Following Kelly Mackie’s freshman year at Michigan State University, the former pre-professional classical ballet dancer felt a creative void that had once been filled by dance and classical music. Looking to fill this void, she turned to MSU’s College of Arts & Letters to stretch her artistic skills in a whole new direction.

An Honors College student, Mackie discovered within the Department of Art, Art History, and Design that she had a passion for graphic design. “When I found graphic design, I felt like this is my thing. This is my calling. This is what I was meant to do,” she said.

This past May, Mackie graduated with a BFA in Graphic Design and a BA in Hospitality Business, and began a new job as a Junior Digital Art Director for Hudson Rouge on the Lincoln Motor Company account. “This is my dream job,” she said. “I had a goal after graduation to gain more experience in digital design, advertising, and user experience, and that is now what I do on a daily basis. I am grateful every day. I work with an amazing team of award-winning creatives on one of the most iconic brands in the automotive industry.”

Choosing MSU

Mackie’s future wasn’t always so clear. Before coming to MSU, she was training 40-50 hours a week as a classical ballet dancer at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts. “There was a lot of tremendous opportunity there, but when I got to my senior year of high school, my heart just wasn’t in it for the long haul,” she said. “Still I would not trade that experience for the world. It totally shaped me as a person, but I know it wasn’t right for me.”

Hanging up her ballet slippers, she chose to come to MSU and took a lot of business classes her freshman year. “I was really struggling, not academically, but in my heart,” Mackie said. “I didn’t have a creative outlet. I wasn’t hearing classical music every day any more. I just felt like a huge part of me had been torn away.”

Recent (May 2016) graduate Kelly Mackie landed a position as Junior Digital Art Director for Hudson Rouge on the Lincoln Motor Company account.
Finding Her Passion
To fill that void, Mackie started taking art and graphic design classes. “It was just for fun at first, but then I started to notice that people were paying attention to my work and teachers were telling me that I should enter things into shows, and that was all I was thinking about,” Mackie said.

Her sophomore year, she took Graphic Design II with former Adjunct Instructor Barbara Hranilovich, who told her, “I am watching you struggle against this. You want so badly to be a graphic designer, but you are not letting yourself. Stop kidding yourself, you are meant to be an artist. If you fight this, you are going to regret not devoting yourself to your passion.”

That was Mackie’s first wake-up call. The second came after she interviewed for an internship during her junior year.

“I was told that my ideas are strong, but the way I was developing them was just not as mature as they should be,” Mackie said. “That crushed my dreams a little bit, but at the same time, it was the final push I needed. When that happened, I told myself I had 365 days to step up my game, to better build out my ideas, to have more time to network, and to get more work experience. Looking back on it, I am so thankful they were honest with me. They basically saved my career.”

This past year, Mackie worked hard in all of her classes. She won a Silver ADDY Award for her “Top 100” project she completed in her Interactive Web Design class and was among the top three in the MSUFCU mural competition. She’s done project collaborations with professors and served as President of the local MSU chapter of AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Arts).

Looking Ahead to the Future
Some day Mackie would like to use both her MSU degrees by owning and managing her own design firm. “In the long run, my dream is to have a design firm,” Mackie said. “I think it would be awesome to own my own business and make amazing work with amazing people.”

She also recently learned that her hand-cut paper illustration series, Color Caverns, was selected for display at the Michigan House of Representative’s Anderson House Office Building in Lansing, Michigan, as part of the 2016-2017 Art in the House Program. Sponsored by the President’s Council for State Universities in Michigan, a special unveiling of this artwork will take place on Wednesday, Oct. 19.