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December 14, 2022 -

As told to Brandon Stosuy, 1718 words.

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On creating work in your own voice

Artist Angela Pilgrim discusses growing your work organically, allowing yourself breaks and mistakes, running a business, and how art is an extension of her voice.

Is it hard running a business and finding the time to be creative and make work?

There are days when I do question how I'm able to balance running this business and being creative and making work. But I think what makes my art different is that a lot of the fine art I would hang in a gallery show or a museum is translated to my shop apparel. Actually, most of my creations come from old ideas from my fine artwork, and I turned it into wearable art—so the lines tend to blur.

I know what works for my fine art and what works for my apparel line, and I'm organically developing my voice in my gallery work. It's a great journey so far; nothing is certain. That's how I live my life, too—very free-spirited.

How did you decide to start Fruishun?

Fruishun began in the summer of 2016 as ShopAngela. The name changed a year later on the one-year anniversary of the online shop. When I completed my residency with the Newark Print Shop, since I'd acquired a new skill, I started thinking about how I could sustain my art practices' longevity and also make an income.

Since I was exploring printmaking on fabric, it just clicked for me to think of ways people could wear this fabric I printed on as everyday wear. I did some research on the history and material of head wraps and then expanded to apparel as well.



In studio

How do you decide what your creative work is worth?

In my opinion, creative work is a personal journey. What you may think something is worth is maybe not what someone else thinks it's worth. Just like psychology and perception, if you feel like your thoughts—or in this case creative work—are relevant, that's all you need to keep yourself progressing. That worth may come from life experiences, personal opinion, or outside influences.

Being authentically you gives your creative work worth as well. I'm always experimenting, and I'm perfecting the voice in my work; it can sway with the day or mood, but I do know that what I'm creating has worth to me.

You have this statement, describing what you make as “an expressive empowerment brand for women, and a progressive art haven for artists to collaborate.” Can you talk more about this? How important is collaboration for you?

My wearable art is marketed towards women. It was something I had to include in the mission statement. And my career as an artist has put me in a position where I'm always collaborating with other people, whether it's through an exchange of ideas or through working on projects together. I have a real need to give back to others, and Fruishun gives other creative people a platform to get their name out there as well. I'm very big into “giving back” to the world; Fruishun has to embody that, too. I imagine this expanding even more with time. I envision the brand continuing to grow in that way, as I continue to collaborate with other new voices.

How do you use social media to promote your work?

I'm still learning the ropes in social media, and although people think I'm amazing at it, I'm always open to try a new angle. I've been using social media to translate my thoughts behind my creations—in the form of photos, behind the scenes, dialogue with my audience, or my overall style. I use Instagram and Facebook. I reach more people on Instagram, which I think is great because not only are my audience learning my work, but about me as well. I tend to host contests on my brand page or collaborate with other creatives in my area because sharing your work with the world also includes in-person engagement, which is vital. Authenticity promotes your work for you and being open with your audience does, too. It's organic.



AFRO PUFF III, Silkscreen

How does teaching fit into your artistic practice? What do you learn from your students?

Teaching printmaking inspires my techniques, organically, and allows me to teach more efficiently. Someone who's taking my class is a beginner, and I'm all about sharing the techniques that help me print accurately. I'm somewhat of a neat freak when it comes to working in this medium, so people feel that as well, but I think it trains them to put more thought into the end result. Most of the time, students want their projects to come out exactly how they imagine them, and I'm there with them in that vision—their project becomes my project. I operate on two planes: as an efficient teacher, but I also allow my artist-side to peek through, and it's lenient to mistakes. This helps me with my own printing process and helps me teach better. I'm also open to my own mistakes in teaching, and I think that makes my classes a bit more human and fun.

How did you find a studio, and what does a studio need, do you think?

Keeping a lookout on studios through word of mouth has helped me find one in Newark. I have artist friends who have leads on spaces all the time. A studio needs space. I tend to house a lot of fabric and papers and my process is not the most organized. For me, my studio needs light—windows that give me interaction to the world outside my studio and ventilation. I think that helps artists to prevent feeling closed in and uninspired, which I tend to feel if I'm working all day and don't go outside. You need materials in your medium and storage. Some artists tend to have a flooding of materials; it's good to have a place to store them.

How do you avoid burnout, and, if burnt, how do you deal with creative blocks?

I think it's important to keep a schedule, a ritual even. Usually I can go long periods of time with a routine, then one day something will click and I'll switch it up for a week. I think allowing for mistakes in your creative work is important. You're allowed to give yourself a break when you need it. This will include for me: being in nature, being still in my own space, writing ideas down instead of getting to work on them.

I remember having a burnout and my body made me rest; that tends to happen, too. Stopping yourself and being still really prevents that.

Creative blocks can be indicators to stop taking in too much of the medium you're working in. So when I get creative blocks I do all the above and try to learn a new skill like a language or I'll do some reading. My sketchbooks help with my creative blocks, too, because I can go back to something I didn't finish—I can flip back and forth, filling it without commitment.



AFRO PUFF I, Silkscreen

Can you talk about your "Afro Puff" series, "Afro Puff I," Afro Puff II," and "Afro Puff III"? It's how I first learned about your work (Note: we included one in the 7 Inches for Planned Parenthood project.)

There was a point when I felt like the work I was making wasn't being expressed as I would've liked. My true voice wasn't being heard in my art. I remember not working on art for a year and a half and wondering what the next step would be. I spent time learning more about myself—the things that made me happy, sad, inspired, hurt, and what I've learned in this brief time on this planet. I thought about my experiences.

When I was growing up, I wasn't as opinionated as I became with age. A lot of my childhood was like watching a movie. I wasn't completely quiet and just a viewer, but I was quiet enough that I was often interpreted by peers and family. I was born into a family where they were pro black and had a sense of pride in it, but didn't speak too much on any issues regarding our real community. The conversation was centered around generational habits of black culture with no explanation of why.

In my adult years I started exploring these subjects: accomplishments, community pride, food, history, culture, and media in the black community. This birthed the hair series that I created two years ago. It's a screen printed series of women of color surrounded by jars of Pomade and the hair grease I grew up using: Blue Hair Magic and Mango Butter. In many ways they're self-portraits interpreted through strong Women of Color.

Subjects involving race, beauty and individuality have a platform today. It's welcomed, which is different from a decade ago. My work's found solidarity with people in my community.

My voice, as an extension of my art, inspires my work tremendously. Art has always been an extension of my voice.



AFRO PUFF II, Silkscreen

You've talked about using old-school approaches to printmaking vs. digital. What is it that appeals to you about the old-school approach? Are you interested in the overall process?

The "old school" approach to printmaking is very intimate. When I was introduced to the digital way to make the art I do, I refused to do it that way because I fell in love with the beauty of having a hands-on experience. I am traditionally trained in painting and illustrating and it probably comes from that skill that I felt closer to the approach. Just like you look up close to a painting with brush strokes, I want people to see the process in my work when you look at it. It's not perfect, it's rough, it has mistakes and it's human. I remember going to a museum, and when I was told to look closer at the imperfections in art, I pardoned the imperfections in my own art.

Angela Pilgrim recommends:

Writers such as Audre Lorde and Toni Morrison.

Entertainers like Solange Knowles, Tracee Ellis Ross, Estelle, SZA, and Common.

Name

Angela Pilgrim

Vocation

Visual Artist, Teacher

Fact



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