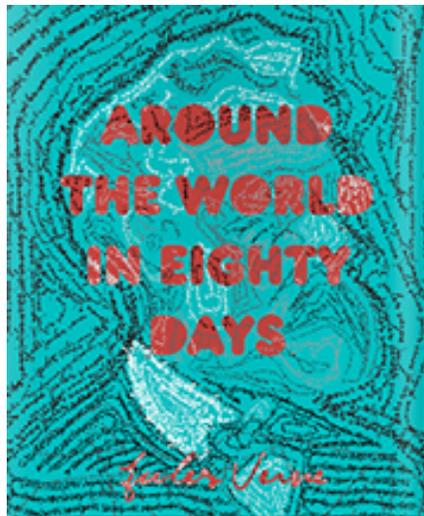# The Proof is in the Pixels

Myron Campbell

The Vancouver Film School (VFS) Digital Design program trains students to change the way people see and interact with the world. During this intense one-year program students use the tools and learn the processes and techniques necessary to start their careers as industry professionals. During the first half of the year, students learn the foundational aspects of digital design and the conceptual and technical fundamentals of communication, interactive, and motion design, the three areas of focus (or "streams") in our program. During the second half of the year, students choose a primary and secondary focus from among these three areas and create a graduate project. This 16-week endeavor is the culmination of the Digital Design program. Adobe products bring the students' educational journey to life. In many instances, students have previous experience using Adobe software, aiding in the expeditious learning of these tools. As new technologies and platforms emerge, we're constantly sharing and discovering unique and inventive ways to leverage the Creative Suite, and we encourage our students to continue their own discoveries of the best ways for them to apply these tools.

Communication Design

After we introduce the fundamentals of Illustrator and Photoshop, students enter 2D Graphics 3, an advanced course where they explore, dissect, and reproduce various trends and styles. In each three-hour lesson, we attempt to inspire students by showing what others have done, and demonstrat e various techniques to obtain a similar look. In Lesson 6, Street Art, students like Luis Francisco learn advanced techniques to emulate this style while employing non-destructive methods in Photoshop. By using smart objects, masks, smart filters, layer styles, and adjustment layers, students are equipped with team-friendly habits while preserving hi-resolution source imagery.

Luis Francisco's Street Art

Digital Design students are introduced to InDesign in the second term, and they quickly learn to master the application. In Communication Design 3, a third- term course, students draw upon the typography and print design principles taught in previous terms to create a book design. The results are always stunning. One example is Arcelia Ocana Manjarrez's layout of Around the World in 80 Days. Arcelia created a portrait of Jules Verne using a handwritten font and digitally typeset the fully compiled book using InDesign.

Arcelia Ocana : Around the World in 80 Days

Interactive Design

The Digital Design program uses InDesign more extensively as the year progresses. We've been fortunate to participate in Adobe's pre-release program for the Adobe Digital Publishing Solution. This same technology is used by Wired and Martha Stewart Living. The platform uses InDesign to create stellar publications deployed on the iPad. VFS has a school-wide initiative called *Compendium*, which is a transmedia magazine delivered on the iPad with profits

Compendium: Vol 1, Lovecraft

going to the Wikimedia Foundation. Digital Design students can contribute to this publishing venture in several ways.

In the first term, within the interactive design stream, students take both User Experience and Information Architecture 1. Between these two courses, they learn the basics of a human-centric design process and develop solid wireframing techniques. In Information Architecture 2 (offered in the fourth term), students use InDesign in an unconventional but very effective way. They create clickable wireframes using InDesign to determine content needs, hierarchy, and general user interface considerations for the current Compendium issue. Then in the sixth term, students can take Design for Mobile Publishing. They use the clickable wireframes from the Information Architecture 2 course to design the user interface, finalize positioning and sequencing of content, and export the transmedia magazine to an iPad application.

The Invisible Man by Cherie Korol

Students who take the Interface Development series of courses learn how to custom-build sites using Dreamweaver, and also develop immersive, online experiences using Flash. Cherie Korol's *Invisible Man* is an interactive narrative project based on the novel by H.G. Wells. It was made entirely from Photoshop and Flash. *Square One*, an interactive documentary featuring stories about and resources for skilled immigrants in Canada, enabled three students to showcase their individual talents in communication, interactive, and motion design all within a Flash-based framework. During the year, students also learn to create physical interfaces. Stuart Ward's *Yaletown Project Mapping Test #2*, featured at Vancouver's 2011 Illuminate Yaletown event, was built using a combination of Flash and other toolkits like Modul8 and Arduino.

Motion Design

In the third term, Motion Design 3, we ask students to create motion graphic station ID packages for fictitious networks, building all of their assets in Photoshop and Illustrator. When animating and compositing, they turn to After Effects and use Premiere for the final edit to create a visually stunning ID, like Anita Kwan's for Innovation Network, that clearly communicates what a real station would use in its broadcasts.

At VFS, we are always evolving and adapting new techniques and industry practices. We are actively exploring Adobe Story and OnLocation to create a streamlined workflow from script to final render, and further help our students to refine work methodologies. This effectively demonstrates the importance of all stages of production and improved workflow, and shows how they relate to one another in both digital and analog forms.

*Play

Collective Learning
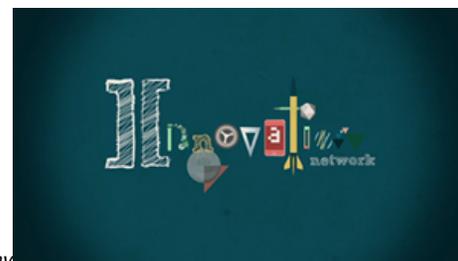
No Pixel Day in Digital Design

Digital
Design

Play
Innovation Network by Anita Kwan

students move at an accelerated pace and work over 60 hours a week on dozens of projects throughout the year. They gain a distinct personal voice and master core design principles. While the Adobe tools and workflow rapidly change and improve, the fundamentals our students learn and apply in this intense environment allow them to successfully harness these powerful tools.

Throughout the year, we encourage students to experiment in combining analog materials within their digital work. One of my lessons is entitled 'No Pixel Day.' It focuses on manually making textures to later scan and use digitally. Students often achieve more innovative techniques by integrating both analog and digital elements using Photoshop or Illustrator as the bridge.

For every new class of students, I have the pleasure of teaching my favorite program, Photoshop, in the first term. Some come with advanced skills. Others start with just the basics, while the majority lie somewhere in between. This is a challenging learning environment, but it provides those with prior experience a platform to relay what they know. Students share their favorite shortcuts and techniques throughout the lessons. If their techniques are effective, I provide alternative ways of producing the effects suggested by these highly skilled students.

This 'collective learning' experience has been great in the classroom and equally beneficial for me. Selfishly, I acquire additional workflow techniques and shortcuts while students help their classmates, and in turn, they are all learning the ins and outs of the software at an incredibly rapid pace. It's really a win-win situation! And I promise to use my powers for good, not evil.... most of the time.

About the Author

Myron Campbell brings 10 years of experience in Interactive Design and Animation to VFS. Shortly after completing a diploma in Visual Communication at Medicine Hat College, he progressed quickly in his career, working with the Trailer Park Boys TV series in Halifax. He then spent four years at the Banff Centre for the Arts as an Interactive Consultant, as well as a Lead Designer for the online digital arts and culture magazine, Horizon Zero. Since then, he has worked with clients including CBC, Brent Butt, Omni TV, and NFB.

More recently, Myron was Art Director at Switch United, where he co-created interactive installations for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. The Curious Tree was exhibited in the BC Pavilion, and The Digital Gateway is permanently installed in Robson Square in Vancouver. In 2010, Myron was named Interactive Designer of the Year at the Canadian New Media Awards.

Myron is currently working toward his Master's Degree in Media Arts at Emily Carr University of Art + Design and continues to produce and exhibit work internationally.