

Crafts Council / Education

Craft Journey

Deepa Vekaria / Art, design and technology teacher in a secondary SEN school



Deepa Vekaria. Image courtesy of the artist.

What I do

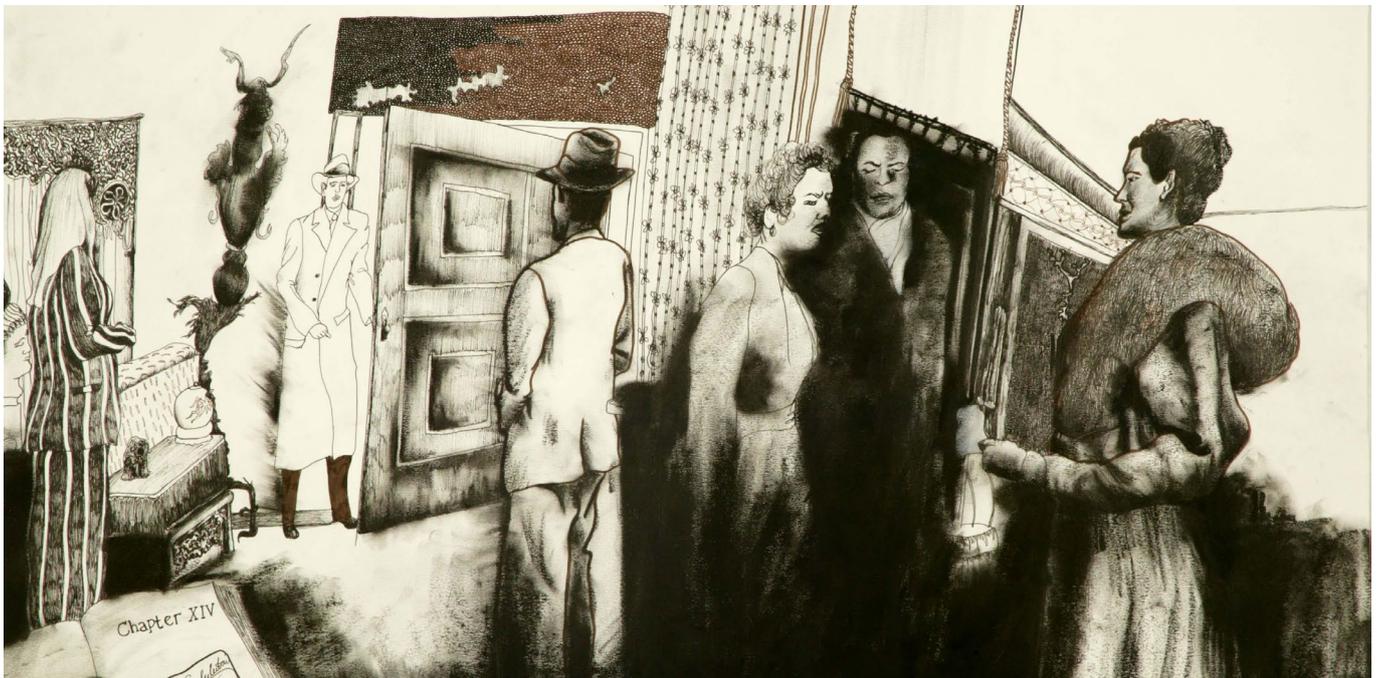
I work at a secondary SEN school and teach art and Design and Design and Technology. I have been working at Woodfield school for roughly 8 years, it honestly feels as though I just started working there and the years have flown by. I love my job and feel grateful to have the opportunity to work here. Each year, I feel that I have learnt so much and grown in my teaching practice.

Jobs in teaching and learning

There are many different areas that you can specialise in such as teaching, research, art therapy, lecturing/tutor, delivering workshops in schools, freelance maker-educator, working in the education departments within museums and galleries and arts and cultural organisations.

Why craft and teaching?

I have always known from a young age that I wanted to do something that was creative and art based. I was happiest when I was being creative, drawing, painting and loved going to museums and galleries. I remember answering a question my teacher asked me at primary school about what you would like to be when you were older and I said an artist.



Personal Portfolio, Deepa Vekaria.

I was really shy at school and didn't really say much (people who know me now may find that hard to believe!) I remember my science teacher, who always found opportunities for me to come out of my shell in class and he would ask me to draw on the board after I had finished my work (we were learning about insects). I feel that there is more choice and support available for individuals who want to work in crafts now and I am so glad that this has happened as there were not many choices when I was in college and I felt like I was entering a world that was unknown. My older brother is also a teacher and he has inspired me to be a teacher, he has always encouraged me to pursue my dreams and during that crucial point where you are in the process of completing your final year at university and thinking about what career options are available, teaching was an area that I was interested in as well as working as a freelance illustrator.



Work from a 'Make Your Future' project at Woodfield School. Image © Caroline Heron.

What I studied at school

The subjects that I studied for my GCSE's were Art and Design, Textiles, Geography, Maths, English and Science. I studied Art and Design, Psychology and Geography for my A-Levels.

I wanted to make sure that I had as many options as possible and wanted to do well in all my core subjects as well as in Art and Design. For my A-levels, I selected the subjects that I was interested in, but I always knew that art and design would be the direction that my career would take. My art teacher had invited an illustrator who had just completed her degree to deliver a talk to our class. This was the first time that we had met someone who was an actual artist and I was so excited because I wanted to be an artist too. I remember she said that she worked as a freelance illustrator and she showed us her work. She also was really honest and mentioned that it was a challenging career and you had to work hard because there were times when she received commissions, and there were times when she had no work at all.

What I studied after school

I applied for a Foundation Art and Design course during my last year of sixth form as this was compulsory at the time. The benefit of doing this was that I could experience working in a range of creative subjects such as interior design, fine art, sculpture, illustration and have a trial to see what the courses were actually like before jumping into a subject for my degree. This year was life changing as I wouldn't be here had I not gone through those stages of learning, decision making and taking risks.

After completing this, I applied for a BA Hons in Illustration at Westminster university (three years) and applied for a PGCE in secondary education at the University of Cambridge (one year).

I trained for seven years at university and I have completed a middle leadership development training course just before the lockdown. I am currently on the NPQSL course, which is so inspiring and I am thoroughly enjoying it.

My career path

After completing my PGCE, I knew that I wanted to both teach and pursue my own illustration pathway, so I decided to apply for a masters in Communication Design, specialising in Illustration at Central St Martins (2 years full time). I also signed up to my borough's teaching service as I wanted to work as a supply teacher for a few days a week as I could go into the art studio after teaching and spend a few hours in the evening developing my own work. Working as a supply teacher was so rewarding and I learnt so much from working in a range of settings, I wouldn't be where I am today if I had not signed up with that agency.



Creative Classroom at Woodfield School. Image: Deepa Vekaria

Important decisions

I wanted to initially work part-time as a teacher and develop my own practice as a freelance illustrator and I was going back and fourth for a few years. I feel that I am making a difference and channelling all the skills that I have developed over the years into supporting the students with their journey and preparation for adulthood. My teachers, family, friends, tutors who I have met along the way had taken their time to share their experiences and give advice and I am really grateful to have had that support.

Challenges

Initially, my parents were not really sure that studying art and design would get me a full time job and they didn't know what options were available at the time and thankfully now, so many things have changed, there are so many options and support available. I think that you have to believe in yourself and there will be hurdles as everyone goes through difficult moments but it is worth it as these are also learning curves and they make you stronger.



Image from a 'Make Your Future' project at Woodfield School. Image: Joanna Veevers.

My advice to you

Always keep your options open and speak to your family, career advisors, teachers and talk to them about what you want to do. Don't let anything get in your way and if this is what you want to do, go for it and you have to trust your instincts. There is help available and this is the exciting part of your journey. All the stages you go through are opportunities to learn. Don't give up. Many people change their careers and it is ok for you to try something (take a risk) and if you realise that it isn't right for you that is okay, as this is a step towards finding your career. Each stage is a learning curve.

Craft Careers

Craft generates £3.4 billion for the UK economy each year, with the contribution of the wider creative industries now growing at twice the rate of the UK economy. British craft has never been so sought-after and craft skills are revolutionising industries from aerospace to architecture.

To learn more about craft careers visit:
www.craftscouncil.org.uk/learning/craft-careers



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