

# UPPERCASE



pattern  
recognition

**32**

for the **CREATIVE**  
and **CURIOUS**



# Art & Design

VISUAL  
MATTERS

COVER ARTIST

## BEING IN THE MAKING KARA KRAMER

STORY BY  
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**D**ECIDING ON THE COVER IMAGERY FOR EACH issue of UPPERCASE is always a challenge. The basic template of the cover design has remained constant since the inaugural issue in 2009—its purpose if fairly simple: to let the artwork set the tone of the publication and hint at the themes of the content within. Not only does the cover have to look great in full size and in person, it also has to work at small thumbnail sizes for the website and promotions prior to the issue's release. As editor and designer, I gravitate towards cover images that are arresting in their overall composition but have intriguing details when examined up close.

Issue 32 is about surface pattern and the need we have as creative people to adorn and decorate the surfaces around us. Some of us are professionals who design textiles, wallpaper and other surfaces; some of us are artists who treat the world as our canvas; and some of us are aficionados who love to surround our homes and studios with colour and pattern. For my cover search, I was looking for something that might encompass all three!

Last year, artist and illustrator Kara Kramer participated in an open call for doodles (a topic explored in issue 28). Intrigued by the quality of her doodles, I clicked over to her portfolio to see more. I discovered her fine art portfolio of works on paper, 3D collages and inky explorations. I was particularly drawn to her constructions made of circles cut from paper that she had doodled on and decorated with colourful marks. I saved images from her portfolio in my digital idea file (in Evernote—I can't function without it!) and tagged Kara's art for a potential feature in another issue.

Fast forward nearly a year, I was browsing through my saved visual notes and returned to Kara's paper circle constructions... they were the perfect fit! I love how she has created her own patterns and how the surface of the paper is transformed with their dimensional presentation. To me, they speak of an insatiable appetite for creative exploration—of finding beauty in the imperfect—and of perseverance through repetition and self-expression.







I asked Kara about her creative path: "Since a child I have always enjoyed making things," she shares. "My mom had a huge impact in shaping me as an artist. She exposed me to art museums and galleries, and signed me up for all kinds of art classes."

When it came time for college, Kara studied art at Washington University in St. Louis: "The first two years I was able to explore lots of different mediums. Printmaking was—and still is—my favourite medium, even though I don't use it now. That moment when the paper lifts off a plate is the best. I chose to major in illustration, as some part of my brain thought it was practical. After undergraduate school, I did editorial illustration for magazines. It was fulfilling to see my images in print but I quickly got in my own way and questioned the need to have a definite illustration style. I can't remember if it was my urge to explore art without boundaries or if I didn't know what else to do, but I applied to graduate school for an MFA."

In her late twenties at the time, Kara admits that it was not the greatest experience. "I became disconnected with why I wanted to make art," she explains. "After graduate school, I placed all my materials, paintings and drawings in storage and left it there."

Life continued, and soon she got married and focused her energies on raising a family and teaching. But the impulse to create things by hand persisted: "I found myself buying lots and lots of notebooks. I began to write," *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron guided her back to creativity and opened the door to exploration. "One pen grew into many markers, a brush, scissors and glue, and I was having fun again. Those notebooks were completely for me."

Around six years ago, Kara rented a shared studio in Brooklyn, New York. "I'm in the same space today," she says. "I go there as often as possible to play with coloured paper piles and draw."

Kara is now actively pursuing her career in illustration and art. She has two websites, separating the activities. I asked her what makes the pursuits so different that they require this distinction.

"Funny you should ask this because one of my studio mates has been asking me this same question. I've been considering merging them," she says (and by the time this article comes out that may be the case). "Originally, I created two websites to help the viewer. I didn't want to overwhelm them with too much imagery. I also thought it may be easier to get illustration work. That hasn't been the case."

Kara says that each pursuit taps into slightly different energies: "Illustration is harder for me. It requires being more specific with imagery to communicate a story or idea. There are parameters. It's a puzzle that needs to be solved visually." In contrast, she describes fine art as an "open game."





