

STEPHANIE ZAJAC

SENIOR GRAPHIC DESIGNER | ILLUSTRATOR | ART DIRECTION

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SUMMARY

Art director and creative leader with 15+ years of experience guiding visual strategy and overseeing production across publications, campaigns, and illustration for higher education and consumer-facing brands. Skilled in translating institutional goals and creative briefs into cohesive visual direction, managing vendors and multi-stakeholder approvals, and mentoring designers, with hands-on expertise in typography, print and digital production, and original illustration.

SKILLS

Design & Production: Visual storytelling; publication, book, and editorial design; cover design; typography, layout, and editorial composition; print production and pre-press; production-ready file preparation; proof review and color correction; 1-, 2-, 4-color, and specialty print production; brand guide and template adherence; merchandise and apparel design; event and environmental graphics; portraiture, conceptual, and pop art; image compositing and photo-illustration; rough sketching and visual ideation; color theory; motion graphics and video editing

Creative Direction & Leadership: Art direction and creative direction; campaign concept to execution; photography direction and image selection; vendor and partner coordination; project and deadline management; multi-stakeholder approvals; cross-functional collaboration; student designer mentorship and training

Tools & Software: Adobe Creative Cloud (InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, After Effects, Premiere, Fresco, Acrobat); Figma (familiar); HTML & CSS (fluent); content management systems (Commonspot, Drupal, WordPress); social and digital campaign management (Hootsuite, Sprout); Microsoft Office, including Excel; Google Workspace; Mac platform; analytics and data-informed decision-making; AI-assisted design workflows (ChatGPT, Claude, Firefly)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Kent State University, College of Arts & Sciences

Assistant Director, Web & Creative Services | 07/15 - Present

- Lead creative direction and production across 19 academic areas, producing publications, campaigns, recruitment materials, event collateral, signage, web graphics, and social content while maintaining brand consistency in a high-volume, deadline-driven environment.
- Produced 75+ print publications, including viewbooks with 60+ pages, commemorative books, program books, and editorial booklets, from concept through press-ready production.
- Designed a historical anniversary book and companion multimedia assets for the Liquid Crystal Institute, including an animated explainer video that reached 179,000+ views on YouTube and ranks No. 1 in search results for “liquid crystals.”
- Art directed visual identity for institutional initiatives including the Jewish Studies Program’s 50th Anniversary, spanning event collateral, a 52-page commemorative publication, and original illustration.
- Create conceptual and editorial illustrations across digital and traditional mediums, translating complex scientific and philosophical ideas into compelling visual narratives for print and digital features.
- Art direct university marketing photographers, providing direction and image selection to maintain cohesive visual identity across projects and departments.
- Partner with marketing, admissions, faculty, writers, editors, and senior leadership to translate strategic goals into clear, compelling visual narratives, managing timelines and stakeholder approvals.
- Manage print production in partnership with external vendors, including file preparation, pre-press coordination, color correction, proofing, and final delivery.
- Supervise and mentor student employees across design, web, and social media, providing creative direction, training, and quality oversight while supporting professional development.
- Integrate AI tools and generative workflows into creative production processes.

Only Steph Creations

Founder & Creative Director | 09/19 - Present

- Operate an independent illustration and design business, overseeing creative direction, marketing strategy, freelance and licensing contracts, sales, inventory, and bookkeeping.
- Built and operate a business with 3,000+ units sold across 15+ product categories.
- Manage online store and retail display at Akron's Northside Marketplace.
- Develop promotional assets and interactive social campaigns to support product launches and events.
- Art direct and create bold, expressive illustrations spanning portraiture, conceptual work, and pop art for retail, events, campaigns, and brand collaborations, working across digital and traditional mediums.
- Commissioned by Nike (via Uninterrupted) to develop six original illustrations for Hasbro's Monopoly Day campaign, targeting middle grade and young adult audiences ages 11–14.
- Commissioned by New Belgium Brewing to create illustration assets for the VooDoo Ranger Halloween Instagram campaign.
- Maintain a licensing partnership with iCanvas.
- Use AI-assisted tools to rapidly prototype and test illustration and product concepts before committing to final artwork.
- Design large-scale branded retail displays and promotional materials for high-traffic public events, including MGK Day (5,000+ attendees).

Kent State University, College of Arts & Sciences

Multimedia Developer | 12/10 - 07/15

- Produced print, digital, and motion assets supporting editorial, recruitment, and marketing initiatives across multiple academic departments.
- Designed websites, publications, and promotional materials supporting recruitment and communications, maintaining usability, mobile responsiveness, and brand compliance.

EDUCATION

M.A. Visual Communication Design, Kent State University | 2013

Master's project: Enhancing the Rock Hall Experience Through Interactive Design

B.S. Media Arts & Animation, The Art Institute of Pittsburgh | 2010

CERTIFICATION

Adobe Certified Professional — InDesign | 2024