An Interview with Raw Studio

We were delighted to welcome Rob Watson of Raw Studio to speak at Shillington Manchester. Along with his wife Ruth Watson, he's designed for clients like NHS and the Vegetarian Society as well as developing a multitude of impressive self initiated works.

We caught up with Rob after his talk to ask a few more questions about Raw and their place in the design scene. Read on to hear about some of their most notable projects and advice on how to remain inspired and enlightened as a designer.

“Do Good Work for Nice People” is the quote that lights up the ‘about’ section of your website and a message which definitely resonates throughout your work. What’s your advice to younger designers trying to keep a moral barometer when choosing their clients.

Pretty early on in the life of Raw, we made the call to channel our creativity into projects that inspire us and can do some good in the world. When starting out more often than not, you may not have the luxury of cherry picking your projects, because you are focused on building your portfolio up and growing your reputation, but this is where self-initiated projects come into play. Through these kinds of projects, you get to express who are you and what you stand for and you get complete creative freedom too, and we’ve found it’s the self-initiated projects that have gotten us the most exposure over the years.

Speaking about keeping things moral, your portfolio is packed full of projects which help highlight societal, health and environmental issues such as Turkey Farming, NHS, Vegetarian Society and Sexual Health Advice. What do you like most about working for these sectors and which has been the most rewarding?

One of the most rewarding was our Let’s Talk Turkey project At the time talking about factory farming wasn’t a popular subject, most people had their heads buried in the sand about this kind of thing. So it felt good to ruffle a few feathers with that one! And it paid off big time, within a few hours of us launching it we got a brief from the Vegetarian Society which turned out to be a great project to work on. So it does pay to follow your gut instinct and stay true to your beliefs.

> *I believe strongly that design has the power to do a lot of good, I’d much rather be putting my energy into projects I feel can have a positive impact on the world.*

Illustrations feature heavily within your projects which really compliments the design. As distinctions blur between creative disciplines do you see illustration becoming a more sought-after skill from a graphic designer?

Yes, no doubt. I think because of the tools available these days, and the trend for a lot of flat vector graphics, even designers who aren’t handy with a pencil can experiment and deliver some excellent pieces of work.

Raw has now got a ‘little sister company’ Make Play Lab which recently produced a lovely Children’s Picture Book, ‘Len Legsworth’. Can you tell us a little bit more about this side company and any future projects it has in the works?

Since Raw started out we've worked on over 1000 client projects, covering all sorts of different sectors and working with practically every age range there is. During this time, it's been the projects for kids that have been the most fulfilling, as a lot of the time we get to put ourselves in their shoes and bring out our inner child. We wanted to use all that experience and start creating our own products, and this is where Make Work Play was born.

> *Our mission is to create products for kids and grownups to explore their world with a little more wonder.*

As well as working with Andy J. Miller on Len Legsworth, we've recently teamed up with Spencer Wilson on our Bed Buds project, which is an animal-themed children's duvet set centred around creativity and educating kids on animal habits around the world. This project has been a while in the making and it's gathering pace nicely at the moment, we aim to launch it before the year is out.

Aside from these larger projects we've recently started developing a series of other pieces, including posters and greetings cards just for fun. We aim to develop other items in the coming months to add to the collection.

Alongside your design work you find time to share advice and resources through your blog. It’s packed full of all kinds of amazing reads! As designers do you think it’s important to share your experiences with others and what are your 5 favourite places to find inspiration and enlightenment?

Over recent years, I’ve tended to look outside of the design world for my inspiration, here are a few things that have served me well:

- **Meditate:** for the past 6 years I’ve been practising Transcendental Meditation, a technique that has literally changed my entire life. I was in a terrible place emotionally and physically back then – it came to me at the perfect time because Raw was beginning to go

through a lot of change and it massively helped me go through that process with more ease. More than anything it has helped me see more clearly and chart a better course forward for my life.

- **Explore:** go see the world, fill yourself up with as much wonder as you possibly can. It will pay you back in dividends with an endless flow of new ideas. As humans, we can get stuck in a routine easily and end up going along with what everyone else is doing. Breaking that continuity and going somewhere new is a great way to clear away the emotional clutter of everyday life and recharge you ready for the next big project. You don't need to jump on a plane either, there's places just round corner that are waiting to be explored!

- **Read:** when I was younger I was never much of a reader, it didn't really interest me but for the last 10 years or so I've become a real bookworm. I find it's a great way to switch off from the day and plug into something that either expands my knowledge or helps to wind me down before I go to bed. One thing that has been a big plus to is listening to audiobooks, especially when I'm driving. It's a great use of time and makes traffic jams that little bit more bearable! The 4-Hour Work Week by Tim Ferriss is a must read for anyone looking to find smarter ways to work.

- **Journal:** we visited Bali a few years ago and I decided to keep a journal of all the things we got up too. It was a great way to reflect on all the good things that went on, but it was also a great way to express how I was feeling. Since then it's become a daily occurrence,

and it’s up there with meditation as a tool for me to turn off from all the noise of the outside world and reflect on what’s happening in my life. I’ve found though journalling I’ve been able to connect into previously untapped creativity, a place where plenty of new ideas have been born!

- **Declutter:** this might not sound like a place of inspiration, but I believe most of us have just got way too much stuff in our lives (I certainly did). Stuff that is not only filling up our physical spaces but also cluttering up our minds too and preventing us from seeing clearly and putting the blocks on those projects you’ve been meaning to start. I found by letting go of a whole bunch of stuff I barely used, I’ve begun to find the space and time to focus on the things that really matter to me. Anyone interested in this, I’d highly recommend reading Marie Kondo’s book, The Life Changing Magic Of Tidying Up.

Despite being a small studio Raw offers a multitude of services from print design to animation. What area do you prefer working in the most and do you think it’s important for a designer to have a varied portfolio?

To be honest, the best jobs are the ones where we get to apply our skills across multiple disciplines. For instance, working on a nice new branding piece is the best way for us to stamp our mark on a project. As well as the print requirements for the project, we’ll most likely get to develop their digital presence too. And that can often include some nice animations too. Not only can these be some of the most rewarding projects, but they make the best case studies to add to your portfolio.

A lot of our students often hope to work for smaller studios like Raw, do you often take on new designers or Interns and if so what stands out for you in an applicant?

Since we made the shift in how we approach our work, we no longer take on full-time designers or interns. We now work on a project-by-project basis with a select team of freelancers for that particular piece of work. However, previously I've hired plenty of designers and interns over the years so can share a few things of what stands out.

> *When getting in touch with agencies I would consider focusing your efforts on a small number of companies who you are looking to work with.*

Take your time to really get to know them, imagine how it would feel to work for them and if you feel like you could be a good fit then do all you can to get their attention. Emails can have an effect but personally, receiving something interesting in the post always stands out more, especially if it's something unique to you. For instance, when I graduated from university I selected 6 agencies to contact and since my initials are RAW (hence how we got our name) I decided to send them out a promotional CD with my work on (when CD's were all the rage back in 2004)! I packaged it up to look like a raw meat pack in a plastic wrapper. It got their attention and off the back of it I was offered two different junior design roles. And then when we set up Raw in 2006 we decided to run a similar style promo piece, but with a poster inside, and this led to us winning a big contract with the NHS.

If all else fails, send them some sweet treats in the post! That always goes down well in the studio.

Massive thanks to Rob for speaking with our students and answering our questions. Be sure to check out the full Raw portfolio and follow across Instagram, Twitter and Facebook for regular updates.

Keen to find out more about being a graphic designer? Read more design interviews over here or head to our website for more details about studying at shillington and visiting a campus!

The post An Interview with Raw Studio appeared first on Shillington Design Blog.

https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/interview-raw-studio/