



Lou Lenzi, FIDSA
is a member of the Academy of Fellows of the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) and is Professor of Practice in the Department of Human-Centered Computing at IU's School of Informatics and Computing.

2017: A Bellwether for the Design Profession

Each year, the Industrial Designers Society of America (IDSA) recognizes the work of outstanding undergraduate students enrolled in accredited, university industrial design programs.

The student awards achieve three goals. First, they provide industrial design students with the opportunity to display their unique talents and achievements on an international stage. Second, the program allows universities and design schools with accredited ID programs to gain visibility and recognition with their peer educators and fellow professionals. Finally, they serve as a talent pipeline for consulting firms and corporate organizations interested in hiring the next generation of designers and design leaders.

The Student Merit Awards (SMA) also serve as a bellwether of the future of the profession. The student work demonstrates not only how they solve a particular design challenge, it's a glimpse into what they see as the significant business, economic and societal issues worth tackling. It signals to the profession what its future leaders feel their newly instilled design skills can and should address.

A bellwether of another sort occurred this year. The first all-female group of winners emerged, continuing the transformational shift from a traditionally male dominated profession. A close look at their portfolio work however, reflects their own individuality when it comes to design and where they elect to focus their design efforts.

Sofia Frilund, the Northeast District winner from Parsons School of Design in New York, places an emphasis on innovative materials choices in her design solutions, creating surprise and delight as well as a handcrafted feeling in the results. Her materials choices range from hardwoods, recycled millinery scraps, and even ice.

The SMA from the Central District, Chloe Georgiades, is a graduate of the University of Cincinnati, one of the most respected design schools in the country. The range of her product design work varies, from medical devices to athletic wear, reflecting her versatility and an understanding of a systematic and repeatable problem solving process. Paying attention to the process, rather than focused design solutions geared for a particular industry, allows her the opportunity to work across a variety of product categories.

Judy Leung, the West District SMA from California College of the Arts, is interested in the opportunities created by combining hard-goods technology with wearable soft goods. Her designs suggest a new

approach to the integration of tech in our daily lives, resulting in an innovative mix of fashion and utility.

Claire Puginier, from the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), represented the South District. Her interest is in the use of artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, and augmented reality technologies to enhance the relationship between humans and machines.

The Midwest District SMA, Erin Rice, is from the University of Notre Dame, and sees design as a vehicle capable of driving change in societal behavior. She plans to apply her education in industrial design and visual communication to larger scale social issues.

While these five Student Merit Award winners approach design from their own unique perspective, there are other similarities besides being a cohort of all-female award winners. They acknowledged the need for designers to become involved in addressing larger societal issues with the designer's creative problem solving methodologies serving as a tremendous asset in these challenges. All brought a sensitivity and awareness to the proper use of materials and processes in their design solutions. Their projects ranged in scale from personal applications to large systems-level solutions. Three of the five winners were born abroad, bringing a global perspective to their design work. Claire Puginier was born in Germany, grew up globetrotting among various cities in Asia and Europe before landing in Savannah, GA. Sofia Frilund grew up in Denmark before taking residence in New York in 2007. Judy Leung was born and raised in Hong Kong and is the first in her family to earn a college degree.

In interviews with IDSA's Summer 2017 Innovation magazine, each award winner commented on what it is like being a female designer in a majority-male profession along with the significance of being a part of the first all-female group of SMA winners. Sofia Frilund felt that men's natural gift of high self-esteem—when compared to women—meant that women “have to work harder to push designs forward” and they have to get others to “believe that women see the world differently than men and can understand certain challenges of daily life in a way men can't.” Erin Rice of Notre Dame struck an optimistic tone, noting “It's exciting to see women emerging as leaders, creative thinkers, builders and designers.” Chloe Georgiades acknowledged the current imbalance of female designers in industry, but was encouraged by the “amazing female role models and peers” she encountered while in school. This certainly speaks well for the future of the profession. ■