

# FORGET- ME-NOT

WITH WORK THAT FITS AS WELL IN COMMERCIAL PROJECTS AS IT DOES IN GALLERY EXHIBITIONS, **EMILY FORGOT** DEFIES DEFINITION. HERE, SHE EXPLAINS WHAT FUELS HER PASSION FOR HER PRACTICE

WORDS: RUTH HAMILTON ■ PHOTOGRAPH © STEPHANIE ALCAINO

[www.emilyforgot.co.uk](http://www.emilyforgot.co.uk)





**E**mily Forgot chose her professional name because of her poor memory, although she's more than on top of things now. Her career as a freelance designer has seen her working for high-profile clients in art and retail, as well as exhibiting her work in galleries and running a curated online journal.

Emily has gained particular recognition for her Assemblages – wooden architectural scenes that play with the viewer's perception of 2D and 3D space. It's an approach that's typical of the designer's aesthetic; much of her work is not quite what it seems. We caught up with her to chat about responsible design, riding out the boring bits and why she's attracted to things that are not quite 'good taste'.

**You've managed to retain a strong artistic identity throughout your career. What do you look for in a prospective client?**

I think a client with an open mind and an appreciation of my work is always a good start. It needs to feel like a good match, particularly if clients are wanting to use my personal work – although the line between commercial and personal work is blurring more and more these days.

**You've said that you didn't plan on being a freelancer, and early in your career you just wanted to be in a studio where you could learn from others. Where do you do your learning now?**

I think I said this because I suffer from imposter syndrome and lack confidence in certain areas of my practice. There's so much value to be had in learning from others. Being a curious person means I've found mentors along the way, but just not in the traditional sense. I think, on reflection, it's not so much of a coincidence that I work for myself. I'm a bit of a control freak so I like to

manage the projects I take on myself and find it easy to work on self-initiated projects.

**Do you think illustrators should have a personal style?**

I'm so interested in [the idea of] style, especially because it's a term that's often used in a negative sense. When there's thought behind the form something takes, 'style' communicates on fantastic levels – it isn't just about 'surface'. I think there can be laziness related to style, but we all have our own preferences and tastes, and as creative people these develop through the things we research and open ourselves up to.

On a practical level, as an illustrator it's important to have a way of working that art directors can understand and commission confidently. It's something I struggled with in the past, but as I've developed a few different ways of working I've managed to keep myself interested. I've been lucky to have some brilliant clients who have allowed for experimentation, and I've been able to push my personal style in new directions over the years.

**In 2016 you held your first solo exhibition, Neverland. How did this shift towards the more arty side of things come about?**

Since I graduated I've always worked on personal work alongside commercial projects. The show was born out of a frustrating year, where I felt deflated about my output. I hadn't worked on any projects I was proud of and felt I needed something to change to regain a satisfaction around my practice.

For the most part, clients commission you based on work you've already done, and I needed to make something I was happy with to start being commissioned to create projects I was happy to collaborate on and share. Doing a show felt like the perfect opportunity to create some self-initiated work that was a better reflection of the work that I wanted to be making. It was a great



Above: Emily Forgot is known for her wooden architectural Assemblages.

Right: Forgot's work plays with viewers' perceptions of 2D and 3D space.

PHOTOGRAPH © STAYONEDGREE

opportunity to experiment with different ways of working, which commercial projects often couldn't allow for.

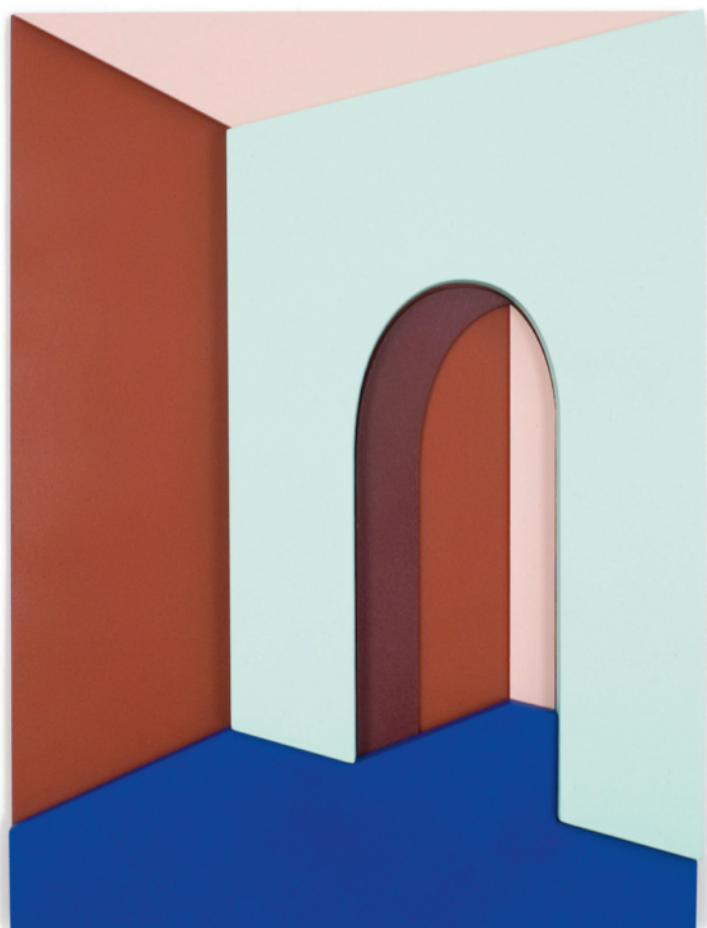
In the month I took off to work on the show I felt like I was returning to a place I had always wanted to be with my work. The studio suddenly felt a lot more creative.

**You maintain Muse & Maker, a kind of personal blog/online scrapbook of inspiration. What made you launch it?**

As artists and designers I think we often hide our inspiration, but I like giving people a window into my visual universe. Sharing the things and people that inspire me to create is really rewarding. I also wanted a place to explore another side of my creativity, which is my love for furniture, interior design and architecture.

**What do you want to explore next?**

I would love to explore my passion for interior spaces and object design further. Recently, I've been







PHOTOGRAPH © STAYONEDGREE





working on a fantastic residency project called Room on the Roof with the Netherlands-based design store De Bijenkorf. I've been working on series of domestic objects. I find the line between design and art a really interesting one to explore.

**You do a lot of window displays, as well as illustration and sculpture work. How do you feel about creating something that will only exist for a short period?**

I really don't like the idea of waste so I think that's why, for my recent window work [for De Bijenkorf], I went down the functional object route, creating objects that are art pieces but have longevity in terms of their function, material and form. It's great to see when I work with brands now that they often have a sustainability programme in place, as this impacts how temporary designs will be used after the event and means designers make better material decisions.

It's something as makers we all need to be thinking about. I don't know if I'm being naive, but I think the 'art and thought' we put into a designed object can help to stop it from just becoming wasteful. Making things that people want to keep and treasure their whole lives.

**There's an element of whimsy in your work (Emily 'Forgot' and 'Neverland' are both a little fairytale-esque), but also a strong feeling of the surreal. Is that a conscious decision?**

Well, I don't take myself or my work too seriously. I like the idea that I can create work that feels seriously playful, if that makes sense. It's this kind of work that I engage with, the fun stuff that makes me smile. I do notice that the things in life which resonate with me often have an element of friction and contrast. An unusual scale, something out of place, a combination that jars in some way... things that are just the other side of what's deemed good taste. These interests must come through my work in some way, but not in a particularly conscious way.

**Are there any particular historical art or design movements you're drawn to?**

I like to keep my references as eclectic as possible. This stops things from simply being a relayed version of a certain time or movement. I do have a strong affinity with early 20th century design. The usual suspects, such as the Bauhaus and Postmodernism (Studio Alchimia and the Memphis Group) are

Left: The artist experiments with different forms, materials and colours to find new takes for her Assemblages.

Above: Emily Forgot worked with Studio EMMI to create a communal area based on the theme of Utopia at Somerset House, central London.

movements I feel drawn to, but I think it's important to look at these movements more deeply than just the surface aesthetic. Knowing the reasons why the work produced at this time took the form it did can help elevate your work beyond a purely stylistic exercise.

**Across your work, there are elements that look 3D but are 2D, and vice versa. Is it the element of surprise that you're drawn to?**

I think this playfulness between the 2D and 3D arose out of constraints. I love working in 3D but it's not always the most practical, and coming from a graphic design and illustration background I'm used to producing work in 2D print form. My Assemblages were born out of trying to find an area that could operate between the two, celebrating my love of space and object design but informed by my illustration practice.

**You've created a few versions of your Assemblages. How do you keep things fresh?**

What I enjoy about these pieces is that they afford me the time to research architecture and discover buildings that provide a jumping-off point for the designs. I also love spending time experimenting



Above: Unexpected domestic objects created for Emily's Room on the Roof residency project with Dutch design store De Bijenkorf.

with colour and introducing new materials into the pieces. For example, for my resort series last summer I collaborated with surface designer Olivia Aspinall and included jesmonite terrazzo sections into the final pieces.

There are infinite possibilities for pushing the form, material and colours, so I can't really imagine getting bored. The sanding and painting part of the process is another matter... that can be particularly boring, but with a good podcast and no email in front of me it can be the perfect time out.

**You worked with Studio EMMI on art direction for the Utopia Fair at Somerset house. Tell us about the concept behind that.**

This was such a wonderful project. A big part of the design was led by the sustainability aspect, so we used materials like recycled crates to construct the space, and we made cotton flags and banners and used recycled stock for printed materials.

I suppose we approached it as you would any branding project, imagining what the personality of the fictional land of Utopia would be and developing a visual language for it that best communicated this personality. The idea of community and interactivity was high up the list,

which is why a huge seating/table area was the central focus.

**Is Emily Forgot a character for you now? Do you use it to separate your professional and personal life?**

There's very little separation now between life and work, which can be both good and bad. In terms of my name, I don't think about it much these days, although it stops me from missing deadlines!

**Which project best encapsulates your creative personality?**

I suppose it would be self-initiated projects because I feel commercial ones shouldn't and aren't about me as much as they are about the subject in hand or the client's brief and personality. My approach will always come through, but it's all about achieving the right balance. It's why who you work with is so important too – if my personality does come through in the work it needs to align with the client's goals, too.

**What's your current project?**

I'm working on some domestic objects for the Room on the Roof residency I took part in at De Bijenkorf in Amsterdam. I'm also finalising the design of an assemblage edition I'm making for the Jaunt's forma series, where I took

inspiration from a trip to Umbria. I'm also working with a design agency in Canada on a more traditional illustrated campaign and some personal pieces for a group show.

I find this to be a good balance in the studio at the moment, although I could always do with having another pair of hands. I hate being too busy, and don't understand busy bragging. If you're too busy you drop balls and do a bad job and you also have no life. I value time out doing nothing or hanging out with friends.

**Has Muse & Maker influenced how your career has developed?**

It's opened doors into interesting areas and opened my work up to other creative sectors. It can be tough to be self-employed, so having other revenue streams and opportunities to collaborate in other interesting areas is really beneficial.

**What were the challenges of creating something that had to function as a social space as well as making an artistic statement?**

Boring but key things like health and safety are always a challenge when working on environment design. And also budget. I have to admit I can find budget restraints very challenging, so it's a good job I enjoy problem-solving. ■