

From getaway to career

Every week, artist **Pickyme (Patricia Schmitt)** designs as many as three new romance novel covers, including covers for national bestsellers like Sherrilyn Kenyon. How did she find such a rewarding professional niche? Through participation in one corner of the passionate romance community. Schmitt shares with Laurie Kahn, executive producer of the Popular Romance Project, how sharing thoughts and graphics on an author's forum helped her develop her skills and find the support and interest she needed to become a cover artist.

Tell us about creating designs on Lara Adrian's message board.

Pickyme: But I joined a message board—Lara Adrian's message board. I was like one of the founding members of the board. And so I started doing artwork banners [...]

[...] I was just there to hang out and socialize and it was nice; it was kind of a getaway, from—it was somewhere I could discuss and vent without anybody knowing, like my family didn't know, and we were a very close group of friends online and we have the same, as soon as you have the same hobbies and passions, you just kind of connect. And so those banners, every time they post, they see the banner, because it goes right underneath; it's a tagline.

And so everybody is like, "Who did that banner?" You know, "I really like that banner," and they're like, "Oh, Picky did that; you know, that's Picky, it's Picky," and then they started to message me, when new members would come on, they

would refer and say, “Would you like a banner? Picky, you know, can do this. Ask her.” And so I would just do generic banners for them and then they can put their —add their name, you know, I did like five and if they wanted one of those, have it. So yeah, I started just getting popular that way and then Facebook came along and first it was MySpace and, you know, I started getting a little bit of followers because I would post my artwork on MySpace.

What were your earliest designs?

Pickyme: I started with Lara’s characters. I started—I saw Lucan, so I did a picture of Lucan, what I thought Lucan looked like anyway, as I was reading, and a lot of people agreed. They’re like, “Oh, that does look like him,” you know, and I’m very detail oriented—if they have a scar somewhere I try to put it in there. If they have, you know, whatever kind of hair, I try to get it perfect and so a lot of the fans just of her started seeing my work and she would you know post it on her MySpace or whatever and say, “Well, Picky did that.”

How many covers have you done?

Pickyme: I’ve done 134 covers since, which I don’t know what the average is, I think it was like three-point-something a week, or something like that, I don’t know how it averaged out but it was a lot. I was surprised that I had done that much. *[laughs]* So I really found out that I’m a workaholic. *[laughs]*

How do you participate in the romance community online? When has the community helped you reach a personal goal or try something new?

POPULAR ROMANCE PROJECT

<http://pickymeartist.com/>

<http://www.popularromanceproject.org>

<http://www.facebook.com/PopularRomanceProject>

<http://twitter.com/popularromance>