



# BEAUTY IN IMPERFECTION

Katy Brown is an up-and-coming designer creating whimsical embroidered scenes and naively drawn pictures. Jennie Musgrove visited Katy at her studio in Greater Manchester to find out more about her inspirations and ambitions.

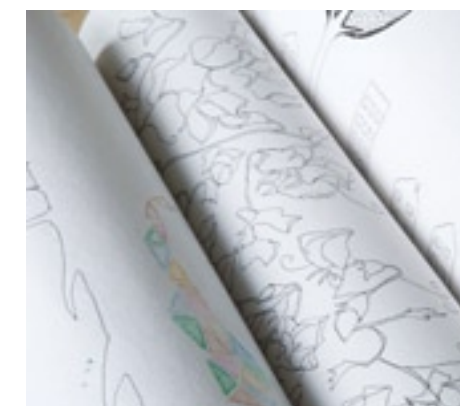


Last year, Katy Brown had a stall at the weekly Fashion Market in Manchester's trendy Northern Quarter. The reaction to her customised second hand clothes and original hand-made brooches was fantastic, and led to Katy selling her brooches in independent shops around the UK. This in turn prompted her to apply for a stand at the Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair, held last October at Spinningfields. The brooches were as popular as ever, but it was Katy's new embroidered wallpaper designs that went down a storm. "I've always loved interior design and have always appreciated feature walls, so that's why I started making my own," she says. "My goal now is to get my wallpaper printed and sell it through specialist shops."

An emerging talent in the art and design world, Katy studied Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University. During her degree, she worked with the Royal Institute for

the Blind, eventually creating a brail fashion magazine for people with visual impairments. "I used to be quite obsessed with getting my drawings perfect," she says, "to a point where I wouldn't draw because I never felt like they were perfect enough. But during my art foundation course, we'd cover our eyes and draw an object. And I preferred those drawings to the ones when I was trying to be perfect! So I continued to do that, and that's how it led to me working with visually impaired people."

Although she now prefers to draw with her eyes open, Katy's style remains imperfect and naïve, and suits perfectly the whimsical and dreamlike designs she creates. She founded her company, Olive and Brown, to act as a platform for her drawings, embroidery designs and bespoke wallpaper. The name is an amalgamation of Katy's surname and her late grandmother's first name, Olive. "My grandma was a wicked person with a wicked sense of humour, and I like the idea of her being part of something that she would be proud of me for. Sometimes I get sad knowing that she will never get to see how well I'm doing. I also like the name Olive, although she hated it!"



Trees, houses and birds are the recurring themes of Katy's work, although boats, bunting and the occasional portrait also crop up from time to time. A leaf through Katy's sketchbook reveals a prolific creative mind, with hundreds of tiny drawings and scribbled ideas giving an insight into her ongoing projects and artworks. There are also plenty of fashion images cut out from blogs and magazines – which Katy names as her main source of inspiration. "I read a lot of blogs such as Stylebubble and The Sartorialist," she says. "I also read *Antler* and *Vogue* every month and often draw the models from them which I use in my work."

Considering all Katy has achieved so far as a designer, it may come as a surprise that Olive and Brown is not her full-time job. "I've been a teaching assistant, I've worked in restaurants and now I'm working as a web editor, but I've always been doing this on the side," she says. "Doing the Great Northern Contemporary Craft Fair last year was really good for me because it made me focus. Getting all that done was a big achievement. At the moment I go to work, come home, do some designing and then go to sleep – that's my life! But it's what I really want to do so I guess I've got to just get on and do it."

We're sure Katy's determination to succeed can only lead to bigger and better things, and *CFL* can't wait to see what's next for this brilliant designer. ■

**Katy's framed embroidery will be on display at the Bowery Gallery, Leeds, throughout April. Visit: [www.thebowery.org](http://www.thebowery.org).**

Katy is currently looking to print her bespoke wallpaper so that it can be sold by the roll rather than by the panel. To see more examples of her work, commission a piece or read her blog, visit: [www.oliveandbrown.com](http://www.oliveandbrown.com).

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