UPPERCASE





BEING IN THE MAKING

KARA KRAMER

STORY BY
JANINE VANGOOL

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 afficionados 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.







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."





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"Sometimes I want to be really messy and not know what I am doing and let the process fully guide me. The works on paper fill that need. There are no rules other than the ones I set."

Kara often documents her creative process on Instagram and on her blog. In a post she wrote, "I am learning that my WHERE is more an internal place, WHERE involves me being deeply focused and engaged in some form of making/discovering creating process." In response I asked her. When it comes to your art, what is your WHY?

"Yes, The WHY," replies Kara. "That is the question that paused me from making art after graduate school and it is the one that fuels me now. The WHY stems from my WHERE. The WHY is a feeling. It is a feeling I have when I'm completely absorbed with what I'm doing and there is no thought to anything beyond where I am. It is a rising, a joy. It's the simple act of putting colour onto paper. It's discovering an image I couldn't have imagined. It is those minutes that turn into hours that feel like seconds with wings. It's a choice to dance with what I am making as it makes me."

Synchronicity and meaningful coincidences are particularly joyful things that happen in art-making, collage in particular. "My road to encountering synchronicity both inside and outside the art studio is not straight," says Kara. "It swerves, spirals, zigzags and ultimately surprises."

"I remember, then forget, then remember again and again, that the process knows more then me. If I want to discover what that is, I must completely dive into the present moment and be open to receiving. This involves letting go of many preconceived ideas about what I think I'm going to make once I start. It's important to surround myself with materials that excite me: paper, colours, textures, ink, pieces of things that for some reason ignite delight. I also store a scrap bin under my table with bits from old drawings."

But perhaps the largest ingredient is time: "I give myself ample time to devote full attention to what I am doing. I am focused in play. That means moving things around this way and that way. Flipping it upside down. The drawing and the painting and glueing and cutting replace thought. And if I am lucky, images or situations will emerge and align in such a way that all I can do is go, wow, how did this happen?" \bullet

karakramerillustration.com



KARA CREATES 18-MINUTE COLLAGES AS PART OF HER ART PRACTICE

Why is 18 a magic number?

"I knew someone was going to ask me that one day," she laughs.
"Eight is my favourite number to draw, and on its side it becomes
infinity. I wanted to set up a practice with a defined time limit to
encourage the feeling of completion while embracing imperfection.
Eight minutes didn't feel long enough. Eighty, way too long.
Eighteen minutes is doable. Perhaps knowing that 18 is a mystical
number in Judaism that means "life" also subconsciously influenced
me. But when I plugged 18 minutes into my phone timer, it stuck.
I'm sure 17 minutes would work, too."





