

CREATIVITY IN THE PANDEMIC

2020 has been a year of crisis, tragedy and challenge. The economic, social and health upheavals of the year have also ushered in a time to dig deep while pausing for reflection and reevaluation.

By Saana Baker, textile design consultant and creator of *The Textile Eye*.

For creatives, whose output is intrinsically tied to mood, it has, by necessity, become a time of learning.

Kristin Colombano, who makes bespoke felted items under the brand Fog & Fury, sums it up thoughtfully:

"I feel emotionally affected by the shutdown and San Francisco's ghosted streets and boarded up buildings, the constant mask wearing and people's hidden identities, expressions and muffled words, the palpable fear of contagion and the immense space between us with social distancing. Then add the layers of climate change with



Kristin Colombano
of Fog & Fury

California's many fires and smoky skies (and the East's hurricanes) plus America's civil, political, and social unrest. We have more problems than we can handle. I believe practice, process, and perseverance will provide meaning and success. So, I go to my studio and work no matter what is going on inside or out. I accept that some days will be unproductive or a full-on fail, and that's okay. Just getting into the studio and making anything counts."

Inspiration is the foundation of creative output. How have our colleagues in design, who are responsible for a boundless stream of exciting, innovative product, been coping—even thriving—during COVID-19?

CREATIVITY: MORE, LESS OR ABOUT THE SAME?

For some designers and makers that generally work solo, the Pandemic has provided a chance to do more of what they love: retreat into their studios and make art. "Hand making textiles brings me serenity and immense joy, and I constantly crave uninterrupted maker time," says Colombano, who has continued to work and fulfill orders throughout the pandemic.

For Tracey Kessler, a Sausalito-based multidisciplinary artist and designer, studio time has been a boon. "My creativity ramped up at the start of lockdown. I was taking a fiber art class starting in January, and by the end of March we had moved to Zoom. Playing off this energy by the time the class was over in May, I was in full-time creative mode and it pretty much has not stopped since."

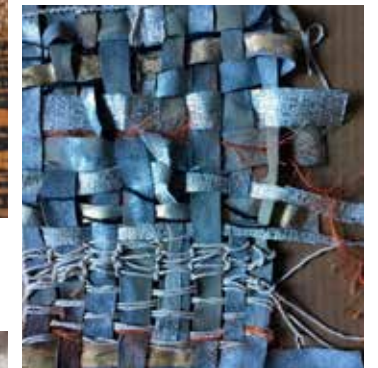
Inspiration has come in waves, more like a roller-coaster, for Giuseppe Molteni of Italian fabric producer G-TEX: "I went through three different phases. From the beginning of lock down until mid-April, I did not have any inspiration at all! Then my brain and creativity started again, and full of new enthusiasm, I started to create a lot of new articles/designs/color combinations. In September, when I realized that most customers are not hungry for new product, I decided to slow down and to keep some ideas for next year."

The lack of travel and connection with others has stifled creativity for some. "I have been less creative for sure. For the first month I wasn't able to go to the studio, and now the textile companies aren't developing new collections," said Italian textile designer and artist Patrizia Ortenzi. "It is hard to be creative (in this environment.) I am definitely an extrovert, and I need to travel and work with people in order to be inspired. I need constant contact with people."



Tracy Kessler:
Silver &
Gold Suede
Wallhanging,
Mixed Media, 2020

Patrizia Ortenzi's studio



Hand felted
pillows and
fabric from
Fog & Fury

MORE ALONE TIME SPARKS MORE CREATIVITY FOR SOME

"I have been even more creative, as I have had more time alone to develop my textile designs," says Eno Jonah, owner and chief designer of luxury textile line Nzuri Textiles. "I like working on my projects (often alone), developing new designs and finding workshops that fit the profile of my business."

For creatives in roles at larger firms, temporary closures and extended work-from-home have offered an opportunity to reconnect with lost habits of hands-on work. "I've been more creative!", says Mary Jo Miller, VP of Design and Creative Direction at HBF Textiles. "I had forgotten that I am a maker. Being home allowed me to experiment."



Eno Jonah of Nzuri Textile

“On a personal level, I’ve enjoyed designing and sewing my own masks,” says Sophie Clarke, Director of Home Textiles at Kelly Wearstler. “I’ve also been exploring some new techniques such as latch hook rug making. I find the more hand-on creative work I do, the happier I am.”

Royce Epstein, A & D Design Director at Mohawk Group, agrees. “I have been more creative because I have been able to find and appreciate slow moments again. It feels like the ‘80’s and ‘90’s in my house, when I had the mental and physical space to focus on creating.”

CONNECT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

With travel at a near standstill and many shows and conferences canceled, designers are leaning into online technology as a place for inspiration, learning and connection.

For many, embracing this change has made a world of difference: “You can make art and design on Zoom and now have access to things that you never dreamed of before via Zoom!” enthuses Royce Epstein. “I set up a craft collective every other Friday night called “Craftwerk”, to make crafts and talk about art and design with two other design industry friends. This has really kept me going!”

Interacting with other creatives is a big benefit. “I’ve been able to tap into more online inspiration. Zoom seminars, classes and workshops have really helped,” says Kessler. “I think people crave working together and connecting in whatever way possible. I’m participating in a wonderful project called ‘Telephone.’ Thousands of creatives around the world pass on their ideas and practice through their medium to create a ‘telephone chain’ of inspiration. It’s fascinating to see the work and connections created by this project.”



| Royce Epstein's home office, with dog Sherman

Tech has also taken the place of travel for product development purposes. “I had hoped to visit some of my workshops, including a new potential partner, in West Africa, Asia and Latin America,” says Eno Jonah. “The current situation has created a setback. Nonetheless, we are still moving on through virtual meetings. I have become much more familiar with Zoom, which I find incredibly useful and time-efficient, in that I do not need to travel to talk about my products.”

Nicolò Favaretto Rubelli of Rubelli Fabrics has also been clocking more screen time. “Everything moved to the Internet and to social media...I love Instagram, it can be a source of inspiration, and I like to share a face of Venice which you could hardly imagine.”

Andrea Galimberti of carpet company NODUS notes, “We live in a technological world, yet the people always stay in the center. ‘Humans first,’ I say, before technology and innovation. This means make fewer things and better. Respect life rhythms and the environment.”

LEARN SOMETHING NEW

The brain thrives on newness. At the start of lockdown, everyone was focused on technology. Learning these new skills has affected everyone. Fashion designer John Galliano, when asked by Anna Wintour on an April Vogue webinar about his experience during lockdown, spoke first about how mastering video conferencing had to become the top priority.

Tacua' rug, from the Mutazioni 1.0 Collection for NODUS by Lanzavecchia + Wai with 'Golden Ratio' carpet grid pattern by Olivia Lee

THIS SEASON, FALL FOR ECO-ELEGANCE.



Breathe by Milliken® is reimagining performance fabrics. These eco-elegant fabrics are soft, beautiful and built to withstand our busy lives - so you and the planet can breathe easier.

Learn more at [breathebymilliken.com](https://www.breathebymilliken.com).

Milliken



DECORATIVE SHEERS • WOVEN JACQUARDS • EMBROIDERIES • UPHOLSTERY FABRICS

www.elitetextileinc.com

Phone: (213) 689.3247 | Fax: (818) 946.8384 | info@elitetextileinc.com | 6710 Valjean Ave. Van Nuys CA 91406



“My daughter and I painted murals in our house, did a lot of watercolors and even some frame weavings,” says Seema Krish, whose eponymous textile collection is all hand-crafted in India. “I’ve really been enjoying painting with watercolors and making collages. The colors I’ve been using are brighter, and this has brought me a sense of calm and predictability through this time!”

Whether a new app or recipe, a dive into art or gardening projects, or signing up for online CEUs, our minds are working in new and different ways. Unfamiliar activities make us stretch, and the effects of expansion in one area often ripple out, creating a creative lift in other areas.

OPEN YOUR EYES TO NATURE

Now that far-flung destinations are inaccessible, many creatives are finding solace and inspiration closer to home. The simple pleasures of a nature walk or a stroll around the block are lauded by many.

In a recent New York Times seminar, Justina Blakeney described a brilliant way of resetting: “I can just get so stuck in my head when I’m home and in front of my computer or my phone, it’s like an echo chamber. So sometimes just getting outside is an “Ahhhh”. Doing focused walks helps me think about things in new ways..One I call “rainbow foraging”. I’ll go outside with my daughter, and we will look for physical objects like leaves or flowers, petals or sticks that are in all the colors of the rainbow. We might bring a little baggy



| Mary Jo Miller for HBF Textiles

to take them back home. Or I’ll just do it in photos. Even on my block, there might be a cool tree that I’ve never noticed before, and the eucalyptus bark—the way it’s flaking off—is creating this really cool pattern and these unique colors”.

Mary Jo Miller has also been getting out into the fresh air, and observes, “I’m definitely seeing more patterns in nature with shadow and light.”

Sophie Clarke has found a new appreciation for neighborhood walks and for gardening: “I have discovered that I enjoy spending the mornings pruning the palo verde trees in my garden. It gives me a sense of great peace and satisfaction.”

SLOW DOWN

Epstein’s summation is shared by many: “We all need to slow down and embrace this opportunity to reset. Don’t be afraid of slow moments! That is one of my new mantras for this era.”

“How nice and peaceful, the absence of noise. We were all able to listen to nature!” says Ortenzi, who enjoys walks and bike rides near her home in the hills above Lake Como.

“The crazy hustle that was my life prior to COVID left me with little time for creativity outside of work. This time at home has been a way for me to reconnect with gardening, cooking, and crafting with my daughter,” says Kristin Riccio, owner of Kristin Riccio Interior Design. “I think it’s easy to overlook the satisfaction and gratification of creative projects that help to recharge us, and that’s what COVID has given me. It may sound strange, but I’m grateful for this recharge.”



| Project board at Kristin Riccio's studio

French designer Pierre Yovanovitch recently told ADPro, “I try to look at the silver lining and see this as an opportunity for a creative reset, taking a pause from our overly scheduled lives to tap back into what inspires us.”

For those fortunate enough to be able to, taking the opportunity to pause and reset has become a worthy aspiration. According to a study by Dr. Marie Forgeard, a leading researcher on creativity, “There is compelling evidence that suggests surges in creativity could be linked to the experience of trauma.” The collective crises that we are experiencing are not easy. But I believe that they will spur growth, as each individual undertakes making meaning from their experiences. In the best of times, our industry and designers are capable of creating beautiful collections that speak elegantly of home and comfort. If Dr. Forgeard is correct, then I am overwhelmed by the creative possibilities that will emerge from this passage. 📖