



Alumni Profile:

Jenn Ski

Jennifer Skoropowski Turns Back for the Future of Design



Artist Jennifer Skoropowski, known as Jenn Ski, graduated from Middlesex in 2003 and has found amazing success with her retro designs.



This line of scrapbooking materials, featuring Jenn Ski's whimsical animals, was available at Michael's craft stores last spring and quickly sold out.



Skoropowski's mid-century modern home is a focal point of her popular blog, and serves as inspiration for her work.



Hallmark has featured Jenn Ski designs on greeting cards and note-card sets.

As one of the new generation of artists looking to the 1950s and '60s for inspiration, Middlesex alumna Jennifer Skoropowski is making a name for herself in the red-hot world of retro/modern design.

Professionally known as Jenn Ski, the 27-year-old artist creates clean, abstract designs in warm colors. Jenn Ski's signature style has become what she calls her "blobs" – rounded, abstract shapes that conjure up the past, yet present a bold new take on the future. Think Sputnik, *Mad Men* and Marimekko all rolled into a totally fresh mix.

Skoropowski sells her work online, and has sold designs to greeting-card makers, including Hallmark. Last spring, her playful alphabetical animal illustrations were made into a line of scrapbooking materials, called Actopus to Zelephant, by K & Co. The line appeared in Michael's craft stores around the country and quickly sold out. Her animals have also been featured in a series of alphabet cards by a company in the United Kingdom, as well as in a variety of children's books.

In addition to her graphic design and illustration work, Skoropowski paints, designs wedding invitations and decorates homes, all in a decidedly "retro" style. She even lives in a 1950s house and writes a popular blog about living in a mid-century modern home.

"I've always liked retro," said Skoropowski. "When I started studying design, I was instantly attracted to retro type fonts and retro images." It took a while to find her distinctive Jenn Ski style. "I began doing my 'blobs' after college," she said. "Back in college, I was into type, type, type."

Skoropowski graduated from Middlesex in 2003 with a degree in studio art. She transferred to the University of Massachusetts Lowell and earned her BFA in graphic design in 2005. "I learned so much at MCC," she said. "The faculty really taught us how to use all the graphic-design computer programs. They really took the time to work with me one-on-one."

After college, Skoropowski worked for a local computer-game company designing logos, packaging and promotional items. "They liked me because of my '50s aesthetic," she said. Eventually though, she felt confined artistically, and set out on her own in 2007.

Skoropowski sells her work – prints, cards, paintings, bags and mobiles – via her website (www.jennski.com) and on the design-marketplace site Etsy.com. In fact, her agent, Lilla Rogers, saw her work online two years ago and asked to represent Jenn Ski. With the help of Rogers, Skoropowski's work has found an international audience.

"Lilla sends my work out to companies all over the world. They use them, and then send me samples in the mail," she said. "It's like Christmas or my birthday when the boxes of samples arrive on the doorstep." It was her agent who suggested that Jenn Ski branch out into children's designs. "I took the suggestion and began moving my blobs around – and they turned into animals," said Skoropowski, as if surprised by her own creative process.

In addition to acquiring an agent, another highlight of Skoropowski's young career was being included in a new book devoted to contemporary design. Titled *Naïve: Modernism and Folklore in Contemporary Graphic Design*, the gorgeous, oversized art book was published in June. "I was really happy to be included in that book," she said. "It made me feel part of a design community."

Skoropowski has also joined a real-world community: A year ago, she and her husband moved into a 2,400-square-foot house, built in 1952, set on 2.5 acres in southern New Hampshire. An open, airy mix of stone and glass, the house not only fulfills a long-held dream, but serves as inspiration.

"I've always wanted a retro home, and living here has really changed my work," she said. "I've been picking up things for the house – vintage accessories and furniture – at flea markets and online, so I'm now into the '50s and mid-century design more than ever," said Skoropowski.

"In my own work, I find I'm using these hideous browns, avocado greens, oranges and burnt umbers. All the colors I hated as a kid, I now love," she said, laughing.

The house and Skoropowski's efforts to fix it up and furnish it in retro style have become one of the focal points of her popular blog (<http://jennskistudio.blogspot.com>). She estimates she spends two to three hours a day blogging. Her site receives 12,000 visitors a month.

"The blog keeps people aware of what I'm doing," said Skoropowski. "There is a commercial tie-in, but it's not a big money-maker."

While Skoropowski is enjoying her increasing commercial success, her sights have always been set high. "My dream is to have my stuff on carpets and fabrics," she said. "I'd love to have my work at Target!"

- Kathy Register



Jenn Ski's signature has become her warm colors and abstract "blobs." Check out her work at www.jennski.com.