COMPOSITION & CINEMATOGRAPHY

Concept Design Academy, Fall 2018, Monday 7 pm - 11 pm
Instructor: Marshall Vandruff www.marshallart.com   mv@marshallart.com

COURSE OBJECTIVE: To understand the elements of pictorial composition for visual storytelling, and the principles of designing images to emotionally empower a story.

COURSE CONTENT: In class, we will study cinematography to understand how master filmmakers tell stories with pictures. Assignments and projects are optional, but they give you an opportunity to apply the lessons to your own projects, and we will devote part of our sessions to showcasing and critiquing select student work. If you want feedback on your projects, upload them digitally and "to spec" by the weekly deadlines. See **HOW TO PRESENT YOUR WORK.**

You will get the most out of this class if you have a story to make into images. It can be an adaptation or an original idea. In our second session, you will learn about story composition, so you may want to develop your own story and compose images for it.

MATERIALS: Use any materials you like that are appropriate to the problems you're trying to solve.

BOOKS RECOMMENDED:
STORY by Robert McKee
THE VISUAL STORY by Bruce Block
FRAMED INK by Marcos Mateu-Mestre
STORYBOARDING THE SIMPSONS WAY (free pdf's)
UNDERSTANDING MOVIES by Louis Gianetti
CREATIVE FILMMAKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT by Dannenbaum, Hodge & Mayer
REBEL WITHOUT A CREW by Robert Rodriguez. Inspiring! A model for success.

COMPOSITION & CINEMATOGRAPHY, Fall 2018 Weekly Schedule:

> **Project 01** (Pre-Term): Compile twelve "desert island" cinematic images (info below) to post on one slide.
> **Optional Weekly Project:** Reduce a Twilight Zone to 24 frames (info below) to post on one slide.
> Watch *The Big Lebowski (1998)** if you have not yet seen it, and *Visions of Light (1990).*
> Review this syllabus. If you want to show work in class, carefully read **HOW TO PRESENT YOUR WORK**.

Oct 1:   Introduction to Composition & Cinematography. Elements & Abstraction.
   Project 02: Analyze six screenshot compositions. Post on one slide.
   Watch *Paper Moon (1973)* and *Jesse James (1939)*

Oct 8:   Story Composition. Unity in Diversity.
   Project 03: Analyze an existing story, or invent your own. Post analysis on 1-3 slides.
   Watch *Bullets Over Broadway (1994)* and *Fresh (1994)***

Oct 15:   Exposition vs Image. Staging for Story
   Project 04: Stream-Draw your story or scene. Post each project on one slide.
   Watch *The Artist (2011),* and *The Killers (1946) or Sweet Smell of Success (1957)*

Oct 22:   Shots: Camera & Clarity.
   Project 05: Revise stream-drawn shots to read without words. Post revised shots on 1-3 slides.
   Watch *Rear Window (1954)* and *No Country for Old Men (2007)*** or *Act of Violence (1948)*

Oct 29:   Imagery: Mood, Metaphor & Motifs.
   Project 06: Design key shots to evoke emotion, seeking"rhymes". Post on one slide.
   Watch *The Graduate (1967),* and *Toy Story (1995)* if you have not yet seen them; or *The Pretender (1947)*

Nov 5:   Lenses. Polarities: Balances & Contrasts.
   Project 07: Continue developing key shots, composing polarities. Post on one slide.
   Watch *Sexy Beast (2000)***, *Pig in the City (1998), Nightmare Alley (1947),* or *The Hudsucker Proxy (1994)*

Nov 12:   Shot Structure. Links, Q&A Pattern.
   Project 08: Arrange your images in a sequence. Post on as few slides as readable.
   Watch *Back to the Future (1985)* if you have not yet seen it, *Asphalt Jungle (1949),* or *The Killing (1956).*

Nov 19:   Pace, Tension, & Timing.
   See notes below** on *Playtime (1967)*, *Wings of Desire (1987)*, and *The Tree of Life (2011*)

HOW TO PRESENT YOUR WORK:

Weekly Homework and Projects: Upload digital files at this page on Sunday nights previous to class by 11 pm:
https://www.dropbox.com/request/6eSfv4y8usblsAmQpB1z
If the above link doesn't work, *copy and paste* the URL. Once it works, bookmark the Dropbox link to upload weekly homework.

LAYOUTS: 1920 x 1080 horizontal slides, because the display screen is horizontal.
Lay out images to delete excess white space and make it easy to see things on the page.
Include the fewest pages possible, but rather than overcrowd a page, break it up into separate pages.

RESOLUTION: Make all files 1920 wide x 1080 pixels high.

FILE FORMATS & NAMING: Submit work as *jpg* files. To keep them at or under a megabyte, "jpeg compress" the files efficiently (between 8 -11), but not so low that it damages the image (like 6 or lower).
Include your name in two places:

1) On the image, integrated into the pixels, like with a promo piece.
2) As first part of file name, no spaces. Use underscores (not hyphens) for necessary divisions. For example:
MarshallVandruff_Idea01_EnlightenmentScene.jpg

Give each file a unique name. If you name a file MyProject_Design.jpg each week, it overwrites your previous image. Your work must meet these specs to get into the class presentations.

MAKE IT EASY! Go to this URL, read the directions, and download a ready-made template:
http://marshallart.com/SHOP/misc-pages/assignments/template/

Frank Guthrie has presented short YouTube videos for his class that use similar criteria to ours:
DART 001 Part 1 - File Creation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzgjvO4X7TI
DART 001 Part 2 - Naming & Export: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5fExrl08Ds

UPLOADING CHECKLIST:

- The layouts are efficient and images read clearly on the screen
- The image has your name embedded into the pixels on each frame
- The file is 1920 x 1080, RGB, jpeg file (extension .jpg)
- The file name begins with your name, no spaces or hyphens - underscores only
- The atomic clock says the time is previous to 11 pm on the Sunday night before our class meeting

FOR MOVIES: Do not upload movies. Bring them on flash keys or any quick-transfer medium.

Footnotes:

Project 01 (Pre-Term): Collect your favorite screenshots and images. Choose twelve to compile on a single 1920x1080 slide. Consider varying cinematography styles as "flavors" you want to include in dishes you cook. You can study one style, or several. They can include MGM Musicals, early 30's Universal Horror films, Film Noir, 50's Cinemascope epics, 60's sitcoms, or 21st century animation frames.They can showcase a producer or director like Val Lewton or Wes Anderson, or a cinematographer like Karl Freund or Roger Deakins, or they can just be a smattering. It's up to you.
Design this as a "desert island" reference slide of the cinematography you admire enough to study.
If you want to include your slide in class, upload it by 11pm Sunday night at the Dropbox link.

Optional Weekly Project: Reduce a Twilight Zone episode to 24 frames. Post on a single 1920x1080 slide.
Choose Twilight Zone episodes you admire enough to work with for a few hours. Sketch or screengrab the shots like a reverse-engineered storyboard, then reduce the number of frames to 24.
This is creative work. Many of the 25-minute episodes of the original Twilight Zone TV show contain over a hundred shots that you will "boil down" to a shorter sequence. Reducing means choosing. You must throw away most of the shots and even the story to edit it down, yet allow the story to "read" and create an effect. That's composing…
While working, name the shots. Use labels (establishing, close-up, 2-shot, pan…) to categorize them, using professional terms. If you aren't sure how to describe a shot, make up a label.

* Trigger warning for R-Rated films:
*The Big Lebowsk*i is a comedy that contains violence
Fresh is a drama with brutal violence and disturbing images
*No Country for Old Me*n is a thriller that contains extremely violent imagery *Sexy Beast* is a crime drama that contains violence and disturbing sexual imagery

** *Playtime (1967)*, *Wings of Desire (1987)*, and *The Tree of Life (2011*) are cinematic masterpieces, but they take commitment. They bore most people and are guaranteed to bore the casual observer. *Wings of Desire* is the safest to start with.