

One Year On by Jan Lason

Last year, Lou Gardiner was our Selected Maker of the Year and I can still recall with absolute clarity our telephone conversation. The timing couldn't have been better. Apparently Lou was on her knees trying to finish her installation for her debut at Collect in London the following week. The news that she had won our award gave her a huge burst of energy, just when she needed it.

I suppose with so much going on last year, it might be expected that 2013 would be at least a little quieter if not something of an anti climax for Lou. Not so, in fact it couldn't be further from the truth. 2012 ended in a way that no-one could have predicted and, in fact, her work has now been enjoyed by a whole new audience.

"There was a phone call," Lou explains, "from the 101 design agency in London. They asked if I wanted to pitch for an advertising campaign for KETTLE® handmade chips." Lou went on to explain that from the outset, she had to come to grips with 'trendy design speak' that began with her having to prepare a 'design treatment' in only a couple of days.

"A design treatment is almost like a creative pitch," Lou explains when I ask what it means (I had no idea). "You have to write a statement and do a design plan that basically gives a flavour of how you would approach the brief. And I was amazed when they said they would pay me to produce it. I thought 'HOORAH! a proper job'. It was all quite exciting at the time although I didn't realise initially that there were three artists pitching.

Then, a week later I got a phone call from the agency who said 'You've got the gig!' I was just laughing with excitement and I think I made a bit of a joke, but then reality set in and I cracked open the sherry!"

Once the commission was awarded, the next

stage involved a lot of hard work and a huge learning curve. Lou did around 30 embroideries that built up the campaign and these featured packets, ingredients, all the strap lines and logos. With the full support and agreement of her own clients, commissions were deferred for three months without any loss of orders - and that speaks volumes about the desirability of Lou's work.

Reflecting on the whole experience, Lou explains: "There was a lot more to it than I initially thought and I had to be very good at communicating as so many people were involved. I wouldn't want to work in advertising full time, but it was very interesting to be involved in the process and, I have to say, sometimes a little disheartening. The agency wanted the whole package: the embroidery artist and the farmer's daughter, and my name on everything to reflect the personal touch.

"Whilst it was interesting to follow the process, letting go of my work in that way was actually very challenging for me. I am used to dealing with commissions and having control throughout, from beginning to end. When I handed over my work I was also handing over the control and that was very difficult for someone like me. I am used to handling every aspect of my business myself."

"However, it really was a brilliant experience and has really made me think about advertising in a new light. I loved the challenge of working with a team, I realised how much I miss that fun in my own practice. You have to go with the flow, let go of the ownership of the work and accept that you are a small cog in a large expensive machine. It is worth celebrating that craft is just about getting out there in the public eye, but for me it was quite heartbreaking to see how much money and time is wasted and how many people are involved in something that could potentially be much simpler. It would be great if artists and crafts people were approached more often and I hope that in time we will lose the perfect and slick gloss that smothers everything in advertising and makes everything so very 'palatable'. Everything seems so over-produced and packaged. That's the world we live in and maybe in time things will change."

Lou worked with Kirstie Allsopp throughout the campaign, which also included the nationwide craft competition 'Kettle Chips and Kirstie's Craft Challenge' and, whilst she has the greatest respect for Kirstie's enthusiasm and expertise as a



New scarf range being modelled by BILLY FOX, Lou's new little dog

presenter, questions why there isn't a 'proper craft person' as the face of craft.

"As part of the campaign I did a radio day with Kirstie," Lou continues, "and we both found that people's perception of craft is very limited. A lot of people seem to think that craft begins and ends with Kirstie's Homemade Home, which for someone like me is very frustrating. It's like comparing a professional golfer with someone who plays Pitch and Putt. I think that there is a really important place for craft as a hobby and I recommend creativity to everyone, but please don't confuse it with professional artisans. It made me realise what a long way we have to go to inform public opinion and encourage an understanding of professional craft. Since my work with KETTLE®, it's occurred to



me that crafts people who are passionate about their work need to get themselves out there, to be seen being professional and dynamic! I'd like to encourage them to stop hiding in their studios and promote what they do! Be really good at it, communicate effectively and get the word out there in different and challenging public arenas! Don't talk yourself down."

As well as learning the design language, Lou also had to be quite commercially savvy when it came to the official paperwork that came with the commission. "I have to say, the Association of Illustrators (AOI) were absolutely fantastic and really supportive. They helped with all the professional and legal advice I needed for negotiating my own contract which was extremely time consuming - it's not something I've had to deal with before. I can't praise the AOI highly enough."

This is an important point for craftspeople considering or already working with a third party in some way, who might need to protect their ownership of designs or copyright etc. It would have been really easy to get so caught up in the doing and creating, but Louise took time out of her incredibly hectic schedule to get proper advice.

So, how does she plan to spend the next twelve months or so?

"Well, I'm catching up on private commissions and, not before time, as I have clients who have waited over two years for orders. I have recently launched a new range of silk scarves which I sell through my website. I am also working on a range of velvet floor cushions and quilts, so there's plenty to keep me busy.

"I think winning the craft&design Selected Maker of the Year Award in 2012 is a real feather in my cap and it was very flattering and lovely to think that people like my work. I think what was loveliest is knowing that people voted, not knowing who or how many. It feels really supportive as though people are saying, 'Carry on, keep at it, I like your stuff!'."



The Association of Illustrators

The Association of Illustrators (AOI) is a non-profit making trade association, dedicated to promoting contemporary illustration and maintaining industry standards, with a membership that includes freelancers, agents, students, colleges and commissioners. As the only body to represent illustrators and campaign for their rights in the UK, the AOI has successfully increased the standing of illustration as a profession and improved the commercial and ethical conditions of employment. The AOI provides its 1,500+ Members with dedicated advice and support for pricing, ethics, contracts and professional practice. For more information: www.theaoi.com

Contract Tips from the AOI:

- Always have a contract in place. Consider that a contract needs to set out who is going to do what by when and for how much money, you can draw up your own or your client must provide one. No matter the size of the client or commission or the deadline, always have a written contract in place before starting work.
- Read it. If any part or conditions previously discussed are missing, or there are clauses you do not understand, ask the client for clarification.
- Retain your rights. Copyright (literally the right to copy) allows you to licence your work to clients, generating your income. Moral Rights ensure that you are credited, protect your reputation and artistic integrity. Giving up (assigning or waiving) your rights can lead to loss of income and control.

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