

Integrating Digital Art Practice and Art History Studies

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1. Introduction

Many professionals in the digital art and design industry emphasize the importance of classical art skills and knowledge as a foundation for creating digital art. As an art educator and theorist, I am trying to bridge the gap between traditional art theory and contemporary studio practice.

This report is based on an introductory level lesson plan of “Visual Art History” for the first-and second-year students of university who aim to be information designers, computer artists or technical directors. In my lesson, students listen to lectures of art history and also make experimental artwork based on what they learn in class. They are assigned themes such as “mythology and character design”, “abstract art and digital painting”, “Japanese traditional picture scroll and character storytelling” from which they are to create their visual ideas.

2. Lesson plan

1) “Basic concept”: At the beginning of the course, students are asked to guess how ancient people tried to depict different aspects of daily life on pottery. Here I introduce “visual distinctiveness (the differentiation of symbols to represent different objects)” as the theme of the lesson. Students learn that it helps human communication and also introduces information design into people’s lives. To better understand this, their first assignment is to design icons or symbols for three pots. The students assume the first pot is used for “drinkable water”, the second is for “medicine” and the last is for “poison”. Even students without drawing skill can understand this concept and try to draw different icons. Afterwards, we read about Greek mythology and then students are to draw some gods characters depicting their relationship before they learn works of Greco-Roman art. Again, “visual distinctiveness” helps students to design characters.

2) “Japanese traditional picture scroll and character storytelling”: In this assignment, students are asked to create a picture scroll “*Emaki*” based on a biography of their favorite artist, or to create a new interpretation of a Japanese traditional story concerning monsters. This exercise demonstrates how through designing characters a story can be told in a series of pictures. Students also learn how picture scrolls have been appreciated, so that they can see some similarities between them and current animation, movie or video games in terms of narration or scrolling interface.

3) “Abstract art and digital painting”: In another assignment called “*Oto-e*” (sound painting), students listen to two different types of music and then digitally paint what they feel by using a painting software. Once the paintings are complete, the class as a whole guess which picture represents which song. In this exercise, the class average for accurate guesses was 82 %. Students are able to then see reoccurring tendencies in patterns and colors, which are common in historical abstract art.



Figure1. Assignment -picture scroll and character storytelling

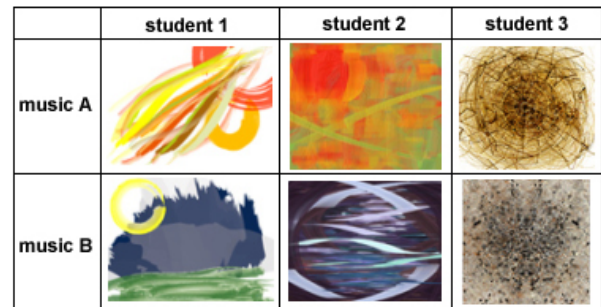


Figure2. Assignment - “*Oto-e*” abstract art and digital painting

4) “Contemporary media art and exhibition design”: In this part of the course, I lecture on installations and how they create meaning for an audience. Students are shown images of installations of electronic media by notable artists (such as N. Paik, K. Wodiczko, R. Lozano-Hemmer and T. Iwai). From these discussions, students design floor plans for exhibitions based on the works they have just learned or something new (It could be their original plan for installation works). This exercise asks students how exhibition design can coexist to add meaning and significance to artwork.

3. Conclusion

Using this hands-on lesson format, I find that students are able to understand theories of visual art much more easily than when they listen to lectures alone. The traditional arts provide rich resources for storytelling and visual communication. I believe even learning art history pre-media revolution in the 20th century is necessary for computer artists as a part of visual literacy that will help their preproduction and other artistic judgment.

Reference

1. TAKAHATA, I. 1999. *Ju~ni-seiki no anime~shon: kokuho~emakimono ni miru eigateki animeteki naru mono.* (Animation in the twelfth century: Im-like and anime-like elements seen in our national treasures, picture scrolls), Tokuma Shoten, Tokyo;