Break the Block: Tips for Overcoming Creative Block

Photography by Clay Allison; Calligraphy by Cathy Sison

We’ve all been there: you’re happily working away, designing, writing, painting and then BAM. It’s gone. You’ve lost your creative mojo and you just don’t know where to go from there. Creative block is any creative’s worst nightmare, but I’ve developed some ways to get myself out of the rut and I’m going to share some of these with you.

Play It By Ear

A major part of my practice is design by play. So, you'll always find me playing around with this and that whenever I'm designing. Though, play is also a great way of smashing through your creative block.

The process of creative play gets rid any negative thoughts. There's no more 'Is this good enough?' or 'Will they like this?' Play comes from a pure and innocent place that we all have. Just tap into your inner creative child and let your mind run free!

Grab The Nearest Thing

Running on from that, use whatever is in front of you to create some experiments. Do a charcoal rubbing over a drain cover, make some ink marks with a toothbrush or create a collage out of those magazines gathering dust in a corner.

You never know, it could make it into your everyday work. For example, I was struggling to make a design work—the marks I had made were looking too flat and had no impact. I got to that point where I just didn't know what to do. Then, I was sat at home putting off a DIY job that I looked at my tool box and saw black electric tape. One thing led to another and I started to play with the tape. The marks all of sudden had a life of their own and ended up playing a big role in the final design.

Have a Rummage

When Creative Block strikes, I love a rummage in a vintage or craft store. You can find some amazing bygone pieces of pure joy. Whether it is a old milk bottle, a rusty sign, a vintage matchbox or a crazy unique painting by an unknown artist that never got the attention they deserve. It's a great source of

inspiration and finding a gem can immediately spark up your imagination.

Be a Keen Bean

Have a niggling interest in something? Great! Do some research in to some weirdness and you'll find a whole world of inspiration. The London Underground? Yep, that will work. A love for Heavy Metal but also a passion for pop music? That will absolutely work. Snake, that game on old Nokia phones? Of course! In fact, these are all niche interests of mine that I've used to inspire my work.

Right now, I love Fruit Stickers who are making amazing prints using those stickers you find in your weekly shop. Just because I've always had a thing about the stickers you find on fruit and veg, and their seemingly endless designs.

Embrace The Awkward

I run Left But Not Right, a left handed drawing event and Instagram account, because I can't draw to save my life. But, for some reason, the more I used my left hand and drawing badly I started enjoying it. It was a great way of getting out my comfort zone and I found it a really useful way to switch off from my design work and do something just for me. It also helped me overcome creative block as I learnt not to worry too much about the outcome.

I'm not saying you have to start drawing with the wrong hand, but make yourself feel uncomfortable or take part in something you never thought you would. It's a great way of making yourself feel comfortable in your day-to-day.

Stop, Collaborate and Listen

Finally, another way to get over your creative block is to check out what other people are doing. It’s important to look at blogs, social media and what other designers are up to. Though, don’t get swept up in Imposter Syndrome—everyone gets creative block, even designers at the top of their game. Just appreciate other designers that have a similar mantra as you and know if they can do it, then you definitely can too. Mine at the moment are Tina Touli and Patrick Thomas—they keep experimentation at the heart of everything they do.

These are obviously just a few of my own ways to break through creative block. They may not necessarily work for but don’t let that get you down—I’m sure there’s a million and one ways to do it.

Originally published in The Shillington Post 09—The Wellbeing Issue

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