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**Interview with Artist
Jill Kittock**

@jillkittock

Topic: Art History

Jill - Why did I choose Art History.... I actually started out as a Physiology major. And then I took a humanities class and loved it so much that I asked my professor about switching majors and he said "Don't change your major. Stick with the sciences." But I've always loved history and art, it's always been my creative place, so I switched. I've looked back and wondered if I would have been better off if I had pursued art, or graphic design, or illustration earlier and ... I don't think so. It's so important to know art history.

Phil - I didn't imagine I'd be talking about art history today! So why is knowing art history important?

Jill - Well you learn all of the principles of design, how to lead someone's eye, using symbolism, you really learn how to beef up your art. You learn what drove the artists of the past, you learn what was inspiration for them, so I pull from that in my work. Another thing that's interesting about majoring in Art History is you have to talk a lot about art. You don't just read about it and walk away, you have to discuss it. And that was something that helped me in graphic design. I noticed other students had some difficulty discussing art but I had done a lot of it, and it's really helpful to be comfortable talking about what works and what doesn't work.



Topic: Picking Art

Phil - So did you draw much as a kid?

Jill - Yeeeahhhhhh (she said with a hem hawing lightness in her voice. We laughed.) I would say it was one of my top three hobbies. I loved to draw, did a lot of copying, took a lot of art classes on the side. I just loved crafts. I loved to make stuff. But I never thought it could be a career until I was like 30. Even graphic design, I wasn't sure about that as a career. I worked at a graphic design temp agency right out of college. They worked really hard, it didn't seem like a lot of fun and I thought I would never want to do this. But then a few years later I thought, 'maybe I'll try that'.

Phil - That's funny. I feel like many artists only had their sights set on art. It was a single track and the only track.

Jill - Yeah, so when I went to college I knew I wasn't going to do art, I didn't think it would lead to anything, I wanted to pick something more sensible.

Phil - Was that your voice?

Jill - Oh, I'm sure it was my parents. Hahaha. But also, I did a bit of drawing as a kid, I took photography classes, and no one ever said anything negative but I also didn't get much praise. So it never felt like "this is for you" so I just kind of moved on.

I read *The Artist's Way* a couple years ago and there's a chapter about different kinds of support. I remember thinking that I didn't get lack of support but I also didn't get enthusiastic support, I was just kind of in the middle. Like when you're taking an art class and there's some people getting lots of praise and some people, who art maybe isn't for them. And I was in the middle not getting any praise so maybe I thought this isn't for me. I'm not quite sure what led me to eventually say "I'm going to do it!"





Topic: A gradual shift towards graphic design

Jill - My transition to graphic design from my admin job at Summit Brewing was gradual. I had a new boss at one point and she asked if I wanted to try designing a box. I was super excited. So I started working on it but then it became I 'had to do it' because they didn't like what the agency created.

Phil - Oh, so they were doubling up? You were working on a pitch?

Jill - Well no. So I was the in-house designer at this point working on marketing stuff I wasn't doing packaging. We were coming out with a new variety pack and the design agency was giving my boss stuff and she didn't like it. They did a few rounds, she didn't like it, then she just said "we're going to go with you."

So usually in the design world you get hired for a certain job and you might do a lot of things but there are certain things that they will 'always hire out, it's too important.' and that's what the packaging felt like to me. So I was doing ads, brochures and stuff like that. But then this opportunity popped up. And I was thinking 'none of mine are going to be better than what the agency sent over' but I was like 'okay'.

Phil - The pressure of that moment!

Jill - I was super scared! Everybody sees it! It's a big brand! All my coworkers, everyone, I was very nervous. So I did the box and it was fine, it's not great, they weren't like bringing it back next year. But it threw me into the deep end of learning keyline files, setting up the artwork, building something within the brand, yaknow all of the design aspects of working for a brand. And after that I got a couple more packages, then they let the agency go and it was just me.

Phil - That's amazing! I sensed your hand in the designs.

Jill - So I did a bunch and then I did one that I really liked called Dark Infusion. It was very different for them, it did super well, they all liked it, and I was like 'okay, if you like something that is kind of breaking the mold a little bit, I can break the mold a little bit more!'

Topic: Finding Balance

Jill - Over time I began to want to do more illustration work and knew that I would need to work for myself. I had wondered for years if I should go to grad school and get a masters in illustration. Just really dedicate a lot of time to my work but it's just not in the cards for us financially. But Andrew (Partner) asked if there was a summer program I could look for. And I had never thought about that, so I looked around and found the SVA in New York had a residency. It was a 5 week program and I came out of there with a bunch of projects I was proud of and it gave me the confidence to say 'okay, I can really do this'.

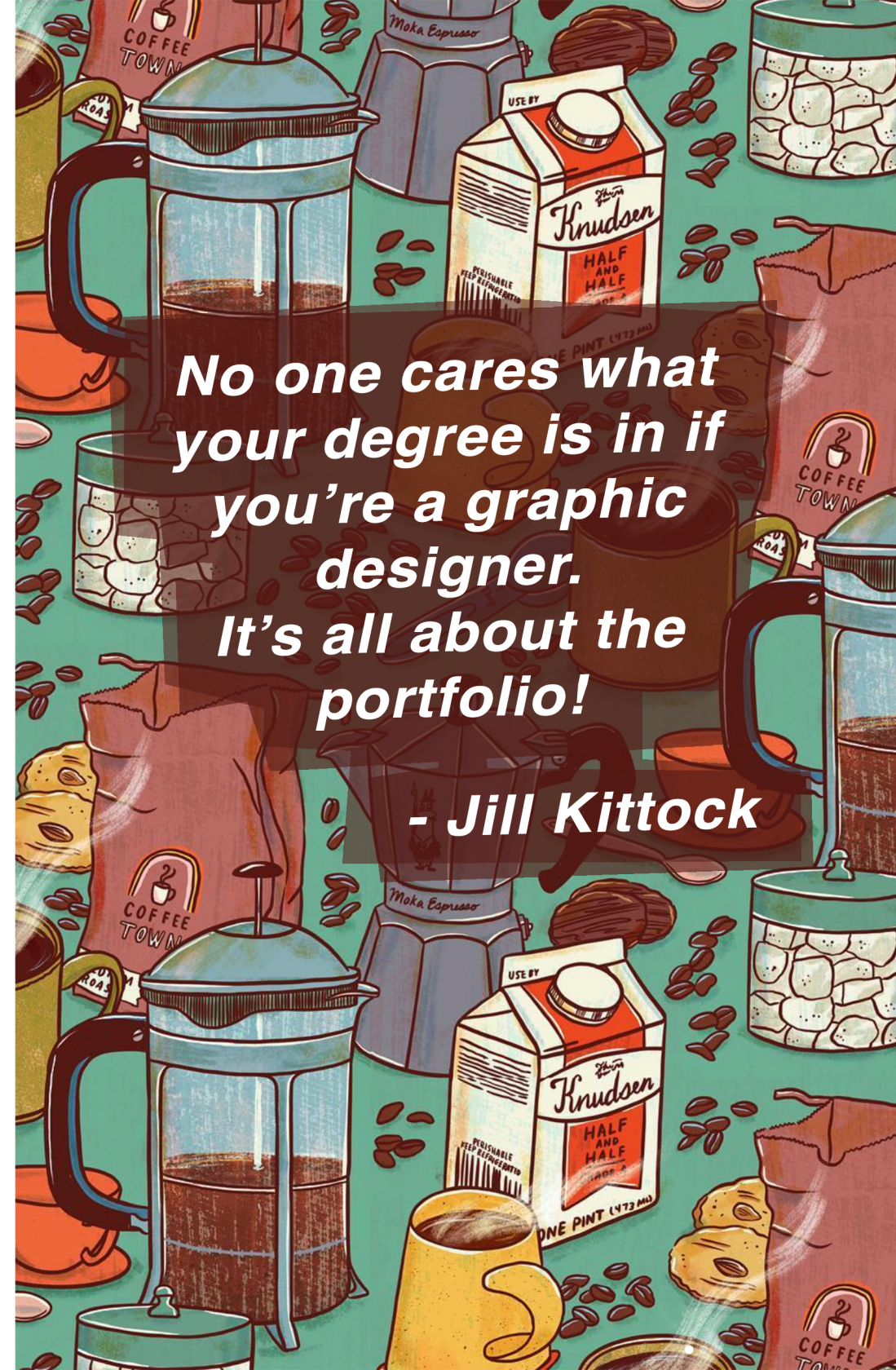
So I requested to go part time at my job and did that for 2 years. On my days home from work I would force myself to draw. I did less looking at other people's work and really focused on creating my own.

Phil - Tell me about those two years of working part time. Were you preparing to quit and do your own thing full time? Business planning?

Jill - The goal was to leave so I was taking it seriously and being very business minded. In the beginning I didn't have a shop online, I actually never wanted to have a shop, but it feels like I'm constantly doing the thing I said I would never do 6 months ago. Hahaha. So I set up a shop, started to post on Instagram a lot more, started a newsletter, tried to meet people, and drawing everyday. Just trying to build myself up.

But I'll be honest, this year has been....kind of like.... I don't know what I'm doing! It's weird because of the pandemic but then I'm also in a rut creatively because I've been thinking about the business side of things so much. I feel like sixty percent of the day could be doing administrative stuff, or more. I feel like I'm not making as much stuff as I want to be. But I've gotten client projects too, so that's good, but I'm working towards that balance.





Topic: Burnout or Ennui?

Jill - I think we're all dealing with some sort of burnout these days. For me, I had a good rhythm of sketching in the morning, working on a longer term project for a bit, getting something in the shop but then I had some client work take over and now I've been trying to find my way back to a routine. But I think I've been cruising for a burnout for the last 6 months because I've been questioning if I want to keep drawing the same things I've been drawing, do I want to draw something that has something more to it, or do I want to go after more client work.... I don't really know. Everybody says to be gentle with yourself. I'm not really sure what I'm going to do. If you have any suggestions! Let me know! I've never really experienced something quite like this. I worked at a day job for so long and then when I worked part time I filled up all of my free time with working really hard to get to this point and now that I'm here... I'm like.... I'm tired. Hahaha.

Phil - I have no advice! Hahaha. Right now I'm in a weird zone too. I'm fried for a number of reasons and I find this interview project really interesting so I'm pouring myself into it. But I have no business plan for it. And that's part of the problem, when you work for yourself everything gets commoditized, so I'm just trying to create something for fun and keep it fun and not have a plan.



Topic: The Social Side

Jill - I'm part of a group called the Art Brand Alliance and when I was about to quit my job I mentioned it to the group the leader gave me a heads up and said 'Just so you know a lot of people find it difficult to go from having a day job and making their art on the side to having all of their time available for their art.' and I was like 'okay, we'll see' and now I see the difference. Because I used to come home from a full day of work and immediately jump into my thing. And now I don't really know what to do with the time.

Phil - Can you tell me more about the group?

Jill - Yeah so the person who started it had worked for a bunch of different companies and just wanted to find a way to help artists. It's been really cool. And she wanted to find a way not just to be supportive to us individually but to help build up the industry and to advocate for us. So it's a place to share about the jobs we get, make sure we're getting paid fairly, and help each other out.

And they have a couple of events a month. Someone just shared how she does a newsletter, she sells everything through her newsletter. After I watched that, I thought 'I need to have a newsletter!', take them off of these platforms, own the audience. So I started doing it and it was awesome! I've gotten some great advice from the group.



Topic: The Less Social Side

Phil - I remember at my first job people inviting me out and I wouldn't go because I wanted to work on a project. It can be super isolating at times.

Jill - I totally felt like that in the first year I was working part time. I'm a very social person, I have a lot of friends, but I had to curtail a lot of it in the evenings because that was my time to create. And then I kind of wanted to spend more time on projects and not go out. I slowly became more of a homebody than I thought I was.

Phil - Did you ever experience being out with friends and just wanting to go home and work on a project?

Jill - haha yah, 'are we done here', I'd wonder if it would be rude if I just stayed for an hour. That's something that has definitely changed for me. But maybe this is something that would have happened naturally in my late 30s as more friends have kids and I'm acknowledging that I don't want to go to a lot of events. But a couple years ago I had that moment where I needed to send out a newsletter but a project at work took up my whole day, so I HAD to do it at night, and then I realized I actually wanted to work on the newsletter because I was building something that I loved.

Phil - So your social time is being affected but maybe not the relationships themselves.

Jill - It's probably more the mental turmoil for me, the questioning, 'am I being a good friend?' No one has ever called me out or said I'm a bad friend. Or with Andrew, I'm like, "I really just want to work on a project tonight". We haven't really hung out, we live together, but we haven't really had fun together in a while, but I'm having fun. Hahaha. But he's totally fine with it!



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