

**Meet Anuja Shukla,
Shillington Graduate and
Creative Strategist at
Twitter**



After a degree in Business Administration and Marketing, Shillington New York graduate Anuja Shukla harnessed the power of empathy spurred through travel and employment abroad to shape a meaningful career in graphic design. Anuja forages for vintage goods, advocates for diversifying the outdoor adventure scene—all while building her photography portfolio!

From helping clients connect with their users at IDEO's Design for Change studio to combining design and strategy at Twitter as a Creative Specialist, Anuja has had a passion-filled journey into the world of design.

Read on to find out about her practice and experience with our course.

What were you up to prior to Shillington? And at what point did you decide that you wanted to switch careers and study graphic design?

I had just graduated from university with a bachelor's degree in business marketing and had spent the summer doing an internship in Japan. After I came back to the States, I went through a variety of marketing job fairs, only to find that most of the companies required graphic design skills.

After spending four years studying business, I was looking for a short but efficient design course that would help me attain the skills I needed—hence, Shillington. I didn't know at that time it would completely transform my career path!

Why did you choose to study at Shillington? Did you have any previous design experience?

Everyone around me wanted to go to X company or do X this or that, and I felt completely lost in figuring out the one thing I wanted to do with my career. I chose Shillington because design seemed like the most efficient skill I needed for my career, while not wasting too much time or money on another degree.

I also really wanted to explore New York after graduating, so that was a big draw for me as I had never been there before Shillington. I still remember meeting up with one of my close friends from the program a few days before the classes started and just feeling the rush and creativity of the city.

What made the full-time Shillington design course stand out from the rest? What were your favorite aspects about it?

Hearing the grad testimonials, reaching out to past students, and seeing the quality of work that was produced during a short amount of time was really mind-blowing to me. I really loved that the course taught a plethora of design skills: print, digital, web, user research, brainstorming ideas, etc. There are so many pathways to design, and the course is set up in a way that is a short and sweet introduction to foundational design itself—from there you could figure out if you want to pursue product design, visual design, environmental design, design research, and so on.



Do you still keep in touch with former classmates?

Yes! I really loved the group I was in, I felt like we all rooted each other on (especially during portfolio week). Jonathan Martin has been a close friend—he has consistently been there for me during pivotal moments in my life when I needed it the most. Carolyn Kao now lives in the Bay Area with me. We talk about design life post-Shillington all the time, and she even helped me make my first loaf of bread virtually during the pandemic! Julia Zou was my right-hand woman during the course, she always has a humble demeanor to her extraordinary talent that I am forever grateful for—and I am excited to go to her wedding next year.

One thing I will say, design is meant to be shared, and I was never fully comfortable with that at the start of the course. Shillington made an important point of showcasing the reality of studio life which I was thankful for when I was out in the “real world”.

Did your experience in the full-time course help you in your design career after Shillington?

Definitely. Shillington was my first experience learning design. I found myself questioning a lot about the world during and after the course. I saw almost everything differently. The way stop signs are designed, the branding of my favorite coffeeshop in my hometown, the layout design of magazines I never paid attention to—everything. Design is truly everywhere you look, and design thinking is the core of innovation.

I was nervous that a three month bootcamp wouldn't be enough for me to get into the industry or into a company that I admired, but back in 2017 a lot of people were surprisingly aware of Shillington. What I've learned is that sometimes it's not about what school you go to, but how well you present yourself and your ideas. It's purely about believing in yourself and being your own hype person.

Since graduating from Shillington, you've worked at IDEO, FitBit and now as a Creative Specialist at Twitter for the last 18 months. Can you share more about your design journey these past 5 years?

When I graduated from Shillington, I really wanted to hone my skills in a small design studio. In a lot of ways, I knew design was a competitive industry, and I also knew that I wasn't the "best" designer out there. I spent a few months after Shillington refining the skills that I learned while freelancing for small businesses around my hometown. Diving more into the history of design, doing a bunch of youtube tutorials, mimicking posters or layouts that I would see in magazines, even reviewing all of the PDFs we got in class, were all pivotal in learning about the design industry.

I never imagined IDEO would be my first step into my design career (talk about major imposter syndrome!), but I am so glad it was because it opened my eyes to different types of design fields and thinking. Since then I've worked at Fitbit designing visual systems for their new products/services, and

am currently in a design/strategy role as a Creative Specialist on the Twitter Next team.

You mentioned that your “passion lies between craft and stories to help support change in local cultures and businesses with an emphasis on visual design and communications.” Can you talk about the projects that you have worked on from identity to branding and packaging?

Design is fueled by empathy. This often looks like gathering personal stories, talking to people you are designing for, researching what the world has currently and how you could improve it through design. This process truly inspires me and more often than not, I find the right questions lead to the best solutions.

I am a firm believer that design is truly never finished, and that we can always improve and reiterate our work—so I always lead my projects with that mindset knowing I am designing for the best solution for the moment. Some of my favorite projects I’ve worked on are: helping to brand an elementary school teacher’s first juice shop (in my hometown!), packaging a new Fitbit product for an exclusive fitness event, and helping to build the design/strategy guidelines around Boss Women Collective.



Can you share a bit about your work as a designer – specifically a creative specialist at Twitter? We’d love to hear more on “Twitter Next” and how you are combining design and strategy to visualize human-centric ideas.

Twitter Next—is a team of strategists, technologists, program managers, and designers at Twitter focused on helping brands create human-centric ideas worth talking about. When given a brief, my design process as a Creative Specialist—revolves around research, looking to find a mind-blowing insight (often hiding in Twitter data) that can be the foundation for a

creative concept, brainstorming with my peers on the best ways to bring that concept to life, and designing meaningful experiences on and off the platform.

On a normal day, I am strategizing/designing/storyboarding visuals to express our big ideas to clients, designing/testing innovative technology, visualizing data into compelling narratives, and on the most magical days I'm out in the world, designing + testing OOH experiences that make an impact in local/global communities. One thing I love about working on Twitter Next is being able to be a chameleon within my role: I am a strategist, a designer, a data researcher, an art director, a photographer—something I found to be a breath of fresh air in a sometimes siloed design career.

What are some of your favorite projects that you got to work on at Twitter?

Some of my favorite projects at Twitter Next would be the ones that create meaningful change in the communities we are designing for. A recent example of this comes from our partnership with the WNBA, where our team discovered a compelling insight: The WNBA audience Tweets more frequently about social justice than any other sports community. That insight eventually came alive as “connected merch”—a hoodie co-created with the WNBA that gave the #WNBA community a way to spark conversation about the game and causes they stand for.

If you could give one piece of advice to someone starting in the full-time course at Shillington, what would it be?

Go at your own pace, ask a lot of questions, and work with tactile matter. The full-time course will have people from various backgrounds, some who know design well, and some who are new to it. As a perfectionist, I ended the course wanting to have a perfect portfolio. What I didn't know is your portfolio will always grow and change throughout your career,

so going at your own pace and trusting the process is key to getting better at design. Getting handsy with tactile matter will also help you to have fun along the way and create something unique.

If you are inspired by a company or a studio, ask yourself these questions: what font do they use, what are their brand colors, do they illustrate, are they a product design company? Then, gear your portfolio towards that style, but of course, with your own personal, unique point of view.

Outside of design, you take beautiful photographs of people and places. Are you working on any new photo projects that you can tell us about?

I've been quietly working on this series of photos around grief: individual, collective, anticipatory, and so on. My mom passed away two years ago, and photography has helped me capture and make sense of a time that has truly felt so surreal. I take photos of the little things that remind me of her: Mother's Day ads, a mother/daughter walking down the street, hummingbirds which used to be her favorite. I am currently looking to photograph motherless daughters in their mother's clothes/accessories, something I do when I need a little reminder that she is always with me.

My mom was also a great cook, and before she passed we were designing/photographing an Indian cookbook together. Since then, I've recruited my dad as the chef as a way to bridge our cultural differences and work through our grief together. I read somewhere that it is okay to keep projects to yourself until they are ready to be shared with the world—I want this to be a healing process for me, and eventually for others as well. Art is so beautiful in that way.

Can you share more about your "Oh She Wonders" intersectional womxn adventure club aimed to diversify and protect the outdoors? Please share some of the creative and branding

images.

I created this womxn's adventure club because I am a huge advocate for diversifying the outdoors and helping the planet while doing so. We did community hikes around San Francisco and even had a few companies reach out to sponsor the events. I have paused the club because of the pandemic, but am planning to charge it up again after my move to LA (hello I am moving!). I hope to expand more adventures to outdoor rock climbing, surfing, backpacking, camping, and more beach cleanups soon!





Is the Forager vintage & modern finds Shop a recent business that you had started in San Francisco? Tell us more about it.

Forager was started with my housemate who is also a designer and loves thrifting/vintage finds. It was a way for me to explore product photography in natural lighting, and experiment with setting up a photoshoot in our living room. I am always learning about a zero-waste lifestyle, and finding creative ways to implement that has been essential.



Big thanks to Anuja for sharing her experiences with us! We can't wait to see where her creative career takes her. Check out more of her work on her website.

Inspired by Anuja's story and thinking of taking the leap into graphic design? Learn more about Shillington's 3 month full-time and 9 month part-time courses Online or On Campus in New York, London, Manchester, Sydney, Melbourne or Brisbane.

<https://www.shillingtoneducation.com/blog/meet-anuja-shukla-shillington-graduate-creative-strategist-twitter/>