



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Jennifer Konanz' modern take on a historic form of art and advertising

**JENNIFER KONANZ (GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION '12)** uses her background in graphic design and printmaking to help preserve an art form that dates back centuries: hand-painted signs.

Her work includes restoring and recreating historical signs, and creating new pieces using her favourite technique – gilding, the practice of painting and applying gold leaf on glass. In Edmonton, you can see it downtown on the windows of Bar Clementine and the Alberta Block. In Calgary, where Konanz is based, look for it at Wheat Pizza and the historic Deane House restaurants.

While Konanz learned her skill with design and fonts at NAIT, she has supplemented her formal education through workshops with sign painters in the U.S. and apprenticeships in Calgary. We asked her about the appeal, as well as the challenges, of her work and about gilding in particular.

**MY BOYFRIEND'S BROTHER** told me about a sign painter he saw in Texas. Then I saw the documentary *Sign Painters* and that got me

thinking about it. I started painting on my own, and then I saw an ad for a sign painter looking for an apprentice. It seemed like a good mixture between the design side and the art side.

**MOST OF MY WORK** comes from word of mouth and social media. Instagram has been a huge help because you're able to show people what you've done. I'll post a picture of a sign on a brick wall and people will contact me and say, "Oh, I have a brick wall, too."

**GILDING APPEALS TO ME** because it requires a lot of attention to detail and I really like that. One of the [gilders] in the States who I learned from, he called it putting jewelry on people's windows. It's got this old vibe but it looks totally new.

**I'LL PRINT OFF A PEN DRAWING**, tape that to the outside of the window and then work from the inside, so you're looking through the glass and following the lines. It's a very meditative way of working and it takes a long time.

**WITH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY**, people thought this work would disappear but it hasn't. There's something very authentic about it, especially when you see so much that's so temporary now. This is genuinely good stuff that lasts.

*As told to Marta Gold*

## TRAINING:

Formal training in sign painting is limited. Konanz recommends a graphic design and/or art background, plus an apprenticeship or workshops with experts.

## HOURS:

Vary, particularly if self-employed.

## LOCATION:

For gilding, work is indoors. Exterior wall and brick painting can involve working at heights.

## SALARY:

Hourly wage is about \$25, on average