

Tatjana Junker



This Berlin-based illustrator reveals the heart of her subject matter by employing contrasting colors and detailed pencil sketches.



By Tatjana Junker

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Duration: One year. After I finished university in 2018, I started working on commissioned illustrations while balancing different part-time jobs on the side. It was only this past year that I decided to focus all my professional energy on illustration.

Location: Berlin, Germany.

Education: BA in illustration, Falmouth University, Falmouth, United Kingdom.

Career path: My mom was a fashion and graphic designer, and always put a pen, a brush or any kind of painting tool in my hands. She had a drawer full of fashion illustrations in our basement that I would look through for hours, wanting to create the same one day. As I was an introverted child, I felt most comfortable escaping into the peacefulness of drawing and painting at school. I went through phases, wanting to be a singer-songwriter, a costume designer, a wood sculptor, a photographer and a writer of fantasy novels. I also created a school paper to become a journalist and lived out my graphic designer fantasies on my mom's old computer and Microsoft Publisher.

When I began to study communication design at the Hochschule Augsburg in Augsburg, Germany, I never thought it was possible to only focus on illustration for a career. It was during an exchange year at Falmouth University that I realized it was actually possible, so I decided to finish my degree in England. Upon graduating, I moved to Berlin to work as a freelance illustrator and designer for various startups while balancing part-time jobs to pay the bills. Inspired by the diversity and boldness of creatives in Berlin, I started renting my first desk at an illustration studio and quit my part-time job in 2020. I didn't have a lot of commissions yet, but I finally felt empowered enough to take the plunge.

Now, I mainly focus on editorial illustrations for magazines or design agencies all over the world. Most of my clients find me through recommendations from art directors, Instagram or my agency Rapp Art in New York and commission me for my style, which has been described as quirky, a bit romantic and expressively colorful.

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Artistic influences: From an early age, I was fascinated by the simplicity and boldness of the fashion illustrations I found in my mom's university folders and the work of fashion illustrators René Gruau and Antonio Lopez. German illustrator Cornelia Funke's work was the first to introduce me to the profession of illustration. I found my love for strange little details in her playful ink drawings.

Having studied songwriting and composition for a year before focusing on design and illustration, I fell in love with storytelling, and I always try to add a narrative aspect to my illustrations. Inspired by package and poster design, I integrate hand-lettered hints, remarks and graphic headings that underline the story depicted in my work.

Favorite project: My latest piece for the Wall Street Journal's wine column by Lettie Teague about how the wine world is still dominated by White men while quite a few challenges remain, especially for Black women. The subject matter and the feminist outlook were exactly for what I wanted to be commissioned. Also, I had dreamed of working for the Wall Street Journal when I visited its office in New York during a university trip in 2018, so now it feels like a personal milestone has been reached.

Approach: Though I mostly work digitally, I try to preserve that feeling as if elements of the illustrations were taken directly from my sketchbook. I want my work to feel spontaneous, light and playful even while delivering heavier topics so that they're accessible to everyone. I love to work with contrasts: placing bold colors next to softer tones; mixing geometric digital shapes with rough, detailed pencil sketches; and incorporating humor into more serious subject matter. There is a narrative perspective in my work—a snapshot in time.

Aspirations: Besides smashing the patriarchy, I would like to work with more inspiring magazines and editorial clients. Coming from a graphic design background, I am keen on creating some world-changing packaging projects or branding campaigns. I am looking for clients who want to make the world a better place with products that don't support unnecessary consumerism. It would be interesting to collaborate with a fashion brand and illustrate for a collection or a runway show. Besides that, I would love to fulfill my Cornelia Funke aspirations to write and illustrate my own book. Or perhaps I may start an animated series on why pickles are the best snack ever.

Philosophy: Aim to create work that feels like you. There are a lot of illustration trends that are always coming and going. People will tell you that your style is not what they are looking for. Some might mock it. Some might criticize it. Self-doubt will arise. Work hard at owning and embracing your style, find out what you like and not what you think others will appreciate or what will bring you jobs. Owning your own style is when you will have the most fun and be the proudest. Success will follow.

Anything else? Don't forget to take breaks. I sometimes still feel like I should be constantly creating something in order to become a better illustrator and perfect my art. There is a lot of pressure being a creative who turns their hobby into a career. I have come to realize that the times I stopped to breathe and just live were the times where I found the most inspiration. You shouldn't feel bad when there is no new work or you're not steadily generating genius—and I'm reminding myself with that statement, too.