



UKTI supports Penny Seume's export initiatives

Fast facts

Company: Penny Seume

Industry: Creative Industries

Target Market: US

UKTI Services: Tradeshow Access
Programme, Events

www.pennyseume.co.uk



Image courtesy of Russ at Orca Photography

British textiles and homewares designer, Penny Seume, has exhibited at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair (ICFF) in New York twice, thanks to financial support from UK Trade & Investment (UKTI). This has resulted in repeat orders for her products from ABC Carpet & Home stores in New York.

An artist may draw inspiration from things that the average person barely notices. For Penny Seume, it is urban landscape that gets her creative juices flowing. Living and working in Bristol, Penny's unique designs subtly capture the mood of the original site, be it the lights of London or the skyscrapers of New York City. She then uses traditional fine art techniques and contemporary digital print to create bespoke and limited edition high quality fabrics and home accessories.

At home in the UK, Penny started out selling to local galleries and high-end interior design businesses. In 2011, she visited New York sparking a whole

collection inspired by the Manhattan skyline. Her New York sofa and cushion covered in Gold Skyscraper fabric, which she made in collaboration with Dulux Interior Design, went on to win a Distinction award from the Society of Designer Craftsmen show at the Mall Galleries, London in 2013. Her New York fabric won a 'highly commended' accolade at the New Design Britain awards at the NEC Interiors show.

Whilst in New York, Penny also took the opportunity to attend ICFF and the New York Design Centre, to see what high end retailers were interested in at the time.

"I'm drawn to urban landscapes and the architecture of cities and I've always been fascinated by colour and texture," says Penny. "I capture the atmosphere of a city in my paintings and collages, and transfer these onto luxurious fabrics like velvet, silk and linen. New York is obviously an exciting place to be, and I was interested to know whether retailers, interior designers and consumers there would appreciate my work."

Exhibition support

On her return to the UK, Penny got in touch with UKTI. She talked with an International Trade Adviser (ITA) about the potential for her business in the US, and the possibility of exhibiting at ICFF herself the following year. The ITA agreed that Penny's work was certainly of the right calibre and put the designer in touch with the British European Design Group (BEDG). This accredited trade organisation receives funding through UKTI's Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) to take British companies to interior design shows.

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As a result, Penny was able to show her products at ICFF in May 2012, in a group of 20 British designers.

As well as displaying her designs and products on her own stand, Penny attended an engaging programme of informational and networking events organised by UKTI around the show, which took place at the British Consulate in New York.

“Without the TAP funding that BEDG got from UKTI, I wouldn’t have been able to afford to exhibit at ICFF,” says Penny.

“Going there for the first time as part of a British delegation and with the support of BEDG and UKTI was invaluable.

There’s so much to learn about these events: how to ship your work overseas, lay out your stand and make the most of your time. I wouldn’t have felt confident to do it alone at that stage.”

Repeat orders

Penny came away from ICFF 2012 with a new list of contacts with whom she now keeps in touch via a regular newsletter. Several orders for velvet pillows from ABC Carpet & Home followed this first show. When Penny exhibited again at ICFF 2013, ABC came to see her new Urban neutral linen collection and these are also now stocked in its stores.

Again at ICFF 2013, Penny attended the UKTI events going on around the show, including a panel discussion by design industry experts about how to succeed in the competitive US market, and a networking evening where she met local creative industry professionals.

In the meantime, Penny has had financial support from UKTI to attend Maison & Objet Paris in France and Ambiente, a consumer goods trade fair in Germany. This gave her an idea of how these shows work and whether it would be worth investing in exhibiting there herself, before committing herself.

Today, around a third of Penny’s business comes from outside the UK, primarily from the US.

“Breaking into new overseas markets can be a long and daunting process, but I’ve found that UKTI has something to offer every step of the way,” says Penny.

“When I first started to think about the US, my ITA was a really useful sounding board to bounce ideas off as I built up my brand and perfected my product offering. Having UKTI funding to attend international shows and exhibitions has allowed me to get my name known outside the UK, and meet important buyers in the industry. The networking events that UKTI organised around ICFF also gave me access to people who I, as a small British designer in the early days of building my brand, otherwise would not have met. When I have questions about exporting, I send an email to UKTI and they get back to me with an answer that I know I can trust. In short, UKTI is a wonderful resource for British exporters.”

The UK and the US

The UK and the US are each other’s single largest investors and most important partners in science and innovation. In fact, more than a quarter of new investment projects in the UK come from US investors, and bilateral trade between the UK and the US is worth around £120 billion per year.

In 2012, the US continued to strengthen its relationship with the UK, funding 396 projects and creating 50,000 new jobs. About a million people in the US go to work for British companies, while a further million in the UK work for American firms.

The US economy is integrated and largely self-contained, with every major industry represented. The sheer size of the US means it should be treated as a series of regional markets with varying characteristics.

For further information about business opportunities in the US, please go to www.ukti.gov.uk/unitedstates

Helping you attend tradeshow

Taking part in overseas exhibitions is an effective way for you to test markets, attract customers, appoint agents or distributors and make sales. UK Trade & Investment’s Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) provides grant support for eligible SME firms to attend trade shows overseas.

Participation is usually as part of a group, a great advantage for inexperienced businesses, and is usually led by one of our Accredited Trade Organisations (ATOs). ATOs work with UK Trade & Investment to raise the profile of UK groups and sectors at key exhibitions.

For further information please visit www.ukti.gov.uk

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