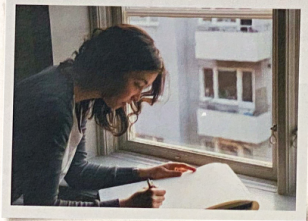


Bloom

BIANCA CHENG
COSTANZO

Berlin-based designer Bianca Cheng Costanzo buzzes with joy, her eyes sparkling as she talks about her work and the creative process behind it. An incredibly talented entrepreneur, Bianca is delightful and energetic, bright and unassuming, an old spirit yet so young.



STORY BY
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Born into a Chinese immigrant community in São Paulo, Bianca has since lived in California, Rome, Madrid, Barcelona and now Berlin. Even at her young age, Bianca is incredibly prolific: she studied at MIT and is an entrepreneur, artist, traveller, musician, and lead singer and songwriter of the spur-of-the-moment band De Volta. On top of that, she did a stint as an interaction designer and software engineer at Apple, illustrating and programming functioning prototypes. Yet Bianca describes herself as simply being human. "I'd say I'm a designer and I'm a technologist just because I think it's something that describes someone who is curious about being creative and learning about what's new in the world," she explains.

Bianca's story is inspiring on so many levels, and her tenacity is reflected not only in her career but in her personal journey as well. In June 2012, while living in San Francisco, Bianca was in a near-fatal bike accident and fell into a coma, suffering extreme memory loss. She had to relearn everything, from walking and writing to complex programming paradigms. Bianca describes the process as one of profound exploration, rediscovery and hard work, with her memory returning in waves. As the memories were streaming in, Bianca remembered the origami art she made with her mother as a child. "It brought back this time when my mother would take care of me. My mother reminded me of how she could inspire me," she says.

As one can imagine, the accident marked a new beginning for Bianca, and soon she decided to pursue one of her long-held dreams: working for herself and seeing what she could produce. In 2013 she quit her job, took all her savings and moved to Barcelona. Up to that

point she had been working so much with computers that she longed to do something with her bare hands. "I didn't like this piece of glass between me and the things that I made," recalls Bianca. "So I rented a studio near the Museu d'Art Contemporani and I thought, ok, maybe now I can start to do something with my hands—oh, I know how to make origami!"

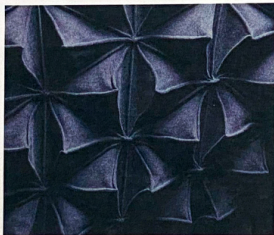
Those folds from her childhood crafts gradually became more intricate and refined, their relationship more mathematically inclined. And thus the bloom blanket was born—a cozy and luxurious blanket made of natural materials: Italian cashmere and wool blend fabric that is custom-woven in Prato, Italy.

The origami- and tessellations-inspired blanket is sewn in such a way that its tailored ridges form three-dimensional pyramids—its continuous geometry constructed with 180 triangles. The bloom blanket is a way for Bianca to explore the relationships between memory, art and math, one of her favourite topics: "I have seen a lot of opportunities in which concepts that I find quite attractive just to think about, in math can be related and explained in a way that is aesthetic."

It was only natural that these concepts were translated into fabric, a medium that could express Bianca's passion for tessellations. Her fascination with textiles was first sparked when she was growing up in Brazil, where her family was involved in the textile industry, and then later at university, where Bianca used textiles for many of her projects. "I was curious about how to animate them, how to make them move, and naturally, it came about how to make them fold," she says.

Revisiting the ideas set in motion back when she was in university, Bianca explored many variations, patterns and prototypes. She experimented with computer programs that generate shapes interlocking with each other in three dimensions, and then transferred her designs to fabric and began developing the bloom blanket.

For months, Bianca carefully planned every detail of her project, balancing sophistication and childhood memories, and contemporary and classic styles; she chose the company name, Bloom, to capture the concept of simplicity. "I had in mind this repeating pattern of triangular units and this idea that the shapes would spread and go over naturally, without much effort. Bloom is a word that sounds like it's a natural process that we get to grow and bloom out of an idea," she explains.



With a sharp eye for quality and an attention to detail, Bianca went on a thorough sourcing search until she found the perfect materials and the right place to produce a few bloom prototypes for her upcoming Kickstarter campaign. "At the beginning it was just me and it was like..." she laughs, "do you know the Spanish word *pánico* (panic)?" At a small factory north of Barcelona, she discovered a group of very talented seamstresses who agreed to sew the blankets for Bianca but requiring a minimum order of 40 blankets. Bianca thought she would never sell that many. She could never have imagined she would soon have to produce almost 1,000 blankets for all the backers of her wildly successful Kickstarter campaign, which raised more than \$200,000 in just 30 days. "It's the dream," she says. "It's what everybody dreams it would be, and I had no idea how to produce them!"

Today the bloom blanket has taken the world by storm. Because it takes bloom's expert seamstresses five hours to sew a single blanket, Bianca had to look for a larger factory that could keep up with the demand. With a friend's help she found a family-run sewing factory, located in Zary, Poland, that has over 20 years of experience and shares Bianca's commitment to quality and attention to detail.

Following her signature minimalist aesthetic, Bianca has also developed Nic, an origami-inspired picnic blanket that uses stitch



pleating that echoes the tessellation pattern of Japanese Miura map folding. She is also grooming the idea of applying origami principles to clothing—she has already created a prototype for a gorgeous tank top and a chiffon dress. Origami will continue to be a theme in her work. "It's the language between arts and math for me. I'm working as a translator with this language," she explains.

Bianca is constantly looking for inspiration and open to new opportunities. Her bright future includes a project currently in the works that involves some interesting cashmere cushions, made using remnants from bloom blanket production, so there is little to no waste. "I'd like to have a small-scale brand that is about origami but also inherently about the materials, because only certain types of textiles can fold in that way and take three-dimensional shapes in the way I invented," she says. "If I'm going to continue this conversation about origami, maybe the next theme will be kinematics: how motion can play into geometry."

It is safe to say that no matter what she does next, her extraordinary designs will continue to garner attention, and yet she will remain the same unassuming artist doing painstaking work. "I feel lucky," she says. "Something worked and I continue to work hard and keep going." 🍀



PHOTOS: JENNIFER ENDON



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