

"Creative success from courage" - Danielle Clough

By Leigh Andrews

3 Apr 2018

In your own creative career, you often find yourself stuck in a comfort zone. At the latest Creative Mornings Cape Town talk, 'fibre artist' Danielle Clough shared that you don't have to be good at just one thing, as well as why it's important to step away from the safety net and have the courage to try new things.



My view at Creative Mornings March 2018 at Friends of Design. It was packed!

Today she's a live visual artist, visual jockey or VJ – that's DJing on a whole new level, with visuals thrown into the mix – as well as an embroiderer, photographer and digital designer, often listed as an inspiration for other edgy young designers even though she calls herself an accidental professional.

“ [#embroidery](#) by [#DanielleClough](#) [@Fiance_Knowles](#) [@Upfest](#) see my [#blog https://t.co/YKuAbfMPWJ](#) [#Bristol](#) [#streetart](#) [#art pic.twitter.com/tEFEKRo7gl](#)— Stephen C JG (@Fishing_Steve) [August 3, 2016](#) ”

“ Outside [@tobacco_factory](#), woven onto gate. [#upfest2016 pic.twitter.com/SfUXoqXo5L](#)— Rob Hopkins (@robintransition) [July 23, 2016](#) ”

Little wonder as her 'contemporary art with a classic twist' design work is both futuristically inspired and old-school whimsical, in a way that's extremely fitting for 2018. She uses second-hand products from tennis rackets to other waste as a canvas for her bright, detailed embroidery or 'fibre art'.

“ Tomorrow, [@Fiance_Knowles](#) is taking over our Instagram! Follow us so you won't miss a thing ➡ [https://t.co/gXm1eGE7li pic.twitter.com/eXDapASJ6r](#)— My Modern Met (@mymodernmet) [February 17, 2017](#) ”

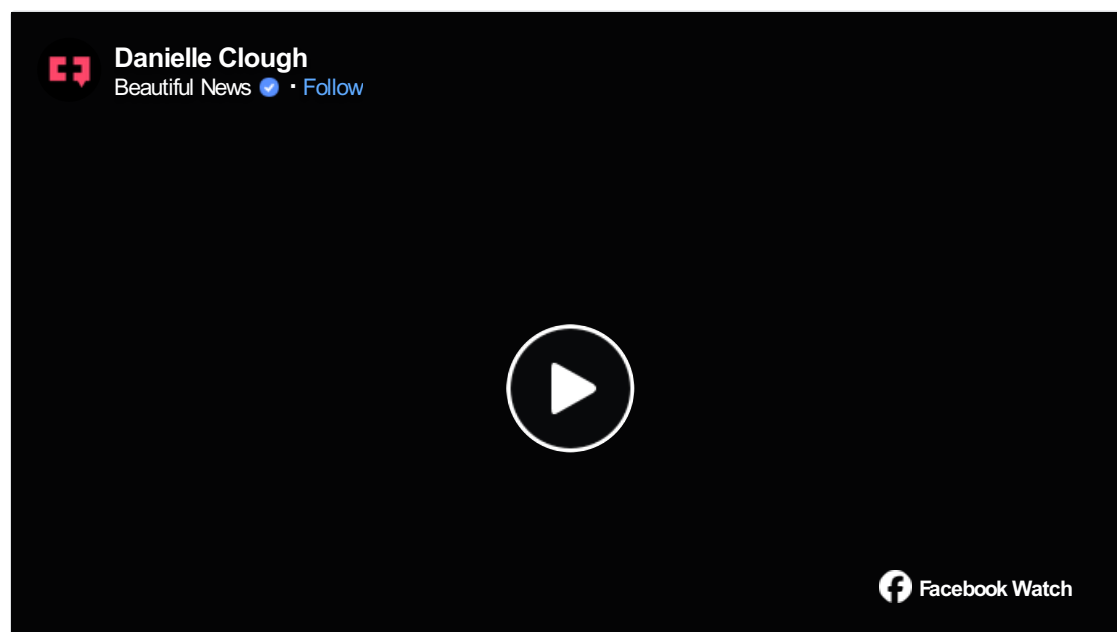
But that wasn't always the case.

At the March 2018 version of Creative Mornings Cape Town, Clough told her personal design story in the bravest way she could think of, "by poking holes into the carefully curated version" you'll find online.

"I want to be Fish Hoek's Coco Chanel"

Having told her mom from an early age that she wanted to be ‘Fish Hoek’s Coco Chanel’, fashion-minded Clough made plush toys from an early age, inspired by her mom’s skill with the sewing machine, then dropped out of normal schooling to follow what she thought would be her dream career, but felt all the disappointment, disillusionment and fear for her future when she realised she just wasn’t going to hack it at fashion design.

So she discussed it with her mom, took a deep breath and dropped out, then interned, worked at media houses, and job-shadowed stylists and photographers to find what she *can’t* do. Through a process of elimination and through numerous failures along the way, Clough learned various important life lessons, most importantly that you don’t have to be good at just one thing.



Clough says that quite inconveniently, she discovered she actually wanted to do it all, to be involved at every step of the process. The best way to get a handle on this was through an understanding of art direction, so she completed the Red & Yellow course and found out how to bring her craft into her work.

And yes, it’s through making toys that she first got into embroidery, but while she typically describes this as “a sequence of opportunity and mistakes,” she admits it was mainly mistakes.

Make things that move you

For example, she shared what she called her ‘embarrassing story’ of having worked at a gallery where she was given a MacBook Air laptop to work from. She simply couldn’t figure out how to open it, so decided to do something else to distract herself from the worry of not being able to get to work. She found she had a piece of felt, as well as a needle and thread in her bag, so started what she calls ‘thread sketching’.

“



'Kop is vol muis neste' is an afrikaans saying, meaning "head is full of mouse nests." Which is that fuzzy state of distractedness that comes when you are constantly day dreaming about someone, or about the idea of love. It's being scatter-minded due to being in love. 💎💎💎💎 #embroidery #bordados #handmade #patch #mouse

A post shared by Danielle Clough (@fiance_knowles) on Feb 10, 2018 at 6:58am PST

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at was just the wrong way around. So her problem-solving process back then led to her current work.

Then, in what she calls her first proper job after graduating, Clough loved telling people that she was involved in “designing interactive ads for mobile devices,” as she felt she had finally arrived, but just couldn’t shake the feeling that she didn’t love it. While she stuck at it for the all-important ‘work experience’, that niggling feeling was the sticking point that prompted her to do what she loves.

“ So many people who have contributed to our lives through their craft have been taken this year. Lets honour them by becoming better at ours. pic.twitter.com/Bh2pg6XI1Z— Danielle clough (@Fiance_Knowles) [December 27, 2016](#) ”

Alluding to the current social media wave, Clough explained that we’re so used to presenting ourselves with a ‘highlight reel’ of our lives, with ourselves starring as the most confident, assured and passionate about what we do. But it’s OK – actually, it’s necessary – to admit that we don’t know what we want and that we feel lost. To explore interests and see what works for us and leads to work.

Have the courage to put your passion out there – especially on Instagram!

So Clough started spreading her wings in fields that interest her. She started out as a radio DJ, upskilled herself in photography, then put those passions for music and visuals together by learning to VJ.

“ If you put that interest out there, you'll be surprised how many hands are stretched out to help you. ”

You may have experienced her VJ work if you attended Grietfest 2017, where Clough worked the after party as her alter ego, 'Fiance Knowles'. "I'm such a child when I name things," laughs Clough, at her creative social media and VJing handle.



Olmecca presents 7th Grietfest for all electronic music lovers

21 Jun 2017



Speaking more of her creative courage, we learned that Clough participated in the launch of social auction house Apollo Auctions, the first Instagram auction house for creatives in Cape Town in 2015.



First Instagram auction house launches in Cape Town

8 Dec 2015



Then, when she was selected as one of 2016's Design Indaba Emerging Creatives, Clough needed a website to showcase her work. Thanks to her experimentation with photography, she already had one. Clough says this is an example of how everything factors in and has value.

She puts the end result online and says that sharing has been part of her success, particularly on Instagram, where she sells lots of work gets commissioned for more. It's that community and her own family that largely comprise her support network, having been supportive even if they don't understand her projects from the outset.

Clough's work may be based on the threads of yesterday, but the fact that it's so easy to find and share on social media is what makes it so inspiring. For example, here's a look at how she brought a pair of Nike 'shoes to life'...

“ FIRST LOOK AT: [@Fiance_Knowles](#) x [@NSWZA](#) AF1 (Box) - 'The Blank Canvas Collection' will be auctioned - <https://t.co/tqFd3x9EsH> [pic.twitter.com/kqOsWDS8OB](https://t.co/tqFd3x9EsH)— YoMzansi SNEAKERS (@yoMzansiSneaker) [November 22, 2017](#) ”

So, while the little girl who wanted to be Coco Chanel never thought she would end up doing what she has done, courage in her creativity means she's gone on to be featured in [Martha Stewart](#) magazine and worked with the likes of Gucci, amongst others.

“ This new [@gucci](#) ad ft [@Fiance_Knowles](#) is the nicest looking thing on the internet today: <https://t.co/fS95dJRBbn>— jacques cilliers (@j_cilliers) [September 7, 2017](#) ”

Embroidering photos

Clough says it's been an interesting journey of seeing how doing what you love and listening to yourself moulds your path. Bravery is a big part of that

“ Perseverance after failure is the best form of courage. It's not necessarily a case of going backwards, nor is it a waste. ”

It's about living a life of more-ness, not less-ness. ”

Clough also embroiders photos into a new form of art.

*“ The talented [@Fiance_Knowles](#) took this photo of me in India and made it into the most incredible artwork. 💎💎
[pic.twitter.com/5RZM4WKobf](#)— Stacey (@StaceyRehbock) [May 8, 2016](#) ”*

Asked how she does it, Clough said it helps that she takes her own photographs, then maps them out onto a fabric or surface. She also edit her photos as black and white and is obsessed with colours, especially mid-tones.

Asked by the audiences where and how she works, Clough said yes, as expected she does lots of it in front of the TV, but also spends lots of time working from coffee shops. She's even had someone come up to her and ask her to fix their jacket while embroidering.

*“ I shared a few thoughts with Allesandra Codinha who wrote a greate piece for
[https://t.co/gwN1kkaPPJhttps://t.co/RNKB0n3oJw](#)[pic.twitter.com/tKKKhoPNBM](#)— Danielle clough (@Fiance_Knowles)
[October 26, 2016](#) ”*

The answer to how long it takes is fittingly similar to that of 'how long is a piece of string: Clough says it all depends on whether you're in a state of flow or not. She adds:

*“ It's like all creative work. Depending on how pressing the deadline is, for some work you can get it done by the end
of the day, otherwise you can stretch it out for a week. It's really hard to quantify work to time. ”*

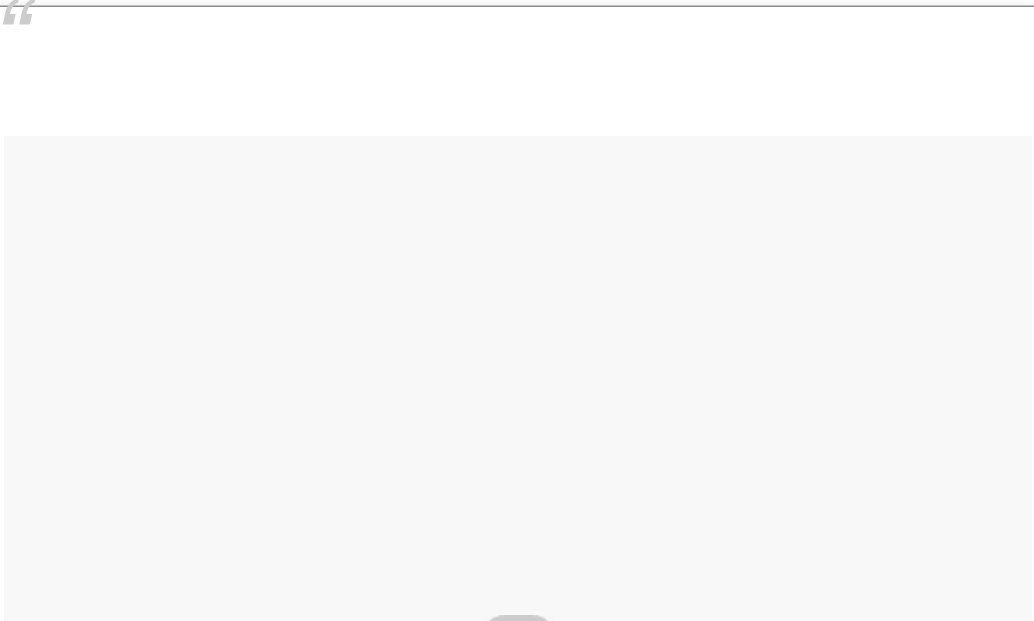
Seems we can all learn from this 'accidental professional' who stumbled into her creative success and stitch-circumnavigated her way through the process.

Your creative passion should guide your inspiration and motivation

Clough's main point from the morning really resonates:

*“ We all know what it is to do something we love. It's hard to define or quantify or explain – you just know when you feel
inspired and you're doing something you love. It's a flash that comes over you. ”*

Motivation is a different thing entirely to inspiration, though. That's what gets you out of bed in the morning, excited to execute on your plans.





There is something special about a round format, and possibly one of the things I love the most about embroidery. I created these circular frames to showcase a range of prints (some of which are now in my online store www.danielleclough.com/) a while back and I am going to do a studio sale of what is left over from the exhibition soon. More information coming soon. . #embroidery #skull #print

A post shared by Danielle Clough (@fiance_knowles) on Jan 12, 2018 at 5:33am PST

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says to take a step back and examine whether you're making good choices for yourself.

acted or unmotivated, Clough

It also helps to surround yourself with people who are passionate about something, even if it's not the same thing you're passionate about, to get your passion back. Take a break and it may return to you in a new form. That's the essence of creativity, and the courage to do what you love.

Visit [Clough's website](#) and the following social media channels for further inspiration: [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Tumblr](#)

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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