Study Design Abroad: Shireen Roy, Vancouver to Shillington New York

Inspired by design and the discovery of a new city, Shireen Roy began her artistic journey in Canada but after speaking with Shillington graduates—decided studying abroad in New York was the next step in propelling her creative career forward. *Shireen thrived in our studio environment, nurturing a deep appreciation for design principles and contemporary life. She translated her passion for processes into a multidisciplinary, creative director role at Blume, now fostering a freelance*

practice.

Read on to hear about what informs her practice and more.

Prior to Shillington, you had experience working in digital, brand marketing and user experience design. What motivated you to study design?

For a couple of years, before I bit the bullet and enrolled for the course at Shillington, I found myself gravitating towards whatever design work was available for me to do at my previous jobs. It started with things like volunteering to design the menus at a cafe I worked at, teaching myself Figma and asking to take on a UX/UI project for a small tech startup where I was initially hired to do admin work.

Towards the end of that project, it became obvious to me that my heart was in design and knew it was time for me to do some sort of a design course where I could have some more guidance and learn the tricks of the trade.

How did you learn about Shillington? How did the design course stand out from the rest?

Google! I spent many *many* hours looking up different intensive design courses since I already had a degree and didn't want to spend any more time than I needed in school.

> *Shillington kept popping up for me and it checked off everything that I was looking for in a course—short, intensive, in-person classes, great portfolios from grads, amazing reviews and the added bonus of learning design in a city with as much creative history as New York!*

I also ended up emailing a couple of the previous grads to get their perspective on the course and they had nothing but nice things to say. Taking all of these things under consideration, for me Shillington stood out as the clear winner from all the other courses I was looking at.

While studying at Shillington, did you have a favorite brief?

There were so many fun briefs it’s hard to choose! I really enjoyed the Packaging brief because it was cool to work with something 3D and tangible, but I would say my absolute favorite was the Venue Brand Identity brief. This was my first time creating a visual language and I really enjoyed the full process of researching, moodboarding, conceptualizing, naming, all the iterations of design + feedback, and getting to apply the final design to different pieces of collateral.

It was definitely my most time intensive project, but it was really gratifying once I was finished to see how everything worked together and to be able to imagine it as a real brand identity.

What was the full-time course like? Did you make any lasting connections with your classmates?

The course was everything I needed during that time and more—apart from making a career shift into design possible, it was a seminal life experience to be in such an intensely creative environment for 3 months surrounded by supportive classmates and amazing teachers.

> *I really enjoyed the studio environment that the course emulated and I realize now that it prepared me for the real world of collaborating with my colleagues and being able to take design critiques professionally.*

You definitely have to be willing to put in the work yourself if you want to get the most out of it, but for such a short period of time it was absolutely worth it for me to push myself a little. Looking back I am still amazed by how much I learned during that time and the amount of confidence it gave me as a designer. I also made some incredible friends from all around the world that I hope I get to visit in the future!

Since studying at Shillington, you worked as a designer at Blume. Tell us about your work there. What was a typical day like? Can you share details about your projects?

Working at Blume was a great experience! Since it's a start up with a small team, I got to take on many projects that I likely wouldn't have been able to at a large design studio and I got hands-on experience doing a lot of different things. There was no such thing as a typical day really because I was the only designer on the team so I was working on different projects all the time, but I enjoyed the newness of every day and working closely with all the other departments.

I joined during an exciting time when they had just gotten the guidelines for a rebrand from a big NY design firm and I got to implement that into every aspect of their brand from designing all the components for their full line of products—creating merch, landing pages, social assets and everything in between. I also spearheaded the creative for all of their campaigns and launches since I joined, and I even got to fully own and do the creative direction, styling and casting for a lifestyle photoshoot! I was given a lot of autonomy in my position which allowed me to experiment creatively and become more confident in myself as a professional designer. They are still one of my clients now as a freelancer!

What would you say to someone who is feeling a bit skeptical about the Shillington course?

You won’t regret taking the course—the time, money, the effort you put in are completely worth the skills, knowledge, resources and connections that you get out of it.

> *If you’re serious about being a designer then this course is one of the best investments you can make for yourself in my opinion.*

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

Give yourself the 3 months to fully immerse yourself in design and the design community. Find studios that you like, follow designers on Instagram, find classmates or friends that you can talk about design with, go to talks and workshops by industry leaders if you can. Getting excited about being in the field is a great motivator for putting in the work that you will have to do during portfolio week. Doing all this research also helps you start to figure out what area of design interests you the most and you may even slowly start to figure out your personal design style!

You recently pivoted towards freelance, how have you navigated the field? What inspires your work?

I'm quite new to freelancing so I'm still figuring things out but it's been really great so far! I was lucky to have booked a retainer client from the start, so I had a steady source of income right away which made the switch a bit less daunting.

> *I used to have a perception that to "make it" as a freelancer I would need to have tons of clients and always be looking for new ones, but I haven't found that to be the case.*

Working repeatedly with a handful of aligned clients has worked out great for me so far and I like that this allows me to spend more time designing, less time managing clients doing admin work. In my work, I'm inspired by unique type, playful graphic elements and color! Some fun projects that I have gotten to do as a freelancer include conceptualizing and designing the creative for a new product launch for Blume and creating my first social post using motion design for Later. I've recently started messing around with After Effects and I can't wait to utilize it more in my designs!

Outside of design, you mentioned you enjoy working on photo projects, ceramics and painting. Can you share more about the creative work you've been doing outside of design? Do you think it's important for designers to get involved in projects outside of their profession?

Yes! For me, experimenting with different creative outlets has been one of the best antidotes for burnout because it keeps me excited about making things in general. I also think being a designer is a unique profession because you have to often rely on your creativity to produce great work, which can be a difficult thing to control.

I find that doing creative projects outside of design enriches

my general creativity and gives me unique perspectives that often end up helping me in my work. Also it’s just a lot of fun to try out new hobbies! Some of my favorite recent projects have been crocheting, making a painting for my place and creating a couple of ceramic mugs that I now get to drink my daily morning coffee out of.

Big thanks to Shireen 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 Shireen’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.

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