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Art Attack! Tanya Wilson's Creative Mission to Engage Children on Social Issues

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Meet Tanya Wilson, 41, co-founder of [EYEHYAH!](#), an interactive platform that uses visually arresting design and artworks to educate children on important social issues like internet safety, healthy eating, mental health, climate change and so on. The mother of two primary-school-aged daughters is no stranger to the creative industry, having spent two decades developing content and experiences for the likes of Netflix, Facebook, Nike, Coca-Cola, Tiger Beer and Heineken. These days, Tanya and her co-founder Steve Lawler are busy equipping young learners with creative thinking skills which, they believe, are essential to solving the world's complex challenges. [ISHAN SINGH](#) finds out more.

How did EYEHYAH! come to be?

I started my career in PR, working on a global creative platform for Tiger Beer. One of the people I hired at the time was Steve Lawler, a professional artist and creative director. Steve introduced me to the field of art, design and culture, and I found that my storytelling skills effectively complemented our work in visual communications.

Later, noticing a general lack of discussion in educational curricula about important social issues, we started EYEHYAH! to bridge this gap. Since our 2007 launch, we've developed a suite of resources including magazines, teachers' toolkits, workshops, activity sheets, animations, an app, and more.

What were the early days like, in terms of finding your footing and building a network of creatives?

When we were starting out, we bootstrapped the whole thing with no funding. It was a very lean team and we didn't earn a salary for two years. But with time, we gradually built our network by combining prosocial work with corporate work. We'd engage designers for branded projects and then continue working with them on others. Today, our network is made up of 2,000 creatives from around the world. We spend considerable time researching ideas and themes before the work is assigned to the suitable people for visualisation or execution.

Who are some of your favourite visual artists? What do you look for when sourcing for the right artists for a particular project?

We love [Angee Neo](#) and [Sesameseed cat](#). What we look for in artists are depth, humour, concept, vibrancy and detail.

What's a common misconception about creativity, or creative thinking?

Creativity is often associated with painting or drama, when in fact creative thinking has more to do with design-thinking and problem-solving. It is an important life skill that shouldn't be confined to the domain of so-called "creative people".

Yet creative thinking isn't a subject that's taught in classrooms, at least not at the primary school level. Why does that need to change?

We find that most education systems can be quite exams-focused and fast-paced. Achievement-based learning has its merits, but kids also need to be able to explore their minds and ponder questions that don't necessarily have a correct answer. Many a time, we have to "fail" or "get it wrong" in order to develop our ideas more fully.

When did you first realise you were making a difference with your work?

We've seen impact at the level of the individual, i.e., the child. When we go into schools and run workshops like collage or GIF-making, the students start off quite reserved. However, at some point there is a switch and they begin to experiment and have fun—that's creativity in action. We've also received support from government bodies based on the impact of our workshops and teachers' toolkits.

What advice do you have for aspiring artists or those hoping to make a career in visual arts?

Never stop learning, be curious and open minded. Visit as many art galleries and exhibitions as you can.

You're also the mastermind behind [GIFFEST](#), a large-scale exhibition of Art GIFS. What was your favourite GIF from last year's edition?

Wow, it's so hard to choose over 500 submissions and almost 150 on display. But I think my personal favourite was the surreal illustrations animated by @ngyonghuiii.

Where do you see EYEYAH! five to ten years from now?

We're excited to take our content onto e-learning platforms and see how we can push that medium to merge gaming, entertainment and education.