Interview with Tina Touli, Creative Director

Tina Touli is a half-Greek, half-German Graphic Communication Designer and Creative Director, who runs her own eponymous studio from London. Known for her incredible experiment designs that blend the physical and digital worlds, Tina has worked some impressive clients, including HP, Converse and Adobe. At the end of last year, we were lucky enough to have Tina join Shillington London, Manchester, New York and our Online courses for a global guest lecture. She talked about her fascinating process and the many amazing places she has found inspiration for a design.

We caught up with Tina after her lecture to talk about how she ended up opening up her own studio, her processes and how to find inspiration in anything.

First off, can you tell us how you got to where you are now? We'd love to hear about your creative journey so far.

I always loved communicating and expressing myself through any form of art. Since I was little I was keen on dancing, drawing, playing music and others. A friend of my parents had a piano and whenever we were visiting her I was always trying to play some kind of a melody. After I implored my parents for a while, they signed me up for piano lessons. That lead me to study on a Music secondary and high school. It was not only about music but also about art, acting classes, drawing classes, etc. Soon, I realised I enjoyed playing the piano and the violin just for me and for expressing myself. However, it was not really my dream to become a musician. I was more thinking of becoming a mathematician, a physicist or an architect. It was only until few months before graduating that I realised what I wanted to do in my life. When a friend told me about design, a field that would allow me to combine everything that I was passionate about, audio, motion, visuals, etc. I got into a Graphic Design course and really quickly fell in love with design and creativity.

You’re now running your own studio. Why did you choose to make the jump into running your own studio? What spurred this change on?

> *What defines me the most is persistency. I like to continuously challenge myself, by experimenting and setting up goals, never giving up on them.*

But when it comes to jobs, I did not manage to last for more than a few months on any of them. On my first job I quit after just 10 months. On my second one, after around 7 months. On my last job I handed in my notice just a couple of days after the end of my probation period. And don’t get me wrong, I really enjoyed working on all those studios, I had some awesome

colleagues (that I still enjoy a lot hanging out with!) and I loved the projects that I worked on. It was just me, that routine that was killing me and my creativity. Stagnation is always my greatest fear. What motivates me and keeps me going is the excitement of something new. Something that comes unexpected, motivates me a lot. I did not have a clear plan on what to do next, I just knew that I wanted to get out of this "9-5 prison".

The only thing I had was a relatively low budget project that seemed dreamy for me at that point. I could manage to survive for 2 whole months paying my rent and bills in London, cycling for commuting (who wants to get to the packed London tube anyway?), eating pasta and frozen pizza every day and drinking soda on my night out. That was promising enough for me! It

might sound miserable, but I was the happiest I have ever been until then. I was able to spend every hour of my day doing something that I love, something that I would do if money didn’t matter (which did not seem to with this budget!).

Now, just a couple of years later, I am 24 hours per day, 365 days per year, in my own dreamy “prison”, having a studio space, travelling by tube but still eating my favourite pizza.

In your lecture, you told us about something of the amazingly varied things that have inspired your projects. Can you take us through some of these?

Nowadays more and more creatives tend to follow the same processes, starting and finishing their projects on their

computer, ignoring all the inspiration from our immediate surroundings. We usually try to find inspiration from other professionals. That is probably the most convenient source, but most likely it will lead us to an infinite loop. Looking at the work of other professionals from totally different fields, could be a better approach, that can perhaps lead us to more unique outcomes. How about exploring our immediate surroundings?

For me, anything around me that can stimulate any of my senses can be inspirational and an “object” for investigation. A hole on a paper, a glass of water, the ribbon that we use to wrap our presents, even our sketchbook as an object itself.

> *There is so much inspiration in the physical world that we tend to ignore, and we could implement in our work. I am inclined to believe that the more unexpected the source of inspiration is, the more likely it is to create original work.*

Can you take us through the process of how you go about creating something from start to finish? It blew our minds during the lecture.

Sometimes the strongest designs come from a simple concept and by trying things out. Experimenting and exploring the possibilities. I really enjoy interacting with the “objects” from the digital and the physical world, leaving them to lead the way, even if things work out differently from the initial thoughts. Once you interact and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the “objects” they can become your tools or prototypes or even the design outcomes.

> *For me creativity is all about process, it is a journey of experimentation.*

What’s in your toolbox? How do you go about creating some of your amazing handmade outcomes?

I wouldn’t say I have a specific toolbox, my creative tools are quite varied. I like the potential of design. I am open minded about mediums, processes, interactions and techniques. I enjoy working on different projects and roles that require diverse skills and techniques. And I love experimenting!

> *What motivates me and keeps me going is the excitement of something new.*

Learning a new skill, using new tools and techniques and creating something different from the last time, something that comes unexpectedly, excites me the most.

You've worked with some incredible brands, including Adobe, HP, Converse, Ciroc and loads more. Do you have a personal favourite project you've worked on? Can you tell us about it?

Hard to pick just one, but perhaps I would say the Z by HP "Create Anything, Anywhere, Anytime" campaign.

One of the most common questions that I have been asked, is where do I seek inspiration from? Creating a campaign showcasing new techniques and ideas that will hopefully be a reference and inspiration for other creatives was the aim of this ad. As designers we don't want to think of any technical issues and limitations while creating. We want to have an uninterrupted creative experience and freedom to Create Anything, Anywhere and Anytime. The Z by HP collection

provides limitless possibilities, breaking any boundaries between creativity and technology. It provides with devices that become an extension of us and our creativity.

The key messages of Create Anything, Anywhere and Anytime have been designed using various techniques, from physical experimentations, to 3D visuals and sketchy graphics, reflecting the concept of a device created by a group of creatives for all types of creatives!

CREATE ANYTHING

An abstract composition of shapes has been created in order to represent the concept of ANYTHING. The look and feel of the composition reminds of space and planets, pushing the idea of

ANYTHING even further. The ‘behind the scenes’ of the design creation is revealed on the ad when zooming out of the graphics and dragging the glass tray with the abstract composition on the side. The ZBook 2 by HP, a device which literally allows you to create ANYTHING reveals.

CREATE ANYWHERE

Living in this contemporary era where we are so busy that we sometimes end up having a quick lunch at the tube or finishing up our presentation on the bus on our way to work, being able to work from anywhere is crucial. Having a device with no place restrictions, super light, easy to carry around and to quickly use it from anywhere, is like a dream coming true! In this scene, custom typography has been combined with clouds, representing the concept of a “dream” and at the same time the idea of literally ANYWHERE.

CREATE ANYTIME

Especially if you are a night owl like me, and you work often till late, having a device like the ZBook 2 that allows you to easily lie down on the sofa and carry on creating with your pen is the ideal set up. You can easily create ANYTIME.

Can you give you some advice to our graduates who want to be able to find inspiration in anything? Where is a good place to start?

Grab the first object that you see around you and explore its possibilities. What are the strengths and what are the weaknesses of your object? What is interesting about it? The material? The movement? The shape? The texture?

> *By exploring the possibilities of the physical world we can discover unexplored areas and come up with unique designs. Simply by trying things out.*

So I am inviting you to grab the first object that is in front of you and give it a try. Position your “object” in different

ways, try different lightings, combinations with other objects/materials, etc and capture the experimentations with a camera (even your mobile phone camera is great!). And what I usually suggest it to look at things from a bit closer or from further. Investigate them from angles that your eyes are not used to see things at. This way you most likely will get interesting results. Everything around us can be inspirational and an “object” for investigation!

And do you have any other advice for graduates who are just getting started out in the industry?

Try to always make every single project that you work on the best project that you ever created. Challenge yourself, experiment and explore new fields, new mediums. Always have a

goal to learn and create something different from last time.

> *And remember to love, appreciate and get satisfaction from every little thing that you do. The best work comes when you had fun creating it.*

Can you give us five words to describe yourself and your creative style?

Experimentation.

Unexpected.

Multitasking/multidisciplinary.

Organised/tidy/“clean”.

Persistent.

Anything else you would like to add?

Every good or bad decision you made will help you in the end to move forward and develop. Even if you don’t know how to make it happen, get started with what you’ve got, and you will figure it out on your way.

Huge thanks to Tina for a super inspiring lecture to Shillington London, Manchester, New York and Online, and for talking to us afterwards. Make sure to follow Tina on Instagram and check out her website to keep an eye on her amazing experiments.

We’ve hosted some of the world’s top creatives, design studios

and advertising agencies at Shillington. Check out more interviews from guest lecturers.

https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/interview-tina-touli/