creative and enjoyed making things. I grew up surrounded by an extremely creative family so I was encouraged a lot. I've always been quite practical so designing or making something functional just made the most sense to me.

You recently launched with Topshop, that's so exciting! Tell us about it.

My streetwear brand han* is now being stocked in Topshop Victoria Square. It's been the most exciting and scary thing I've worked on. It's on a temporary basis for now but I'm hoping it'll lead on to further growth and opportunities. I only launched as a brand in September of last year so to be the first local clothing brand in Belfast's flagship store (so soon) is a massive deal for me!

What is it like being based in a more rural setting as opposed to a big city?

A big city has its advantages but living in Derry has been part of our success so far. Not only has local support been amazing but overheads are low and the internet now makes the world a lot smaller. 60% of our business has been to outside of the UK, so I don't feel that being based in a rural setting has hindered our chances of success.

Do you have any advice for women looking to start up their own business?

Just go for it, life's too short. Be practical, be confident and know your customer.

Define

The
Optimizer

groups of
friends
travelling
together



The Planner

Understand RC

2. PROBLEMS / PAINS

Which problems do you solve for your customer?
There could be more than one, explore different ones
eg. existing solar solutions for private homes are not considered
a good investment (1).

TOO MANY
POINTS FOR
COMPARISON
(FI) X

Hard to
coordinate
booking for
a group.

TOO MANY
TABS

Too many
info
cards

on PR, tap into

coffeenosugar

As well as established brands, we are excited about the new ventures starting up in Northern Ireland. One of these is a new Service Design startup called coffeenosugar.

Tell us about Service Design!

Service Design is about designing services for the people who use them, involving them in the process. It's about using design to problem solve to create a service that responds to customer need. Looking at all elements in the service from the physical and tangible to the intangibles, such as interactions and sequences. Turning weaknesses into opportunities is the hallmark of service design. Business owners however, are often too close to see the business objectively from the customer perspective.

How do you go about finding your niche?

I believe finding a niche is about responding to a need on the ground, rather than deciding on a business and then trying to establish a need and market. The business concept must then continue to be shaped by user need so the business can evolve as the need does. The greatest challenges businesses face today is keeping ahead of customer need. How did I find my niche? I noticed a cycle of new businesses opening but struggling to survive. Which I understood was because they were entering an often already saturated market without a clear concept, compounded by an over-reliance / focus on product (we are now living in an experience economy, where the experience creates an added and sought after value). This resulted in a gap between what the customer was seeking and what the service provider delivered on the ground. Service Design is used to solve this gap worldwide, but it didn't exist in Northern Ireland even though the need was significant. I responded to this niche out of a desire to bridge the gap.

What is the importance of a Unique Selling Point (USP)?

In a finite market such as Belfast a Unique Selling Point is crucial to become the 'go to' place for your business. Being the "go to" place ensures a business can be sustainable overtime as opposed to being just one of many doing the same thing in the same way. Businesses can only see this when they start to see their business and other businesses through the customer perspective. And unless there is something that stands out for the customer, which ultimately addresses a need for them, there is no reason for them to use that service.

What project are you working on next?

I will be working on Reimagine 'Dublin One.' Dublin 1 is Dublin city centre's north retail and residential quarter, within the area bounded by the Liffey Quays to the south, Capel Street to the west, Parnell Street to the north and O'Connell Street to the east. In 2016 Dublin Town, Dublin City's Business Improvement District (BID a collective of 2,500 businesses in the city centre), undertook research to establish why Dublin city's south side exited recession sooner than the north side. The findings - lack of connectivity and permeability, poor public realm, perceptions of safety and general lack of awareness of what the area offered - led Dublin Town to initiate a programme to boost the northern quarter, called 'Dublin One'. In March the American Institute of Architects will lead a team of design professionals and Dublin Town to develop practical solutions towards the goal of creating a welcoming and economically viable city environment for Dublin. Elizabeth will be the Service Designer working with the team.



GEMMA O'NEILL

Gemma is an illustrator/author from the Causeway Coast, based in Belfast. When she graduated from Falmouth University in 2011 she already had her first authored and illustrated picture book deal which has been published globally and received many award nominations.

What made you decide to study illustration?

I've always enjoyed drawing, colouring in and making things. By GCSE stage I wanted to pursue a degree within art and design. It then became very obvious that I should specialise in illustration during my A Levels. We were very much encouraged to experiment within all areas of art and design at school and I loved that, although I think my love for narrative shone through and made book illustration an obvious choice. When I look back at the time before that point now I actually think it's really obvious that I was an illustrator! I have equal love for fine art and design and I think illustration is the perfect combination of both in terms of my personal style. I studied English literature too and enjoy writing my own books, so an illustration degree that had the flexibility to dip into creative writing was very important to me. The course at Falmouth University really stood out. It had a high success rate of graduate employment, a wide range of different modules and I loved that we got to write our own projects in the final year alongside trips to London, Paris and New York throughout the degree. Falmouth was a beautiful location to study too.

Where do you find your inspiration?

My Causeway Coast roots are definitely of huge inspiration in terms of mark making, colour and the natural theme within my work. I love animals too, so they feature quite heavily. I've always tried to carry a sketchbook with me, but I've got into a much stricter habit of doing this lately. It's always a wonderful eye opening experience. It really refreshes my portfolio in terms of subject matter, media and techniques, but also in terms of how quickly I generate work because I fill my sketchbook very much on the go a lot of the time. I find this practice really keeps me connected to the raw joy of what I do too. It's also lovely to be part of a larger group of creative people. I've actually just started working from Blick Studios and I find art classes are really useful in this way too. It's always lovely to see the work of others being generated in the flesh. I recently attended a life drawing with speed and movement class led by Sharon Kelly, which was wonderful. I intend to work more human characters into my portfolio, so classes like these are incredibly useful. Classes that are slightly more detached from what I do are also really inspiring. I think these are important for keeping things fresh, as is following a wide range of artists.

What's been one of the biggest highlights in your career?

My first book deal has to be the ultimate highlight. A few friends and I travelled to the Bologna Children's Book Fair during our final year at university. We took dummy books which we had hand bound ourselves with sample artwork and text, our portfolios, sketchbooks and promotional material such as postcards and business cards. I'd always wanted to visit the fair, so I was just really excited to be there and the experience contributed greatly to the professional practice portion of the degree. I just didn't think I'd go home with a book deal. That was a wonderful surprise!



SALLE

HOMEWARES

Salle is an interior and homewares brand, and is the passion project of Maria Allen, a style and interiors obsessionada. She collaborates with a number of super-stylish spaces and places in and around Belfast and brings a rotating selection of the chicest, freshest wares for your home.

What inspired you to set up your shop?

I've always admired the lifestyle store approach to retail - I love that you can get quirky, unique bits and pieces of stuff all in one cool spot. I love independent stores - they excite me; you never know what you'll find inside. And I'm obsessed with interior style and design. I'd finally got to a stage in life where the cogs had turned for long enough - my boys had all started school and my job as a teacher was on a part-time basis, and I had the breathing space to pursue it. So I did.

I couldn't afford to find premises and set-up shop there and then. And, perhaps more importantly, I wanted to test my market and reach my customer in a unique way, bringing something new to Belfast, both in terms of the product range and in the format. So, inspired by my concept store loves, I decided a collaborative approach was the best course for me. The first season of Salle has seen us pop-up in some beautiful, design-led spaces such as Root and Branch, Wild Thing and Pot Kettle Black. We have been fortunate enough to get the owners of these spaces on board, which has really helped me position Salle in the settings I had envisaged it. It's been a dream; I have enjoyed every baby step in the infancy of my venture and the people who have taken my idea on board and supported it to help me get it to market have been wonderful. I'm indebted to them for helping me make my first step.

Could you describe to us your typical workday?

Without the standard formula, describing a typical day is tricky. I teach Wednesday to Friday, so in essence, Salle work and prep happens Mondays and Tuesdays, but like anyone running their own business knows, there are no set hours - you work at it as and when you can. I usually use the days at the beginning of the week to meet with people I hope to collaborate or work with. Networking, which is so important these days, also needs to happen on those days. Sourcing stock, planning social media content and blogposts is generally work I do in the evenings. Events take place on Saturdays and Sundays. So, as you can see, there's no particular cut-off point!

What have been some challenges you've faced and your biggest successes?

I feel so fortunate. Thanks to the willingness of people who have hosted us, I feel that Salle is already a success, no matter what happens in the future, because this funny wee idea I had in my head has become a reality. For me, that will always be the greatest success of all. And the satisfaction it has given me; I'm getting the chance to do something that I utterly adore - from the joy of sourcing the pieces to the honour of going inside people's homes and businesses and writing my blog. I love it all. Sure, there have still been challenges - the balance of time, the energy required (and what happens when you can't muster any!) But it's all part of the deal. It's been a true adventure.

Do you have any advice you'd like to share to other female entrepreneurs?

It's too early in the game for me to be administering advice, though I'm more than happy to share my own experience in the journey thus far. The only thing I can say, is do it. If you have a passion, if it's what you think about as you're falling asleep every night, it's probably time to have a go. Feel the fear of putting it out there, and do it anyway. In my experience, people are kind. And genuine passion, enthusiasm and drive are contagious. Go get 'em, tiger!



TACA

Lorna Mills is one half of the photography and film making duo TACA Works. She works alongside her husband documenting the creative processes of artists and makers.

What made you start working in film-making?

My path to my current life as a filmmaker has been more of a meandering river than a straight road. My original degree was in Business Management at Queen's. When I graduated I worked for my father for a few years. I moved on to a few other jobs before finally realising that a 9-5 office job would never satisfy me. I had been teaching myself coding through various online courses in my spare time and got really into it. A couple of my friends were successful web designers and I decided this could be my chance to do something more creative with my life. So I started researching courses and discovered a masters course in Applied Digital Media at Griffith College in Dublin that would allow me to learn more coding languages. I handed in my notice and left the following week!

I learned quite quickly that coding websites for a living would leave me in a similar situation to the career I'd just stepped away from and although the process gave me a thrill I realised that there were hours and hours of desk-bound work behind making something look beautiful and fit for purpose. Then I started my filmmaking module and it really was love at first lesson! I'd always had an interest in photography but not ever really taken it seriously. During the course I met Simon at Build conference in Belfast and coerced him into helping me with a poster for my Visual Communications project. He agreed! Over the next few years we started working together. I worked as a chef for a while because I was too scared of diving straight into freelance but eventually I summoned the courage to go fully freelance. It definitely is a deep dive, no two days are the same but for me a tough day's shooting is better than any good day in an office!

What are some of the key things you like to focus on when filming the creative process?

I am naturally a really curious person so my love of filming the creative process of craftspeople and artists comes from my innate nosiness about how things are made! Crafting and making has been a constant theme in my life, I've always had creative projects on the go since my teens - baking, knitting, weaving, spinning, felting, writing, painting - so I'm always excited to film someone else's creative process. We like to get across the story behind the process and to allow the viewer of our film to really understand the time and effort the maker is putting into the finished piece and the story behind their work. I think every maker's creative process is a rich tapestry, they all draw so much on their experience, their surroundings and their materials. Even within the same disciplines their techniques can vary wildly and we like to reflect this in our films.

What are some of the most exciting places you have worked and how did you end up there?

Our trip to Morocco last year was definitely the most exciting location I've filmed. We were invited out by Dan Driscoll from The Anou, an online marketplace that allows artisans all over Morocco to sell their creations direct to customers all over the world. Dan had organised a route and hired a van to drive us around. We drove 2,500km, spent about 50 hours in the van with all our gear and a crazy road-loving kitten called Moon. We visited artisans all over Morocco, stayed with families and learnt so much about their work, culture and the landscape.



THE HOLDING PROJECT

Dearbhaile Heaney is a designer from Derry-Londonderry who studied at Goldsmiths University and the Royal College of Art, London. She currently works for Prince's Trust International as Programmes Manager for Europe and she is a Winston Churchill Fellow. She founded The Holding Project with Chris Millar and Sean Cullen in 2016 and in 2019 they launched Belfast Housing Lab in collaboration with Eastside Partnership.

What first sparked the idea for The Holding Project?

It came mainly from the pain and frustration of being a renter for over 10 years. I have lived and worked in different cities, and have been in both social and private housing and have had mostly negative experiences while paying over £50,000 in rent. In 2014, I moved into a tiny log cabin that a landlord had built on the grounds of his suburban home, which had its own garden and entrance. I loved living there, as it was comfortable, environmentally sound and most importantly, affordable. I began looking for other methods of providing housing for young people like me and came across huge global movements such as Tiny Houses in the USA and shipping container homes in Scandinavia. I also looked closely at the housing crisis in the UK and could see how vulnerable young people were, giving rise to 'Generation Rent'. I knew that all communities were being hit hard by the crisis but felt that I understood the motivations and concerns of those who were my own age best. I thought about new housing models and came up with the transition model for The Holding Project. Thankfully, I then met Sean and Chris, who both had architectural backgrounds so together we were able to develop the idea into what it is today. We also won significant funding towards building our first microhome, and are now over halfway to our prototype cost of £35,000.

What has been the single most memorable thing about your journey so far?

There have been so many memorable times, it's so hard to pick! Working on The Holding Project is really fulfilling and enjoyable. 2017 brought so much good news, such as receiving a Winston Churchill Fellowship and being awarded £15,000 from Unltd. I would have to say that all of my travelling experiences have been memorable, they have exposed me to people and ideas that I never would have experienced otherwise. I feel so inspired by what I saw and hope I never forget any of it! We also had some really good conversations with the general public on Culture Night which gave us some more food for thought on how we can hold some focus groups to gain more insight on their experiences in the private and social housing sector.

Where have you been on your design research trips and what are some of the things you have you learned from them?

I applied for the WCMT Fellowship with the idea of investigating 'New Approaches To Affordable Housing' so chose countries that had been creating pioneering work in this area, often against very challenging circumstances. I travelled to Finland, Sweden and both coasts of the USA over an eight week period which was interspersed throughout the year. I discovered so much from all the places and people I encountered, it was hard to keep up. I wanted to look at new financial, social and physical models for housing so carefully selected a range of projects that were innovating in these areas from different angles - from grassroots housing groups to the Mayor's office in Boston. Sometimes I had quite a formal relationship with the organisation I was visiting and worked alongside them for a week or so, and at other times it was much more informal and I was embedded within the community - such as the week I spent in a powerless caravan as part of an eco-community. I am glad that I chose that approach as it helped me to understand housing issues on several different levels. I would say the biggest lesson that I have come home with was that housing initiatives which played with experimentation and multiple solutions tended to have the most productive outcomes. As a result of this I will be working on opening up the concept of The Holding Project into more of an independent housing solutions body. We will continue to pursue our objective of building our prototype and the community we have proposed, but we would like to look at ways in which we could work on short term living experiments with small groups that might give us a better insight into how we can create other housing interventions. These could be less funding dependant and might help us understand more about the intricacies of housing in Belfast.



TAUNT STUDIOS

Fiona McLaughlin is the co-founder of Taunt Studios, an animation and VFX company who creates thoughtful and interactive imagery. The aim to deliver effective visuals and progressive content for a global audience.

Tell us a bit about Taunt and how you started it.

Taunt makes beautiful Animation, realistic VFX and thoughtful Interactive image. The studio is made up of Tom Getty and myself. We love to work on forward thinking projects to deliver effective visuals and progressive content for a global audience. Tom and I started Taunt as a bit of a pipe dream. Thinking that someday, it would be cool to run our own studio and make the work that really excites us as artists. Having worked together for a short while, we knew that we had a great creative partnership and were bursting with ideas. That being said, Taunt nearly didn't happen at all. Tom started freelancing and I moved to Berlin. Eventually, I decided to move back to Belfast and it felt like a now or never moment for us both to start the studio.

How did you get into the industry? What did you study?

Like many bright-eyed enthusiastic young creatives, I left school with a portfolio and applied for a foundation year of study at Ulster University's Belfast School of Art. Would you believe I wanted to do ceramics! I gravitated towards fine art print making and graphic design, eventually taking graphic design as my main field of study. It really wasn't until one of my lectures at the time prompted me to do the new animation course, that I had even thought about animation. I started to become aware and active in the animation industry through this course; and where I learned the value of working as a strong team, communicating effectively and discovering the excitement in taking a bold creative risk. It was some of the best times in my life!

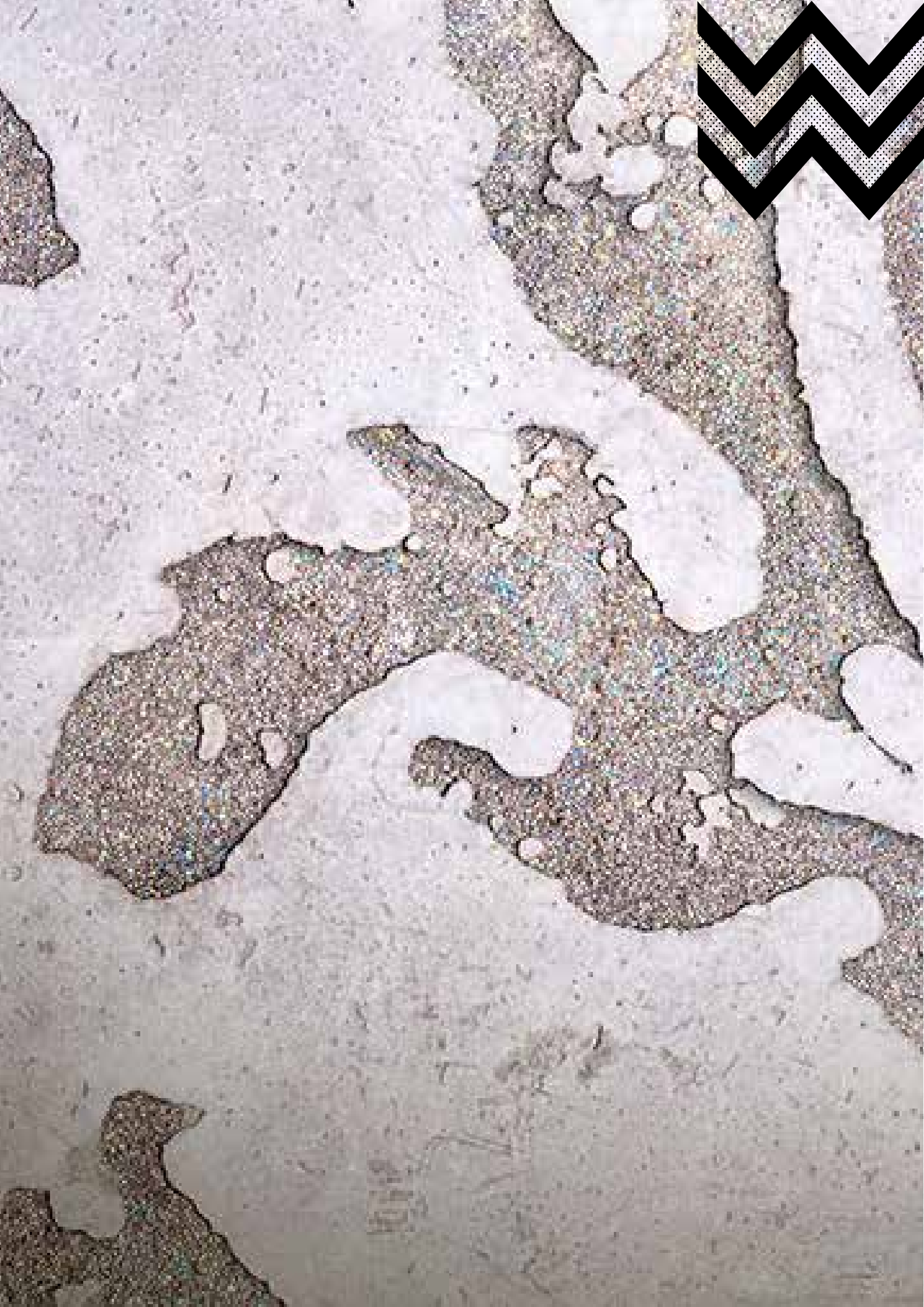
What's are your thoughts on the community of animation/VFX in Northern Ireland?

It's small, but mighty! NI Screen has been a massive support to the community of Animation/VFX in Northern Ireland; training and funding local talent to reach an international audience at an international standard. This goes hand-in-hand with the development of skills through Ulster University. All of which help the animation community grow and become more competitive with other creative hotspots for animation.

Any tips/advice for those looking to start their own business in this field?

We are a very new/small studio at the moment, so my advise may not be overly extensive - but I'll definitely say three main things that we have found super helpful.

1. Start with a solid team of people you can trust and work well with. Tom and I had built up an experience of working together through many projects before starting the studio. We know how each other cope under pressure and what our individual strengths are in the creative process.
2. Never be afraid to ask for help. Whether its trying to find a solution to your buggy software in online forums, trying to find a way to reach more clients or asking another studio to collaborate on a big project. Maintaining a level of communication and understanding with the industry around you can really help you achieve over and above for your clients and business.
3. Lastly, don't be a dick. Sometimes the creative industries can be cut throat, but nobody likes to work with a dick. So cut the bullshit, be sound, help others and give back as much as you take. It will help in places you least expect it.



TACTILITY FACTORY

Tactility Factory is an innovative company set up by Trish Belford and Ruth Morrow, that mainstreams tactility in the built environment. It does this through a range of innovative products and processes that can be used in a variety of contexts. Their “Infused Concrete Collections” have been the focus of the company and have had application internationally. The inventive nature of Tactility Factory has won the company many awards over the years.

How did you come up with your signature techniques?

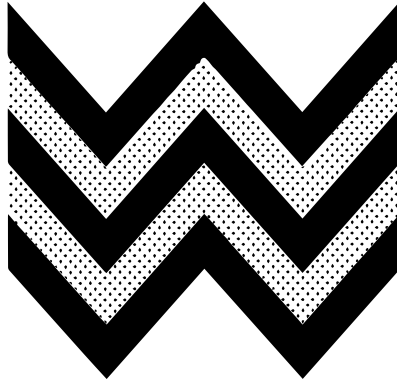
For 19 years, Trish ran Belford Prints, a company that were known for their high-end fashion fabrics for companies including Vivienne Westwood and John Galliano. Belford Prints' focus was on screen-printing and the company employed around 30 people. When digital print became more popular, it changed the game entirely. Trish felt a lack of inspiration due to the digital process requiring less hands-on tactile work. She decided to return to Belfast in 2004 to start Academic research into new textiles and accidentally met Ruth Morrow who had also recently returned to the city. Trish had always been interested in architecture and the built environment and their mutual interests formed the basis of what would eventually become Tactility Factory. A CCOI talk on Textile Design that Trish had to give to architects cemented her interest in this crossover of the different design disciplines. She decided to start experimenting with how to make hard surfaces “soft” and using a grant bought a concrete mixer to play and experiment initially. Her experiments included infusing concrete with more delicate materials including lace. Both Trish and Ruth's fathers had worked in the architecture and construction industries and were definitely an inspiration for their new company. For Trish, velvet concrete has been one of the most exciting developments at Tactility Factory, because of her use of previous knowledge of the Devoré (chemical process) technique that she used in the 1980s at her previous company Belford Prints.

What have been some of the most exciting applications of your work?

One of the earliest projects that made Tactility Factory better known was their project for Derry Playhouse, a commission for artwork for the foyer of the building. Starting off creating a smaller concrete art piece initially, the excitement behind such an innovative technique led to the commission being made at a larger scale. Some of the projects that Tactility Factory has worked on outside of Northern Ireland include large-scale spaces in Dubai, Cairo and Abu Dhabi. It has been exciting for Trish to work with cultures that work with and appreciate pattern at such a large scale. An additional benefit of the materials Tactility Factory creates are that they allow building interiors to remain cool which is ideal in hot climates such as those in the Middle East and Africa.

What are you currently researching and working on?

Trish is currently working on an AHRC grant with MYB Textiles in Scotland - a company that works with wide-width lace in cotton - working with them to reset their machinery to linen and using weaving techniques. She is also conducting research in to Damask Lace fabrics.



Katie Ireland

KATIE IRELAND DESIGNS

Katie Ireland Designs is founded by Katie, an art student at Ulster University. She illustrates landmarks and buildings of Belfast and sells them as prints at Unique, Ulster University and four other shops based in Belfast.

What/who influences/motivates you?

I guess what motivates my art comes from a love of exploring cities and buildings and my hobby of urban/architectural photography. We've always had books on Belfast in my house and my mum and I have often taken trips around NI, to attractions and National Trust properties which I always loved to try and draw. We also do a bit of travelling when we can, usually trying to do city breaks, where I guess I started practising Urban photography. We've always had local Irish art around the house and try to support local manufacturers and businesses, so I guess the local influence around me helped encourage me to focus my art of what I know and love locally. I don't really know what motivated me to start up my business, at the time I was just enjoying drawing Belfast landmarks and architecture as a starting point for my practice in uni, and I decided there was nothing to lose by selling prints of them in Unique Art Shop in uni. However, when they started selling well I realised I was maybe onto something and decided to see where else might take my work. I guess now my motivation is to make it into a lasting business, something that will be not only a continuous income for me but also a fun hobby that I get to call my job.

What has been your biggest hurdle and your proudest moment or accomplishment?

a. biggest hurdle

I think the biggest hurdle for me was actually realising I was running a real business and believing that I could do it. I think it was stepping up and figuring out how to be professional in correspondence, paperwork and merchandising. I had to sit down and start working out financially how to run the business, and I had to consider how to run a website, an Etsy store and social media etc, rather than just being an artist selling prints as a hobby. Despite that being the main (continuous) hurdle (I'm still learning and figuring it out, now with help from business advisers though), I do find it very fun. I guess it doesn't feel like work at all because it's something I enjoy doing.

b. proudest moment/achievement

I have had a few proudest moments/accomplishments since starting the business - some like first international Etsy order, successfully getting stocked in shops. But I think it's between when I got asked to sit on a panel about design in Belfast and my experiences - which really made it feel like I'd achieved something, and one of my prints being given as a diplomatic gift.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

In terms of advice for young emerging designers I guess I'd say just go for it, believe you can do it and just make it happen there's nothing stopping you. Take every opportunity (within reason as long as you're not being exploited) and network as much as you can. Even if you think the answer will be no just go ahead and ask for whatever it is you're after - the worst anyone can say is no. Use any help that comes your way. The government, universities and banks all have enterprise programmes anyone can apply for, so use them, even if you think you've covered everything there's probably something they can help with. Someone in business once told me there are 2 times in business when you can take a risk: at the beginning when you're starting out and when you're fully established. So take the chance; you'll never know unless you try.

THE CORDIS PRIZE FOR TAPESTRY

1 2 | 1 6

BUT IS IT TAPESTRY?

Some of you (we hope) will have found the cover art on this publication a little puzzling. Maybe even challenging.

*Miranda Henry -
Cordis Trust*

The criteria for submission to this third Tapestry were different from previous years. We knew artists would have a shorter list of entries, and that we would need to make a fine exhibition space made available to us in Scotland in the Royal Scottish Academy building to use this opportunity to investigate the works, setting a maximum rather than a minimum. We also required that while works should reference traditional weaving techniques, they need not necessarily be woven. We positively encouraged artists to think of traditional wall-hung pieces.

The result of this change in criteria was fascinating. There were submissions from around the globe but in the contemporary take on tapestry, all of our selections came from the United Kingdom. Why this should be is open to speculation – are we benefiting from a wider British willingness to experiment in the arts? Were overseas artists concerned about complex transport and hanging issues? Is it a legacy of British art school training? The range of works from concrete objects to abstract symbols is vast – or is it? There are 'things' and there are 'images', but are the objects not symbolic? And with tapestry, the abstract seems a playful element of subverting sophistication, yet focusing on simplicity.

As interesting as the works themselves, will be to observe the reaction of the viewers – will they love them? Will they be provoked? Will they be inspired? Why not record your own reaction on the Cordis social media and website. We would be fascinated to find out.

OUR THANKS

are due to our 2017 judges,
Zoebie Bulke, Miranda Henry,
Fiona Mathison, Susan Mawort
and Nicky Wilson.

All text written in pages 4 & 13
by Fiona Mathison
Letter & layout in International, formerly
Tapestry – Edinburgh College of Art.



ELENA MAGLIVERAS

Elena Magliveras is a graphic designer who loves all aspects of design. She loves communicating concepts through functional and visually appealing designs in several creative fields.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

I have always been into all forms of creativity and design. With an artist as a mother, my life has been surrounded with art, and creative expression was encouraged from an early age. After school I knew I wanted to go to art college and graduated from Winchester School of Art with a degree in Fashion Design. After this I moved to Sydney, and got some work with a small fashion label, where I worked closely with the founder, who was a graphic designer. Through her I understood more about the graphic design world and realised that this was exactly what I wanted to do. I re-trained in Graphic Design and have now been working as a freelance designer for the past two years. During this time I have worked in both print and digital for various clients and I'm lucky to have received a lot of exciting work from them.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

a. biggest hurdle

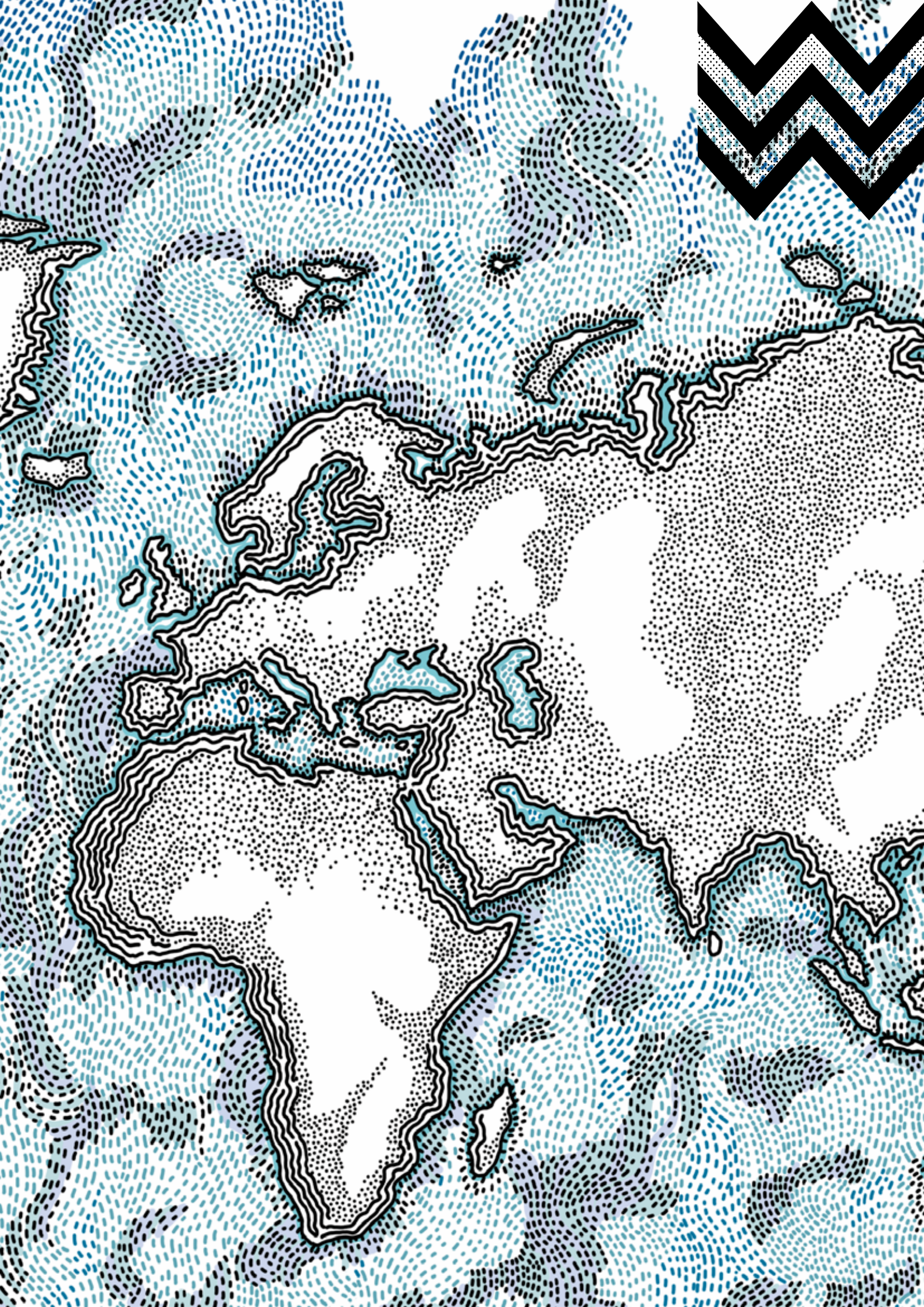
In the months after graduating and starting my first design job, there was so much to learn and get my head wrapped around. I was going home from work and spending hours and hours every night researching and going over any new thing I had come across that day so I would be ready for the next. Although it was really tough I learned so much in that time and gained invaluable experience.

b. proudest moment/achievement

I think my proudest moment was when I got my first freelance job. The job was to design the brand identity and promotional material for Cordis Tapestry Prizes. This was a big moment for me as the Cordis Tapestry Prize has a large audience and as a result my work was seen by a lot of people in the art world. I ended up getting a lot more freelance work after that exposure.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

I would say the best advice I can give is to work hard, believe in yourself and persevere to reach your goals. The design industry can sometimes be a tough one to crack, so don't give up.



KARISHMA'S WORLD

Karishma Kusrkar is a multidisciplinary designer who runs Karishma's World, a studio producing physical objects such as games, accessories, stationery and books, digital media including podcasts, illustration, graphic and social design and service design including event design.

Tell us about your journey, how did you start Karishma's World?

Having lived and studied in London, I decided to move back to Belfast in 2010. When I had first studied design, it was always with the view of working with a design agency or a company, but after working for a few companies and completing my MFA in Multidisciplinary Design in 2014, I decided to set up my own business. I started Karishma's World straight after completing my Masters, and initially focusing on print and accessories as it felt like the natural direction to go in with my background in digital textiles. Since then, I have adapted the business to becoming more multidisciplinary and I work project-to-project which means I might design a game for one project and something in a different area of design for the next one. I also work on a mix of self-led projects, client-led work and collaborations.

It's been a year since you released your game Espionage, what did you learn from the experience?

Creating my card game Espionage was definitely a milestone in my career because it helped me understand a few totally new areas of design and business: the two main ones being how to create games from scratch and how to run a successful crowdfunding campaign. What I loved about creating Espionage was coming up with the concept and working on the design elements - game play, illustration, merchandise and packaging. What I found the most challenging was running the crowdfunding campaign. To raise funds to make the game, I ran a Kickstarter campaign for a period of a month, and alongside this I continued developing the game. Self-promotion doesn't come naturally to me, and it was something I had to do over and over again for a long period of time which I found slightly awkward and stressful! It was incredibly rewarding - no pun intended - getting fully funded and my friends and family were a huge support throughout. If I were to do the campaign over, I would only set up the Kickstarter campaign when the game was fully ready to go and would give myself more time to comfortably develop the game as during Espionage I set myself a pressured deadline to make and deliver in time for Christmas.

What projects are you currently working on?

In 2019, my main project focus will be on A Tiny History and Pick & Picks.

A Tiny History is a project about retelling history through the roles visionaries played. It is a collaborative, bold, visual project in partnership with Kylie Chan Illustration and has been funded by the Artists' International Development Fund. As part of this, I will be travelling to Hong Kong in March to learn more about the creative scene and to work and collaborate with Kylie. The project will be showcased this summer in Belfast and Hong Kong. Pick & Picks is a startup idea that I began developing last year, initially as new tools for musicians to play with, but it has evolved more recently to becoming a digital platform for musicians to collaborate on and get creative. I developed the initial idea further on Y Combinator's Startup School 2018 and have started focusing more on the UX element of the project as well as how to commercialise it in 2019.



CREANDO PENSAMUS

Rachel McQueen runs Creando Pensamus creating beautifully illustrated notebooks and art prints.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

My name is Rachel McQueen and I run Creando Pensamus. I have created custom hand-painted notebook, art prints and some other little creations. I am a geography graduate, currently working as a receptionist in a dental practice and doing Creando Pensamus on the side. I am passionate about simple beauty and nature which hopefully comes across in any work I create.

What or who influences and motivates you?

I find new inspiration all the time, either in the natural world or through others on social media but it is important to develop your own style, which is something I am hoping to work on more.

I love seeing how people use colour or restricted colour palettes. Stella Maria Baer is an artist from Santa Fe now living in Colorado who creates pigment to paint with from the rocks and dust around her, meaning her work is a beautiful mix of earthy, warm tones. I love that, how she is able to create artwork from earth. Mostly I am drawn to minimal or simplistic styles though I do love more expressive or modern pieces, like the work of Heather Day.

Motivation is a whole other area for me. I find it really difficult to get motivated, or more so, figure out what direction I would like to take my art. I don't want to do it just for the sake of it, I want to have purpose in what I do. I have lots of different ideas that are always changing, I suppose I should listen to those closest to me who tell me to just go in a direction, any direction, to take a step. Really motivation needs to come from within myself otherwise I find it difficult to keep going, especially because Creando Pensamus is my side project and not a full time thing.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

a. biggest hurdle

My biggest hurdle is probably - honestly - myself. I have had so many amazing opportunities through Creando Pensamus and I know there is potential for more, I have never really pushed it that much. So yes, myself and my own motivation continue to be my biggest hurdles.

b. proudest moment/accomplishment

Like I said so many great things have happened through this, meeting so many lovely people, having my work sold in some brilliant shops and being part of Belfast Design week. I have had some artwork printed in local magazine Turf & Grain that I have loved helping with over the past few years. It is amazing to have recognition for something you have created. My most random accomplishment though was an order for over thirty hand-painted notebooks to Hawaii. The shop owner came across my work on Instagram and sent me an email (which my dad told me to delete because he thought it sounded too good to be true), which is pretty amazing, just wish I could have delivered them in person!



Mourne Mountains

- Co. Down -

Slieve Donard

Meabane

Doan

Slieve Donagh

Lamagan

Slieve Donnan



PIERA CIREFICE

Piera Cirefice is an Irish illustrator, who graduated from Falmouth University. Her love for the outdoors fuels her travel reportage work. Through en plein air watercolours and sketches she hopes to capture the atmosphere of the living landscape. Drawing on the natural environment Piera also uses traditional materials and techniques to address contemporary issues. With an emphasis on fluidity of line and mark makings she hopes to create sense of atmosphere and emotional evocativeness within her work.

What made you decide to set up your business?

I've always known I've wanted to do something creative as a living since I was young and studying Illustration as a degree really cemented my determination to make it a reality. After travelling and working for a year after graduating I finally decided to take the step to becoming self-employed and establishing my business as an Illustrator. For me the advantages of being my own boss and doing what I am most passionate about was too great to ignore!

What's the hardest thing you've faced since setting up, and how did you overcome it?

I have stumbled across a lot of challenges so far, but I feel you learn far more when you are confronted with these challenges. The hardest part I've found so far, however, is having the confidence and self-belief in yourself, as sometimes it can feel like you're going into a downward spiral of self-doubt when it's just yourself you have to rely on. However, tackling these doubts head on has really forced me to address those issues, and in turn given me the self-belief I need to make this business work. Building up that confidence and self-belief bit by bit is therefore how I try to overcome those internal obstacles within myself. Realising that you are the maker of your own fate/ the only person holding yourself back is also something I've found incredibly empowering (in terms of breaking down these barriers of self-doubt).

Do you have any advice for those who are just starting up their new business?

I feel the main thing is to believe in yourself and your business (easier said than done I know!) But I feel it comes down to self-belief, and as women, I do believe we're not encouraged enough by society to practice this in our every-day life. So, it's about owning our agency and acknowledging our capabilities, unique skills and embracing the strength that stems from that.

On a more boring note keeping track of your finances and documenting everything from an early stage, so as you have a clear idea of where your business is at, and enough reliable data for making financial forecasts is a huge help.



ALW ARCHITECTS

Architect Jane Larmour is a co-founder and Director of award winning Arigho Larmour Wheeler Architects, a design led, cross-border RIBA and RIAI Chartered practice established in 2014. From both their recently opened studio on the Lisburn Road, Belfast and their studio in Dublin beside Trinity College, ALWA work with a range of private, residential and commercial clients across Ireland to find creative yet pragmatic design solutions that add beauty and value. Jane is a Member of the RSUA Council and is a Lecturer in Architecture at Queen's University Belfast where she has taught since 2009.

What made you decide to set up your own practice?

Mark, Pat and I all met in Dublin in 2004. Having enjoyed the experience of working for some of the best architectural design studios in Ireland, the time felt right and we made serious plans to set up our own practice in 2014. As an architect your instinct is to be creative in everything you do and building a company is an extension of that. Just as in a project when you are making the first drawings and there is excitement about where it is going to go - growing the company is like that, with the added bonus of being, to some extent, in control of shaping your future and the kind of work you might attract. We are excited about where we might be as a company in five, ten years and the kind of work we will be making.

How would you describe your style of architecture?

Architecture is probably one of the most long lasting, and expensive design investments a person will make, so any design needs to outlast any fleeting fashions. We set out to make buildings which are useful and beautiful backdrops against and in which people's lives can play out. For us it's about getting to know and understand our clients needs and responding with the right balance of creative and pragmatic solutions, adding beauty and value through design. We really enjoy the detailed design of our projects and enjoy the challenge of finding appropriate materials for each project, working with our clients to arrive at solutions which respond to their aspirations and complement existing conditions. We get inspired travelling and looking at great architecture and ideas we pick up on our travels often find their way into our work.

What type of building would you love to design in future years?

The three of us have all worked on significant public buildings in previous practice, including a theatre, art galleries, community buildings and commercial headquarters. In addition to our residential work, we look forward to the prospect of taking on public commissions in the future. It can be hard for newly established practices to move in to larger scale work and open competitions are often a way in, they are also exciting times of intense activity in the studio. We are fortunate to have had success in two pan-european architecture and urbanism competitions which focused on housing, master-planning and public buildings, in Dublin and Ås, Norway, which called for the regeneration of a town square.



ONA BY AGNE

Agne Nazebetauskaitė is a luxury knitwear and homeware designer. Her designs are created by correlating the knitting concepts from the past, present and the future. Agne spent all her childhood watching her grandmother knit, wearing her handmade garments and learning the techniques. In the past couple of years her passion for textiles grew into the knitwear and homeware brand ONA (her grandmother); connecting the memories with a contemporary vision and transforming them into luxury knitwear and home accessories. Agne showed her first knitwear collection as an upcoming designer at Belfast Fashion Week 2016.

How do you make your work look contemporary even though you are using a traditional process?

I use simple patterns and designs, straight lines with little details that make my garments stand out. Chunky wool adds that boldness and contemporary touch to the design.

What materials do you use and how did you come across them. How do you source them now?

Pure merino wool is my favourite material to work with, but because its purpose is limited to the cold months, I have started incorporating cotton into my designs. I do believe in all things natural and in the sustainability of materials and designs. I came across merino wool when I learned to felt, and after some research I found that it can be used for knitting too. The merino wool I use is sourced from Australia and Southern Africa.



Alnus serrulata

4

DOLLYBIRDS ART

Dollybirds Art is a studio in Belfast, established by artist Eimear Maguire. Original artwork begins outdoors, then a pencil study is then brought to life in colour. Featured birds include the Puffin, found along the cliffs of the Antrim Coast, to the Swallows that return to Ireland every year marking the beginning of summer. Dollybirds is stocked in leading stores including Avoca, The National Trust, and most recently Kew Gardens London along with selected independent stores and boutiques in Ireland and the UK.

What made you start up your company Dollybirds Art?

I started Dollybirds Art after redundancy and reading a book by Paulo Coelho called The Alchemist. I realised that I wanted to create my own job which would be flexible around my kids, allow me to be creative and my own boss. I felt in my bones that this was what I was meant to do with my life, to be an artist and make a living from my work. I had been teaching art and working in community development which was very fulfilling but left no room for my own creativity. So when I started Dollybirds I can only describe the feelings I had as an explosion. I still feel like that, I am very lucky to do what I love every day and I don't take that for granted.

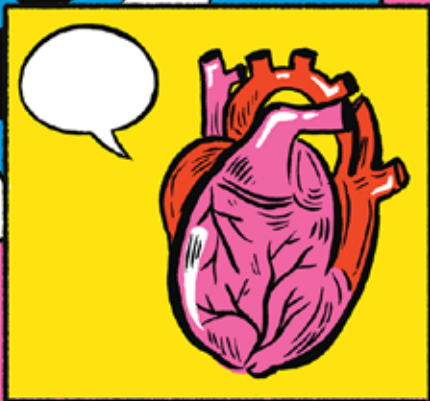
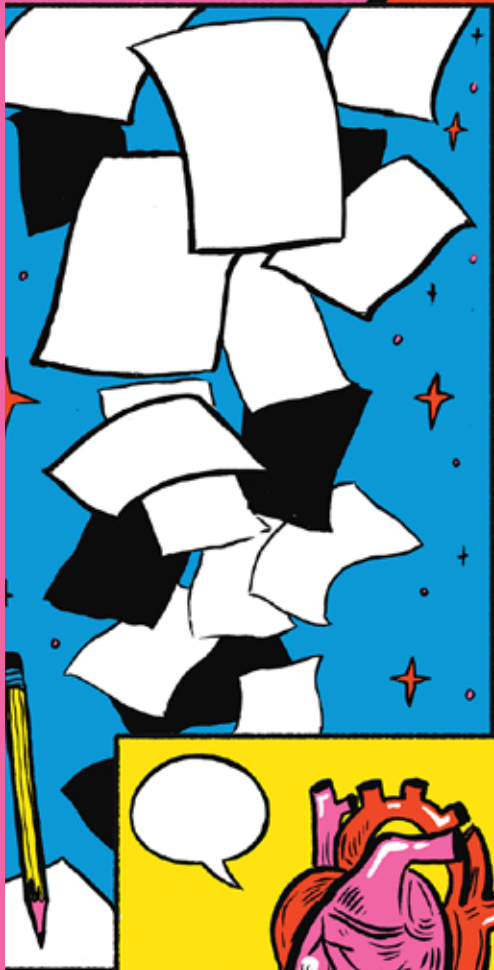
What have been some of the challenges and highlights you have faced on your journey so far?

There have been lots of both! I totally believe in the potential of Dollybirds and that belief has really kept me going throughout. Having my work stocked with major Irish retailer Avoca almost from the beginning certainly gave me confidence. They were very supportive and this helped me to push on ahead and develop my product range. Last year the National Trust commissioned me to create a new range of prints and notebooks based on birds from the North Coast of Ireland. Thankfully they have been a huge success and this year they will be introducing a new design to the collection. Most recently my botanical print collection has been stocked in Kew Gardens London which has the largest and most diverse botanical collection in the world. I am planning a trip to Kew Gardens and to develop my botanical range this year so its pretty exciting to see where things go with them. I love painting and being creative but running your own business is about much more. It has been very hard work, a lot of perseverance. I have developed a very thick skin and I have learned to always trust my gut instinct. I have a young family and my husband works very long hours so I feel like I am constantly juggling my time. It can be a bit of a rollercoaster but I think surrounding yourself with positive and inspirational people really helps. I also make sure to recognise and celebrate every achievement along the way.

My prints have been featured in Elle Décor, Irish Country magazine and featured in the Ikea Spring 2018 advertising campaign. Dollybirds Art was awarded runner up in the gift category of the prestigious 2017 Irish Made Awards and finalists in the 2018 Awards.

What advice would you give startups looking to sell work outside of Northern Ireland?

Last year I took Dollybirds to Top Drawer in London which was great exposure. I met so many new creatives and gained lots stockists throughout the UK and actually doing the show gave me great confidence. I am definitely planning to do another trade show this year. There are so many to choose from but it is important to pick the one that feels right for you. So my advice would be to take risks, you will never know unless you try. Obviously Instagram is a great way to get exposure and to connect with retailers outside of Northern Ireland.



FIONA MCDONNELL

Fiona McDonnell is a Belfast-based freelance illustrator with a distinct and colourful style of work, often accompanied by commentary and self-reflection on social issues, music, film or whatever else she may be interested in at the time.

What made you decide to become an illustrator?

I was pretty obsessed with animation, comics, graphic novels and anime etc. growing up and I've always loved drawing and image-making. So naturally I wanted to study art at university, but I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do specifically with that interest. While studying Foundation Art and Design at University of Ulster, we had an Illustration module, it made total sense to me, it was the exact type of work I wanted to make. After that, I moved to England to study Illustration at Norwich University of the Arts. The course and people I met there really brought me out of my creative shell and motivated me to take my work seriously and pursue Illustration as a career.

Tell us about some of the collaborations you have worked on locally.

I've been incredibly lucky with the groups I've got to work with since graduating and moving back to Belfast, mostly due to joining UsFolk (Belfast's first Illustration and Design agency.) The Phlox show came about from meeting Ben Crothers, The Naughton Gallery at Queens' curator, during an UsFolk exhibition. Ben had been wanting to put on an Illustration exhibition for a while. Phlox ended up being a showcase of international female illustrators as a response to reports of sexism and gender inequality in the industry. I thought this was amazing and I was really humbled and excited to be asked to exhibit alongside the other illustrators whose work I'd already admired for a long time (Penelope Gazin, Laura Callaghan, Tuesday Bassen). I could honestly write an essay about how much I loved being a part of Phlox but overall I think it's great to see such a high standard of exhibitions and events like this happening in Belfast right now. There are loads of other local collaborations I'd like to talk about (ie. Womens Work Festival, Ponyhawke, The Tangerine, WANDA film festival to name a few) so i'm just really thankful to be able to work in Belfast at the moment. When I compare the Belfast from before I moved to England for University, to how it is now, there's just a lot more opportunity to be a part of something local and creative, which is priceless really.

What is your favourite project you have worked on and why?

It's really hard to choose just one, it's always when I get to do an illustration about something I was already interested in or had a personal attachment to, some of which would be:

a/"Ireland Unfree" editorial illustrations - one of the best jobs I've got to work on was for Dazed and Confused, they were running a series of articles called "Ireland Unfree" that highlighted and supported the repeal the 8th movement in the run up to the referendum in 2018 and created several illustrations to go alongside them. It's an issue that's very close to my heart so i'm grateful my work was able to play a part in creating awareness for the movement.

b/Designer in Residence at the Analog Research Lab Dublin - One of the most rewarding experiences I've had as an illustrator was a 6 week residency at the Facebook Analog Lab in Dublin during the summer of 2018. I had 24 hr access to a dream studio, complete with a risograph printer which I got to learn how to operate myself, that was just an absolute dream come true! It was also a big challenge, I created more personal work in those 6 weeks than I had in the last few years, which was tough but really rewarding.

c/'The Freelancer Series' - was inspired by my fellow freelancers and has lots of little nods to different groups and projects hidden in the illustration. I had an exhibition of the full series in Framework Gallery which was also my first solo show. So I was pretty proud of how quickly I got the whole thing together!

d/The EP cover artwork for Belfast based band Robocobra Quartet - this was one of the first commissions I ever got and it's still one of my favourites.



ISLE JEWELLERY

Born in Annalong, County Down, Isle Jewellery's Geraldine Kane went on to study Metalsmithing & Jewellery at the University of Ulster in Belfast. She became a teacher and taught Fine Art in a college in England for a few years before moving to Tokyo where she later began jewellery company ISLE in collaboration with her Belfast-based sister, Helen.

In what way have Japan and Ireland influenced your jewellery?

A lot of the themes and the starting points for the collections are elements from home. I started ISLE while living in Japan and feeling a bit homesick. I guess the further away you are from home, the more nostalgic you get about it, and you start viewing things you previously took for granted in a different light. The Japanese element is more aesthetic; clean lines and simplicity rule. Allowing space for the materials and craftsmanship to speak is key.

What are some of the key staples of Japanese design?

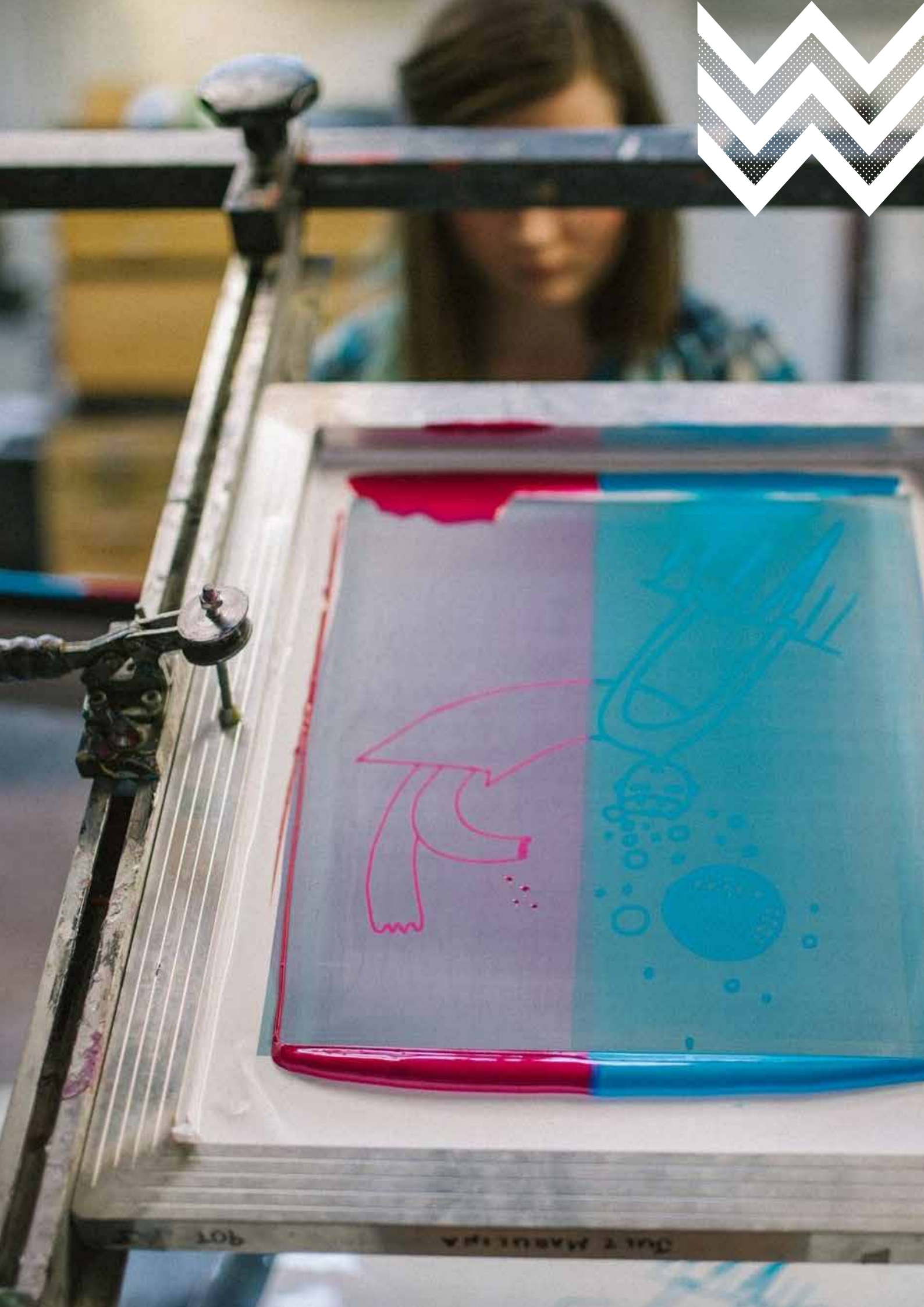
In Japanese culture craftsmanship is still highly valued, something I believe we are trying to get back to in Ireland and the UK. High quality materials, along with meticulous design and execution, are the main identifying features of Japanese design. Here in Japan, the packaging is just as important, if not more so, than the actual product. The Japanese really understand the art of gift-giving and every shop provides gift wrapping service as standard when you buy something. The quality and sophistication of the packaging here is mind-blowing, often just too beautiful to open. I would say Japanese designers really know how to refine and 'subtract' when designing, removing any unnecessary or distracting elements from their work. Less really is more.

Give 3 tips on how to run a successful international business

We are still trying to work that out to be honest! The main thing (and the most difficult) is communication. Luckily, we are sisters with a similar outlook on life and design, so understanding each other is pretty easy. I don't know what we would do without all the communication apps available these days. We usually have several conversations on the go at one time through Line, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.

Understanding the impact of time difference is vital. You need to think about the far-flung people you are dealing with and the rhythm of their day in connection to yours. Sometimes you have to hold off sending that email until they are fully awake.

Understanding different markets and the fact that your product may not work everywhere is something we have really become aware of. In Japan the focus is very much on super delicate 18ct gold jewellery whereas in Ireland and the UK, 9ct gold is very popular and usually the designs are a little more substantial. We are bringing elements of Japanese inspiration into designs made, primarily, for the Irish & UK customer. I wanted to design jewellery that I, my sisters and my friends would want to wear.



PRINTS BY JULZ

Prints by Julz is an eco-conscious design venture by artist and printmaker Julz Marulina. Working from a shared studio, The Belfast Print Workshop, she designs and creates hand-printed fine art, textiles and t-shirts. The Prints by Julz brand evolved through a personal quest towards sustainability, and aims to achieve as little negative impact as possible.

What are the themes and influences on your print design work?

The dominant themes and influences in my work are the environment, minimalism and surrealism. I like to include subtle activism, whether it's printing a series of local endangered animals or celebrating nature and outdoors. In modern times, I feel that art has to serve a bigger purpose than purely aesthetics. This is why I like to offer an alternative to conventional fashion and fine art products.

How do you create an eco-conscious / environmentally friendly brand?

Ongoing research, trial and improvement are a big part of my work. I am always on the lookout for better ways to lower my footprint. I am interested in the entire lifecycle of the making process, from mining of ingredients for pigments in the paints I use, to where my products will eventually end up.

In my work, I use suppliers that have earned an ethical reputation and can provide me with low impact materials like sustainable textiles, eco paper and soil association approved inks. I personally handpick the textiles and garments I print on, as comfort and fit are very important to me. If I'm not happy with it, it doesn't make the cut. I'd be thrilled if my products served a good purpose either as wall art or have been worn to death for many years. My aim is to promote creative design and slow fashion through quality over quantity.

What are some of the exciting projects you are currently working on?

Over the past few months I have taken a slight sidestep to become a tattoo artist. I am currently working towards combining my printmaking practice and tattoo art to complement each other. I am hoping to incorporate printmaking effects and techniques into my tattoo flash as well as produce prints and apparel to showcase the tattoo designs on decorative and wearable items.



BELFAST MELA

26 AUGUST 2018

Botanic Gardens, 12 - 6pm

SONIA MCCOURT DESIGN

Sonia McCourt Design is a creative design company set up in 2011 specialising in branding, design, marketing, advertising, web design, signage and print management. They have over 10 years' experience and strive to deliver results within tight deadlines and budgets.

What made you start your own graphic design company?

In 2011 I began a world travel trip with my husband - which lasted for four months - to soak up some international inspiration and to nurture my love of graphic and multicultural design. On returning, I set up her studio with the aim of bringing a warm, unique, human element to a world dominated by digital design. I love travel and design collaborating, and have an obsession with finding quirky locations to help influence my design work. This can be seen in my work for clients such as Belfast Mela, ArtsEkta and Get into Glengormley.

Who are some of the most influential or inspirational female graphic designers currently out there?

Since starting up my own design business I have been influenced by Finnish printmaker and designer - Sanna Annukka. Her work is strongly inspired from natural surroundings and childhood memories. She has created an album cover for British band Keane and she is part of the Marimekko team. Another female inspired graphic designer is Yasmeen Ismail. Yasmeen is an illustrator and author. I discovered her work at this year's Offset Dublin Festival. She uses beautiful inks and watercolours to create bright and energetic illustrations. Her clients include Channel 4, Marks and Spencers and Google.

What are some of the tips you would like to share when creating a strong brand identity for yourself?

Believe in your brand and its values. A strong brand comes from a good thought process and understanding your brand's position in the current market.

Develop the brand's creative elements. This is the look, feel and voice of the brand that will be carried out through all channels from social media to advertising.

Be bold, innovative and daring. Understand your competitors and be sure your identity stands out from a cluttered market.

How do you achieve a good work life balance?

I am a busy mum to my daughters and also run my own business, so naturally work life balance is important. I am a planner - whether it's family life or work life. I keep a diary of a family schedule and a work schedule and try to dedicate equal time to both. It's important for me to spend time with my daughters in the evening and have a cut off point in the day where I stop work. Occasionally clients ask me to work to tight deadlines which means late nights but I try not to make this a habit. A healthy mind is so important to me - I destress by meditating, pilates and running.



LINES & CURRENT

Born out of a love for clean lines with a boho twist, 'Lines & Current' is a minimal jewellery and accessories brand for normal girls who 'work hard to keep it simple.' It's about de-cluttering, finding clean lines & pursuing your version of minimalism or simplicity. Lines & Current have built an online community of followers who love the look and styling of the brand through creating a strong brand look as well as engaging in a genuine way with their customers. They have built a community.

Tell us about your brand!

I am Rebekah, creator of Lines & Current, a minimal jewellery and Accessories brand. I want my customers to have a beautiful, inspiring and most importantly, 'hassle-free' online shopping experience and I offer free shipping too.

How do you go about creating a strong brand aesthetic?

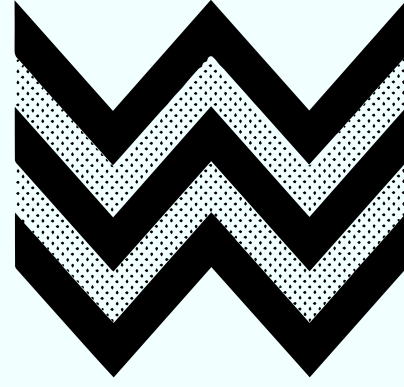
I see myself as a curator in many ways, even more than a designer. I love to use my designs to curate a visual display for the viewer, for example, putting together a seasonal lookbook and creating consistency in aesthetic and tone even if I'm dipping into various different photographic sessions and products across the four collections in the Lines & Current shop. The muted, often subdued aesthetic of the brand reflects the minimalism I value. I think it's so important to define your brand using a consistent visual palate and not be too much of a magpie. I have to show restraint because I love a good collage, but I'm careful not to dilute the clean visual backdrop I've worked hard to create.

What tips do you have for startups wanting to build a recognisable brand?

a/ Get started! The beginning is the hardest part of any creative activity I find. Then modify and evolve. Gosh, when I started Lines & Current in 2015, I had one headwear product, the HETTA multi-functional hat. I was also working a lot with pen & calligraphy fonts experimenting with whether this would be an outlet of the brand. I was also selling a kitchen product called 'the spiralizer' online after having written an e-book for recipes to use alongside. I wondered if Lines & Current would be more of a lifestyle brand. The past two years has been a process of de-weeding and streamlining the vision of the brand. I had to experiment first, but the challenging part is knowing when it is time to 'de-weed & cut out' and to 'hone in & focus.'

b/ There's a balance between what I want to put out there and what my customers like and will purchase. This means I have to design with the customer in mind yet still remain true to my creativity instincts and desire to push the "artistic envelop" as well. This may involve some failure, some major duds, but you are gradually building up a picture of which designs and marketing strategies are the strongest with the hope that eventually you will know which areas to focus on. Once you find something that works, milk it, work it, stay true. For example, I sell an infinity necklace called the ELSKA. It's my biggest seller and even now after a year and a half has stayed at the top. A few months ago, I released a sister version of it called the Eclectic ELSKA and now sell them both at this top selling rate.

c/ Find your unique selling point. Finding what makes your brand stand apart is crucial. For me, personifying each product across the collections and creating a back story for each piece has meant my customers have something to sink their teeth into when they are making their purchase. The giving aspect of our brand also assures the customer that we are not just after sales, but have an outward focus too.



TapSOS™

TAPSOS

TapSOS is a non-verbal app to enable anyone to contact emergency services in a difficult situation. The founder of TapSOS - Becca Hume - lives and breathes inclusivity, is curious about users, their behaviours and needs. She questions and explores day-to-day activities in order to design functional products that are accessible and usable by a wide range of audiences.

What is the current product you are working on and what problem does it resolve?

I am currently building and leading a team developing a product called TapSOS, a non-verbal method of contacting the Emergency Services. We all know that engaging with the Emergency Services is often overwhelming. TapSOS is designed to eliminate this. Designed in a highly visual manner through icons, you will be able to request the help you need, giving responders a more accurate understanding of how they can assist.

“In a world where time is everything, a better emergency response can often mean the difference between life and death” - BAPCO

We are committed to delivering a more inclusive solution, allowing everyone to contact emergency services, without barriers.

The TapSOS app will be launching in March 2019 and will be available for both Android and iOS - free to download from both Play store and App store.

Do you use design thinking in your process and if so, in what way?

I'm sure I do use certain techniques that are considered as “design thinking” but I don't purposely do them with the thought “oh I must use this technique as it is a great design thinking tool” ... However, my workspace is often covered in sticky-notes, I think this is a useful way to brain-dump ideas - it gives you the flexibility to get rid of some or move some to the top – prioritizing tasks and visions. The best pieces of advice I've been given that have helped me along the journey are:

Say YES and shit your pants later

#GoDO

The first, coming from a mentor, and the latter, the motto of a business acceleration programme.

Give 3 tips to people that are currently thinking of setting up a business but don't yet have an idea!

Don't put too much pressure on yourself; some of the best ideas come to mind during the most random, unplanned times. Think blue sky, you can always reel it in later.

Don't be afraid to talk your ideas through with mentors or business advisors. This will really help to shape your thoughts and move you from procrastinating to doing!

Give it a go – you won't know until you try. I have heard many times that if you are going to fail, fail fast. Then you will be able to put that aside and move onto the next project, having gained valuable experience



COLOUR & CLOTH

Colour and Cloth is owned and run by Christine Boyle. Based in her quirky home studio in South East Belfast, Colour and Cloth offers sewing classes workshops and events and will be teaching costume design in Madrid in 2019. Christine has taught over 2000 students in colleges, community groups, individual tuition and mentoring. She has over 20 years of industry experience and over 10 years' experience being self-employed.

From inspiration to outcome, what is your particular process for costume designing?

Inspiration for a costume can come from many sources. It can be from having quiet time to reflect, or the result of travelling to a city and being bombarded with culture. Often it is nature; a petal of a flower can often translate wonderfully into the silhouette of a dress that had been at a sticking point until a visit to a floral market. To rule anything that exists out as a source of inspiration is to close the doors on the possibilities of creative journeys and progression. Fabric will come next. Each fabric has its own qualities that can also be manipulated by garment construction. I believe it is very important for a designer to understand the materials they are working with and understand how to construct a garment. I think to only sketch an idea is limiting. Some of the Costumes I made recently can currently be seen on stage at the Sydney Mardi Gras.

What inspired your upcycled / reconstructed range and where do you forage fabrics?

I have always had a collection of fabrics - from stacks of sample clothes from Castleisland Tweed, leather from the GOT costume department, Irish lace and crochet from the 1950s. Even if a garment is still intact but maybe on its way to the charity shop, I will see it as fabric, and look at how it can be reinvented into something else. Leather belts can be used as bag handles, everything can be repurposed. I only like natural fabrics because they will last. I used linen that is over 50 years old and I know it will still be as good as, 50 years from now. It is not our natural way of thinking, but you can really become open to this by dissecting how a garment is made and then literally turning it inside out, upside down and changing it. It is very addictive once you get started! Our wastefulness of clothing and fabric and its effect on our planet is very frightening so I hold classes on teaching sewing skills on Make Do and Mending and An Intro to Upcycling. We need to bring these creative life skills back - focusing on re-design and re-purposing clothing and bringing awareness to fast fashion and what we can do to slow it down. I am also a volunteer at Belfast Repair Cafe - I am very community focused. I love teaching a new generation the essential life skill of sewing.

What is your top tip (with detail) for fashion and textile graduates embarking on their careers?

I am continually learning from those younger and older than me. I would say that just because you have graduated, your learning and development should not stop. Instead, always immerse yourself in the new fabric, fashion trends and developments. Be aware of what is coming up, but always respect the past. Our graduates of today have this mountain of fast fashion to overcome. Their collections have not only to be commercial and of great design, but the expectations to be eco and sustainable are just as important. I graduated in 1996 and I have been blessed to be involved in the NI Fashion & Textile Industry since 1996 and since 2008 in the Costume Design and Construction industry. I would also say that a healthy attitude to getting things done will reap rewards.



N. ROLLINSON

Natasha, founder of N.Rollinson is a jeweller who is skilled in traditional and contemporary methods. Her designs are award winning and have been well exhibited and recognised internationally.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

I knew that I wanted to make jewellery from the first time I worked with silver. Aged sixteen, I took a short course one Summer at the Edinburgh College of Art and made a wide, hammered cuff in a minimal, modern style that would still fit in with the style of things I make now, all these years later. I have studied and trained intensively in jewellery, first in Belfast, then Reading, followed by Kilkenny before moving to London to live and work as a goldsmith for six years. My business has grown organically, from bespoke commission and exhibition work whilst I trained and then worked at the bench. I began N.Rollinson in Islington, London in 2014 and it has grown from there as a destination for refined collections, bespoke designs and unique wedding and engagement rings. My husband is from Belfast - we moved back at the end of 2017 and renovated an old office block. My showroom and studio is downstairs.

What or who influences or motivates you?

My inspiration comes from all over the place, but my work is underpinned by precision, versatility and nature inspired geometry. I strive to create effortlessly elegant jewellery that transcends time and season and am motivated by the connections within jewellery. The sentiment that jewellery holds and the specialness in pieces that can be passed on is a truly amazing thing and a joy to be a part of, whether it is a gift for yourself or someone you care about, or a symbol of love that binds two people together. I also have a fascination with objects that transform, have a hidden element or a dual purpose, which has led to signature pieces where versatility is key and is a recurring theme in many pieces.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

a. biggest hurdle

I would say my biggest hurdle was having the confidence and self-belief to focus on building my brand, even though it was what I'd always wanted. Maybe because it is what I'd always wanted. I am a perfectionist!

b. proudest moment/achievement

My proudest accomplishment was the studio in Belfast.

It was a ten year dream to design a creative home for the jewellery that I love to make and to turn my dream space a reality has been fantastic.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Work hard, persevere and try to maintain a happy outlook on life! A good working attitude will get you far. And as cliched as it may be - 'Rome wasn't built in a day'. Take the opportunities that come your way and try to get as immersed as you can in the industry you are interested in, it pays off in the end.



LAUREN FORN

LAUREN FOWLER

Lauren Fowler is a woodworker who started out creating serving boards as gifts for family and friends, which lead to her creating the Lauren Fowler Handcrafted Company.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

I am Lauren and I run Lauren Fowler Handcrafted Company. I started just over a year ago after making little wooden serving boards for friends and family as gifts out of my husband's little workshop, where I enjoyed playing about with scrap wood we had lying around. We were fortunate to move further out to the country last year where I was able to set up my own workshop in one of the out buildings which was the start of my little business. Since then we have steadily grown and my husband has even come on board. He has always loved working with metal and together we have been able to collaborate on furniture for clients' custom pieces. We try to work with local sustainable wood sources as well as using all natural finishes on our wood products where possible and are always researching and trying to improve on this. I feel very fortunate that we have been able to sell directly as well as through various shops around the country; it has allowed for fantastic friendships, networking opportunities as well as collaboration with other local makers and businesses.

What or who influences and motivates you?

The world outside and the wood I work with influences me in my work. Using the natural shapes and forms of the wood to enhance what is already there, whether it be the grain, the natural edging, or curvature to create items that work in customer's homes and meet different tastes. I also find it important to make items that I love myself. If I had to make things that I wouldn't have in my own home, or use myself then it wouldn't allow the creative juices to flow.

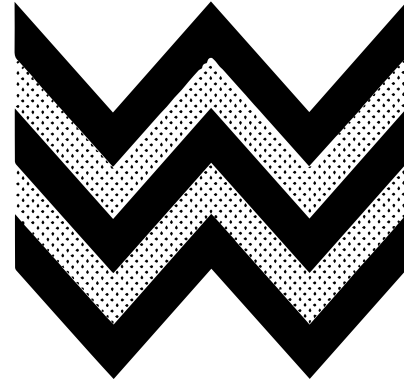
In terms of motivation, I find that other makers motivate me to work hard in the things I make. The culture is improving here for local makers/crafters and I think it's very important we see this continue to grow, especially for women. There is such a community of support with local makers, as we are all trying to achieve the same thing. Since I started I have found that other makers I have got to know and talked with are open with advice, do's and don't's of starting a business, even running ideas past each other.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

I think one of my biggest hurdles has been not always believing in myself. Everyday is a school day and I am still very much learning about the craft of woodworking and also what's involved in running a business. I don't think that will ever go away, I will never finish learning, but as I've grown as a maker, working on different projects for different kinds of clients I've started to gain a more confidence in myself and my abilities. I think my proudest moment will always be making my first sale. That was the moment where everything changed and I wasn't just making wooden goods to gift to friends and family. When I received that first order for one of my live edge serving boards it made me so excited that someone thought they were worth something and that really helped me put myself out there and see where it would take me.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Do what makes you happy! As scary as that sometimes is, if you are passionate about something make sure you include it in your life. If you get to make your living out of it, always be grateful and never take it for granted. Starting your own business can be hard at times but if you love what you do and work hard to get where you want to be, you'll be living your dream, which not everyone gets to say...



STUDIO PARK

Lisa Park is an architect and a teacher at Ulster University, she started her practice Studio Park in 2016 when she moved back to Belfast after living abroad for many years. She's interested in the ethics and the impact of architecture as well as architecture within the community.

Tell us a bit about yourself and how you started Studio Park.

While working in Australia, I did a business course part-time. Business isn't generally taught to architecture students at university and being a good architect doesn't necessarily equate to being a good business person. I always had an interest in business and loved the idea of starting a practice, although I was aware that would bring its own challenges. We moved back to Belfast in 2016 and I decided to start the business shortly after the birth of my second child last year in 2017. I had been working on very large-scale projects in the previous years and wanted a shift back to smaller scale projects. I also wanted to teach alongside working in practice as well as have some flexibility in my working hours with two small children at home.

I spoke to a few people I knew who had their own architecture practice and gathered as much advice as possible from those who had been through the process of setting up their own business previously. I had a project to get started on but obviously needed to get more work lined up, so it was important to spread the word as quickly as possible. The first few months were a big learning curve.

Do you have any advice for anyone who would like to set up their own architectural practice?

a. Be prepared to admit that you don't know something. Be ready to ask lots of questions and listen to lots of advice. Take it all in and assess what will work best for you. Build up a network of your peers and support each other. Speak to business owners who aren't architects as they may have a different viewpoint.

b. Ideally start some projects while you're still in employment elsewhere. This can be a challenge or impossible if you have children or other commitments. In that case it is good to have a steady, secondary source of income while you are establishing the business.

c. Don't sell yourself short. Architectural fees can be very competitive, and it can be tempting to charge very low fees when you're starting out but remember your worth and charge realistically. You can't do your best work if you're burnt out working for next to nothing.

e. Take the business as seriously as you take your architecture. Take the time to set things up properly. Track, monitor and assess. Don't be afraid to try things and change it if it's not working. There's a lot of trial and error at the start. Keep learning.

f. Remember why you are doing what you do. Keep images of things that inspire you close at hand to keep you motivated and focused on producing your best work. And remember, in the words of Nelson Mandela, "It always seems impossible until it's done".



CHLOE DOUGAN DESIGNS

Chloe is a fashion designer who graduated in from Ulster University in 2014, winning multiple awards and nominations for her work. She designs edgy and feminine clothing and enjoys using fabrics that are striking and make an impact.

Tell us a bit about your business.

I studied Textile Art, Design with Fashion at the University of Ulster, Belfast, where I graduated in 2014. I was soon awarded a Residency position in the Fashion Department at the University where I mentored final year students alongside working on my own label during my time there. So far I have showcased at Belfast Fashion Week for Autumn Winter 14, Spring Summer 15 and the Fabulous Fashion Teas fashion show at the 5star Merchant Hotel. My designs are well recognised as being edgy and feminine with strong elements of leathers, suedes and lace; my favourite fabrics to work with as they are so striking and make a great impact.

Designed and made in Belfast, I create beautiful bespoke garments that will make you feel confident, feminine and empowered. After graduating in 2014, I launched my womenswear brand and love how each working day is creative, challenging and different. I also offer a bespoke design service where I create one off pieces for special events and occasions.

What are some of your proudest moments in your career?

The proudest moment of my career to date would be my invitation to Buckingham Palace for the first ever Commonwealth Fashion Exchange, held during London Fashion Week in February. I was so nervous before the event and wore one of my own bespoke designs to the showcase and made my own accessories to compliment my look. Fashion industry stars like Stella Mc Cartney, Naomi Campbell and Anna Wintour were also there and the event was hosted by HRH The Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton.

I've also won awards including "Artist to Watch" 2015 by Culture Northern Ireland, a nomination for "Young Entrepreneur" at the Lisburn City Business Awards where I won second place and being Artist in Residence at Duncairn Arts and Culture Centre.

Do you have any advice for those looking to start up a design business?

Starting up your own business is extremely difficult although for me the rewards far out way the stress of juggling several jobs at a time. Every working week is different but for me this keeps it interesting and you end up developing skills in things you never knew you had an interest in. I would advise getting some work experience and following local people who are in the same industry, learn from them, ask questions and most importantly make sure you are constantly staying motivated as if you don't push yourself you can lose your creative streak. Also remember that it doesn't all happen in a heartbeat and patience is key to growth and longevity in your business, so stay true to who you are, work hard and be happy with your development throughout your ever-changing career.



EMMARIE

EmMarie's Emma Curtis developed her luxury fashion brand in October 2016. Emma is concentrating on womenswear at the moment with the hope of branching out into other areas of design such as accessories. The brand uses luxury fabrics and offers a high quality of craftsmanship. Everything is designed and made in Ireland to date.

Where do you get your inspiration from?

I love to design from nature, I find it fascinating what nature can create. I love the colours, the shapes, the textures, just thinking of nature gets me so excited for what I'll use as my next inspiration. In general you can get inspiration from anything - once you have a connection with or a passion for something you can design from it.

What designer inspires you the most and why?

French designer Stéphane Rolland. I love his use of design, the elegance and class within each individual piece. The mix of elegance and surface detail. Genius.

What is the most important piece of knowledge or advice you have gotten from setting up your own business?

It's not easy and it doesn't happen overnight so it is very important to surround yourself with positive people, people who support you. I believe you get back what you put in, if you work hard and dream big there is no limit to what you can achieve.



I can
my
own
super
hero

ALKAA

Sharon Plumridge is a Fine Art graduate of Ulster University, she and her partner Michael run design company Alkaa. Alkaa are a multidisciplinary Graphic Design agency team that specialises in Branding, Identity and Illustration.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

My name is S J Plumridge and I am one half of design company Alkaa, which I co-run with my partner Michael McAleer. My journey began after I graduated from University of Ulster in 2012 with a degree in Fine Art but after spending a couple of years trying to find my place in the world I felt compelled to return to education. I knew I wanted to focus on illustration and so I decided to enrol onto the Graphic Design HND at Belfast Met in 2015, which is coincidentally where I met my partner. It was during the second year of the course that we joined the Belfast Enterprise Academy programme which helped us to realise the possibility of starting our own business. After graduating from the HND, my partner and myself applied for the graduate residency programme with Blick Studios and have slowly started to build up our business. The past year has been very busy between working my day job, creating design work for clients and going back to college to complete a top-up degree.

What or who influences and motivates you?

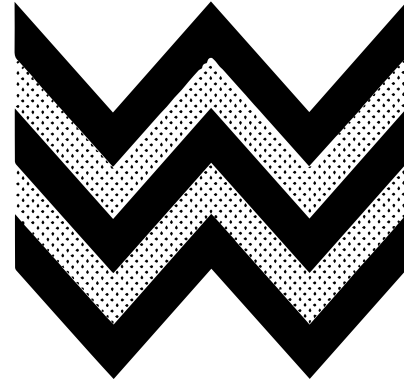
I find myself to be motivated by my love of all aspects of art and design. I'm always trying new ways to produce work! Seeing the work of other practitioners really inspires me too. At the minute I'm obsessed with the work of Grayson Perry and I love the illustrations of Camilla d'Errico.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

The biggest hurdle I've faced so far has probably been the decision to return to education. It has involved a lot of sacrifice and hard work! In turn though when I got my distinction and graduated it was one of my proudest moments because I had proved to myself that I was capable of achieving my goals.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

The advice I would give to emerging designers is don't be afraid to make changes; if you don't feel like you are moving in the right direction then make the change! I would also say be kind and be humble, it makes asking for help a lot easier!



AFTERBOOK
CELEBRATE A LIFE

AFTERBOOK

Jess Dornan Lynas is the founder of Afterbook, a tech company which offers users a platform to create digital memoirs for lost loved ones, or indeed, their own memoirs.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

I have always been a creative person and grew up being artistic and adventurous but a problem solver too. When I was 19 my Mum died and it really turned my world upside down. It determined the course of my life from that day forth. That was 20 years ago now and I have realised over the years (and after a career in fashion) that I yearn for a way to remember her better and to celebrate her life and legacy. I want my children to know more about their Nana Lorna and I want to share and hear her stories. I have realised that it's not just me; people struggling with loss and grief find the creating and curating of memories to be very cathartic. So I created Afterbook as a digital home for the memories of the ones we love.

What or who influences and motivates you?

Love and life and people. I wrote recently in a blog post that having lost my Mum at such a young and pivotal age, I know that life is for the living and people are for the loving. I meet so many people who want to honour their loved ones and feel happier on their journeys and that's what it's all about I think. That's why we're here - to love and leave a legacy. I don't mean that you have to find a cure for cancer, though that would be beyond brilliant of course, but to love and be loved, that is a real legacy. It's a life with meaning and experience that I strive for and I endeavour to show that to my children.

What has been your biggest hurdle proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

a. biggest hurdle

Founding a tech business in a world that I really know very little about ie. tech! I, unfortunately, know a lot about grief and so I can craft a message of what we are trying to do. But I couldn't write a line of code if my life depended on it and am slowly, slowly, learning more about tech products and user journeys. Being a woman in tech and trying to achieve investment also has its challenges. I'm very often the only woman in the room. There's a lot of talk about change but I often don't see it. But I believe, as Ghandi said, "we must be the change we wish to see in the world."

b. proudest moment/accomplishment

I have been selected onto two accelerator cohorts - Entrepreneurial Spark (now Ulster Bank) and the Ignite Propel Programme. I was runner up in the NI heat of the Startup World Cup and went to the finale in San Francisco and I was nominated for a Great British Entrepreneur Award this year. These are all great achievements but to be honest my greatest achievement is that I am still here, doing this, making progress, 18 months after leaving my part time job and all whilst I'm on my own Monday-Friday with our 2 children as my husband works away. I look back and wonder how on earth that has been possible!

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Be true to yourself and the message and product you wish to create. It's great to be inspired by others but your path is your path. You've got to have immense tenacity and a little audacity to keep creating and producing. Because there isn't a magic wand or fast-track to get you to where you want to be. The most brilliant, brightest creators failed and failed and failed again. I have learned this and continue to learn this all the time. Please know that there are incredibly low days but they end and something, however small and seemingly insignificant, will happen and the sun will rise on a new day and the landscape will look a little different and a path will become clear.



PAPER AMY

Amy Mathers is the founder of PaperAmy, who creates commissioned sculptures out of paper as well as illustrated versions for editorials and advertising.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

So, my name is Amy Mathers and I grew up just outside Tandragee (Portadown area). I studied Graphic Design at De Montfort University in Leicester, which is where I discovered paper art for one of my final year projects. Ever since I was little, I was always making things from paper and card. I was your typical kid who preferred the box rather than the toy so it didn't come to any surprise that I continued to make my little sculptures after university. PaperAmy was never a dream of mine, or a goal, but working for myself always was. The way it all came around was through the support of my family, friends and colleagues (at the time) who encouraged me to start up an instagram page for my work and I'm forever grateful. There are two sides to PaperAmy - I have my miniature sculptures which are created on commissions for presents and markets (and also for my own personal enjoyment) and then I have my illustration side, the sculptures/pieces are still small scale (but can be bigger if need be) but they're created for editorials, advertising, etc. I love what I do.

What/who influences/motivates you?

One person, or thing, does not influence me in particular. Everything influences me, the people that I meet, the places that I see and the activities that I do; I try to take everything in because everyone and everything has something to offer. In saying this, what motivates me the most are creative people who love what they do. Do you ever find that you have so much energy after having a conversation about with someone that is so passionate? That's how I find my main motivation for getting started into a project.

What has been your biggest hurdle and your proudest moment or accomplishment in your career?

a. biggest hurdle

My biggest hurdle was myself and overcoming the self-doubt I had about my capabilities. People can tell you that your work is good and that you're talented but unless you believe that yourself, you're not going to get very far.

b. proudest moment/achievement

When I look back over the past 5 years, I have accomplished so much with university, work, PaperAmy and just life in general but my proudest accomplishment has to be the most recent one, taking that leap into the unknown of freelancing. Even though it is only a recent thing and I'm still learning, it is opening up so many opportunities for me. Before when I was working full time, I was stressed, working weekends, working right up to the deadlines and also didn't have a social life. Now it gives me more freedom to work on personal projects and take on bigger ones with confidence. I'm so much happier now.

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Love what you do, if you don't love it or you're not happy in a place then change it. No one else can make you happy or make decisions for you; you're in control.



JUMP THE HEDGES

Síofra Caherty is founder of multidisciplinary design studio Jump The Hedges. Jump The Hedges focuses on sustainability, functionality and local manufacturing.

How did you come up with your product?

Whilst living in San Francisco I began practicing yoga but could not find a suitable bag for carrying my mat. I wanted something that was water resistant for cycling and that was big enough to carry other things beside my mat. Over the next few years I continued to look for something suitable yet was unable to find anything that fulfilled my needs. I decided to create my own product and this is where 'The Yoga Sac' was born.

What made you start designing products for yoga?

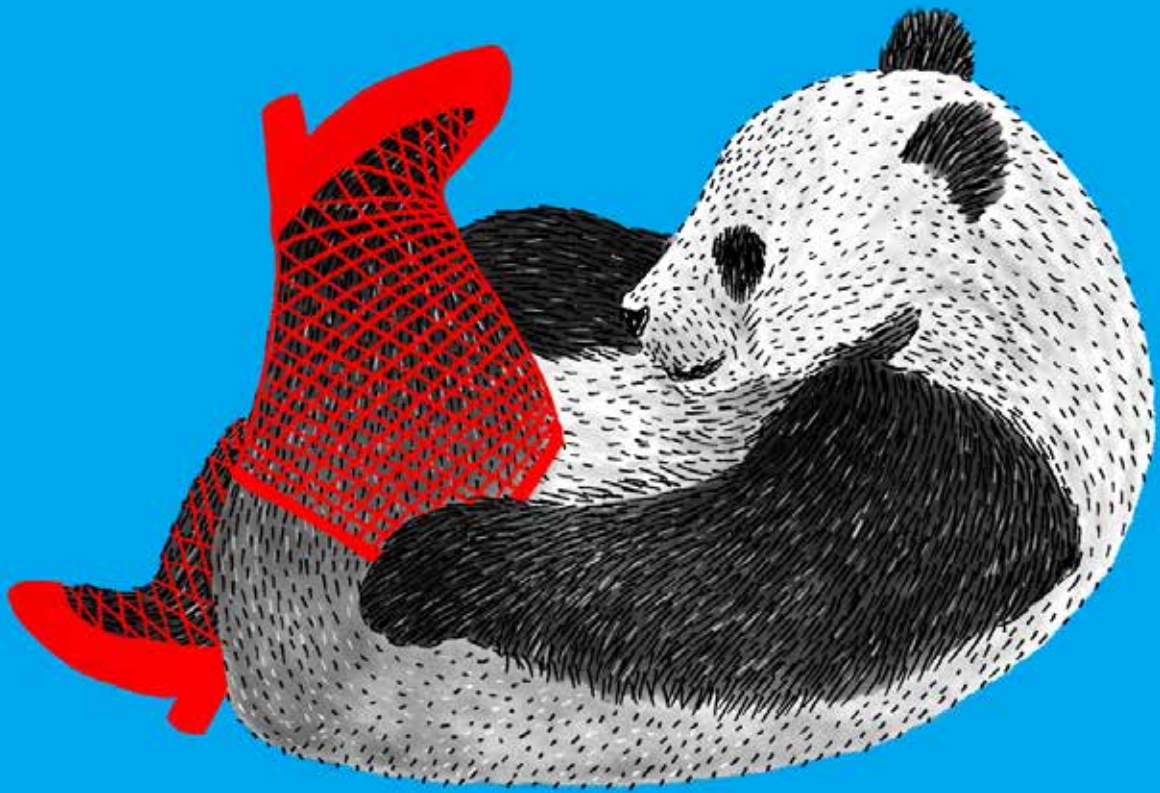
I noticed a gap in the market for functional products for the yoga consumer. Most things were made from natural heavyweight fibres which are not suitable for busy bike commuters. I was also aware of the growth of 'Athleisure' which continues to grow steadily so I was assured that the yoga consumer was keen to have something that not only worked but looked good also.

Where do you manufacture your products and how did you decide on this?

I spent 7 years working as a designer for several different companies with lots of different kinds of factories in the Far East. Some factories were well run but others were not so much and this lack of continuity and sustainability frustrated me. I became disillusioned at spending so much of my time emailing factories rectifying communication breakdowns and longed to have a factory I could visit locally. I have manufactured all of my products to date in Ireland and it has not been easy. Production prices are high and therefore retail costs are high. Starting out I was adamant that I wanted local production but I have now come to terms with the fact that 'local' may have to mean 'within Europe'.

What are your tips on how to turn your idea into a product?

Learn as much as you can about the industry. Although I am a qualified designer and have worked in industry for several years I interned with bag manufacturers to properly learn about bag construction and design. Surround yourself with other entrepreneurs. You need as much support as possible when deciding to pursue the road of self employment. By getting to know people already in business this will let you see that your dreams can become a reality and keep you focused. Find out about all the free stuff. There is SO much going on in Belfast for startup businesses. It is a matter of researching everything and attending multiple networking events. There is free office space, mentorship, website development, courses etc. It is just a matter of educating yourself and being aware of what is going on.



MARTINA SCOTT

Martina is an illustrator living and working in Belfast. Drawing inspiration from daily life and the fantastical, Martina creates engaging illustrations which connect with people. Using a range of media and techniques, a happy marriage of traditional and digital, the resulting artwork is richly textured. Martina enjoys wordplay, and feels that the concept of the illustration can often be as layered as the artwork.

Tell us about the importance of a side project

Side projects are a great opportunity to create work without the limitations or restrictions of client work. It's wonderful having something you're passionate about you can work on while you're waiting on client feedback or just to start the day. Also, what you create on personal projects can influence or attract future commissions.

How do you stay motivated and focused?

Setting timely goals. Normally if I have structure within a side project it dictates what needs to be done or when so it feels mandatory. Mandatory, but still in a fun way. My current side project The Monday Friday Project is an illustration for every Monday and Friday of 2017. It can be hard waking up early on a Monday morning to draw a tired badger or a grumpy hedgehog, but it's a promise I made to myself and I would hate to have a week missing out of the year. If it wasn't for the time restriction I've imposed on myself, I probably wouldn't have managed the amount I have so far. I have other side projects that are more casual and can sit for months and months without being added to, but that has its own advantages too as they don't get rushed and you can reach further for quality.

Align the side project with some of your other interests/passions. I've always enjoyed documenting and looking back through memories. When I was a kid I used to keep diaries, other ways I do this now are through using the 1 second Everyday App or creating illustrations about my day. Picking a side project that aligns with my other interests and goals helps motivate me to keep on track as I enjoy it on more than one level.

What are some of the favourite side projects that you have worked on?

I haven't had one personal project yet that outshines the others, I suppose that's a good thing as things can stagnate if you're ever too content with something. I've enjoyed different aspects from each of the side projects.

This Is The Coolest Place - This was the first time I'd ever made GIFs and it was fun to learn a new skill and have all the 'test subjects' be part of a collection. The GIF gang are still hanging out together yet happy to welcome new members when I have the time!

Inktober - A lot of the work I created for Inktober has proved to be very versatile for inspiring work since. I also found my mind to be exploding with illustration ideas while I was working on this.

Springfield Record Co. - This wasn't a side project with a daily limit or any time restrictions so I was able to work a little longer and with more detail. I had just as much fun creating these illustrations as I did brain storming on the ideas. Just like other on-going side projects, this series will be added to when I find the time.



DANNI GOWDY

Danni Gowdy is a freelance Illustrator from Belfast who has an MA in Children's Book Illustration from the Cambridge School of Art. She prefers to use traditional drawing tools including dip pen and ink and often adds colour digitally in photoshop. Her work is bright and colourful and she uses humour to connect with the viewer.

How does creating a story or concept for children differ from creating one for an adult?

I guess for me the most important aspect of creating a story for children is to create something that interests them enough to want to turn the next page. Kids have short attention spans (I know this all too well from having an almost 4 yr old nephew and a 1 yr old niece!) so I think you really have to keep this in mind when creating artwork to engage with children. I try to connect them to the book or the image by using humour - I think if you can make a child giggle from looking at a picture then you're winning! I like creating expressive characters that children can relate to - whether it's a bored giraffe or a frightened vegetable. I've actually never tried creating a story for adults - although this is something I'd love to try at some stage. I love graphic novels and one of the most beautiful ones I read recently was 'Jim's Lion' by Russell Hoban & Alexis Deacon. It's about a boy who finds bravery during a serious illness, and the imagery is so powerful and moving. I suppose the difference between creating artwork for children and adults is the freedom to express the darker subject matter. Although of course there's artists like Edward Gorey who aren't afraid to portray darker subject matter to kids. One of my all time favourite books is 'The Gashlycrumb Tinies' which tells the tale of 26 children (each representing a letter of the alphabet) and their untimely deaths, presented in rhyming couplets. It's completely sinister but you can't help but laugh!

What part of the design process do you find the most challenging and which one do you enjoy the most?

I think the most challenging part of the design process is deciding on the final composition or design solution. There's so many ways you can go and I often find it overwhelming in the early stages of a new project when my mind is filled with ideas. I think I'm naturally quite an indecisive person therefore I really have to force myself to make a decision about final outcomes. The part I enjoy the most is the initial brainstorming of ideas and doodles - quite often the first sketch I do for a new project will be used in the final design. When I was doing my Masters, I did my dissertation on 'The Process of Finding the Finished Piece' which explored the concept of the 'honest' line and how drawings can be deadened if they are overworked. This has stuck with me ever since and taught me to be confident in my scribbles as sometimes they are the most honest and therefore the best outcome for a project.

What are some tips you'd give to illustrators when creating artwork for children?

Put yourself in the child's shoes - what would make them laugh? What would make them relate to the drawing? Try to find a means for them to feel emotionally connected to the image. Look at what else is out there - there's noticeable trends particularly in the children's picture book scene, for example dragons and bears were REALLY popular in 2015! Don't try to copy a particular style or 'visual language' - when you draw enough you naturally develop your own style, even if you don't see it yourself. I quite often get told that I have a distinct style that people recognise but I honestly don't see it myself. Be confident in your work and try not to compare yourself to others - there's so much talent out there but everyone is unique in their own individual way. :)



HUG

Hug is the first fully wraparound reusable hot/cold pack designed to fit to women's bodies so that it can be worn discreetly under clothes and provide effective relief from period pain. Hug also offers relief from back, shoulder, neck, muscular pain and headaches or migraines. It can be heated in the microwave or cooled in the freezer, over and over again.

Tell us about the project/s you are currently working on

I can't talk too much about most of the work I am doing because the ideas aren't protected yet, this is one thing I have to be very careful about! However I can give you a flavour of what I am up to in top secret: I'm working on some improvements to Hug based on the customer feedback so far as well as a number of complimentary products for other conditions. To create some of the new Hug line products I need some clinical input so it's not likely to be a quick turnaround. Aside from Hug I am developing a number of products for babies and parents to make taking care of a tiny person a little less intimidating, helping to improve bathtime, making sleep safer and helping parents out with 'poopy' situations.

Why did you choose to make the move from designer to design entrepreneur?

I think ever since I was young I wanted to have my own business, even if I did not quite realise it. I had stalls at craft fairs in early secondary school, sold things I created to friends, started a recycled clothing mini business in my first couple of years at uni. I needed to get some product design experience under my belt before I really understood how to develop a product, test it, and take it through to (mass) production. For me it started with a problem I personally experienced and wanted a solution to, the more research I did, the more it became apparent that many other people were in the same position as me. Time to design!

What made you decide to base production in China and how did you go about doing it?

I started working for a local engineering company before I graduated and as part of my role there I was sourcing factories in China and travelling there regularly to check on the progress of my projects. Working in China is refreshing, things get done, and it is not like people imagine, the technology is often ahead of what is available in the EU, customer service is second to none and quality is great if you choose a good partner. I try to make a point of visiting a factory before we give them any work, as soon as you step foot in the door you get a real idea of whether they are a good fit for your project or not. I'm writing this from China right now! I've been studying Mandarin for a few years so coming out here is not intimidating any more but there are plenty of ways to get help to work out here if you feel you need it.

What tips would you give aspiring product designers?

Try not to get stuck doing one type of thing for too long, I think breadth of experience can sometimes be better than in depth experience in one field. I never know everything I need to know to design a product, because the nature of design is that you are creating something new from nothing and it has not been done before. If you are willing to learn you can always find more information or get some input from someone when you need it. Northern Ireland is great for this, everyone knows someone who knows someone who can help, and will.

If an idea is gnawing at you just go for it and do something about it, planning is good but you can spend so long planning you don't take action. I have had many projects and endeavours that have failed, it's all good learning and will help you get it right next time.

Finally, I can't tell you how many times someone has told me something is not possible, sometimes you need to trust your gut and keep going until you prove them wrong!



NINETEEN THIRTY

Nineteenthirty is a design studio owned by designer Bronagh Griffin who specialises in luxurious menswear and design consultancy . The Nineteenthirty label designs & produces exclusive bespoke made to measure shirts and accessories. Bronagh trained in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin and has worked as a designer and brand creator for over 25 years.

Tell us a bit about your business Nineteenthirty, and why did you decide to start it?

I have worked for myself for the last 20 years and for the first 10 I was a design consultant for companies across Northern Ireland and Invest NI, including a shirt company, for which I developed 5 brands. About 10 years ago as the manufacturing was disappearing from NI, I decided to launch a shirt brand partly for work-life balance and also so that I could control the design aesthetic. Nineteenthirty launched right in the middle of a recession and was named after the period of the great depression (I believed they designed their way out of it - so much creativity happened then.) Initially, it was a wholesale brand that retailed to 25 retailers across the UK but as the recession bit it became a very difficult market, so I set up a pop-up shop and for the last five years it retailed through a branded shop on the Lisburn Road Belfast. I also design accessories and gifts. As time went on a large part of the business became bespoke, personalised and made to measure shirts and this is the one to one service we specialise in from our studio on the Malone Road. Working from a studio also gives me the flexibility to do design consultancy work again which really excites me. I provide design specialism in terms of, fashion design, textile design, and social media content creation.

What are you most proud of in your career so far?

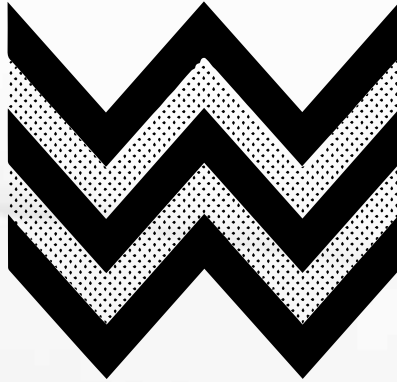
Working for myself since my first daughter was born has in itself been an achievement.
Having shirts that I have designed in Saks 5th Avenue, Selfridges & selling in Scandinavia Europe the US and Japan.
Being chosen for New Beats at the Pitti Uomo Menswear show in Florence.
Being able to sustain a creative career.
Mentoring the next generation.

How do you manage your work/life balance?

I have compromised a lot, and a lot of my business decisions have been to ensure that I am there for my two daughters and my husband. It is difficult for any working mother, but I am the daughter of a professional musician who inspired me, she once told me ' you have to follow your dreams as it gives your children permission to follow theirs'. My children are now well into their teens and hopefully I have done that.

Any exciting projects you're working on at the moment?

I am currently redefining my business and the one thing that I love about working for myself is that you can have a portfolio of different projects which can be diverse and challenging. So currently I am rebuilding my website, which will concentrate on the bespoke shirt service and our personalised shirts; our accessories line is being redesigned and that will be sold online and I have some great consultancy projects, so it is all looking very positive, but I am building slowly to ensure I get the business framework right and of course still chasing that work-life balance.



limited edition
**ART
PRINT**

limited edition
**ART
PRINT**



HUNTER PAPER CO.

Hunter Paper Co. is a letterpress stationery brand based in Northern Ireland. With a slight obsession for the beautiful tactility of letterpress printing and a modern, minimal design aesthetic, designer Emma Jackson established the brand fresh out of a degree in illustration to continue to explore her own visual style. They're now stocked in nearly 100 independent shops across the UK, Ireland, Europe and America, and nationally in Oliver Bonas stores across the UK, and Selfridges in London.

Tell us about your studio!

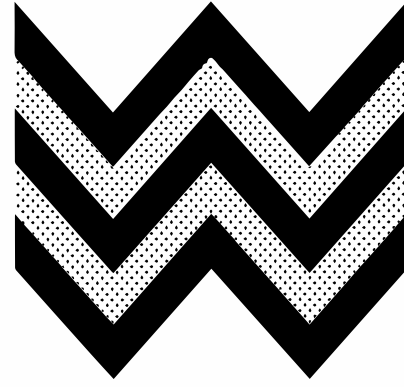
I set up my business just over 3 years ago and in that time I've adjusted my studio and workspaces lots to accommodate the growing business. I started out of a tiny box room studio I rented in Belfast as soon as I graduated. I started freelancing and found the need for a dedicated space and a routine, so rented a little studio and got to work. As the business came to fore and I found my interests were definitely leaning more to pursuing it rather than freelancing, I found myself outgrowing the space really quickly. I was incredibly lucky to have the support of my parents who were willing to let me put a large shed/studio at the back of their house, and my Granda who built the studio for me! It's great to be working in a space that has not only an obvious connection to home, but was also purpose built for me by family. I'm now starting to outgrow that space, and am cramming shelving and storage into every usable space possible as well as taking over much of my parents garage to house my ton-and-a-half 1960s letterpress printer. At the moment I'm a team of one, although I do call in favours and get the help of family and friends when I have big orders going out and need a little extra packing help!

How do you incorporate handmade processes in your designs?

I'm completely obsessed with printmaking and giving my work a really tactile quality. I've always loved letterpress but never imagined I'd actually get to play around with the process myself, never mind actually own a printing press and make it the focus of my business. When I started the company I had been producing lino prints and started printing onto cards as a little extra offering at fairs and on my online shop. This quickly took over and the range really naturally and quite quickly grew and I knew it was going to be the main focus. As I got busier, block-printing became less realistic as it was so time consuming, so I took a screen printing class and switched to screen printing. After about a year I started to outgrow that and knew I couldn't scale the business any further while I was hand screen-printing everything myself, so I looked into letterpress and after a few months research I had a press of my own and was getting to grips with the process. It's much faster, yet still retains all of the texture and perfect imperfections I love so much about printmaking and is still a really hands on process, which I love. From start to finish I decide every step of the process, from hand drawing the illustrations and typography to mixing the Pantone colours, applying the ink to the press and printing each colour on layer by layer to create the final image.

What is the most important piece of knowledge or advice you have gleaned from setting up your own business?

Honestly, just get to work and do it. It sounds cliché, but trusting your gut is hugely important. I knew buying a letterpress printer was the best thing to move my business forward, but on the surface it could have been seen as extremely risky. It was expensive, I'd never printed on one before and I didn't really know where to begin, but I was driven and determined to make it work and it has grown my business already beyond what I thought it could be!



MICHAEL FOX & JORDAN DRAPER

MEGACITY™ OCEANIA



HUB GAMES

Anita Murphy is the co-owner of Hub Games, a table-top games publisher based in Belfast. They are best known for the storytelling game 'Rory's Story Cubes' (now owned by Asmodee SRL), which they sold in 50 countries around the world. Anita also created 'The Extraordinaires Design Studio', an award-winning activity kit to introduce children to the world of invention, design and creative problem solving. Since rebranding as Hub Games, they have launched a number of tabletop games including the critically acclaimed 'Holding On', which has links to the company's Belfast base. In 2019 they will release three new games including MegaCity: Oceania. In 2016, we interviewed Anita about her company, game design and the ups and downs of being in business.

What made you decide to start your company and create games?

We accidentally became a games company. We started out as a creativity training company, developing tools and training materials to assist with creative problem solving. Our first product was a deck of cards called The Inner Vision Deck, which brought a tactile element to working through problems. This led to our next product, Rory's Story Cubes, which used icons to spark word associations and stories. This had a much wider reach and its value was quickly recognised by therapists, teachers and creative writers. The real joy was hearing about three generations of families spending time, telling stories together. We realised that a game had the power to reach more people and help develop creativity than we ever could as a training company. We changed our focus and learned what we needed to know about making games in order to see it out in the world. We want to make games that matter. Physical, table-top games are more inventive than ever and we believe it is their time to shine. There is a real appetite for the physicality of things, alongside developments in the digital gaming space. We want to use the medium of table-top games to explore a wide range of meaningful themes and storylines.

What are some of the challenges you have faced on your journey so far?

Constantly learning as the world keeps changing. You have to keep changing in order to keep going. We did that initially in changing from a training to a games publisher. When we created The Extraordinaires Design Studio, an activity kit to teach design thinking, we initially developed it as a retail product. We faced challenges in it sitting on a shelf, but teachers are doing wonderful work using it in amazing ways and sharing it with each other. You have to admit when you have been going in the wrong direction and change strategy. We have recently had to make big changes and unfortunately let go some of our team. This was the most difficult thing we have had to do.

What are some of the key differences when designing products for a younger target market as compared with adults?

I think that the key difference in designing for products for children is that they are not the target 'market'. Adults sell toys and adults buy toys. One of the things that bothers me about the international toy fairs that we attend is that there are no children allowed. Too often the business of selling products meet adults' rather than children's needs. The toy industry has grown because there are more adults and less children in families. A generation or two ago, there may have been 4 children in a family and there were families of cousins, each with 3-4 children. Now those families have grown up adult children but only a few nieces or nephews between them all. The buying of product is not to fulfil the needs those children. I think the games market differs from toys in this regard because adults play games too, and adults play games with children. Good family games operate on multiple levels; they are accessible enough for the children to play but deep enough for adults to be challenged too.



SHE SAID DESIGN

shesaid - a design and branding studio - was co-founded by Lisa Smyth and Christine McKee after having worked in industry for several years as graphic designers and practitioners. shesaid work on both public and private sector projects and collaborations including, recently, the new Ulster Bank polymer notes.

Tell us a bit about yourself and your business.

shesaid is a female led design and branding studio in the heart of Belfast. Created out of a passion for honest, thoughtful design, shesaid is a conversation between our clients and us. We like to get under our client's skin. Understand what makes them tick. Know what they want to say. We communicate their story in a bespoke and visually engaging way. Set up by Lisa Smyth and Christine McKee we provide impactful design and branding solutions for a diverse range of clients and collaborators. Our aim is to enable growth and success for our clients through meaningful design strategies.

What or who influences and motivates you?

We're inspired by some of the global branding agencies such as Pentagram, Super Union and Landor, who just do branding so well. But we're also equally inspired by smaller agencies and designers who are making a difference in the design world such as: O Street - Glasgow, Studio Frith - London, Red Dog - Dublin, Sort and AV Browne - Belfast and local designer Alice Kearney. We're also a big fan of Tina Touli who is just a wonderfully creative and thoughtful designer.

What has been your:

a. biggest hurdle

As a young studio our biggest hurdle to date is getting the balance right! Between getting the work, doing the work and having the right people to help us along the way. Wearing all the hats, all the time can be tricky!

b. proudest moment/accomplishment

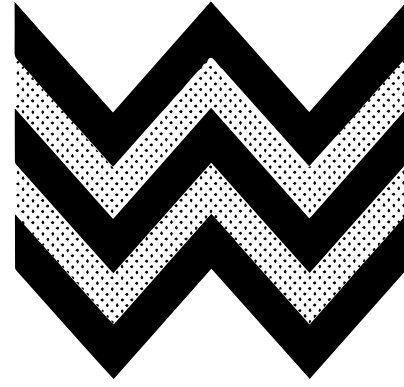
Our proudest moment has to be our role as a Creative Director on the design of the New Ulster Bank Polymer notes. We were responsible for gathering experts, illustrators, artists and creatives from all walks of life in Northern Ireland and ensuring the 'Voice of Northern Ireland' came across onto the note design. We were involved from the initial engagement, sketching and design concept phases, through all the design stages and sign off by client. It's wonderful to see the notes that we were so closely involved with, passing through the hands of hundreds of people every day!

Could you give some advice for any young, emerging designers?

Yes, get yourself out there and sell yourself, don't be afraid to approach people you admire and want to work for, they'll respond well to enthusiastic designers. Design agencies are always on the lookout for talented designers who aren't afraid of hard work. Go to talks and events and get involved in the design community, you'll meet a great network of like minded people. Lastly always be nice - it costs nothing!

What do you hope to see over the next two years in Northern Ireland for the female design community?

I hope to see the current generation of young female designers that I meet at so many different events flourish and achieve their dreams. I would also like to see more emphasis on diversity in the true sense of the word, people from different socio economic backgrounds, different ethnicities, and those with disabilities all being represented within the design community in Northern Ireland.



NOLKA DESIGN

Nolka Design creates websites for businesses and organisations and develops digital marketing plans to drive traffic and create engagement with those websites. They have been in business for two decades, having grown up and down in size over those years. Having started out mainly as a graphic and web design business, they have developed and expanded into what they really love doing over the years. Since 1999 they have worked with many local companies and non-profits designing, developing and rolling out brands. Nolka have also been involved in the print industry, being a main supplier of graphics for print for many years. In the past few years, Nolka have focused more on web and digital marketing, still using graphics for online work, but less for traditional print media.

What drives you?

Being given the opportunity to be creative in our solutions, bringing something to the table and contributing to the success of a business or project. Having a family with 2 kids at uni and 1 at secondary school!! Loving learning, with so much opportunity on the internet to learn. Supporting other women in business in whatever way I can.

How has your business adapted in the fast paced world of digital design?

We have truly embraced the change in the digital marketing landscape, we get excited about SEO, CTR's, CRO and (search engine optimisation, click through rates, conversion rate optimisation) as we can see that being creative and using design can make a huge difference in how you are perceived by your target audience.

What are some of the exciting projects you are currently working on?

We are currently working with a company near Dublin who have turned an old boarding school into a unique sports training facility with accommodation for approx. 300 people. We have designed a brand identity and website and are now working on rolling out a digital marketing strategy to create a flow of traffic to their website and convert this traffic to leads and customers.

What is the most important piece of knowledge or advice you have gotten from setting up your own business?

Be passionate about what you do, know and understand your customer, place value on what you do/yourself and don't be afraid to say no! Plus, for the difficult days, I love what the multi millionaire Lara Morgan recently advised us during her visit to Derry...'get the big pants on and just do it!!'



BELLAMOON

BellaMoon is a luxuriously comfortable multi-functional breast-feeding bed, designed around the lateral breastfeeding position which is practised by millions of mothers around the world to 'Nurture and Rest'. Despite the enormous benefits of this position, it can give rise to discomfort in mothers when lying in the one position feeding for hours on end. Founder, Irene also wanted to ensure that her baby was always protectively located right next to her within the adult bed. BellaMoon provides comfort to mother's neck, shoulders, back and hips whilst creating an awareness of baby position, and allowing Mum and baby to nurture and rest day or night.

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I was born in Co. Donegal and I now live in Saintfield, Co. Down with my husband Conor and our little girl Bella. I love art and design, so I studied Architecture at Queen's University from 1999 - 2005. I practised my profession in many design-led architecture firms around the world from London to Moscow to Sydney. However, I always had a passion for entrepreneurship so I diversified into the exciting start-up world. I have worked on numerous successful entrepreneurship ventures from construction materials to renewable energy to electric cars to plastic bottles. I went back to business school in 2015, and recently graduated with a Distinction in an Executive MBA from Queen's University Belfast. After giving birth to our first baby, it was during my MBA that I developed my idea for BellaMoon.

What was your inspiration for creating BellaMoon?

Our beautiful daughter Bella was the inspiration for BellaMoon and our story shines through on my campaign video. I am incredibly passionate about BellaMoon because I genuinely believe in it and its ability to solve an important problem by providing comfort and rest to breastfeeding parents - like it did for me.

What are your goals and aspirations for the future?

I would love to see a successful crowdfunding campaign* to help me raise enough funding to manufacture BellaMoon, launch it on the global market and to help parents throughout the world 'nurture and rest'.

*Bellamoon successfully crowdfunded £10,258 with the help of 110 supporters in 2018.



BLICK SHARED STUDIOS

The last interview of this publication is with Blick's Christine James.

Christine is the director of Blick Shared Studios and the founder of Womenfolk. Since its inception, Blick has grown from one space to three in Belfast and along with it a programme of activities for creative businesses. Passionate about collaboration, Christine has also co-founded other ventures including Belfast Design Week and Small Town Big Dreams podcast.

Why did you decide to start Blick Studios?

I started Blick with a group of creatives after returning to Belfast from working in Italy to start my own creative business in 2007. I had always wanted to work for myself, but was really struggling with the realities of trying to start a creative business from home. I hated working from home and found it isolating, lonely and hard to stay motivated and really missed the structure, but also the community and collaborative work environment I had been used to when studying and working as a textile designer. I also found I was missing out on opportunities and struggling to build a network for my business which is essential for getting clients and paid work.

I took part in an intensive 2 month full time creative enterprise course with Nesta and Ulster University called "Insight Out" and found a huge benefit in working alongside like-minded creatives again. When the course finished me and some of the other course participants looked for shared studio space but couldn't find anything we could afford or that would suit our needs. We wanted something affordable and flexible, but also professional and a nice working environment. The only options in Belfast at that time were artists studios which as businesses we didn't fit the remit for and which also didn't have the facilities we required (internet requirements etc.) or corporate office spaces on long term leases, which were too expensive and also didn't have the right feel or flexibility to fit our needs.

What steps have you taken throughout the years for Blick Studios to become a financially sustainable social enterprise?

We made the decision early on to really focus on the needs of our customers and cut any extras to make our services as streamlined and therefore as straightforward and affordable as possible to deliver. We have been very careful to manage our outgoings and focussed on offering a small amount of niche services to a very specific audience and always do our best to offer a good level of service and treat all our customers well. We have been strategic about growing big enough to sustain our staff costs, but careful not to grow too quickly that we would have to increase our staffing levels and outgoings to an unsustainable level.

Since 2nd March 2017, there has been a 17% rise in female-led businesses residing in Blick Shared Studios. What can be done to increase this percentage even further?

It's such a complex issue. More needs to be done at schools, colleges and universities and wider society to ensure girls grow up confident and have inspiring role models. People in decision making roles within the business community need to make sure they don't subconsciously discriminate against women and girls. As a petite and often casually dressed woman I am often assumed to be a receptionist/junior member of staff and asked for coffee. I have also often been referred to in professional settings alongside other professional women as a girl, have been told I was hysterical and won contracts because of my smile and countless other experiences that undermine your confidence. I have numerous other stories from other women.

I think there needs to be a broader view of business, there is currently a lot of emphasis on high growth start-ups, working crazy long hours and beer and pizza events (not to say that women don't like beer or pizza) but the marketing is very gendered and often makes business seem aggressive, competitive and unpractical for women with caring responsibilities. Running a successful business can actually mean more flexibility allowing for family commitments and business growth and success but on your own terms and fitting with your own values.

It would be great also to see more support for women entrepreneurs with children, as in our experience balancing their business with children is generally the biggest barrier for women taking on business premises, they often are based at home to save money and make it easier to manage both.

At Blick we hope to continue with Womenfolk and showcase more of the amazing role models we have in NI. We are also planning to roll out a trial mentoring program this spring and are excited to be working with the tech community Women Who Code to try and bring more women designers and tech industry professionals together at a meet up in April for learning, collaboration and community building. We hope this to be the beginning of our collaboration and the opportunity to build a strong and supportive cross discipline design community for women in Northern Ireland.

What do you hope to see over the next two years in Northern Ireland for the female design community?

I hope to see the current generation of young female designers that I meet at so many different events flourish and achieve their dreams. I would also like to see more emphasis on diversity in the true sense of the word, people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, different ethnicities, and those with disabilities all being represented within the design community in Northern Ireland.

RESOURCES

DESIGN

99U - 99u.adobe.com

DESIGN MATTERS PODCAST - designmattersmedia.com/designmatters

99%INVISIBLE - 99percentinvisible.org

LADIES WINE & DESIGN - ladieswinedesign.com

CREATIVE REVIEW - creativereview.co.uk

CREATIVE PEP TALK PODCAST - creativepeptalk.com

INTERN MAGAZINE - intern-mag.com

ALPHABETTES - alphabettes.org

WEPRESENT - wepresent.wetransfer.com

DEXIGNER - dexigner.com

BUSINESS

NESTA - nesta.org.uk

IDEO - ideo.com

THE PRINCE'S TRUST - princes-trust.org.uk

INNOVATE UK - gov.uk/government/organisations/innovate-uk

NEON MOIRE - neonmoire.com

SETH GODIN - sethgodin.com

KICKSTARTER - kickstarter.com

LIFE

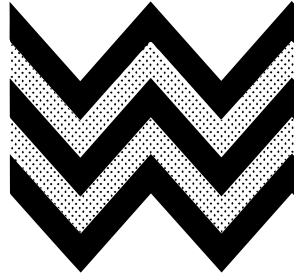
MINDBODYGREEN LIFESTYLE - mindbodygreen.com

TINY BUDDHA ARTICLES - tinybuddha.com

THE CUT ON TUESDAYS PODCAST - gimletmedia.com/the-cut-on-tuesdays

A BEAUTIFUL MESS DIY BLOG - abeautifulmess.com

For more resources please visit our website womenfolk.co



WOMENFOLK

is a project by
Blick Shared Studios

Kindly supported by

