

The views

Kellie Miller

Kellie came to Sussex in 1991 when she started a degree course in three-dimensional design at Brighton University. She now runs her own ceramics business from the Biscuit Studio in Hove.

After school in South London where she did A levels in Art and Textiles, Kellie went to the Camberwell School of Art to do a foundation course. Oddly enough, one of her teachers there was a famous ceramicist who thought she wasn't cut out for ceramics! At first Kellie was more interested in fashion, but became bored with flat things, so chose to concentrate on 3-D designs, mostly in wood but also in ceramics.

After getting a 2.1 for her degree, she taught ceramics at adult education classes. It was through the process of teaching that she discovered she needed to learn more about ceramics by making pieces, so she began working from home.



A meeting with another former student at Brighton led to Kellie looking for a studio to work from. After much looking around, she and Jessie, together with two other artists, found the workshop they were looking for. There was a lot of hard work involved (including much decorating) in turning the space into the studio they wanted. Later the other two left, and Jessie and Kellie continue to share the studio, although they both run separate businesses.

Initially Kellie found it difficult to get funding for her business. She tried unsuccessfully three times to get a grant from the Craft Council. As she was signing on at this time, she really needed some financial support to take that important step into self-employment, so although she was reluctant at first, she decided to apply to the Prince's Trust for a loan. The artist in her felt, at first, that the procedures were a little too bureaucratic, because she felt they didn't apply to her. For instance, she'd never had to do cash flow forecasts before! However, as a businesswoman, she now appreciates why the Trust puts so much emphasis on the business planning side. She was given her loan in September last year.

It's taken Kellie a lot of hard work to get to where she is today. She says, "I always knew I wanted to be an artist and to be self-employed, but earlier on I wasn't sure about the what and the how". She had to think seriously about what it was she wanted to make and also about what would sell. Having exhibitions and going to trade fairs has been part of that process and is also important in marketing terms.

Now that she's really running her own business, what does she enjoy most? "I like the flexibility of being my own boss. I can make my own decisions. If I want to lie in bed an

extra hour, then I can, but if I want to work late or at the weekend to meet a deadline, I can do that too." However, there are some disadvantages, like no sickness or holiday pay. Also, there are some aspects of the work she doesn't much like, but these are associated more with being a ceramicist than running her own business, like getting dirty. It's not a particularly attractive occupation, but there is the odd occasion, she says, "when it's a bit more glamorous - at shows and private views". She finds time management difficult, though. "You have to plan well in advance, because it takes quite a while to produce my work, for example, you need to allow a week's drying time, so sometimes meeting deadlines can be difficult, even though I can be working very hard." As a person running her own business, she is involved in the whole process from design and manufacture to marketing, PR, distribution and selling.

Kellie's currently doing a course in London on art criticism, which is an area she'd like to develop. In the future she hopes to actually produce less, but invest more time into her designs. In her business there's a very fine line between the artistic and commercial sides; the secret is in striking the right balance.