



Viñales Collection  
by  
KOUAMO

## Stories of Prints

interview by Karolina Barnes, photography by Yeshe Venema

Immediately after entering the open studios event at Cockpits Arts in London the other day, my eyes were drawn to a pattern on cushions and lampshades displayed beautifully to welcome its guests and to set the vibe of the creativity in the building. It was almost at the end of our tour that I met the textile designer behind them. Bringing stories of travel and colour through printed cushions, wallpapers, lampshades and home accessories, is something unique to Julia Kouamo of Kouamo, who founded the brand in 2011. The designs share journeys through warm memories or fragmented dreams of far-off places. Julie's appetite for exploration extends to the way she works. She gathers inspiration from across the globe through photography and illustration, and the result is in artisan products beautifully made, and made to last - with the finest materials, hand finishing and detailing.





**What has been your journey so far?**

The journey has been really interesting full of ups and some downs, plenty of questions and reflections but always learning. I started as a textile freelance designer working for design studios and brands like Designers Guild in the product development team, and then I created my business but I think I started as a designer and not as a business owner. Since 2012 and being at Cockpit Arts, the London business incubator for designer-makers, my business changed a lot: I exhibited in ICFE in New York and Maison et Objet in Paris, great experiences, and that's where I knew there was potential.

The brand has evolved a lot in five years, I have defined much more my values, my tone of voice, my market and now it is all about my customers, trying to understand them as much as I can to provide them with great and inspiring products, and for them to being part of the journey.

**How important are colour and pattern in your work? Has your approach to both of them changed over time?**

Colour and pattern have always been part of my design work since college actually, but it has evolved quite a bit along the way. At the beginning I was using colour in a quite raw way, very instinctively. Now I have learnt more about colours, how each colour react with each other and how to combine them to create more subtle patterns. As much as I love colours, my first instinct is to use as many as I can, but I learnt (and am still learning) that a smaller colour palette can create as much impact, too. My approach to pattern has always been about storytelling and I am inspired by travels that I went to so my patterns are usually influenced by the stories and the countries of the collection.

**Who or what inspires you?**

Design-wise: Travelling is a big source of inspiration for me. I love researching the different ways of markmaking and printmaking, giving traditional print techniques a contemporary twist in my work. Nature is another big source of inspiration for me: Flowers, trees, leaves, especially going close to nature - it brings natural patterns to my work. Sometimes nature does it best. Who: I love artists such as William Klein, a photographer who looks at the city and its people in a very unique way, and Rothko, painter, and how he shows emotions and feelings through colours.

**What was the concept behind your latest collection?**

With the Viñales Collection, Kouamo takes you to a small town in North West Cuba. Cuba is an island full of fascination and under the surface much is changing. Here in the countryside though, it feels that time is on hold. Our designs draw on the beauty in the detail of everyday life in the Cuban countryside. The music in the air, a queue at the bakery, games on the outdoor football pitch and animals running free in the courtyard. The Viñales people have cultivated tobacco for generations and their cigars are famous all over the world. We celebrate their deep understanding of the soil. Using layers of print techniques - memories and colours from Viñales, and the surrounding areas are blended with traditional French 'Toile de Jouy' tones and styles. Sketches, lino prints and photography depict bright window shutters, a sleeping dog and a tobacco farmer. We observe rocking chairs at 'siesta' and the abundant foliage, which cloaks the landscape in colour.