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Changing faces: how a body artist found creative ways to adapt her business

Amy Jones has worn many hats to earn a living, including face-painting at football matches. Here, she explains how being versatile has helped her business thrive

by Rosie Mullender

As a professional face and body painter, Amy Jones is adept at helping other people achieve a degree of metamorphosis. But she is also something of a showstopper in her own right. "Adaptability is key in my work - I can be working at a child's party in the morning, and doing UV face painting in a nightclub in the evening, or go from painting glittery eyes or henna on hands at a wedding to a football match, all in the same week," she says.

Jones has used that same versatility to be a true chameleon throughout her career, having formerly worked as a florist, beauty and sports therapist, makeup artist and costume supplier. Today, Jones, 57, combines face and body painting with being a balloon modeller and henna artist - among other skills.

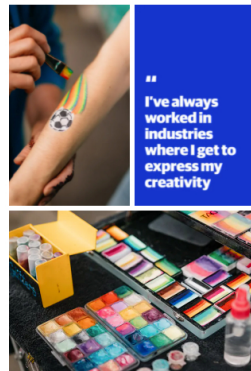
"I've always been creative, sketching, painting and crafting since I was a child," says Jones. "It means that as an adult, I've always worked in industries that are customer-facing, and where I get to express my creativity - I've worn a lot of different hats."



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Amy Jones: Taken from painting henna on hands at a wedding to a football match, all in the same week. Photograph: Peter Fudge

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"I've always worked in industries where I get to express my creativity"

Jones launched her business, Creative Capers, in 2009. Starting by hiring out children's costumes, she realised she needed more flexibility as she raised her two young children - and so she trained in face painting and balloon modelling. "I'm very fluid, and tend to go with whatever works best at the time," she says.

Living in Southampton, Jones is often to be found at St Mary's stadium, home to Southampton Football Club, helping Saints fans show their stripes alongside bubble-blowers, street performers, and the Saints brass band. "I've been booked at St Mary's on and off for six or seven years now, and I absolutely love the atmosphere," Jones says. "It's really interactive, and I enjoy going up to burly football fans saying 'Come on, why don't you show your stripes?'"

"Face painting at matches becomes almost ritual. I once had a lovely moment with a group of teenage lads when one of them decided to get a full face of stripes, and then they all joined in. I got the chance to chat to them all while I was painting, and they were taking photos and laughing. I've also drawn footballs on the ball ball head!"

With Creative Capers booked to appear at all three of the UEFA Women's EURO 2022 matches being hosted at St Mary's this July, Jones is looking forward to the extra opportunities to meet customers that the tournament will bring. "I enjoy working at St Mary's the most when women are playing matches, because you get more female spectators," she says. "They're more used to makeup, and easier to persuade into having their faces painted. Although it's a little bit like being a dentist - you ask them a question, and they can't answer because they have to hold still! I absolutely love the atmosphere on match days."

Jones's ability to adapt and thrive was crucial when the pandemic hit, with her business decimated overnight. "I work wherever there are lots of people - at festivals, weddings and football matches - so my job simply disappeared," says Jones. "Before the pandemic, I was kept my hand in by hiding balloon animals in my front garden for local children to spot on their daily lockdown walks, and along there what I should make next. It was also a way of keeping that sense of connection."

She ended up working in a distribution warehouse with people from a gamut of different industries, from company directors to cleaners. "It was very different from my usual work, but I was very glad for it. She also found support from fellow artists from across Southampton and the UK via organisations such as the International Face Painting Association and the Face Academy. "I'm lucky enough to have a fantastic network in our local area, and we keep each other sane and motivated," she says. "Industry organisations give a lot of support through lockdown, too, teaching us new techniques online to keep going. I kept my hand in by hiding balloon animals in my front garden for local children to spot on their daily lockdown walks, and along there what I should make next. It was also a way of keeping that sense of connection."

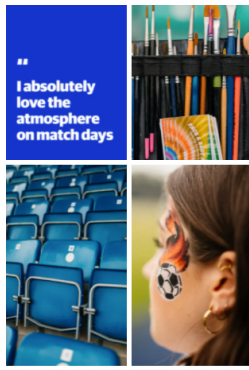
One virtual session Jones attended addressed what the industry would look like post-Covid - and, as the country emerged from lockdown, she pivoted her business once again, to meet the increased demand for digital payments. "When things started reopening, I set up a stall on a local market, offering henna tattoos," she says. "I bought a card machine, it has enabled me to get sales where I couldn't before. Some festivals are entirely card-only now, and I can take deposit payments for events on the spot."



Amy Jones: Taken from painting henna on hands at a wedding to a football match, all in the same week. Photograph: Peter Fudge



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Although most of Jane's jobs are booked through an agency, she also offers so-called "pay-per-face", where customers pay on the spot for face painting, glitter tattoos or hair braiding. Her business is fully portable, including taking her own table and chairs wherever she's needed, which gives her the flexibility to take on a variety of jobs. "That's one of the things I love about my business," she says. "I could be working on a church estate one day and in a steady home the next. I'm still passionate about what I do because there are always new avenues to go down."

"My job means I get to go to some amazing places and events, which I'd never have gone to if I wasn't in this industry. To be part of creating that atmosphere, that buzz - whether I'm blowing balloons, painting faces or creating henna tattoos that day - is really wonderful."

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