

INTEGRATED CURRICULUM – DESIGN AND ILLUSTRATION TOGETHER

JASON FRAZIER
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF GRAPHIC DESIGN
DEPARTMENT OF ART & ART HISTORY
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

A design curriculum that has a rich, integrated image-making and illustration component is more productive in developing the well-rounded designers and creators needed for the future, providing a way for image-making, and the development of hard illustration skills, to become a natural and important part of creating more relevant and powerful design. Over the past several years, it has become easier and more accessible for students, and professionals alike, to easily engage in high quality tools, for process and execution, with the ever-improving landscape of software, hardware and mobile tools that are available. This has fundamentally changed how we can teach and integrate illustration and image design into a broader design curriculum.

This paper will argue that having image-making and illustration as an integrated part of a general design curriculum, and not always as individual silos, is so important to the future of design, and the development of smarter, more divergent, more engaged, and more capable designers.

In what follows, I will examine why making images are important in design and visual communication, and further, why images can be so meaningful to people. In addition, we will look at how the changing and evolving nature of image-making tools, beyond the traditional materials we have known for centuries, have allowed a greater access to a variety of mark-making and material expression, as well as created a low-risk scenario for more individuals to attempt serious illustration. Lastly, what happens when individuals who are primarily designers engage in serious illustration and image-making, not just a few simple shapes and graphics, but meaningful images that communicate on their own, as well as how image-making skills enhance process and propel ideas forward to new arenas. What can this look like from an educational standpoint – how does it integrate into a robust and open design program, one that creates more broadly capable designers with a deeper sense of the tools they have to visually communicate.

WHY WE DRAW

Why do we draw in the first place? Is it the fantasy, the playtime, a deep-seated need to invent? Is it to communicate, to emote, to feel? Fundamentally, it is all of these, and more. Stories are important. Since the beginning of man, the need to communicate is rooted deep within, for

entertainment, for survival. Before we made the written word, we used pictures to relay information to each other, what was important, what was dangerous, what was useful.

In Mesa Verde National Park in southwest Colorado, there are petroglyphs etched into the rock outcroppings. These symbols and marks are there to guide inhabitants of the area to food and water, mark danger, as well as describe the conditions of the environment. These



Fig. 1. Petroglyphs, Mesa Verde National Park, Colorado

symbols, created over decades and hundred of years, have helped to piece together some of the history and local migration of the Anasazi in the area, telling their stories. (Nps.gov, n.d.)

In our modern era, the form of something, the way it looks, can create particular feelings and emote particular moods, adding and enhancing the intent of a designed object. While writing and editing his classic American journal "On The Road", Jack Kerouac typed out the manuscript on a 120 foot long scroll, pages taped together. This single side document adds a profound immediacy and reinforces the stream-of-consciousness mythology of the novel, even though it is neither — it was written after his journeys, and was heavily edited by himself and his publisher. (Shea, 2007) But, the myth that was created, along with the physical form of the book as a long, continuous, organically charged artifact, added to its emotional impact, giving the words of the book that much more depth and gravitas.

One of the inherent appeals of visual language and imagery is that it can quickly and deeply engage an emotional context, striking a point to its core, often much more quickly than the written word can. In addition, it can also hide, masking within the overall impact, specific small details and narrative elements that further the impact and resonance with a viewer as it is experienced over time. Visual and physical forms are essential to the way we understand both the smallest elements, as well as the largest aspects of the world around us.



Fig. 2. Jack Kerouac's original type scroll manuscript of "On The Road"

In a famous interview with designer and educator Archie Boston in 1986, the great Saul Bass was asked what advice he would give young designers of the day, his answer, without hesitation, was “Learn to draw. If you don't, you're going to live your life getting around that and trying to compensate for that.” (Marshall, 2013) His description of not knowing how to draw, and the eventuality of that getting you into trouble, needlessly complicating a solution when it could be quickly resolved with an ability to make a simple and effective image through drawing, is a compelling argument for the inclusion of drawing and illustration in a broader design curriculum.



Fig. 3. Saul Bass, “Man With the Golden Arm” poster

Another obvious example is the late Ivan Chermayeff’s collage work. Known for his involvement in some of the most widely respected logos and brand marks from the last 50 years, Chermayeff also had an eye for producing intriguing collages. Finding materials, prints and scraps, collecting them, and then repurposing them, Chermayeff created visual diaries of himself and his thinking — thinking that is revealed in his design work, from logos to books. By spending the time in this play, or visual exercises if you will, Chermayeff was doing the critical work of developing and evolving his visual language. This is the fundamental desire for the inclusion of image-making in a design program, allowing for an expanded visual dictionary that students, as they develop, can tap into, revealing designs and processes that go well beyond the basic and practical.

Lester Beall, the designer of many famous posters and logos, produced some of the most remarkable works of the early 20th century in the United States, some of which contained little if any words. His posters for the Rural Electrification Administration were used to raise public awareness for electrifying the rural parts of the country. The images and designs produced made comfortable the idea that this new effort by the federal government was to be met with enthusiasm, rather than skepticism. While they did contain words, they were quite accessible to “an audience with minimal reading skills.”(Golec, 2013) This is an important point, one that shows how visual language and vernaculars can create powerful impact, getting to the heart of the matter quickly, with little in its way or



Fig. 4. Ivan Chermayeff, collages



Fig. 5. Lester Beall, Rural Electrification Administration posters

need of explanation. Cultural sensitivity and specific knowledge can go a long way, and the success of the REA posters can attest to this, rather than speak down to a culture group, they spoke directly with them in ways they could gather.

As the work of Bass, Chermayeff, and Beall reveal, drawing is not simply about putting pencil to paper, or paint to canvas, but rather a way of thinking about form and composition, a way that can be realized in the examples above. A variety of means to create images is a crucial and meaningful aspect of design as a whole.

I come from a background of image-making and design as the same idea. Thinking in images has always come naturally to me – but not just to make images. For technical layouts, publications, etc., seeing type as image, or as one of the ways to make a mark in a larger drawing [for example, a page design], has been the key asset for me. My instructors in college at Missouri State University, saw no difference in drawing versus designing, It was a natural thing to use drawing as the foundation of all design, more than likely because I was part of that last generation of students to learn mostly with analog tools, with a [literally] little Mac SE thrown in. It was in college when we as an industry got a new toy to try – Photoshop 1.0. It could not do much at that time, but, it was clear this was going to change things, and could see that the PMT camera was one of the tools that was going to go first. Access to a decent scanner, a Mac, and a laser printer, was going to make this faster, cheaper, and far better — eventually.

Now, I don't need to recap the entire history of digital design for this audience. But let's just say, that these days, making design, and making illustration, it's definitely a less toxic, less dangerous and a less time-consuming practice. It's also a lot less messy, even though that can be a lot of fun sometimes! This however does not negate the need or the desire to use analog tools. It simply means that we can work quicker and cleaner, in a hybrid manner, using these new and greatly improved digital tools that have finally caught up to, an in some cases even surpassed, their analog counterparts. Though, we

have to be careful these days, just like in the past, that we don't let the tools get ahead of the ideas. There is no better example than in introductory design classes, where students will jump on the computer to make something, without really knowing what they're even trying to make, seeing the tool as the solution, rather than a means to get there. Spending time drawing, sketching, and planning — with research — pays a dividend that is hard to achieve through shortcutting..

IMAGE-MAKING AS PART OF PROCESS

Image-making and illustration is as much about the process as it is making final images. By developing ideas with higher-quality drawing and finishing, rather than only rough sketches, one can produce final design solutions that are of richer and of greater significance. The significance of drawing as mental exercise, as a way to develop ideas and to work out meaning, can't be overstated. Clear storyboards, diagramming, and prototyping without committing to a specific visual can be a great asset to the designer. Design Army in Washington, D.C., has been famous for their approach to drawing and sketching, often using refined pencil comps to present ideas to clients. This leaves some of the questions open, like specific typography, but gets across the ideas and concepts clearly, unencumbered by a clients personal tastes, allowing them to see it for what it is.

As we build designs, often we lean on our logic and practical brains to give ourselves approval along the way. However, by using drawing in part to invent and validate ideas, we also can more effectively reveal the emotive, a necessary part of the end experience. After all, people don't attach to art, design, brands, or anything for that matter, unless they become affected, and infected.

Drawing has always been a significant, and sometimes, the only part of my process that produces real direction. A quick image, taken to a level when the secrets of an idea become clear, would propel a direction, sometimes at warp speed. I had to find out where it was going. This idea of searching inside process, allowing the act of sketching and drawing with purpose to reveal way of seeing and ways of thinking, was something ingrained in me while I attended college at MSU. While there, I had two mentors that taught me several valuable lessons, I want to share two of those moments.



Fig. 6. Roman Duzek, above, and logos for LOT Polish National Airline, left, and Polish Television

First lesson — materials don't have to be fancy. My design teacher Roman Duzek, a well-known and respected Polish designer, best known for the 1978 LOT Polish national airline identity, among many others, had a poster in his office. I was always in awe of it. It was for an exhibition of his posters from Poland, and had this beautiful abstracted image of a fish,

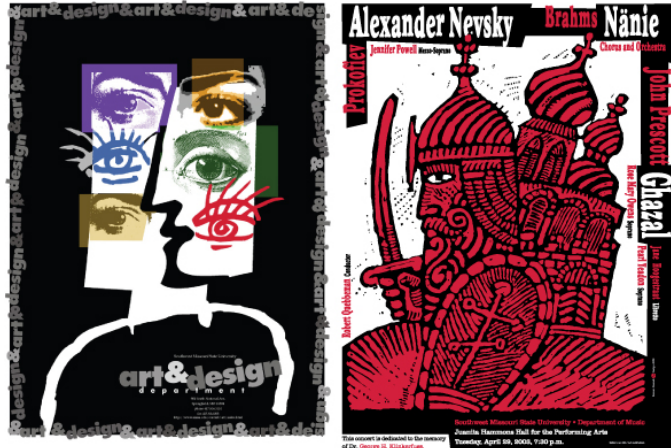


Fig. 7. Roman Duzek, posters

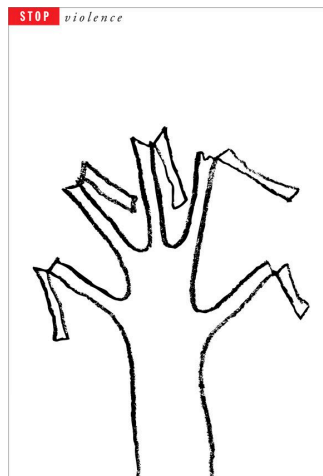
painting. Hoping for a master lesson in watercolor, quality of the pigments, supple brushes and special ordered paper, I was shocked and excited when he answered he could show me how he did it, right then. He turned, reached into his file cabinet next to his desk, and pulled out a single square of toilet paper – with the painting of the fish on it. He said, in the restroom one day, he thought this might be an interesting paper to paint on. So he did. What I learned here was that it did not matter what you used to make images, just make images with whatever you have. I took it to heart. To this day, I have trouble spending money on fancy sketchbooks and inking pens. Cheap composition notebooks, felt markers, and decent pens can do the job. Many of the posters and design work I have done over the last 25 years involved no more than construction paper, a knife, and a photocopy machine. Learning in that method of design craft, using mostly my hands, paid off in not only giving me the hand skills I would need, but most importantly how to think with

movement, assembly and physicality. Even when I work exclusively digitally, I am still thinking about moving objects around — artifacts and things still matter.

Second lesson — save things you make, and make things even if you don't know why. My illustration teacher,



Fig. 8. Cedomir Kostvoic, left, "Stop Violence" poster, right



Cedomir Kostovic, the renowned Bosnian poster designer and illustrator, gave me many tools to keep in my design quiver. But one thing that stuck out to me was that he often just made drawings, of things, of actions, of thoughts, without any purpose but to bring them to life, let them live on paper somewhere, or in a sketchbook. But, it did not stop there. He saved them, at least for a time. Old notebooks, scraps of paper, doodles, all this stuff. He told me you never know when something you drew might be useful. A few years later, Cedo produced a poster, "Stop Violence", an image of what looks like a hand with the fingers cut off and dangling, an image he had drawn and saved years earlier. What began as a simple doodle, with no other purpose other than it was interesting, made its way to a new life as a powerful part of a commentary on violence, and its interpretation is open — personal, national, global. I blame him for all the old sketchbooks, boxes of papers and cardboard tubes filled with drawings, doodles and collected ephemera that I keep moving around everywhere.

It is important though that we do not confuse drawing and rendering, they are different things. Even if the goal is to produce meaningful and impactful final illustration, with images that can stand alone and tell their own story, realism, or the sense of replication and relation to natural existence is not always necessary, and often is a detriment for the image to work. No one would have told Henri Matisse, late in his career, sitting on his stool, cutting paper, that he was not drawing. Of course he was! Even Chermayeff stated that he was "more comfortable with scissors than I am with drawing." (Introspective Magazine, 2016)

The well-known British letterer Ian Barnard has proclaimed that he "still can't draw people or animals or even a car." (Barnard, 2018) His exquisite lettering and calligraphy comes from a desire to communicate tone and emotion as much as the technical elegance of the words, and it is the result of a willingness to try, fail and try again, stating, "...the secret is to try stuff. Try calligraphy, try cooking, try photography. You'll only find your spark by trying and doing." (Barnard, 2018) And



Fig. 9. Ian Barnard, calligraphy and lettering using everyday items as tools

sometimes you use whatever you have on hand — cheap markers, hot water on snowy windshields, vegetables — just like that first lesson I described earlier.

Not only have I used these lessons, among many others, as capital to spend in my design process, but I have also worked to instill the same notions in my students as well. Even when teaching what could constitute a pure design course, I make sure to push the students to use their hands to develop ideas, don't rely on the computer to do any of the thinking for you. By this, I don't mean to say you can't use digital drawing tools. That's nonsense. Just like not worrying about the perceived quality of the analogue tools we use, we should also not dissuade ourselves from using any useful and appropriate tool. I myself have replaced a great deal of my paper sketching, drawing and note making with an iPad Pro and Apple Pencil. Many of my students use Surface devices as well. The trick is to make sure you are making the marks directly, don't rely on the type chooser to show you an idea, plan it yourself. Of note here is how the application Adobe Illustrator Draw has allowed for the direct manipulation of vector forms, using a device so familiar, the pencil, that the resulting vector image feels just as natural as an image as it was to make. The ability to direct vector shapes organically, rather than mathematically, especially for free illustration, has opened up great new possibilities for illustrators and designers who have found direct drawing in the desktop Illustrator application difficult and frustrating.

INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

Students have a great deal to gain from this approach of drawing as a significant part of process, I believe. By exposing them to a variety of visual language ideas from the beginning, they are able to develop ideas that are more emotive and meaningful in the end, transforming function into purpose. In our graphic design concentration in the Colorado State University Department of Art & Art History, we don't have a dedicated illustration track, but, we teach illustration throughout the program. The structure of the concentrations within the department expose all students to a variety of image-making opportunities, such as drawing, painting and printmaking, but within the graphic design concentration, currently up to two-fifths of the total course time is devoted exclusively to illustration and image-making. The content of this course varies over time, and has evolved to include rich illustration topics and an exploratory attitude for tools and mark-making. Thankfully, the response from the students has been to embrace this experience, even with some trepidation. A nice byproduct from their time in the Illustration courses is the realization that the computer is actually pretty dumb, as in it only gives you back quality if you put quality into it. With that, students are much more keen to see that, for one, they are going to have to delve deep inside the software to find out both what it is capable of and how to tell it what they need it to do, and

secondly, that they are allowed and encouraged to embrace all kinds of media to achieve the end result, with an eye towards professional production.

How this plays out in the experiences of the students can be shown from recent CSU graduates Maggie Christensen and Maddie Shackelford. For many students in design programs that are part of fine art departments, much of their experience with image making is formal, in that they are learning how to draw and paint the world around them, to study form and meaning through observation and abstraction, and often giving pointed, specific instructions on methods and outcomes. Once they enter the Illustration course, communications and emotional context take center stage, and all activity and decisions, from materials and media, to mark and style, are serving this core — the idea remains supreme.

With Maggie Christensen's work, her lessons in image-making began early in her time in the program, in the junior studio. In that course, a project to design a poster for an opera leads the semester. Her background in photography led her to put together a concept that included an actual butterfly for the opera *Madame Butterfly*, but before long, as we discussed that the opera name is not literal, that the antagonist was a bit of a philanderer, and the intense cultural shame the main character endures, new ideas began to take shape, resulting in a photograph that took abstracted cues from themes of the story and ideas of entomology. As Ms. Christensen moved to the Illustration course, at first she struggled, but soon began to find a voice, remembering those conversations from before. Embracing metaphor, much of work began to take an emotional stance on the topics she



Fig. 10. Maggie Christensen, “Madame Butterfly” poster, top left, self-portrait illustration, top right, “Our Hidden Truths” book, center and bottom

was presented with. This in turn moved to a larger scale that incorporated and exploited her experiences within image-making for effect, as seen in her senior project, *Our Hidden Truths*, a book that showcases secrets that strangers have exposed to her through anonymous submissions, with her typographic and image interpretations, making for a richer work with a deeper emotive impact. As a young designer who can illustrate well, her ability to compose a page, to scale and set type for maximum emotive impact, makes her work resonate only that much more. An image-making mind, incorporated into both process and towards the appeal of the outcome, had a strong hand in those ideas.

For Maddie Shackelford, the evolution of her work was one where the illustrations she made are not what the strong elements of her portfolio are, but rather, working her way through meaningful illustration projects gave her a better ability to see, to evaluate, and discern. By learning to incorporate visual storytelling with her image work, she gained a valuable skill, one of critical analysis. Her work on her final BFA project, the book set

The Love Storybooks, she used this new viewpoint to develop and evolve hand lettering, something she was terrified of trying in many ways, but was able to cast a sensitive eye towards, and be successful. Furthermore, the layout of book and the changing form, one that surprises as it is read, varied in such a way to respect and elevate the emotion and depth of the stories being told.

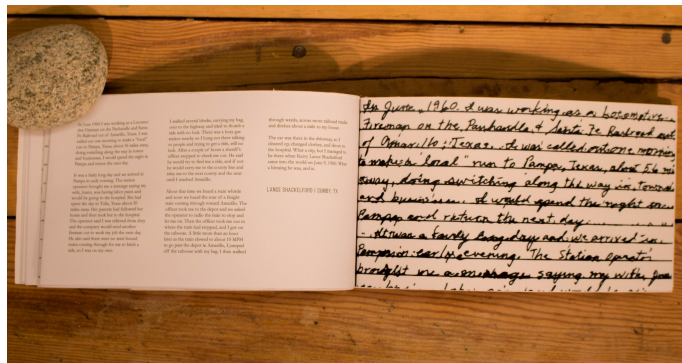


Fig. 11. Maddie Shackelford, "The Love Storybooks", set of books in wooden slipcase, hand-bound

In each of these examples, much like the examples from the first part of the paper, show how thinking like an illustrator, giving ideas a story to tell, rather than only transfer information, can make design that much more impactful and meaningful for the viewer. From logo and publication design, to information architecture and user experience design, there is much to learn from image-making to establish the tone and vernacular that a user should expect, to queue the kind of experience that they should prepare for. Even if we determine in the future to add an illustration concentration, I know we would not remove this exposure from the students in the graphic design track. The benefits of the methods and ways of thinking that working on illustrations bring far outweigh any negative aspect of the time spent.

To facilitate this, design educators and design programs need to commit at least a portion of their program to illustration, and not by just adding it as a part of an existing course, one that may not have a focus that engages and goes deep enough, but devoting at least an entire course to the investigation, development, and execution of serious illustration. This does not mean that students will come out with illustration as a serious career option, or even that exercises will be successful at all. It does mean that students, and the young designers they become, will have an expanded foundation on which rich design can be produced.

CONCLUSION

Seeing that modern, high-quality illustration tools can be easily accessed through the ongoing advancement of digital resources, and seeing how the act of making images through illustration can greatly enhance design overall, it is critical that we in the design education community continue to include both high-quality process sketching, and more involved image-making and illustration as a significant part of the broader design curriculum. When today's students learn that images and illustrations aren't just something that you choose and add to a design, but are rather integral and controllable elements that should be a central part of the development of design, both in terms of concept development, and as part of final outcomes. By engaging in the rich activity that is drawing and image-making with purpose, intensity and depth, designers, especially these young designers just venturing into their careers, will be able to create a world that is more meaningful, more poignant, and more accessible through design.

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