

## Creativity is a broad church.

By the time you read this, September will have come around and Laura Jordan Bambach, Creative Director of Dare, London, who was born, raised and educated in Australia (M Art, MFA in Digital Art, and Bachelor of Fine Arts, Digital Media, Photography, Installation Art from the University of New South Wales), will have embarked on her one-year presidency of D&AD, following in the steps of Neville Brody, who held this position in the past year. Laura cut her teeth as a key figure in Australia's "Geekgirl" hyperzine in the early nineties, and has been involved ever since in the design and implementation of many of the world's most cutting-edge projects for top international brands. She has worked at a senior level at Deepend, Lateral, I-D Media London, and Glue, before joining LBI in 2009. She also lectures extensively at major universities and centers of excellence. Michael Weinzettl chatted to Laura about her background and the plans she now has as the new president of D&AD.

L.A.: Hi Laura, what first struck me when I read your bio is that you were trained as a taxidermist. What is the story behind that? And what made you embark on a career in a totally different field?



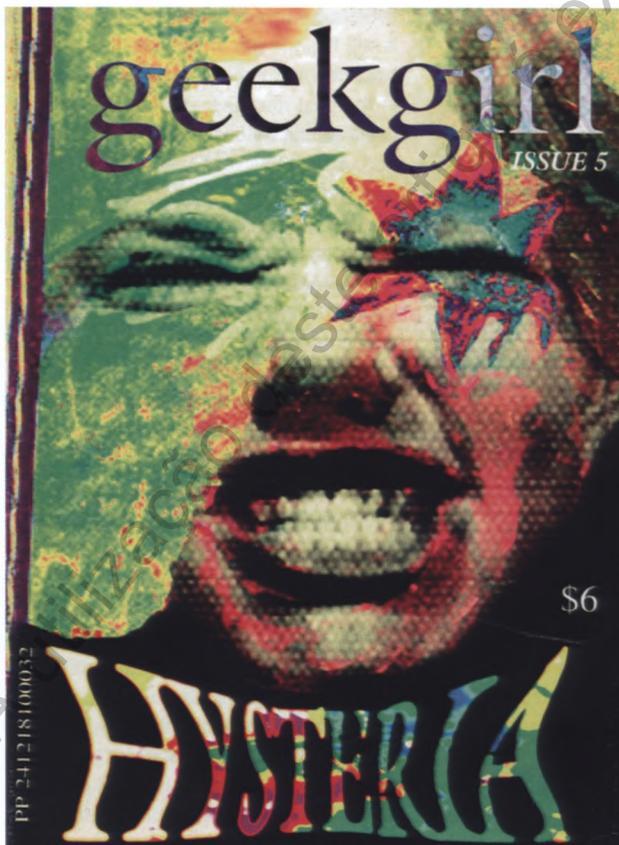
Laura Jordan Bambach, Creative Director, Dare, London

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** I never intended taxidermy to be a career, more a job to put myself through art school. "Animal Fetish" was a crazy store, and the only shop in between my first share house and my college. I went in to ask about a job behind the counter but the only thing going was a taxidermy assistant, so I did that instead. Later, I lived in an artist-run gallery, Imperial Slacks, with a group of friends from the College of Fine Arts - all of us behind the walls of the public space (we had to run through the gallery to get from the bedrooms to the kitchen and bathroom) - interesting on a

weekend!). We've all gone on to have very successful artistic careers. I think being part of a "collective" is incredibly powerful, and we helped each other a lot along the way. We still do, to some extent.

L.A.: You were a key figure in the "Geekgirl" hyperzine in the early 90s in Australia. How did all that come about and what was the intention behind it?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** I was heavily into the cyberfeminist scene in the early 90s. The Australian scene was very strong creatively: VNS Matrix, Linda Dement, and others were doing amazing work and the



Bambach was a key figure in "Geekgirl," an Australian magazine focusing on issues relating to women in technology that was produced in both print and online during the early 90s.



In a campaign for Macmillan Cancer Support, a robot machine turned people's messages into a knitting pattern to produce a real-life scarf, which was eventually sent to the UK prime minister. The aim was to support cancer patients in their struggle with fuel poverty.

theoretical dialogue was transgressive and bristling with debate. I came across "Geekgirl" when the founder, Rosie X, launched in Sydney, and was instantly absorbed. She had stickers with mottos like "Put down your pony and pick up a computer" and "Girls need modems" across everything - the real beginnings of girl DIY geek culture. Very inspiring. I met Rosie a few months later and began designing for her. We hit it off and she "appointed" me as a partner, which meant looking after the design, coding and animation of the print and digital editions of the mag. She gave me a space where anything I could teach myself I had an instant outlet for. It was one of the pivotal moments in my life and my career. She is an incredible woman.

**LA:** And why do I sometimes read the word "infamous" in front of "Geekgirl"? What was so infamous about it?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Foremost, it was the world's first cyberfeminist zine, voted one of the top 10 sites in all the mid-90s digital culture press. It was the first outlet for women who liked "digital" to connect with each other outside MUDs and MOOs, which were usually just full of men pretending to be ladies. Secondly, we featured many of the discussions that were central to

the cyberfeminist movement. So we didn't just cover strong digital female role models (coders, hackers, animators, artists, poets) but also issues around gender, sex, pornography, war, privacy. Pretty punchy - and we didn't shy away from controversy. We felt that we were hacking culture as much as code. All with a sense of humor.

**LA:** Was the motivation to start this a similar one to that behind co-founding SheSays (with Alessandra Lariu), an international organization with over 10 000 members that encourages more women to take up digital/creative careers, currently operating in 21 cities worldwide?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Yes, very much so! The cyberfem movement died and I moved into a pretty exciting and heavy-duty career in professional digital agency work. And moved to London. Ale and I were both in charge of hiring at our agencies (Agency Republic and Glue) and we just weren't seeing any female CVs. How could that be? Just over 50% of design and advertising students were women! In the 90s, we had thought a lot of it was to do with access to computers and confidence with technology. Was it still the case? We thought we'd start something to bring the conversation out into the open and share ideas. After our first meeting (at

Dare, where I now work as CD), we knew that we had created something special. We now run training, monthly inspiration sessions, a global awards scheme, conferences, mentoring, and even a collaborative briefing platform (in the US). Different flavors in every city, with a clear mission and a tight set of guidelines about events. Everyone volunteers their time, their agencies (for events), and their knowledge. We have a group of incredibly dedicated, smart and passionate women that help make it the success it is. Ale moved to the States about four years ago, but is still absolutely my partner in crime!

**LA:** You arrived in London in 2001 in the middle of the dotcom crash. What were the challenges facing you - and how has the creative industry changed since then?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Six months after I arrived, the crash took out the agency (Deepend) I had worked at until three weeks previously, leaving 280 of my friends unemployed. I was very lucky to still have a job but it was a grim time and a real reality check. I just put my head down and worked harder. It was a long time before the mood picked up and the industry started to grow green shoots. I never would have believed where we are now, and how integral our little patch of weird and wonderful geekery would become. The creative industry landscape today is unrecognizable, but I've always loved it and been excited by it! It still fills me full of wonder.

**LA:** How has consumer behavior changed in the past decade?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** It's almost a question of what hasn't changed. Work/life balance, gender roles, social media turning marketing on its head, mobile payments in developing markets; it's in constant flux. All to do with digital life and its influence.

**LA:** What have been the best and the worst moments in your career?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Best? Probably when Ale and I won the award for Greatest Individual Contribution to the Industry in 2011 for our work with SheSays. Better than any Pencil! And being voted the next D&AD president! And launching wonderful work! Worst? There've been a few. Bad work, bad designs, accidental emails to clients... It's never as bad as you think at the time, though.

**LA:** Which of your projects as a Creative Director are you proudest of?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** It's always my current project. I've had a lot of success in my career, but it's the projects that have made people's lives better that I still love the most. I did an amazing piece of work for Macmillan Cancer Support whilst at LBi, to raise awareness with MPs around fuel poverty for

cancer patients. We were originally briefed to create an online form that automatically populated details for your local MP into a letter. After some research, we realized that this really wouldn't cause too many waves, MPs get this kind of thing all the time. So we created the Infi-Knit, a robot knitting machine (viewed live online) where you could send your message of support and it would add a unique piece of knitting to an ever-growing scarf. This got sent to Number 10 and it got a lot of publicity. The most beautiful thing were the messages that people left with their "signature" online. It was incredibly challenging - we were building something completely unique and it took a lot of maintenance. More recently, I've been involved driving the LifeSkills program for Barclays. It's a long-term program to help 14- to 19-year-olds enter the world of work. We have been developing the online platform and training modules, social layer, social media presence, and digital marketing. The aim is to have 1m young people complete the program (where they get access to work experience opportunities from Barclays business customers) over the next year, and to really spark the debate around how the UK's young people are supported in what is a much more difficult and dynamic workplace than we experienced leaving school. We want to challenge the attitudes that many employers have around young people, and help them to showcase their incredible talents.

**L.A.:** How did your involvement with the D&AD come about?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** I'd been involved with them for many, many years, especially around New Blood and the student awards. I strongly believe in what they do and how they help further the education and careers of so many young people. I was voted onto the board two years ago.

**L.A.:** What do you hope to achieve in your one-year presidency of D&AD?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** D&AD doesn't shout loudly enough about its purpose, about the amazing things it does. It exists 365 days a year to help people achieve creative excellence and give people opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have. We have just launched a foundation so that we can be even more effective around areas of disadvantage and diversity. Secondly, I want to refresh the organization. More collaborative, more open, younger, multiple voices, different kinds of events and ways that people can engage with us. We should be as dynamic as the industry we represent.

**LA:** What do you say to people who believe that D&AD has, at least in terms of awards, lost some of its relevance in the past ten years, and a lot of creatives nowadays

*The LifeSkills program, initiated by banking and financial services group Barclays, was designed to support young people in the UK by providing them with access to the skills, information and opportunities they need to succeed professionally.*

would rather take a Cannes Grand Prix over a Black or Yellow Pencil?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** I don't believe that's the case. A Pencil is the hardest award in the world to win, the ultimate recognition of creative excellence. It has integrity. A Lion is great, too, of course, but where Cannes has the beach and the glamour we have the fact that everything we do feeds back directly into the creative community to benefit the next generation.

**L.A.:** Talking about Cannes, what is the CANNT Festival, which you also founded, and what goes on there every year?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Simon Gill (at LBi) and myself founded CANNT three years ago, in recognition of the growing number of creative, talented people that are responsible for the work that gets us creative directors to the Croisette every year - but never get to go themselves. Over the same week as Cannes, we stage our own festival with a range of serious and not-so-serious events around London. It's open - any agency or group can run something as long as it's free. Hopefully it delivers a bit of the fun of Cannes to the grey streets back home. We're keen to kick them off in other big advertising towns too - NYC, Amsterdam... We just need volunteers!

**L.A.:** What and who has inspired you over the years?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Loads of people outside of the industry - artists, filmmakers and musicians. MUSIC! And a few key

people, like Rosie X and Simon Waterfall, who have really helped me on my way. What is inspiring to me right now? Wes Anderson, Utopia (the Ch^ drama), Teleman, Daughter, Ghostpoet, The Notwist, Midnight Juggernauts, W+K's Southern Comfort ad with the guy on the beach (my favorite ad of last year), the students at SCA 2.0, Raw Duck, Eyebeam, Ars Electrónica, the work coming out of the Input Devices and Music interaction Lab at McGill Uni...

**L.A.:** What is your take on the attitudes towards digital from "traditional" ad agencies? Are there still a lot of reservations on their part, or a lack of understanding - or have they now fully embraced the medium?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Every agency is different, and trying different things. The individual agency culture is more important to doing great work than their label.

**L.A.:** Also, what do you think is the better way to go for one of those "traditional" agencies that still might be mostly about print and film? To build up their own digital agency in-house, or to outsource this part of the business to a specialized digital shop?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** No one knows the answer to that one yet, or they'd be rich! Seriously, I hate even thinking about this duality; it's far too simplistic. There's no point creating an opposition just to bash it.

**L.A.:** How do you see the future of print advertising?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** I'm doing some at the moment! It's fun. We are helping

the free morning newspaper Metro grow their business and develop its brand. It engages people around what they love and hate about city living, and has an incredible sense of humor about it. The clients are wonderful. Print will always be there and can be incredibly powerful; it's just a broader toolkit now for us to choose from. The best marketing isn't even advertising at all anymore. Across the board with Barclays we are doing less traditional advertising and more around always-on, conversational creative programs where the bank can rebuild their reputation with customers, and put them in the center of new product creation. On EE, we are helping them deliver the magic of technology across the business through a range of tools and initiatives, none of which is an ad in the traditional sense.

**L.A.:** Why are you creative?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Because I love it! It keeps me alive. I think it keeps everyone alive. Creativity is a broad church.

**L.A.:** How do you relax?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** I play with my family, or cook. Actually, the more stressed I am the more I cook obsessively - it makes you focus on the present to the exclusion of everything else.

**L.A.:** Any advice you could give to young creatives starting out in the industry?

**Laura Jordan Bambach:** Go out and meet the boat - the easy route is rarely the most rewarding.



Print campaign for mobile casino games available from free newspaper Metro.