

SPOTLIGHTS

INTERVIEW WITH SHREYA GUPTA

DEADLINE

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SOURCE: GRAPHIC COMPETITIONS

I was born in India. As a kid I was encouraged to focus on studies only, so I didnâ€™t draw much as a kid unlike other illustrators. I first started drawing when I was told that I was â€œtoo youngâ€ to carry around a camera. So because I could not take pictures, I started drawing the places and things that I wanted to remember. This is how I first got introduced to art. Eventually I got very interested in drawing but never thought it could be considered a career choice. In India, art as a profession is not encouraged. So fast forward few years, I finished my undergraduate degree in Computer Science Engineering and got an IT job at a major company in India.

However, after working there for around three years I got very frustrated and realized that I needed to make a change. So I looked up online different creative fields and found Illustration. I spent a year in making a portfolio and applied to three art schools and got selected in the MFA program of School of Visual Arts. Being a student in the Illustration as Visual Essay program and having the most illustrious illustrators and designers in the field mentor me along with very talented and supportive peers was the best I could have asked to prepare myself for the illustration field.

When I first started drawing, I didn't like my work much. Then I realized that I need to understand why I like certain artwork and perhaps incorporate those elements in my work. A few things that I like are pencil textures, limited color palette, patterns and lines. For some odd reason I love drawing lines and love to look at patterns of lines too. So I experimented with those elements and developed my current way of drawing.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON AT THE MOMENT?

I am mostly working with book publishers these days along with some editorial assignments. I am working on map illustrations and interior illustrations for YA novels with a couple publishers. Then there's a book jacket that I am illustrating. Another very exciting project that I will start working soon on is a YA novel where I will illustrate the cover, endpapers and the interiors.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WORKING DAY LOOK LIKE?

I wake up in the morning around 8, and play some music to really wake up. I check my emails the first thing in the morning. I have a studio set up in my apartment, where I live by myself, so it's very peaceful. I start my work by around 10 AM and go over the list of things that need to be done that day. My kitchen is a few steps away from my workspace so I am usually munching something as I work. I work pretty much the entire day with breaks for lunch, dinner or sometimes a tea break with my cousin who lives a block away.

WHAT TOOLS DO YOU USE MOST FOR YOUR WORK?

My illustrations always start on paper. I draw with pencil and then ink with pens. After that I scan the finished sketch and color digitally on Photoshop. I also have many hand drawn textures and patterns made with graphite and watercolor that I use to give my work a little traditional look.

WHAT SKILLS HAVE YOU LEARNT ALONG THE WAY?

One of the most important skills I learnt is to understand what the clients expectations are and at the same time keeping my aesthetic. A client may have a certain idea or vision about a project which may or may not match with mine. However, I always consider the clients ideas and at the same time present my own communicating why a certain idea may work better. So communicating the right way is very important.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A YOUNG CREATIVE?

Work hard. This is a very common advice given for any field but illustration needs thrice as much or even more. Illustration is not just drawing, it is a small business where you need to constantly market your work and keep in touch with your clients. This will take almost 50% of your time. So it requires a lot of self-discipline to manage your time. Be interested in things other than illustration. Because those things will inform your work and help you develop a voice. Be nice and help your peers, you will always gain from that.