Art and production problems in an educational film on design elements
by Stanley Edwin Torrence

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF APPLIED ART
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Abstract:
Several scripts were written in preparation for an educational film on the design elements. Through a series of revisions a final script was narrowed to an introduction of the visual elements.

In preparation for filming over one hundred junior high and fifth and sixth grade youngsters contributed toward the film-making by making costumes, masks, stick sculptures and paintings. They became acquainted with elements of design, learned new ways to use materials, and found a new enjoyment of art.

Composition, animation and special effects were undertaken at the camera while timing, continuity and other effects were accomplished at the editing bench. Voices were added and music has been arranged. Until the release print is returned from the processor final results cannot be evaluated.

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ABSTRACT

Several scripts were written in preparation for an educational film on the design elements. Through a series of revisions a final script was narrowed to an introduction of the visual elements.

In preparation for filming over one hundred junior high and fifth and sixth grade youngsters contributed toward the film-making by making costumes, masks, stick sculptures and paintings. They became acquainted with elements of design, learned new ways to use materials, and found a new enjoyment of art.

Composition, animation and special effects were undertaken at the camera while timing, continuity and other effects were accomplished at the editing bench. Voices were added and music has been arranged. Until the release print is returned from the processor final results cannot be evaluated.

INTRODUCTION

Educating children in art has not been consistent, nor has it been adequately stressed. Limited use of art films in the elementary school provided a challenge to do a film project on the visual elements which would appeal to children.

Information was sought from the Eastman Kodak Company, from the Film and TV Department at Montana State College, and from the General Film Laboratories of Hollywood and finally from personal contact with N. C. Dimick 16mm Motion Picture Production Services of Portland, Oregon. A number of books were also consulted, particularly for the use of design in film-making.

To assure the greatest educational value the project was carefully planned from the narrative and selection of props to the use of professional film-making techniques and procedures.

It was necessary before work could begin on the film project to establish some objectives. These were as follows:

1. To develop an educational film for teaching the fundamental elements of design in an entertaining way.
2. To show the relationship between the artist and his work.
3. To involve an actual class in all aspects of creation, development, acting and filming.
4. To relate the elements of design to the story and to

the editing of the film.

5. To provide a framework which would allow ample freedom for creativity.

Early attempts to establish a plot included one in which youngsters would caper through enormous enlargements of their own abstract paintings. This was not technically feasible with equipment that could be secured for filming and had to be abandoned in favor of a new plot.

In this age of space exploration appeal might be achieved by writing a story about a moon rocket. To visualize the story a set of sketches showing each shot was prepared (Figure 1). These were placed on the floor in comic strip fashion. Weaknesses began to appear. The visual element, value, did not work in smoothly. The second half of the story did not use the visual elements enough. The sorcerer, antagonist, was inclined to be a more inspiring creator than the artist, protagonist. Too many things were happening in the story for the short length of the film.

Some changes made were as follows:

1. Introduction, frequent mention, and final summation of the elements was made.
2. The "right and wrong way to art" was changed to "art is fun no matter how you go about it."
3. The plot was rewritten to add strength to the elements.

4. Troll dolls were introduced to symbolize each of the visual elements.[1]

A revised script was prepared with each change of camera view carefully indicated (Figure 2).

The next step was to visualize how the story would go together shot by shot and, if possible, to get some idea of timing.

A technique known by the film industry as checkerboard editing was adopted, but to see more clearly how it worked an editing plan was drawn. A brief description of each shot, its length in frames, in seconds, and in feet was shown as well as lap dissolves and fades (Figure 3).

An allowance for $2\frac{1}{2}$ words per second was made and the pace of silent shots geared to mood, importance, interest, and distance, a close-up shot being generally briefer than a long shot.

As a direct result of the editing plan further script revisions had to be made. A set of index cards, known in the industry as story-board cards, was prepared, one for each shot (Figure 4). The cards were separated into the following groups

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[1]Commercial dolls were used even though art would have been better served to have had the children make them. But as child-made artifacts seldom have appeal for other children this was not felt wise in this case.

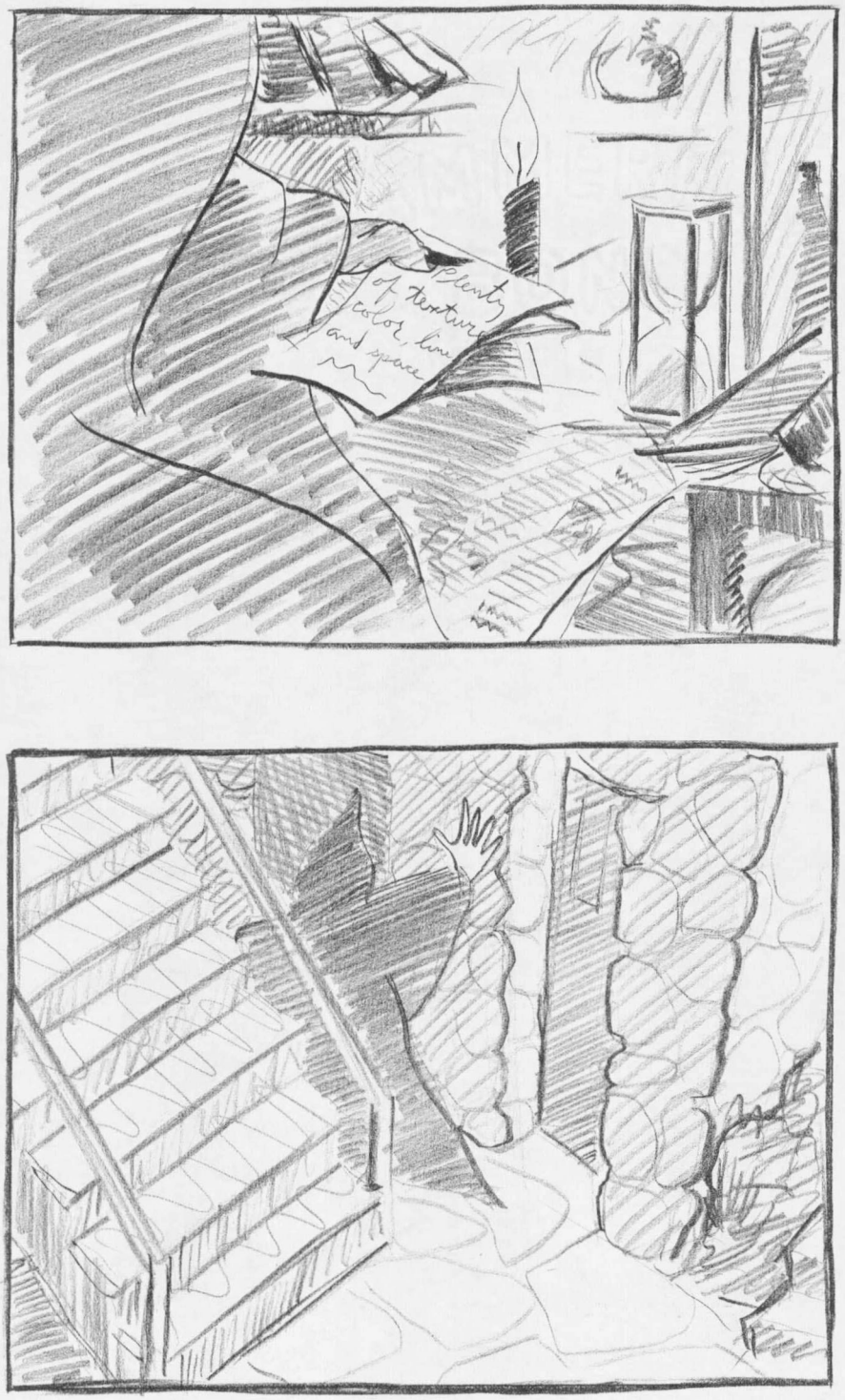

Figure 1. Sketches for Camera Shots

for a shooting schedule:[2]

1. Shots of Zama.

2. Shots of trolls with animation.

3. Shots of set without Zama or trolls.

4. Special effects (titling, moon, sunrise, etc.).

Below is a synopsis of the final script in narrative form:

DESIGN AND ZAMA

A student-made non-objective painting was chosen to use as a background for the title, DESIGN AND ZAMA. One by one the troll dolls, each dressed as an element of design, enter and cause the title to be effected. Then Color causes the letters to become bright magenta, Line causes the letters to have lines through them, Texture allows the texture of the background to come through white letters and Space crowds the letters into a pile and spaces them out again. When that happens, Zama appears.

"So! You dare to dabble in my magic arts?
I cast a spell to still your hearts!"

Zama drops his wand on the table, accidentally getting it into wet paint. While this is happening credits appear superimposed over the action. Zama picks up his wand and --

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[2]The shooting schedule simplified the task of setting up the camera and lights. All the shots from any one position could be completed which would avoid the need to readjust the equipment. For example, all close-up shots of Zama could be taken from one set-up.