

Designmatters Concentration
Featured Student

Ashley Pinnick

Illustration, 7th Term

with DM concentration, Summer 2014

Art Center College of Design



Why did you decide to declare a Designmatters concentration?

I came to Art Center for a multitude of reasons, but the foremost was always to be involved with Designmatters. When I saw what they were doing, it became clear that this program was a cut above the rest. It was a no-brainer I should try to commit to the concentration.

What has Designmatters' philosophy of "experiential learning" done for you as a designer that a conventional classroom setting could not have done? In other words, what has producing real-world outcomes done for you?

There's so much that comes out of a real-world situation, but for me, it was learning about the minutiae of cross-disciplinary collaboration and gaining confidence in how you represent your ideas to others. Throughout the process I learned how designers of different disciplines work and how their language and thought process can be eye opening. I came into my first sponsored project with a skill set that was analogous to my major. What was surprising to me was the diversity of work I was challenged to contribute: from shooting my first video, to creating posters, illustrations, 3D printed objects, animations and branding that eventually coalesced into a full-blown campaign. All during the design process. I was further challenged to consider the end user, the client, and the project's overarching effect while also collaborating with others. Then to take all of this work and boil it down into something digestible for your client is an entirely different skill, and one that is unimaginably important. It broadened my horizons exponentially. I came out of it looking at the volume and diversity of what I could make, as well as what it could mean, in an entirely new light.

How has that been challenging?

The work itself is certainly a challenge but it's a rewarding one. Like many have said, the stakes are much higher. Instead of letting only yourself down in the advent of failure, you've got a whole group who rely on your contribution to help keep things rolling. Process-wise, it is much different than typical studio classes, where we tend to bring things to a finish continually throughout the term. Here it's more about the idea than the execution for the first few weeks or maybe more, simply because of the malleable nature of group work. Being thrown into a new process was definitely overwhelming, but showed me the importance of a well-developed, well-understood idea that is communicable.

How do you imagine Designmatters impacting your career post-Art Center?

Designmatters has given me the opportunities and experiences that I never dreamed possible at a student level. Beyond having the opportunity to create real outcomes to timely issues, I have been given a huge amount of skills to use in the future. It has given me a context to a world beyond image making, and has helped in generating a change in direction for me as an artist. I have the confidence now to pursue the type of work I've sought out to create and challenge myself to step outside a career following a traditional illustration trajectory.

Compare your expectations and what you've learned so far.

I came into Art Center looking to connect with Designmatters. Knowing that they were one of few school organizations with an NGO status and seeing some of their outcomes told me that the work would be unimaginably challenging. It was this and much more. The concentration allowed me to explore how to conduct research and fieldwork, communicate cross-culturally, and how to be sensitive enough to create work that I am comfortable being held responsible for.

I thought this knowledge might affect DM-specific work and projects, thinking I would have two disparate bodies of work. More and more, it seems that social impact has become something I think about when I start any project in any class. Almost everything has become a mini design brief with its own application. That was unexpected, but it makes everything more enjoyable.

From the four themes, which matters to you the most and why? What kind of issues do you care about?

All four themes are fantastic ways to frame an issue. For me however, I am most interested in elements of education and using my work to foster a new generation of inquisitives and science lovers, which mostly fall under the Social Entrepreneurship and Public Policy themes.

Being a visual learner, I didn't always fully grasp a concept unless I supplemented my reading with further research or with visual tools. I'd like to make things that show the wonder of scientific and historical subject matter in a way that is digestible for people who learn differently. I'd love to do this through collaboration with experts and communication across different fields, generating an impact in museum exhibitions, school curricula, educational installation, and informative children's books to name a few.

How do you define the social responsibility of a designer? Where do you see your responsibility?

Social responsibility, for me, is about being aware of the things that I make aside of what makes an "interesting" image. What's visually interesting isn't always what's ethical or communicating your intended message. If I am going to be someone contributing to popular culture, then I should understand the implications of doing so.

Give a few words to describe the DM Concentration.

Formative, challenging, enriching, engaging.

One sentence about why to get involved with Designmatters.

Designmatters gives you the tools to approach complicated issues and generate an impact that takes the well being of all into account...take advantage of it and you'll surprise yourself with how much you can achieve.