

MAKING YOUR MIND OVER

Anna Liversidge explains how her inexhaustible love of art helped her survive and thrive during patches of depression and made her the artist she is today

My fascination with art began early. My happiest times have always been when my hands were busy making, although it was a great surprise to find that textiles were going to be my 'thing'. I grew up surrounded by women who made clothes and baked, but dressmaking was something I just couldn't work out, however hard I tried. I realise now that it is my messy, arty brain that wasn't good with the precision needed, although I did inherit the baking skills. These are not always so useful, as I sometimes head off to whip up a cake when I should be creating!

I had some incredible art teachers at school who encouraged me to take art further even though I had little faith in myself. At art college I imagined I would become a ceramicist or jeweller, but nothing clicked. One day, we had a visiting tutor who taught a machine embroidery workshop. I was immediately hooked. The speed, possibilities, and wonderful textures were like magic. That day was the start of

my love affair with stitch, one that burns brightly some 24 years later.

After a difficult start and finding textiles a little too late in my formal education, I was plagued with health problems and depression. Ten years of being a full time mum also left only small pockets of time to create. One thing that remained with me throughout this time though was my inexhaustible love of art. Being creative and working with my hands is what really defines me and is fundamental to my life. Depression is not very friendly or helpful to put it bluntly, and it was a vast obstacle to creativity. Though I was exhausted and had trouble concentrating and focusing, it was my mission to not be thwarted by it. I won't pretend it was easy; it took time, and hard work.

This shift in thought took a couple of years. I read 'Big Magic' by Elizabeth Gilbert. Then I read it another three times. It is a gem of a book. I loved her discussion of giving yourself a permission slip and how she described perfectionism as "fear in high heels". Her promise to herself to always be a writer, no matter what, was such an inspiration to me.

'How to Be an Artist

Without Losing Your Mind, Your Shirt, Or Your Creative Compass: A Practical Guide' by Joanne Nagler is another amazing book I recommend. It explains how to actually make this work. Having talent is one thing, but being fulfilled, and making it work in your life is a complex issue. She instructs you how to take a detailed look at your life area by area, and helps you to find practical solutions to make art a viable part of your life, and make it work around a paid job and family responsibilities.

Through these sources and others, I learnt the wonder of placing restrictions on myself and I slowly began to get a feel for what it was I most wanted to do. I had tried making products and selling them. I

began to see that the commercial path wasn't one for me. I realised that I just didn't want to try selling small products anymore. I decided I was going to focus on one off pieces to be framed, as this is what I really loved doing.

I let go of trying to make money from textiles. I started to work hard at doing it every day, keeping my focus, having a vision about what I wanted to create. I taught myself new skills and developed them. I let go of the end results and fell in love with the process just for the sake of it. My creativity began to flourish, grow, and bear fruit, and people began approaching me with commissions and freelance work.

At art college, drawing and sketchbooks were highly valued and it was something I did my best to avoid as I felt my drawing skills were weak. I find it funny that now, I don't like to be far from

my sketchbook. Drawing for textiles is very different to formal representational drawing, and it can be playful and a way of getting to know a subject in more depth. I take hundreds of photos, but when I sit and draw, I come away feeling different and seeing better. My sketchbook is my playground; it's where I note down the ideas that are always flooding in, where



I sketch, scribble, and plan embroidery samples.

I live in Brighton on the Sussex Coast; in fact I am very blessed to look out on the sea from my flat. There is a lovely under cliff path where I cycle just by the water and observe the sea and its changing tides. I love the flotsam and jetsam, the beautiful shells and sea battered objects - knotted fishing line and seaweed always hold my attention. The lace vessels I make with machine embroidery and water soluble fabric echo these qualities. Shadows, and light shining through leaves or petals, and the qualities of strength combined with fragility are subjects that hold my interest.

Louise Bourgeois said that "the act of sewing is a process of emotional repair". This quote is one that I really connect with. There is something deeply relaxing and grounding about making stitches with your

hands. I teach embroidery sessions at the local primary school where I see the benefit children find in creating and stitching; I have taught children who struggle in the formal environment of a classroom, but flourish when working with their hands. It is a joy to watch. I initially started with templates and instructions, but now I take a big bag full of colourful fabrics and threads and encourage them to let their ideas run wild. They draw their ideas, and I help them find a way to make them. I also teach workshops for adults and I find great delight in watching the magic unfold, as they discover they are more creative than they imagined. It seems I've come full circle.

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