

Shikira's colourful designs and workshops help people to rediscover their natural aptitude for creativity



Shikira Alleyne

MEET THE EMBROIDERY ARTIST USING HER VIBRANT, MIXED MEDIA PATTERNS TO SPARK JOY AND FULFILMENT – ESPECIALLY IN THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR CREATIVE CONFIDENCE

Words by Daisy Game



From punch needle portraits to bugle bead blooms, Shikira uses a variety of techniques to stitch her patterns



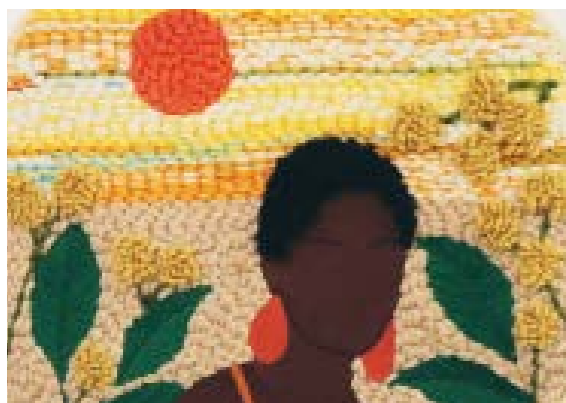
“I t felt like society didn't value creative people. Like I was trying to fit into a box that wasn't for me...” For Shikira Alleyne, founder of embroidery pattern and workshop business, *Kreative Pursuit*, the path to creative fulfilment never did run smooth.

After completing her studies at the University of East London, the designer decided to take some space from the arts. Creative opportunities, as the textiles grad came to discover, are hard to come by: “When I left university, it wasn't so easy to find work in that area. All the graduate programmes were in banking, property...” Shikira remembers. Instead, she spent the years that followed higher education donning a variety of professional hats – starting with recruitment, moving into holistic beauty, and finally landing herself a position at a SEN school as Art and Design Technician and Teacher. But nothing felt right; and no matter where she turned, Shikira's desire to create was prodded and poked. She felt endlessly frustrated by an education system that refused to pay the arts proper attention: “I was really feeling dissatisfied with teaching. It really wasn't what I thought it was going to be when I went into it...” Most primary school children, Shikira tells me, are only given one hour's worth of art lessons per week. A token effort, the designer and I agree: “If you valued creativity, you would allow children to explore that. Children are naturally creative. It's over time that we lose it. We lose confidence”. And it's no good trying to reintroduce creative thinking later down the

line, either – despite the efforts Those In Charge make to protest otherwise. Shikira recalls a 2018 scheme that aimed to 'boost creativity' in offices: “There was a whole thing about the corporate industries needing to get more creativity back into the office...but it was like, you've spent all of this time killing the industry – not putting money into that area in terms of education – and now you're complaining that people in offices aren't creative enough?”. The knock-on effect of denying our young people the opportunity to flex their creative muscles, says Shikira, is clear: “I speak to so many adults that say, 'I'm not really very creative'. And I totally get it. We lose that muscle memory, and we think that we're rubbish. That's what happens over time...”

Enough was enough. Shikira was determined to reverse the negative effects of an uninspired education system and create a space in which people could rediscover their creative potential. And so it was that in 2019, *Kreative Pursuit* was born: an online platform from which Shikira shares embroidery patterns – often inspired by her →

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love of colour and her Caribbean heritage – tutorials and stitching how-tos. Kreative also organises custom creative workshops: from quick-stitch festival embroidery, to screen printing classes for little'uns.

A believer in the positive effects of creative activity on mental wellbeing, Shikira tells me that Csikszentmihalyi's Flow Theory plays an important part in her understanding of craft. 'Flow' is a state of deep concentration that can be cultivated when you're fully focused on the task at hand.

"Once you're in Flow, you forget about time..." Shikira expands: "You're completely focused on that activity, so your brain can only do one thing at a time. It can't focus on stresses at the same time as you're doing that activity. The brain shuts down that side". It's a Goldilocks situation. You need a craft that's consuming enough to demand total concentration – thereby allowing your brain respite from its whirring and worrying – but simple enough that any potential frustrations are kept at bay. Repetitive activities like embroidery, then, tick a lot of Flow boxes.

So, what's next on the Kreative cards? Well, Shikira is planning to take a bit of a breather before she focuses too hard on the future. It's been quite a year. The designer has recently completed, in a rather full circle moment, writing the syllabus for the Level Two Creative Design and Production qualification for 14- to 16-year-olds. She tells me that it's been an immensely rewarding, but challenging, process, after which she's in need of a little R&R.

But that doesn't mean all-things-stitching are off the table. The stitcher has recently released her own punch needle Christmas decorations kit, and is still finding the time to put the finishing touches to an embroidered piece marking the history of Windrush Day. Creating an environment in which members of the black stitching community feel welcome and valued is another Kreative priority: "I was doing all these workshops, and 80% of the time, I was the only black person in the room", says Shikira. When she got invited to The Black Women's Forum UK, Shikira was curious to understand why this might be: "I just wanted to talk to the women. I just wanted to ask: do they craft? Would they go to a workshop?". The answers she received were definite: Yes, and yes! So in November 2019, Shikira organised Black Girls Stitch Up – a workshop in which she taught stitchers the embroidery techniques needed to sew an applique Afro-style head wrap design. Shikira is keen to facilitate a more positive dialogue around racial inequity: "I just feel like everybody – black, white, whatever – we all just need to have that difficult conversation! It's uncomfortable, it's horrible. But if we're not going to have that conversation, then the problems just continue. We just all need to have a conversation together".

The future of Kreative Pursuit, it seems, is wide open; but one thing's for sure – we can expect some serious Flow.

Follow Shikira on Instagram @kre8iveshack and visit www.kreativepursuit.com to learn more about Kreative workshops.