

MC71177A – Visual Storytelling

Gerry McCulloch

Autumn Term Wednesdays 4-6pm
MRB Screen 2



Visual Storytelling

I'm not as interested in the notes as the spaces in between them.
(Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart)

Course Aims:

Visual Storytelling invites you to make an engaging visual sequence consisting of between 8 - 12 still images.

Inspired by artist-photographer Duane Michals, the objective of the course is to make a sequence of still images that conveys a story, a dream, a memory, an impression or an emotional tone that expands in the gaps between frames - and beyond . . .

Your sequence may be linear or non-linear and may be classically structured, circular or experimental in nature. Please find examples of visual storytelling sequences here: <http://www.darshanaphotoart.co.uk/sequences>

Course Premise:

1. Only the impossible is worth attempting. Only the invisible is worth photographing.
2. Composition (contrasts within frames) and the cut (contrasts between frames) are the primary locus of meaning in sequential art.
3. Arranging your images to prioritise meaning in the cuts (not vice-versa) is the path to engaging story content.

Learning Methods:

During teaching weeks 1-5, we consider photographic sequences by artist Duane Michals as an alternative to the classical visual grammar of television and cinema. We investigate accepted conventions of moving-image narration and explore alternatives.

We look at pictorial narrative conventions that are:

1. **Internal to an image** – Focus / Composition / Contrast / Colour & tone / Shape / Line / Lighting quality / etc.
2. **Characteristic of a sequence** - The cut / Continuity / Screen direction / Point of view / Eye-lines / montage / etc.

We consider the possibility of **photographing the intangible** by:

1. Identifying a personal theme through play.
2. Inhabiting our idea imaginatively and intuitively.

3. Evolving pictorial verisimilitude that conveys our fledgling idea in a universally accessible form.
4. Recognising how structural elements in sequential art such as composition and the cut, can facilitate narrative immersion.
5. Considering the role of conceptual thinking and literal associations.

Our aim is to make intangible emotions, feelings, memories, thoughts and impulses visible – to photograph a sequence of frames that elicits an affective response that is located predominantly in the juxtapositions within and the gaps between frames, i.e. in the contrasts proposed by compositions and cuts.

Week by Week:

1. Course Intro
2. Photographing the Invisible
3. Presentations 1 with Peer Feedback
4. Presentations 2 with Peer Feedback
5. Preproduction & Planning
- 6-9. Individual Tutorials & Making your Sequence
10. Test Screenings with Peer Feedback
11. Final Screenings & Submission

Course Notes:

On weeks 3 & 4, you pitch your idea to the class and we begin the preproduction planning phase on week 5. Between weeks 6-11 you work independently towards realising your project, with tutorial support.

Ideally, you already possess basic competence with a reasonable quality still image-making device (camera or phone, but preferably a camera with manual controls) and are familiar with the fundamentals of a free image editing software programme such as iPhoto.

You must ensure you have access to a camera and computer during weeks 6-11 of the course. No video editing or sound is involved and you may work with either black and white, colour or both.

Submission:

Your sequence is submitted to the main Media & Communications office at the end of week 11. Your written reflection is submitted at the beginning of the Spring term - allowing you approximately four weeks to reflect on your creative process.

- Images should be numbered and include your name e.g. Gerry_McCulloch_01.jpg
- Individual Images should be no larger than 2Mb .jpg format
- The word count for your supporting statement is 1,500

Learning Outcomes:

You are requested to demonstrate:

1. *Imaginative and aesthetic skills* in devising a still-image sequence.
2. *Practical and organizational skills* in the planning and realization of a visual sequence.
3. *Flexibility, adaptability and willingness to experiment* throughout the creative process.
4. *Presentation skills* in pitching an idea to the class and participating in discussions.
5. *Conceptual skills* in analysing key practical, aesthetic and critical aspects of sequential art and reflecting on your creative process.

Assessment:

You are assessed on three elements:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| 1. Completed still-image sequence | Learning Outcomes 1, 2 & 3 | – 60% |
| 2. Presenting your idea to the class | Learning Outcome 4 | – 20% |
| 3. Supporting statement | Learning Outcome 5 | – 20% |

Suggested Reading (Creative Play):

Atavar, Michael - **How to Be An Artist**, Kiosk Publishing, 2009.

Benedict-Jones, Linda - **Storyteller: The Photographs of Duane Michals**, Prestel, 2014.

Cameron, Julia - **The Artists Way**, Pan, 1994.

Fulford & Halpern - **The Photographer's Playbook**, Aperture, 2014.

Lynch, David - **Catching the Big Fish**, Michael Joseph, 2007.

Watson-Payne, Bridget - **How Art Can Make You Happy**, Chronicle Books, 2017.

Suggested Reading (Visual Storytelling):

Block, Bruce - **The Visual Story**, Focal Press, 2007.

Mamet, David - **On Directing Film**, Penguin Books, 1992.

MacKendrick, Alexander - **On Filmmaking**, Faber & Faber, 2006.

McCloud, Scott – **Understanding Comics**, Harper Perennial, 2001.

Murch, Walter - **In the Blink of an Eye**, Silman James Press, 2001.

Suggested Reading (Reflection):

Claxton, Guy – **Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind**, 4th Estate, 1998.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly - **Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience**, Harper Perennial, 2008.

Bresson, Robert - **Notes on the Cinematographer**, Green Integer, 1997.

Herrigel, Eugene – **Zen in the Art of Archery**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953.

Lotto, Beau – **Deviate**, W&N, 2017.