

Why I am a Designer

by Olivia Soule Nelson

Dear Reader,

Welcome to my book all about why I am the designer I am today. Throughout my journey, I have come across many different things from objects, packaging, paintings, political campaigns, architectural parks, and more that have inspired me and informed my design style and skills I have developed over the years. In this book each section is titled after something that is a collection I own, an object that has deeply inspired me, is something I love and use regularly or has changed my perspective on my surroundings. I aimed to create a book that is a direct representation of me at this moment.

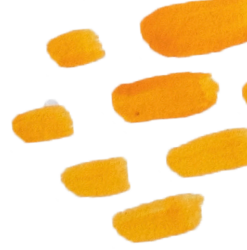
I began my path in design through the simple act of creating art. I fell in love with the ability to create something from nothing. I was able to foster my creativity and love for art in private art lessons or at school. My childhood friends shared my love for these endeavors as well. Working with my hands and the act of creating things has always been something that I have been passionate about. The act

of making something was so gratifying to me and was always something that soothed me.

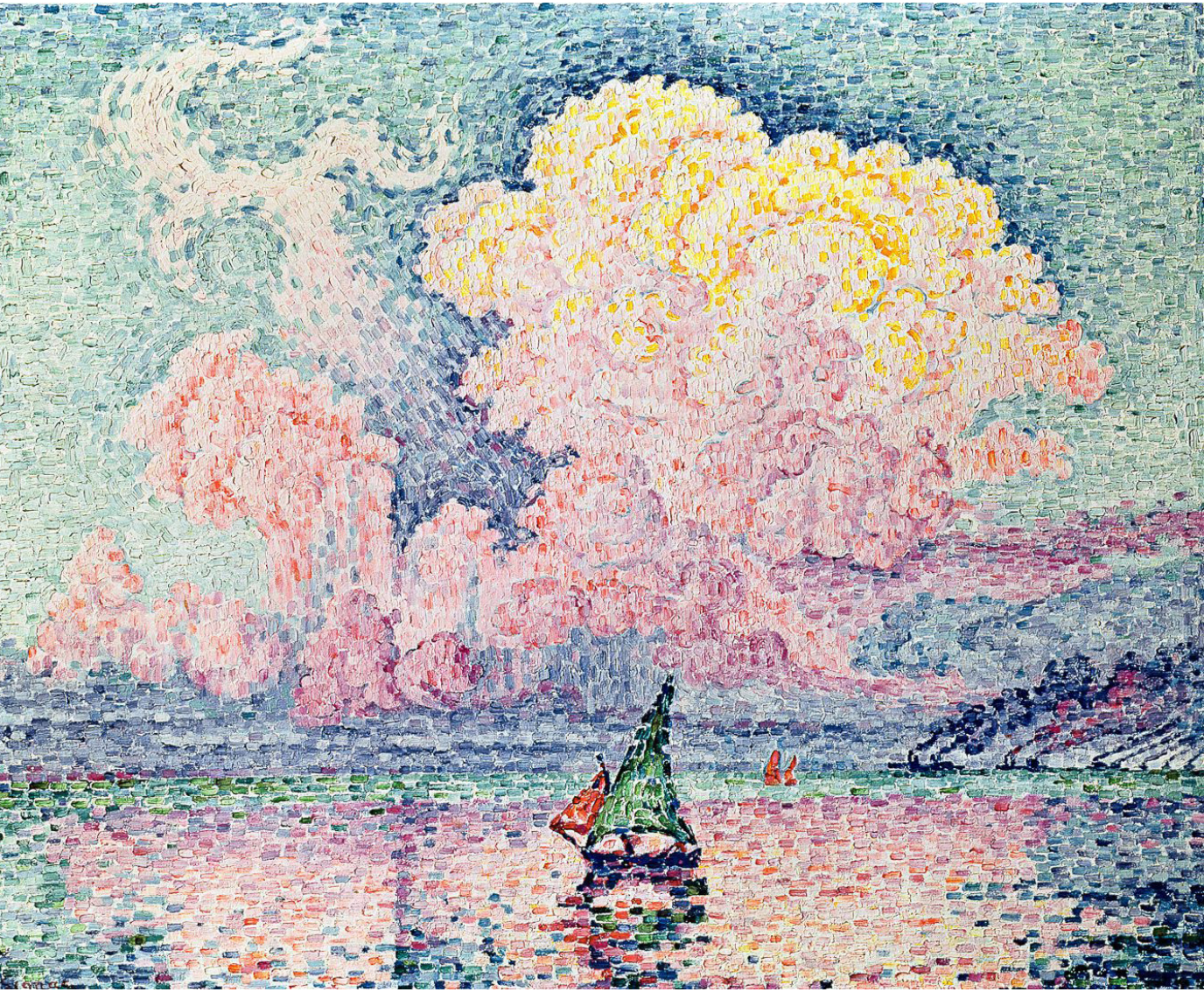
I wanted my book to show and honor the fine arts and graphic designs that I have made. Throughout this book, I have combined both handmade elements alongside designed elements. The cover is the first instance of this. The cover has my initials debossed in the cover into the paper that I splattered paint onto by hand to connect with the hand-drawn painted patterns and shapes that I have created to weave throughout the book. Both these elements work together to honor my journey so far in making things.

This book is a snapshot of what makes me the designer I am today. As I grow as an individual these interests will change and evolve as I grow and explore new parts of the world and my relationship to them. I hope you enjoy this book and gain new insight into who I am.

*Cheers,
Olivia*



LEFT, Paul Signac's *Antibes, Le Nuage Rose* which he painted in Antibes, France (1917). Now on display in a private collection..

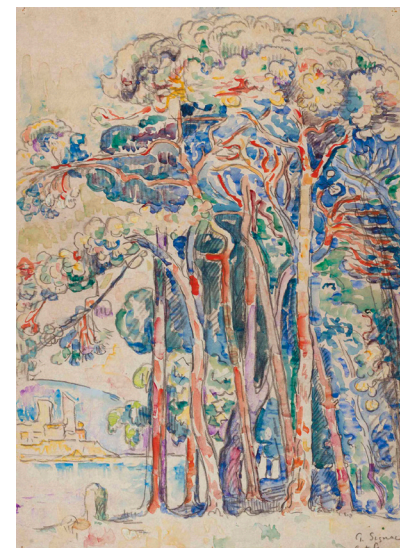


Signac's spark of inspiration

I saw this painting during one of my first visits to the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) in Boston. My family and I were touring schools for college. We had some free time during our visit to go explore the MFA. I grew up in a home that had a deep appreciation and love for all art forms and my family always loved to go see art. During this visit, we went to the Impressionist paintings and on the way to the gallery, I spotted *Antibes, Le Nuage Rose* by Paul Signac. I immediately fell in love with this painting. Signac's use of color, his short brushstrokes abstracting the scene of a boat sitting on the water during a beautiful sunset. I remember looking at this painting with my father and just staring at it in awe. Despite the short brush strokes, Signac captures the tranquility of the moment. The dark green boat perfectly countered by the giant cloud that is drifting in the background and bleeds into the sea. After looking at it for several minutes, I snapped a photo of it on my phone and for several years I kept it as my background screen. A constant reminder of the power of color, composition, and style.

me, it was the start of a new chapter in my life and kicked off my design career. While this painting did not directly inspire anything specific in my design work, I always carried this piece wherever I went. I would always visit *Antibes, Le Nuage Rose* when I went to the MFA. When I visited other museums, I began to look for other works by Signac. I discovered more paintings that he created during his time in Antibes, France and throughout his career. His use of color and leadership in the Pointillism art movement is something I admire about him and his work.

This painting is the start of my design journey at Northeastern University. For



ABOVE, Paul Signac's watercolor painting titled *Antibes, le fort depuis Juan-les-Pins* in 1914.

Antibes, Le Nuage Rose

PAUL SIGNAC | 1916

Rocks & Shells

BELOW, Some of the shells from my collection, Photographed by Olivia Nelson.

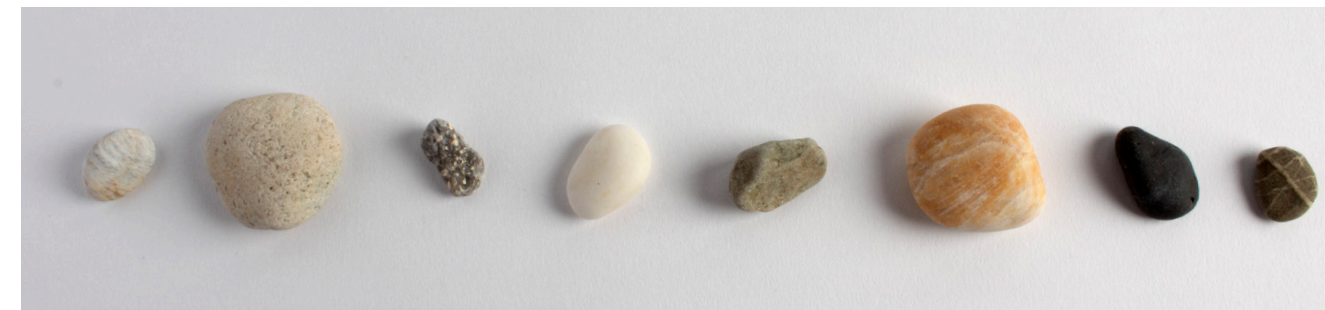


Small discoveries & little momentos

Growing up I lived nearby the beach. My family would go to the beach daily during the summer. We played sports, went swimming, built sandcastles and read books on the beach. My favorite activity was walking along the water with my mother. We walked along where the waves and the sand met and would talk about anything while we enjoyed the landscape. Various shells, rocks, and sea glass were searched for and brought back home with us. Each day we would look for something different, either a rock that was completely black and smooth or a rock that had a band or two that wrapped around the rock. The discovery of sea glass or an interesting shell was always a treasure for us.

As I grew up we continued to take beach walks no matter the season. I would take friends with me on beach walks or walk by myself. As the years

continued rocks and shells became something to collect and remember the day by. I would take them home after stuffing them in my pocket and place them in a bowl full of other rocks and shells. When I travel I look for a nice rock to remember the trip or the place by. They become a way for me to connect emotions and a moment in time with a small object. While I don't remember what places my rocks and shells originate from, I still admire their shapes, size, and coloring. This collection that I have will never stop growing and is something that I will always cherish.



ABOVE, Some of the rocks from my collection. Photographed by Olivia Nelson.



LEFT, Some of the mugs from my collection. Photographed by Olivia Nelson.

Items of comfort

In my hometown Setauket, NY, we have a gallery art fair every year during the first weekend of September. All the local artists in the area come to display and sell their work. It is a fantastic time for people to support local artists and come together as a community. It is one of my favorite weekends. During this event was when I first discovered several ceramic artists who created the most beautiful mugs. I bought one of my first mugs at this fair in my junior year of high school. It was a low green blue ceramic mug with a turtle on the inside at the bottom. The following year, I bought another mug from the same artist but this one was purple and speckled. From that moment on I fell in love with mugs and began collecting more and more. When I went abroad to London, I fell head over heels in love with all their mugs which were sold everywhere. Their cultural love for tea fostered my obsession with tea and mugs. I adored the colors, shapes, sizes, and various designs the mugs came in.

For me, mugs represent the cozy feeling of curling up under a blanket and sipping on a hot chocolate or a herbal tea with honey. Mugs have

become an item that I am known for loving and collecting. My friends and loved ones gift them to me. My significant other, Levy, surprised me with a Bob Ross mug for Christmas. The mug has a picture of Ross painting, one of his quotes, and reveals one of his paintings when hot liquid is placed inside it. I also have a poop emoji mug as well. (Definitely one of the weirder mugs that I have in my possession.) This collection is used daily and is something I love to share with my friends and family when they come to visit my home.



ABOVE, My Bob Ross mug that reveals one of his paintings when hot water is poured into the cup. It was gifted to me by my significant other, Levy.

Mugs



The Nativity

Sandro Botticelli | 1842-45



Exquisite eye for detail

During the summer between sophomore and junior years of high school, I was fortunate enough to travel with my best friend Sabrina and her family to Italy for two and a half weeks. During our time there I got to visit the city of Florence for three or four days. We explored the streets of Florence and saw many amazing works of art like *The David* and Sandro Botticelli's famous paintings *The Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*. The attention to detail in his work and the level of precision left me breathless and amazed. When looking at his work, his subjects are beautifully depicted and they feel as if they could touch the viewer.

His painting *The Nativity* on display at the Isabella Gardner Museum in Boston is an excellent example of this. The heavenly beauty is represented in everything from the hair on Mary's head to the folds in Joseph's robes. Every little detail in all of his work is done purposefully and artfully. His works of art are not only beautiful but

RIGHT, Sandro Botticelli's painting *Pallas and the Centaur* (1482). On display at the Uffizi in Florence, Italy.



they also tell a story, full of symbolism, and combine scenes in stories into one painting. Which is apparent in *The Nativity* which depicts the holy birth of Jesus Christ to Mary and Joseph. I am inspired by his attention to detail, the level of planning out the entire composition, and how he shows the story he has selected. Much like a designer you have to be able to understand and know every single detail in your deliverable, be able to convey a clear story, and connect with the viewer.

LEFT, *The Nativity Scene* by Sandro Botticelli. Painted in 1842-45. On display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, MA.



Postcards

LEFT, Postcards that I have collected over the years from galleries and places around the world. Photographed by Olivia Nelson.

Memories of faraway places

My collection of postcards began during my time in London in Fall 2015. I was in an art history class and every week we would go to a different art gallery in London to look at the paintings and art that we were learning about in class. At many of these museums, they didn't allow photography of the paintings. Also, I did not have enough space on my phone to take all the photos I wanted to take of the artwork I saw. So I began to purchase postcard of my favorite paintings or sculptures that I saw that day. I loved how portable they were and how they could be used to decorate my room. My collection of postcards became a ritual that I do now whenever I visit a place or a museum that inspired me or evoked strong emotion. These postcards are displayed in my room where I can admire the art every single day and pull inspiration constantly from those artists.

One of my favorite postcards is the Van Gogh painting *Two Crabs* which depicts two crabs on a bright

green paper. I love the use of his brushstrokes to create volume and depth in the pieces. Not to mention his brushstrokes remind me of cross-hatching, a shading technique I love to use in my work. When I look at this postcard it reminds me of the importance of color choice, line, and the balance of detail and abstraction. Furthermore, another favorite postcard of mine is *Poppy Fields* by Claude Monet. It is a recent addition to my collection. I love the moment that he was able to capture of his wife and daughter walking through the wildflower field full of poppies and the abstract quality it begins to take.



ABOVE, One of the most recent additions to my collection. Here is a painting by Claude Monet of his wife and daughter in a field of poppies. This painting is titled *Coquelicots* or *Poppy Fields* (1873). On display at the Musée D'Orsay in Paris, France.

Ophelia

SIR JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS | 1851-52



Fair Ophelia

During my time living in London in Fall 2015, I saw the painting *Ophelia* by John Everett Millais. This painting was painted in 1851-53. It depicts the scene of Ophelia from *Hamlet* as she drowns after committing suicide. The melancholy of this moment is apparent and the viewer can feel it when looking at the painting. My adoration of this painting began right when I saw the painting and grew the more I learned about it.

Millais believed in creating paintings with the utmost care, precision, and dedication. He began this painting at the beginning of 1851 and due to many issues that arose throughout the process, he completed it 2 years later. He began by finding a river in the English countryside and began to do various sketches of the banks and its natural foliage. He did many studies as well of the flowers that float around Ophelia as she slowly sinks into the river bank. During these nature studies, he was swarmed with bugs and threatened with trespassing. Furthermore, his model Elizabeth Siddal while posing for him in a bathtub caught a terrible cold from the ordeal. Her father then threatened Millais with legal

actions until he agrees to pay for her medical expenses. Despite all of these problems he faced throughout creating this painting, Millais completed the painting in 1853.

This painting is an absolute masterpiece, full of precision and detail. Everything he depicted was chosen with care. Each flower that he painted in the piece was selected due to the symbolism of each flower: poppies for death, pansies for love in vain, violets for faithfulness or chastity, and willow, nettle and daisies are associated with love, pain, and innocence. Even Ophelia's gown is perfectly executed from how the fabric sinks into the river to the beading details.

Millais's deep dedication and detailed construction of every element in this painting from the botanical plants to the realistic depiction of Ophelia sinking into the riverbank is deeply inspiring for me. He shows the importance of curating every single element to create a cohesive painting and a powerful story as well.



ABOVE, One of Millais's studies of Elizabeth Siddal in the bathtub leading up to the final painting.

LEFT, John Everett Millais's *Ophelia*. On display at the Tate Britain in London, England.



LEFT, Some of my favorite tote bags from my collection. Photographed by Olivia Nelson.

A bag or two never hurt anyone

I'm not sure how I began to collect tote bags. I remember I received my first tote bag from my Mom's business partner and good friend Jane during my sophomore year of college. The bag was a giant bucket back with a crossbody strap and purple shapes all across it. It was so functional and became a bag that I used all of the time. From that moment on I began to see more and more tote bags that were designed with fun, bold and playful ways. I couldn't stop buying them and adding them to my collection. During my second co-op at Ronik Design, Nicole who was a partner there would come into the office and would ask if anyone wanted a free tote bag that she received at an event. I would always take the bags home with me. From this, I got bags from Benjamin Moore, Charity: Water, and more. Over the three years since I received my first bag, I have no idea

how many I have collected.

One of my favorite bags is a red, yellow, and blue dachshund bag. I love the simplicity of the design and how cute the dogs are. I bought this bag during a visit to Vancouver from a local artist. All her bags were made by hand and hand-painted. This bag is one of my most used bags. My other favorite bag is this Artist and Flea bag that I got for free when I signed up for their newsletter in New York City. The dynamic use of hand lettering was extremely appealing to me.



ABOVE, Two of my favorite bags : My primary color dachshund dogs, and Artists & Fleas. Photographed by Olivia Nelson.

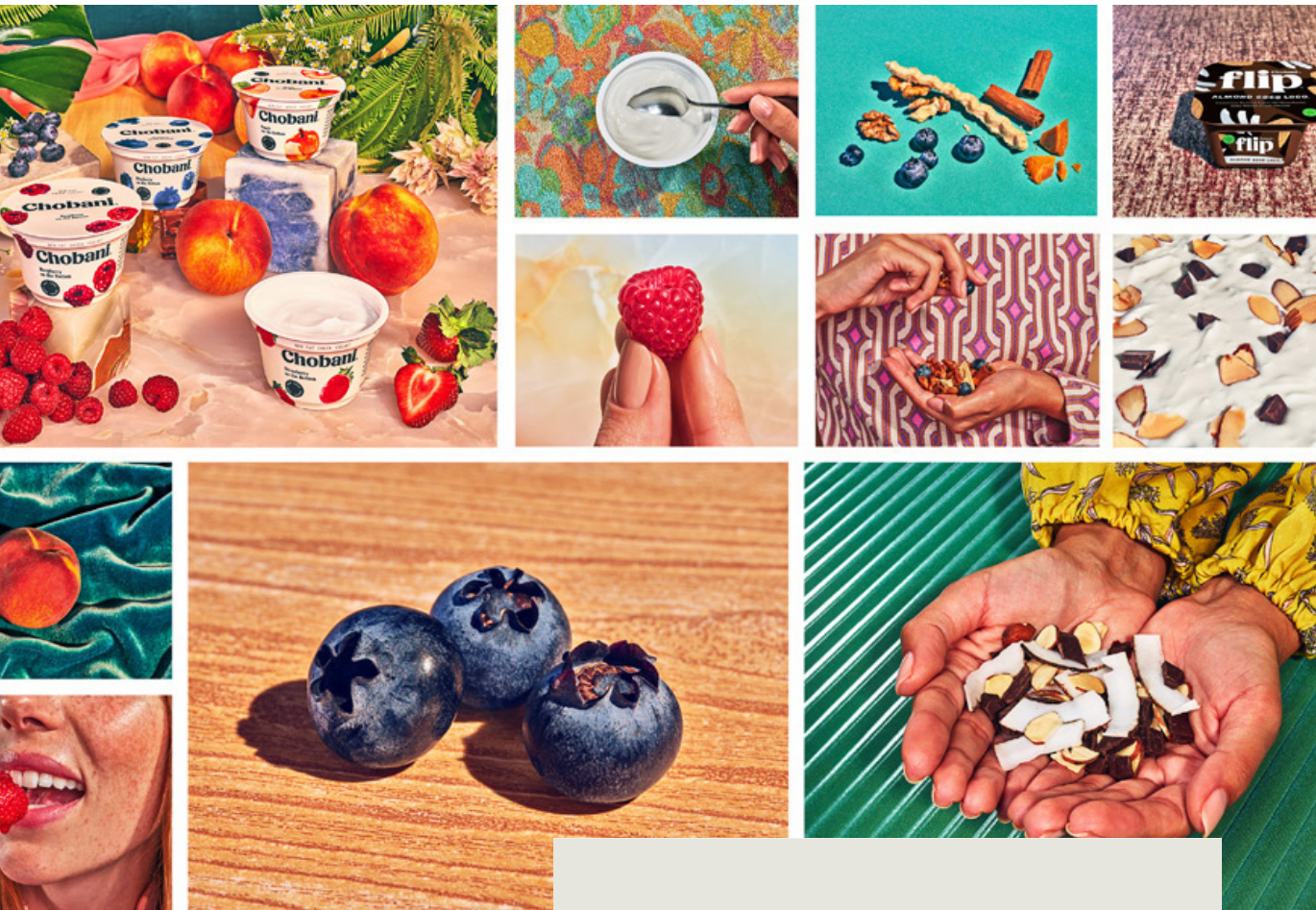


ABOVE, The first tote bag I owned. Photographed by Olivia Nelson.

Tote bags



Chobani Redesign



ABOVE, Photo is of the new product photography style and packaging designs.

RIGHT, The new logo and colors. Using their new custom typeface Chobani Serif

Chobani®

RIGHT, A poster series for Chobani using the new brand styles and colors.



Approachable elegance

In 2017, Chobani came out with their new branding and identity. My friends and I were all in shock and impressed by this rebranding. We could not contain our excitement for Chobani's rebrand. The combination of the humanist chunky serif typeface, hand-drawn illustrations, the use of an off white and green color, and the vibrant authentic product photography that showed the packaging, as well as the yogurt being used. This rebrand was a complete one hundred and eighty from the previous brand and it was a smashing success. The brand and the yogurt felt natural, down to earth, and something that everyday people use in their homes. This design of this brand was so successful that I began to buy their yogurt over all their competitors. It made me trust this brand and made me feel that the yogurt was made for me and was a high-quality product.

For me, this redesign shows the power of a strong brand and identity. The use of color, typeface, illustrations, packaging, and messaging tone completely changed the whole

identity of the brand and increased the trustworthiness of the brand. Not to mention it completely sets Chobani out from all its competitors. Especially with food products, all the brands sit together every single day on the shelves so branding is incredibly important in helping them retain their customers and even gain new customers. Food packaging has always been a big passion of mine. I am fascinated to see how a brand chooses to represent themselves because food and cooking is such a personal activity. How we cook and the food we eat is a deep part of our culture. It's there when we make new memories and spend quality time with loved ones.



ABOVE, Designs for buttons and a tote bag for the new Chobani brand.



LEFT, Some of my favorite pieces from my jewelry collection. Photographed by Olivia Nelson.



LEFT, Jane's jewelry pieces alongside her inspiration.

Little keepsakes

My mother's career was working for jewelry companies and helping the jewelry artists run their businesses. By the time I was born she co-owned her own jewelry company with her friend Jane. Jane would create all the jewelry designs and my mother ran the business side of the company. I remember when I was very young my mother would pull out her entire jewelry collection from her secret hiding spot and we would go through all her beautiful necklaces, rings, earrings, and bracelets. I would ask her about the different gemstones and try on all her jewelry.

the ring and I wear it every single day.

Now my collection has grown more each year. Over the years, I have been gifted with Jane's work for momentous occasions. On my 16th birthday I received a pearl necklace, for graduation I received a gold necklace with a small flower pendant, and for my 21st birthday, I was gifted another ring. I love the moments and stages in life my jewelry has come to represent for me. Jewelry holds deep meaning for me and will be something that I cherish.



ABOVE TOP, One of Jane's necklace pendant designs.

ABOVE BOTTOM, The golden necklace I received for high school graduation, my first ring, and my first earrings.

One day Jane was making a custom ring for a customer and during production, the ring shrunk too small and it would not fit the customer's hand. She gave it to me since they could not sell it to anyone else and it would likely only fit a child's finger. The ring was golden with a small triangle ruby. This was my first piece of jewelry. For many years I was too scared to wear it for fear of losing it. I still own



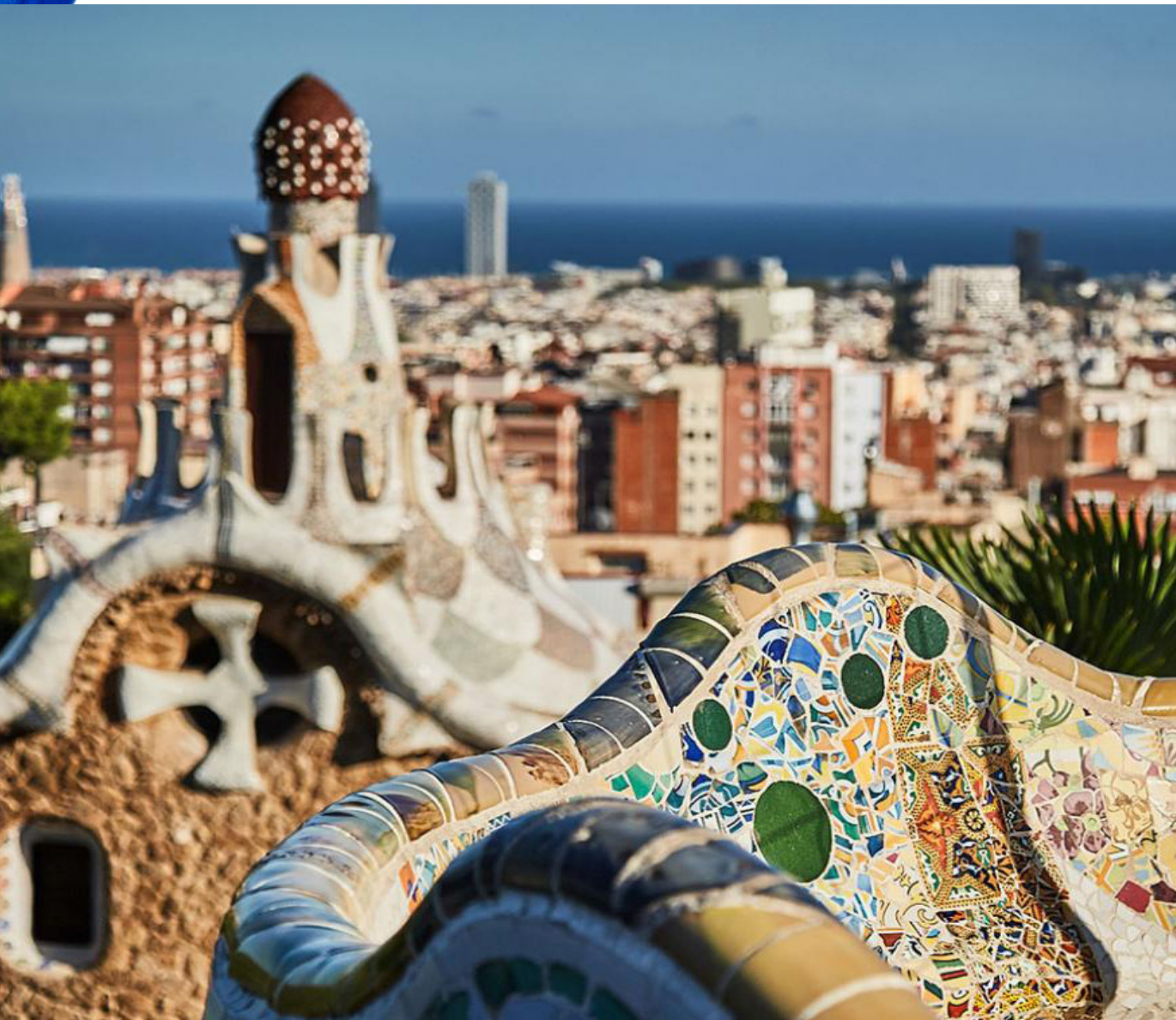
ABOVE, One of Jane's pendant designs that is a necklace that my mother wears almost every single day. Hers is in gold.

Jewelry

Park Güell

Antoni Gaudí | Barcelona, Spain

BELOW, The top of the marketplace with the benches, overlooking Barcelona. Park Güell, Barcelona.



RIGHT, The dragon that guards the entrance to the market. Park Güell, Barcelona.



RIGHT, The inside of the market place. Park Güell, Barcelona.

Tiles, patterns & dragons oh my!

In October 2015, I was lucky to visit Barcelona, Spain with my friends Megan, Caroline, and Zoe. During our visit, we went to Park Güell designed by Antoni Gaudí. When we first walked into the park and began to explore I was so impressed with the scale, drama, and color of the spaces that Gaudi designed. The use of organic shapes, mosaic tiles, glass, and ceramics sprinkled throughout made the park feel as if it was another world. One full of possibility and life. The park was meant to be a space for an egalitarian community to live in. Gaudí built an area where people could have a market to bargain and sell items with one another or to perform plays for the public. All the forms used in the park are curved, sloping and are made in such a way that it doesn't seem structurally sound

to walk through. As you walk around, you discover more elements. You see new colors and patterns that surround you. I loved this about Park Güell. It felt magical. The planning and the design behind the space were so perfectly made that it seems effortless and otherworldly.

My favorite part of the park was the curved and wavy benches that sit atop the market place structure. I loved the way that the mosaics were designed and how the patterns change as you move along the bench. Also, if you look at the benches together in a certain way they begin to overlap and have the appearance of waves. Another part of the park that I love is the walkway up to the Dragon that guards the entrance to the market. The way the walls slope together to form the staircase up to the market feels elegant and regal. I loved this space and I look forward to returning to Barcelona and exploring this world that Gaudí built in Park Güell.



LEFT, The walk way up to the market place and where you can find the Dragon. Park Güell, Barcelona. Photography by Olivia Nelson.



LEFT, AOC campaign yellow poster design for the 2018 Primary Election.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Campaign Design



ABOVE, AOC campaign branding used for a bus wrap that was stationed around NYC.



ABOVE, AOC Campaign button designs.

The power of design

During the fall of 2018, I was working at my second co-op during the midterm elections. One morning while I was getting settled into my desk, I discovered Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Campaign. She was a woman of color who was running against Democratic incumbent Joseph Crowley. She is such a powerful and confident woman and her campaign designs are a reflection of her.

Her campaign was designed by the design studio Tandem NYC. I was very fortunate to hear them speak about their experiences and inspiration for creating this campaign design. They said that they pulled a lot of inspiration from socialist posters and took many of the graphic styles from them and applied them to Ocasio-Cortez's

brand. The upward gaze that mirrors the slanted text was an homage to those posters as well as represent her value of improvement and looking to build a better future. Due to the large Spanish speaking population in her district, she wanted the posters to have both Spanish and English on every single campaign material they gave out and used. With the diagonal text design element, the hierarchy was already a challenge and to have all the copy be repeated in Spanish made it an even bigger one. Despite these challenges the posters felt balanced and not overwhelming. Not to mention they used unique combination of colors like purple, blue, and yellow. This use of dynamic layout, design elements, and different color combinations made her campaign stand out and catch people's attention.

This design broke the standards of what a political campaign had to look like. It created a new standard for people to look to for inspiration. I think it directly reflects what Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has also done as a member of Congress. This campaign represents her and her identity but it also represents ideals of change, hope, progress, and democracy for all.



LEFT, Her posters used at Pride Parade in June before the 2018 Primary Election.



LEFT, AOC's campaign team hanging up her posters for the 2018 Primary Election.

The Ten Largest Series

Hilma af Klint | 1907



LEFT, A photograph of *The Ten Largest* Series on display at the Guggenheim in New York City.



RIGHT, A photograph of Hilma af Klint in her painting studio.

The female painter

In the fall of 2018, I lived in Brooklyn, New York for my second co-op. During my time living there, I went to many of the museums and saw as much of the art that I could. I grew up on Long Island so I have been to many of the big art museums. However, that fall the Guggenheim had put on an amazing exhibition of a new artist called Hilma af Klint. I wanted to see her work and show my support of women artists. When I saw her work in person, I was captivated. She created abstract art well before the men who were credited with creating the Abstract Art movement. This woman was a revolutionary thinker, yet she felt that no one would accept her ideas and her style because of her gender. She stated in her will that her work was not to be shown until 20 years after her death. Her work was first displayed in 1986 and only now is she receiving the notoriety that she deserves.

Her series titled *The Ten Largest*, stood out to me. This collection of paintings tells the story of growth and the human experience. Each painting is over nine feet tall and six feet wide. All the paintings are titled after major life phases like childhood, youth, maturity, adulthood, and old age. She uses a wide variety of colors, organic shapes, lyrical lines, and stylized letters to

represent each stage of life.

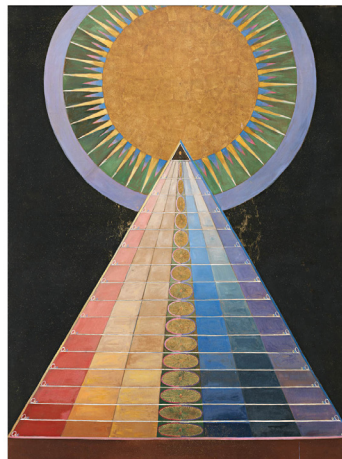
I love the way that she has abstracted each phase in a way that feels like it is being depicted at a molecular level. Despite the large size of all these paintings, they feel intimate and hold different meanings with each viewer. I love these paintings and it makes me question what other groundbreaking women artists are hidden by history and a culture dominated by white men.



ABOVE, Klint's painting *Group I, Childhood* from *The Ten Largest* Series.

RIGHT ON TOP, Klint's painting *Group X, Altarpieces, Nos. 1-3* (1915).

RIGHT ON BOTTOM, *Group IX, Series SUW, Svanen* (1915).



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