

Techniques and Practical Skills in Scenery, Set Dressing and Decorating for Live-Action Film and Television



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Skills Victoria/ISS Institute TAFE Fellowship

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Executive Summary

In film and television production, the art department operates, under the leadership of the production designer or art director, to create and manipulate the overall 'look, feel and mood' of the production. The appearance of sets and locations transports audiences into the world of the story, and is an essential element in making a production convincing and evocative.

Although the set usually creates the dominant visual motif, the set dressings and properties (commonly known as 'props') are coequal design elements. In most cases they are the chief design tools utilised to provide visual clues about the personal characteristics and socioeconomic status of the inhabitants of the set, while the set itself establishes the location of the scene. These settings are rarely left to chance; a great deal of work and imagination goes into constructing appropriate backdrops to any story.

The Australian screen industry, as a part of a global movement, is currently in a transitional phase in which a new 'digital framework' is being set. Computer imaging is no longer simply an asset for the visual effects or post-production departments; instead it has become an indispensable part of the production designer's creative repertoire. Unlike the well-established arts of miniatures or stage sets, digital set generation remains new territory for which a workflow has not yet been established. In this transitional phase, new strategies must evolve that will lead to a standard process for the production of a digital set, or for sets created from a combination of 'live' and digital components. The same can be said for the production of props and set dressings, with computer controlled free-form fabrication being utilised at a phenomenally increasing rate.

There has been a current trend within the screen industry and government training bodies, both in Australia and overseas, to promote the move into digital technical areas of design; with areas such as animation and multimedia design being high on the list. Unfortunately, this foray into digital imaging is narrow in scope and vision, and has not been integrated with the new 'digital framework' of the production industry as a consideration.

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of the current global trends and practices in adapting to the new 'digital framework', primarily concentrating in the areas of properties and set decoration.

The aims of the Fellowship Programme are:

- To establish a fundamental understanding of state-of-the-art materials and the techniques used in scenery, dressings and prop preparation for live-action film and television, as well as other screen productions.
- To develop a fundamental understanding of newly established art department skill sets, and their relationship to the emerging 'digital framework'.
- To learn and develop new skills and knowledge in the area of art department organisation and processes—especially in relation to the contemporary design process in film, television and other screen productions.
- To establish an understanding of the various roles of art department personnel at an international level, as well as the training background and career paths of practitioners in relation to the emergence of the 'digital framework'.
- To identify underpinning skills and knowledge required of art department personnel at an international level.

Executive Summary

- Evaluate and apply international training methodologies for development of art department crafts and skills.
- Gather resources and materials to develop teaching aids for ongoing training in the area of screen design and art direction, with particular reference to the emerging 'digital framework'.

In identifying the skills deficiencies, a strategy for research was developed incorporating three key elements:

- Identify new methods and technologies in set construction, set decoration and props manufacturing in film and television production.
- Identify the new skills sets associated with new processes and methods relating to the introduction of new technologies into the art department.
- Collect, record, and analyse information relating to the education and training of art department personnel, particularly those practitioners of traditional methods and techniques needing to adapt to new technologies adopted within the art department.

As a component of the Fellowship Programme, research was undertaken overseas in the USA and UK at major production studios and highly regarded film and television schools. Over a period of two weeks interviews were recorded with a wide range of stakeholders including production designers, art directors, set decorators, props managers, production design lecturers, design students, and film school managers. In addition to interviews, inspections of the associated training and production facilities were carried out.

The overseas component of the Fellowship provided the Fellow with an insight into the current situation concerning the role of the art department in production for film and television, and the need to address the issues associated with working within the emerging 'digital' framework and its associated implications. It can be said that on a global level the film and television industry is in a constant state of flux, especially since the introduction of digital technologies.

In regard to the art department outside the design area, technological changes appear to be slow in comparison with the more technology-based areas of production (cinematography and editing, for example) but nevertheless technology has had an impact, albeit somewhat indirectly. The means of addressing these challenges of change are still in progress, but the industry requires a response that is both flexible and of a visionary nature while protecting the more traditional skills.

The training needs of the future generation of art department practitioners should not be based on new technologies alone but incorporate them with time-proven traditional methods and techniques. The key to success of the visited film schools and their graduates is in part their realisation that the art department and the associated skills play an integral role in developing the visual storytelling within a production.

Recommendations are made in the report to government, industry and educational bodies. The recommendations address three key areas of new technology, versatile training products and art department training.

Executive Summary

The recommendations discussed in the report include:

- Target specific training in traditional areas, such as set decoration, set dressing, standby props, and staging, amongst others.
- Review film making course structures to include a more comprehensive training ground for art department personnel.
- Recruit highly skilled professionals from the professional art department area as tutors and teachers in film making courses.
- Review and update art department industry units of competency.
- The development and implementation of short courses to develop existing art department industry craft skills to a broader and higher level of expertise.
- Develop and support programmes that promote the 'pursuit of excellence' of the art department craft skills of the screen industry.

Screen production is moving towards a homogenised workflow within a 'digital framework' and we must adapt to the change. The creative and artistic potential of the new tools is far-reaching and we have just scratched the surface of what is to come.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

2D	Two dimensional
3D	Three dimensional
ADG	Australian Director's Guild
BAFTA	British Academy of Film and Television Arts
BFDG	The British Film Designers Guild
CAD	Computer-aided drafting or computer-aided design. This is a generic term for all computer-assisted drawing.
CGI	Computer generated imagery
CPR	Cinema Production Resources (Hollywood CPR is a community based production facility in Los Angeles, USA)
FDI	Film Design International: a film and television design school based at Pinewood Studios, UK.
IBSA	Innovation and Business Skills Australia
ISS Institute	International Specialised Skills Institute
ITAB	Industry Training and Advisory Board
LAFS	Los Angeles Film School
MA	Masters of Arts
MEAA	Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance
NESTA	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts: an endowment in the UK, that was established by an Act of Parliament in 1998 to maximise the United Kingdom's creative and innovative potential.
NFS	National Film School (former name of National Film and Television School, UK)
NFTS	National Film and Television School, UK
PSW	Props Services West
PSWF	Props Services West Fridays: a weekly promotional event
SDSA	Set Decorators Society of America
SPAA	Screen Producers Association of Australia

Abbreviations and Acronyms

SPQ	Skillset Professional Qualification. Skillset is the sector skills council for creative media in UK. Skillset works with a number of awarding bodies and regulatory authorities to ensure that vocational and occupational qualifications being developed for use in, or progression to, the creative media industries will meet the needs of employers and individuals.
SFX	Special Effects: a term referring to mechanical or physical effects, such as wind, rain, fog, fire, pyrotechnics, etc.
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VFX	Visual Effects: the term refers to effects generated through the camera or in post-production.
VSTA	Victorian Screen Technicians Association
WIFT	Women in Film and Television, Victoria

Definitions

Design	<p>Design is problem setting and problem solving.</p> <p>Design is a fundamental economic and business tool. It is embedded in every aspect of commerce and industry and adds high value to any service or product—in business, government, education and training, and the community in general.</p> <p>Reference: 'Sustainable Policies for a Dynamic Future', Carolynne Bourne AM, ISS Institute 2007.</p>
Innovation	<p>Creating and meeting new needs with new technical and design styles. (New realities of lifestyle).</p> <p>Reference: 'Sustainable Policies for a Dynamic Future', Carolynne Bourne AM, ISS Institute 2007.</p>
Live Action	<p>In screen production, live action refers to works that are acted out by human actors, as opposed to by animation. Use of puppets in productions is also considered to be live action, provided that digital effects are not used to animate them.</p>
Screen Industry	<p>The screen industry covers all businesses involved in the screen production, post-production, broadcasting, distribution, and exhibition sectors.</p>
Skill deficiency	<p>A skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and training is unavailable in Australian education institutions. This arises where skills are acquired on-the-job, gleaned from published material or from working and/or studying overseas.</p> <p>Reference: 'Directory of Opportunities. Specialised Courses with Italy. Part 1: Veneto Region', ISS Institute, 1991.</p> <p>There may be individuals or individual firms that have these capabilities. However, individuals in the main do not share their capabilities, but rather keep the intellectual property to themselves. Over time these individuals retire and pass away. Firms likewise come and go.</p>
Sustainability	<p>The ISS Institute follows the United Nations for Non-Governmental Organisations' definition on sustainability: <i>"Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"</i>.</p> <p>Reference: http://www.unngosustainability.org/CSD_Definitions%20SD.htm</p>

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Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

The International Specialised Skills Institute Inc is an independent, national organisation that for over two decades has worked with Australian governments, industry and education institutions to enable individuals to gain enhanced skills and experience in traditional trades, professions and leading-edge technologies.

At the heart of the Institute are our Fellows. Under the **Overseas Applied Research Fellowship Programme** the Fellows travel overseas. Upon their return, they pass on what they have learnt by:

1. preparing detailed reports to government departments, industry and education institutions
2. recommending improvements to accredited educational courses
3. offering training activities including workshops, conferences and forums.

Over 180 Australians have received Fellowships, across many industry sectors.

Recognised experts from overseas also conduct training activities and events. To date, two dozen leaders in their field have shared their expertise in Australia.

According to Skills Australia's 'Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy 2010':

Australia requires a highly skilled population to maintain and improve our economic position in the face of increasing global competition, and to have the skills to adapt to the introduction of new technology and rapid change.

International and Australian research indicates we need a deeper level of skills than currently exists in the Australian labour market to lift productivity. We need a workforce in which more people have skills, but also multiple and higher level skills and qualifications. Deepening skills across all occupations is crucial to achieving long-term productivity growth. It also reflects the recent trend for jobs to become more complex and the consequent increased demand for higher level skills. This trend is projected to continue regardless of whether we experience strong or weak economic growth in the future. Future environmental challenges will also create demand for more sustainability related skills across a range of industries and occupations.¹

In this context, the Institute works with Fellows, industry and government to identify specific skills in Australia that require enhancing, where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions or other Registered Training Organisations. The Fellows' overseas experience sees them broadening and deepening their own professional practice, which they then share with their peers, industry and government upon their return. This is the focus of the Institute's work.

For further information on our Fellows and our work see www.issinstitute.org.au.

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¹ Skills Australia's 'Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy 2010', pp. 1-2
http://www.skillsaustralia.gov.au/PDFs_RTFS/WWF_strategy.pdf

Acknowledgements

Fellowship Sponsor

The Victorian Government, Skills Victoria is responsible for the administration and coordination of programs for the provision of training and further education, adult community education and employment services in Victoria and is a valued sponsor of the ISS Institute. Belle would like to thank them for providing funding support for this Fellowship.

Supporters

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- Paul Sumner, Skills Victoria Fellowship Co-ordinator, ISS Institute
- Ken Greenhill, Fellowship Report Co-ordinator, ISS Institute
- Bruce McKenzie, Chief Executive Officer, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
- Professor Roger Simpson, Fellowship Mentor
- Sue Marriott, Fellowship Mentor
- Daniel Schultheis, Training Manager, Open Channel

Those Involved in the Development of the Overseas Program

- Frank Simpson, Director, Property Department, Sony Pictures Studios, California, USA
- Pat Brizendine, Operations Manager, Props Services West, California, USA
- Shari E. Schroder, Executive Director, Marketing, Production Services, Twentieth Century Fox, Fox Studios (a unit of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation), California, USA
- Gene Cane, Executive Director, Set Decorators Society of America, California, USA
- Beverly Hadley, Director, NBC Universal Property Department, NBC Universal Studios, California, USA
- Beala Neel, Production Designer, NBC Universal Studios, California, USA
- Joe Byron, Director of Education, The Los Angeles Film School, California, USA
- Barbara Dunphy, Production Designer/Head of Production Design Department, The Los Angeles Film School, California, USA
- Terry Ackland-Snow, Member of the British Film Designers Guild (BFDG), Managing Director, Film Design International, Pinewood Studios, Buckinghamshire, UK
- Debra Wootton B.A., Course Coordinator, Film Design International, Pinewood Studios, Buckinghamshire, UK
- Moira Tait, Co-Head, Production Design Department, The National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield Studios, UK
- Mark Raggett, Freelance Supervising Art Director, UK
- Michelle Hosier, Production Design Course Coordinator, The National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield Studios, UK

Those Involved in the Fellowship Submission

- Neil McCart, Production and Policy Manager, Film Victoria
- Sue Marriott, Freelance Production Management Consultant, Victorian Vice-President, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), President Women in Film and Television, Victoria (WIFT)

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- Daniel Schultheis, Training Manager, Open Channel
- John Hipwell, Melbourne based producer (international credits)
- Colin Budds, Freelance Director (international credits)
- Brendan Campbell, Freelance first assistant director (international credits)
- Paddy Reardon, Freelance Production Designer (international credits)

Australian Organisations Impacted by the Screen Art Direction Industry

Government

- Screen Australia
- Film Victoria
- Australian Broadcasting Commission

Other State Government Organisations

- Pacific Film and Television Commission
- Screen Tasmania
- Screen ACT
- South Australian Film Commission
- Northern Territory Film Office
- Screen West
- New South Wales Film and Television Office

Industry

- Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA)
- Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA)
- Verve – Knowledge and Skills, the industry training advisory board (ITAB) for the arts and culture and sport and recreation sectors in Victoria, Australia.
- Victorian Screen Technicians Association (VSTA)

Professional Associations

- Screen Producers Association Australia (SPAA)
- Australian Director's Guild (ADG)

Education and Training

- Skills Victoria (TAFE)

Community

- Open Channel
- Channel 31

About the Fellow

Name: Julie Belle

Employment

- Julie Belle is currently working at Holmesglen Institute of TAFE and Commercial Arts Training College as a teacher and is planning her own business that will provide training and resources for the film and television art direction sector.

Education and Qualifications

- NSW Higher School Certificate, Cessnock High School, NSW, 1972
- Carl Schwartz School of Interior Design, 1 year part-time course, Newcastle, NSW, 1973
- Diploma in Art Education, NSW, 3 years completed, Newcastle CAE, 1976
- Costume Design for Film and Television, 1 year part-time, UCLA, California, USA, 1984
- Certificate of Competency in Computer-Aided Architectural and Engineering Design Systems, D.R.C Auto Training, North Sydney, 1993
- Advanced Custom CAD Certificate, D.R.C Auto Training, North Sydney, 1993
- Train the Trainer, ABC Management Training, 1994
- Workplace Assessor Training, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, 2001
- Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, 2002
- Diploma of Vocational and Educational Training, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, Melbourne, 2006

Memberships

- Member Design Institute of Australia (Design Educator)
- Member of the Board of Directors of Open Channel
- Member of the Board of Directors of Women in Film and Television (Victoria)

Biography

Julie Belle has worked in the film and television design business since 1976. Her work has encompassed a wide variety of productions, and she has particular expertise in the drama production field. She has worked throughout Australia, as well as internationally as a production designer and art director. Belle undertook the bulk of her training and began working as a designer in Sydney, where she was appointed Head of Design at the Australian Broadcasting Commission. In 1995, she resumed her work as a senior production designer, and moved to Melbourne for a six-month long production.

After leaving the ABC in late 1996, Belle began freelance work in Melbourne as a production designer and designed a children's drama series, as well as numerous television commercials for local and international production companies. Since 2001, the Fellow has been teaching interior design and screen design in Melbourne. She is currently working at Holmesglen Institute of TAFE as a teacher.

In 2008 Belle felt the need to return to the screen industry at an elevated level as she had serious concerns for the future of 'the art department' in a period of radical and rapid change throughout the screen production industry. Soon after, she was appointed to the Board of Directors of both Open Channel and Women in Film and Television, Victoria (WIFT).

About the Fellow

In 2009 Belle organised and chaired a symposium and demonstration event for WIFT in association with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image exhibition 'Setting the Scene'. The event, called 'Designing Women', featured six leading female professionals in the fields of design and art department crafts. The professional practitioners shared their experiences, career-path stories and knowledge with the audience and then participated in a series of demonstrations of their craft skills. The symposium was a sellout success, with an audience consisting of film students, screen professionals, new professionals and interested members of the public. Later in the year, Belle acted as the production design mentor for the Channel 31/Open Channel/Film Victoria mentor project 'One Night Stand'. In the programme she mentored six novice production designers/art directors for their participation in the production of six half-hour drama productions to be aired on Channel 31.

During September 2009, Belle undertook the overseas component of her Fellowship programme and was particularly impressed with much of the work being done in the USA and UK with regard to both industry training and development, and academic qualifications in this area. Since her return she has worked with Open Channel to develop and deliver a six-day 'Art Department Foundation' short course, with ten students gaining the knowledge and skills to better prepare them to enter the art department as art department assistants.

Through her board memberships, public speaking at industry events, consultation to industry members and training bodies, and mentorships, the Fellow has continued to promote the role of the art department in production, as well as the need to address issues associated with working under the emerging 'digital' production framework. Belle is currently researching the content for a series of texts relating to the screen design and art department areas.

Aims of the Fellowship Programme

The aims of the Fellowship programme were as follows:

- To establish a fundamental understanding of state-of-the-art materials and techniques used in scenery, dressings and prop preparation for live-action film and television, as well as other screen productions.
- To develop a fundamental understanding of newly established art department skill sets, and their relationship to the emerging 'digital framework'.
- To learn and develop new skills and knowledge in the area of art department organisation and processes—especially in relation to the contemporary design process in film, television and other screen productions.
- To establish an understanding of the various roles of art department personnel at an international level, as well as the training background and career paths of practitioners in relation to the emergence of the 'digital framework'.
- To identify underpinning skills and knowledge required of art department personnel at an international level.
- Evaluate and apply international training methodologies for the development of art department crafts and skills.
- Gather resources and materials to develop teaching aids for ongoing training in the area of screen design and art direction, with particular reference to the emerging 'digital framework'.

The Australian Context

In screen productions, the art department operates, under the leadership of the production designer or art director, to create and manipulate the overall 'look, feel and mood' of the production. Although the set usually creates the dominant visual motif, the set dressings and properties are coequal design elements. Generally they are the chief design tools utilised to provide visual clues about the personal characteristics and socioeconomic status of the inhabitants of the set, while the set itself establishes the location of the scene.

Depending on the size and type of production and budget, the art department may vary in size from a few individuals to many hundreds. In relation to the size of the production, the roles of various art department personnel may change from production to production. There is, however, a core set of basic skills that all art department crew members should possess, as well as a base level of knowledge and understanding required to function effectively within the department (Refer to Attachments 1, 2 and 3 in the Attachments section). The requisite skills and knowledge apply not only to the traditional screen industry, but also cross over into related areas, such as digital screen production, theatre and display.

The Australian screen industry is currently in a transitional phase in which a new 'digital framework' is being set. Computer generated images have taken the leap from playing minor roles in some productions to becoming the main player within the global screen industry. Computer imaging is no longer simply an asset for the visual effects or post-production department; instead, it has become an indispensable part of the production designer's creative repertoire. Unlike the well-established arts of miniatures or stage sets, digital set generation remains new territory for which a workflow has not yet been established. In this transitional phase, new strategies must be evolved that will lead to a standard process for the production of a digital set, or for sets created from a combination of 'live' and digital components. The same can be said for the production of props and set dressings, with computer controlled free-form fabrication (also known as rapid prototyping) being utilised at a phenomenally increasing rate.

Without a basic knowledge of Computer Graphic Image (CGI) production, art departments cannot adjust their workflow, nor can they optimise their means of communication. This makes cross training, between the two disciplines, essential to this transition. The art department needs members that have both the knowledge and desire to foster education in the visual effects and art departments. Hand-in-hand with the introduction of pre-visualisation in the art department is the increase in the use of new materials to suit the requirements of new methods of manufacture. Once again cross training is essential; building a new set of job skills with both traditional manual skills and an understanding of digital manufacturing techniques.

The following article excerpt, Written in 2006, for the US Art Director's Guild (ADG) magazine addressed the issues being faced with the emergence of the new 'digital framework' at that time.

The Future is Now, by Thomas A Walsh, ADG President

There is a vast array of new digital technologies being introduced into the workplace at a rapid pace. There is a new generation of designers and specialists, as well, who are mastering these tools and providing services to our live-action Art Departments. In many instances their positions are freely interchangeable and only restricted by an individual's skill sets and interests.

The Australian Context

The digital, or progressive, Art Department's job categories will include Design Visualisation (d-vis), pre-visualisation (pre-vis), 3D Set Design, 2D and 3D concept illustration, 3D prop design, 3D manufacturing (sculpting tools and rapid prototyping), digital locations, research and archive management, and IT management. In some situations these digital designers' and specialists' abilities mirror those of the more traditional Art Director, Set Designer, Model Maker, Storyboard Artist, Illustrator and Art Department Coordinator. Digital tools, however, will continue to blur the 'who does what' lines within the Art Department as these technologies make it possible for all designers and their associates to become more multi-faceted, regardless of our industry's past traditions and jurisdictional practices.

Historically, the Art Director has always been the head of the Art Department. We continue to be the principal stewards and advocates for many of the crafts that interact with us. The digital age is creating a new playing field where the most proficient and talented artists will always be the first to be hired based more upon their abilities than upon their affiliations. It is the Art Directors Guild's intention to embrace and nurture these developing technologies and their practitioners, and to build the necessary bridges so that we can create a more progressive Art Department, one that is strategically conceived for the digital age and one which represents, with equality, those with whom we have the most in common. It is our hope that you will share our excitement and admiration for the work of these talented artists and collaborators. Their tools and methods of working will provide us all with many new and exciting options to do what we do best – visualise the story.

US Art Director's Guild magazine Perspective, 2006 (viewed 1 November, 2008, http://www.wiki.artdirectors.org/~wiki2/index.php?title=The_Future_is_Now).

The Australian screen industry, government and training bodies need to look at the advances that have been made overseas since that time, and develop a new set of job skills appropriate to our own industry.

According to recent surveys and recommendations from within the Australian screen industry and government training bodies, the area of art department skills has been targeted as an area with growing skills deficiencies.² It is not only of concern that there are skills deficiencies within the industry and a lack of training for those entering the industry, but it is also likely that traditional skills will soon be lost due to an ageing workforce. Older practitioners who possess a wealth of traditional knowledge and experience need to be given opportunities to impart their wisdom to the younger generation entering the workforce, enabling the cross training platform to be set, as well as providing the prospect of a second career for those reaching the end of their screen career—an approach that is beneficial to all parties involved.

In order to keep jobs in the Australian film and television industry and to give our screen industry workforce the capability of reaching high levels of excellence, we need to give our practitioners the necessary skills and knowledge to compete. Those skills need to be a product of integrating the traditional art department skills with skills associated with the emerging new technologies. The skills of the art department are broadening, and training needs to reflect this.

² Victorian Screen Industry Review, Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. August 2008, viewed 11 November 2009, <http://www.diird.vic.gov.au/diird-strategies-and-initiatives/victorian-screen-industry-review-and-strategy/victorian-screen-industry-review>. Industry Change Drivers Report, Verve-Knowledge and Skills. February 2008, viewed 11 November 2008, http://www.skills.vic.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0017/23408/Cultural-and-Rec-Industry.pdf

The Australian Context

A specific benefit in obtaining the new sets of art department skills is that they can be passed on to both those already in the film and television industry and those entering the industry, thus increasing the pool of knowledgeable and skilled practitioners.

The same skills can also be spread across a broader range of visual arts areas, such as theatre and performing arts, window dressing, exhibition display, and museum display. There would also be a crossover of skills into areas of screen production, such as corporate or business productions, live-action design for the web, and other new media.

An improvement in the quality of screen production can be seen as a benefit to both the state of Victoria and to Australia as a nation. Having well trained and skilled art department personnel available to home and overseas productions can only be seen as a positive for the film and television industry. Often, overseas productions will bring their own key creative crew members (eg production designer, art director) and, in turn, they may import their own specialists for the production, since, on past occasions, we have not been able to offer the level of expertise required for the particular job—especially within the new ‘digital framework’. Primarily, this has been because we have few experts who possess a wide knowledge and skill base, and those that do have these qualifications are often occupied with other productions, or are reaching retirement age. This leads to us losing work opportunities within our national production industry.

It should also be noted that live action in screen encompasses an extensive area including not only drama production for film and television, but such areas as entertainment (live and recorded), children’s programmes, news and current affairs, historical re-enactments for documentaries, television and other digital commercials, game shows, and corporate media; the list goes on. There has been a current trend within the screen industry and government training bodies to promote the move into digital technical areas of design with such areas as animation and multimedia design being high on the list. Unfortunately, this move into digital imaging is narrow in scope and vision, and has not been integrated with the new ‘digital framework’ of the production industry in mind.

Screen production is moving towards a homogenised workflow within a ‘digital framework’ and we must adapt to the change. The creative and artistic potential of the new tools is far-reaching and we have just scratched the surface of what is to come.

Identifying the Skills Deficiencies

1. Identify new methods and technologies in set construction, set decoration and props manufacturing in film and television production.

- Conduct interviews with leading US and UK production designers and art directors and record and compare information pertaining to the relevance of the recent introduction of pre-visualisation techniques in creating new processes and methods of set and prop manufacture.
- Collect information and analyse new manufacturing methods in relation to various types of screen live-action productions.
- Differentiate 'best practice' processes of rapid prototyping of props and set components and record information on major productions.

Aim: To evaluate the impact of the recent introduction of pre-visualisation to film and television production and to identify the new techniques and processes that are developing within the art department. Analyse current methods of sets and props manufacture. To become knowledgeable and skilled in understanding the new design processes evolving within the international film and television industry.

2. Identify the new skills sets associated with new processes and methods relating to the introduction of new technologies into the art department.

- Compare and distinguish the differences and commonalities between leading US and British production design offices, workshops and model shops where traditional skills have been adapted to work with new technologies.
- Observe and analyse the techniques of laser cutting, etching, water-jet cutting and, in particular, free-form fabrication from point cloud digital models.
- Determine new skills sets associated with the evolving techniques and methodologies.
- Determine what new technologies are being applied that are not currently being used in Australia.

Aim: To become skilled in the identification of new skills sets for art department personnel with regard to the changing requirements of film and television production.

3. Collect, record and analyse information relating to the education and training of art department personnel, particularly those practitioners of traditional methods and techniques needing to adapt to new technologies.

- Compare and distinguish the differences and commonalities between the US and Britain pertaining to current practices in training art department staff, teaching resources, equipment and professional development programmes that keep teaching staff abreast of new technologies and applications.
- Identify and evaluate available industry standard software and that which is being taught in education and training institutions.
- Collect curriculum information pertaining to training.
- Identify and evaluate courses and training currently available in the US and Britain for practitioners already in the film and television industry but needing to update their traditional skills.

Aim: Learn about innovative training courses and methods of training for art department staff. Develop case studies as points of reference to inspire innovation in the training of art department personnel within the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) environment.

The International Experience

Sony Pictures Studios Property Department, California, USA

Contact: Frank Simpson, Director, Property Department

Objectives

The aim of the visit to Sony Pictures Studios Property Department was to collect information pertaining to the changes in processes and techniques in art direction and props management in recent times.

Outcomes

The Sony Pictures Studios Property Department has been serving the Hollywood film industry since 1924 and offers props to feature films, television productions, commercials, music videos, student film productions, promotional events and other projects. Their inventory consists of over 70,000 square feet (around 6,500 square metres) of a broad range of action and dressing props including:

- furniture
- artworks
- relics and antiques
- statues
- drapery
- lighting fixtures
- household items
- hand props.



Typical dressing props found at Sony Pictures Studios Property Department, Los Angeles

The International Experience



Lighting fixture props from all periods



A small proportion of the many artwork props available at Sony Pictures Studios Property Department

The International Experience

The turnover of props is a major concern for this organisation. The current area of props could be doubled within two years if all props that came into the store were kept, therefore there is a constant requirement to control the amount of props contained within the store.

Although the storage and operational methods are quite traditional, the Sony Props Department uses tracking software and a system where every prop is photographed, bar-coded and recorded on a database. Props are kept or discarded according to their rental history. Decisions to eliminate props from the inventory are based purely on financial viability and assessment does not take into consideration a long-term rental potential or the prop's current physical condition. If the prop isn't making money, it is eliminated from the inventory. Props that are discarded are either donated to smaller prop stores or to charities, eg Habitat for Humanity, Hollywood Cinema Production Resources (Hollywood CPR).

Sony Props Department also has a service where props are stored for a feature film until the film has been 'locked off'. The props may be stored for up to 2 months and after the clearance of the film, the production generally recoup on most of the props and discard the rest. These props are stored in shipping containers on site and locked until cleared.

The prop store operates under Local 44 Union Group, where all members of staff are required to be union members. The teamsters (those who transport the props to and from productions) are under a separate Union Group, Local 399.

Frank Simpson, who has worked in props for 31 years, suggests that the requirements to work as a prop storeman are a good general props knowledge and good physical condition as the job involves a large amount of lifting and moving of prop items, including furniture.

Props Services West, California, USA

Contact: Pat Brizendine, Operations Manager, Props Services West

Objectives

The aim of the visit to Props Services West (PSW) was to collect information pertaining to the changes in processes and techniques in art direction and props management in recent times.

Outcomes

PSW was founded in 1978 by set decorator Bill Harp and art director Chuck Murawski, and has long been favoured by set decorators, production designers, art directors and prop masters as a prop source; as seen by the countless television productions, feature films and commercials that they support.

As a division of Occidental Entertainment Group Holdings during the past five years, PSW has steadily expanded its inventory; outgrowing its previous 40,000 square feet (around 3,716 square metres) Los Angeles (LA) based location. The LA location continues to operate in conjunction with the new site, which is in the heart of Hollywood.

Opened in June 2009, the Hollywood site is a 12,000 square feet (around 1,115 square metres) storefront featuring high-end contemporary props and set dressings displayed in 'vignettes' throughout the space. These 'vignettes' consist of entire room settings that are fully decorated and accessorised.

The International Experience



Displays of furnishings and dressing props at Prop Services West



Furnishings and set decoration props in the new space at Prop Services West

The International Experience



Dining room dressing props displayed as a 'vignette'

The Hollywood and Los Angeles locations interface via a video link allowing clients to view inventories at each locale on a big screen monitor, so when customers come into either prop store and cannot find what they need, they can access the database from both stores with ease and in comfort. Orders are placed and/or picked up at either locale, with location delivery arrangements available upon request. A conference area and Wi-Fi Internet connectivity is also available at both locations.

PSW Fridays (PSWF) is a weekly promotional event that features complimentary sandwiches and soft drinks for decorators who visit the Hollywood location between noon and 2.00 pm every Friday. PSW's signature chocolate-chip cookies, coffee and refreshments are available daily. Unlike most prop store staff in Los Angeles, PSW staff members are chosen not only for their props handling capabilities, but also for their creative abilities to decorate and accessorise. They are also chosen for their ability to present the user-friendly customer service on which the company is building its reputation.

At a time when other entertainment related companies are scaling back, or relocating outside of Los Angeles, PSW's management have recognised the need to build their place in the market by providing superior customer service and a price structure that is competitive.

While still supplying the same props as other suppliers, their high-level customer service approach seems to be satisfying a new breed of set decorator, whose preproduction time is limited and who is comfortable with online shopping.

In addition to PSW, Occidental Entertainment Group Holdings operates a dozen sound stages in Hollywood and surrounding areas, along with a lighting and grip division, a virtual studio, a motion capture stage, and three dozen office buildings that cater to the entertainment community.

The International Experience

Fox Studios Production Services, California, USA

A unit of Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation

Contact: Shari E. Schroder, Executive Director, Marketing, Production Services, Twentieth Century Fox

Objectives

The aim of the visit to Fox Studios Production Services Department was to collect information pertaining to changes in processes and techniques in art direction and props manufacture and to inspect the studio craft departments.

Outcomes

Fox Studios in Los Angeles has become highly corporatised in recent times and is essentially used as a facility that is rented to clients on a 'hire by need' basis.

The Production Services department has been reduced to a series of workshops with a skeleton staff, and is utilised according to the current production needs of the studio.

The Fellow was given a guided tour of the facilities by Shari E. Schroder's assistant from the marketing department and little opportunity was given to talk with practitioners. From brief observations at the time of the visit, it was obvious that development of the Production Services department was not a priority with studio management and no training of junior practitioners appeared to be underway.

Set Decorators Society of America, California, USA

Contacts:

- Gene Cane, Executive Director, Set Decorators Society of America (SDSA)
- Daryn-Reid Goodall, Set Decorator and Member SDSA
- Jay Ray, Set Decorator and Member SDSA
- Liz Kay, Production Designer
- Natalie Contreras, Assistant Set Decorator and Associate Member SDSA

Objectives

The aim of the visit to the Set Decorators Society of America (SDSA) was to meet with set decorators, production designers and art directors in order to collect information pertaining to changes in processes and techniques in art department practices in recent times.

Outcomes

The SDSA, founded in 1993, is the only national non-profit organisation in the USA dedicated to the support of the set decoration profession. Members include qualified set decorators of motion pictures and television (TV), including commercials and music videos, as well as business members who provide furnishings, materials, and professional services to the trade.

The International Experience

The Society offers Fellowship and networking opportunities for set decorators, crew members and vendors within the craft, and a bridge to other design and technical professions in the entertainment industry. For students and apprentices hoping to enter the field, there are associate and student memberships, as well as internships and other educational opportunities.

SDSA's many activities are planned with the objectives to preserve the past, provide businesses with strategies for success, and pave the way for an ever more professional group of set decorators in the future.



Members of the Set Decorators Society of America with the Fellow at SDSA headquarters in North Hollywood. Left to right, Gene Cane (SDSA Executive Director), Julie Belle (ISS Institute Fellow), Jay Ray (Set Decorator), Liz Kay (Production Designer), Daryn-Reid Goodall (Set Decorator), Natalie Contieras (Assistant Set Decorator).

An informal meeting of interested members was convened to meet the Fellow and discuss the issues of change in the industry and the current situation for set decorators, production designers, and other art department members. Several issues were at the forefront of the discussions.

Those who attended the meeting expressed a growing concern with the diminishing knowledge of producers and directors as to the various roles and their jurisdictions within the art department. Because of this the boundaries of responsibility for certain roles are becoming increasingly unclear. This is sometimes attributed to the need to economise on productions, but mainly it is felt that it is due to a lack of education about those roles and the responsibilities they carry.

Most new producers and directors in the industry have an educational background in film production where the production design component might be included at a minimum level, but the other roles within the art department have been ignored.

The International Experience

There is a perception, with new producers especially, that all art department personnel have homogenous, interchangeable skills. The SDSA members at the meeting see this as a short-sighted view, especially in the planning of a production. This inevitably results in extra costs in time as well as money to the production.

The SDSA members also recognise a problem with the public perception of what a set decorator does. Often those wanting to enter the business have the misguided idea that it is a glamorous profession that includes little more than shopping, decorating and accessorising sets.

Over the past few years, the SDSA have developed a programme where they invite interested parties to 'talk to the decorator' at an organised event. There, the prospective set decorators have a chance to speak to many set decorators with widely varied backgrounds. The essential idea is to educate and inform those who have common misconceptions, and to guide those with potential onto a tangible career path. The programme has been very successful. They also work with several film schools in LA, helping with mentorship and internship programmes, where students are given 'real life' job experience.

The SDSA have been involved in assisting film schools to develop their curricula and programmes. The problem the SDSA members see here is that while their roles are generally understood at a local level; at a government level they find the same confusion about the separate roles that collectively comprise an art department. The SDSA have lobbied relevant State Government bodies in the USA in order to correct this problem, but political turnover and structure changes have hampered progress.

There was also a concern about productions that are moving to other states, with particular states offering producers incentives to move to new areas. While some Hollywood heads of department and other professionals may work on the initial production, untrained and inexperienced local staff will be promoted quickly for subsequent productions.

There is generally little regard to the characterisation of sets and poor time and budget management decisions are made. These poor decisions have resulted in a fall in quality of the subsequent end product, and not only are the professionals deprived of the work, but the promoted set decorators find themselves out of their depth. This is a growing concern with set decorators, who see the reputation of their profession as being at risk.

Finally, there was discussion about the declining expectations of quality in the target market of most film and television production—the 18 to 35-year-old demographic. It was noted that most people in this age bracket have been accustomed to viewing images either on a computer monitor or a mobile phone screen. Quality of image does not seem to concern the majority of this demographic and has influenced the way in which producers perceive the quality required of their end product.

The resultant 'reality style' of set dressing and art direction doesn't embrace the fundamentals of the craft, which is to build and develop characters and be a major part of the visual storytelling of the script. The SDSA members feel that this will have a far-reaching impact on future production, and envision that their involvement with educational institutes is one strategy to counteract this trend.

The International Experience

NBC Universal Studios, California, USA

Contacts:

- Beverly Hadley, Director, NBC Universal Property Department
- Beala Neel, Production Designer, NBC Universal Studios

Objectives

The aim of the visit to NBC Universal Studios was to collect information in connection with the changes in the processes and techniques in art direction and props management and to inspect the studio craft departments, in particular the NBC Universal Props Store.

Outcomes

The NBC Universal Prop Store is one of the largest in Hollywood, with approximately 300,000 square feet (around 27,871 square metres) of props over three floors at the Universal City location. The props store boasts a vast array of props from all periods including:

- furniture
- artworks
- relics and antiques
- statues
- drapery
- carpets and rugs
- lighting fixtures
- household items
- hand props of all descriptions.



Universal Studios Prop Store reception area

The International Experience

The props are used for NBC Universal productions, as well as rented to external organisations for film, television, commercials, music videos and events.



Lighting fixture props in all period styles



Period furniture props typical of the huge range available at the Universal Studios Prop Store



Some of the huge range of drapery props arranged in colour categories. Many pieces are from the original period



Period furniture props are available in large numbers and all period styles

The props are managed using a software solution in which all props are bar-coded and photographed, then tracked through a computer database. Props are stored using the traditional methods of shelving and racks to display items. The props are well organised and divided into appropriate sections.

In a time when other prop houses in Hollywood are closing down, the Universal Prop Store is expanding and concentrating on collecting props that are seen to be an investment in future business. Beverly Hadley often buys props that are becoming increasingly rare from stores that are closing down or vintage stores. Management seems to support her foresight and industry knowledge in building the stock of very particular props.

The International Experience

Beala Neel, a highly esteemed Hollywood Production Designer, conducted the Fellow on a tour of the Universal 'back lot'. The 'back lot' is an expansive series of multi-purpose outdoor sets. The sets are currently being rebuilt after a devastating fire several years ago. Neel designed the new sets and is supervising the construction using materials and processes that comply with strictly enforced state fire prevention regulations. Neel has used his design skills to incorporate fittings such as hydrants, sprinkler systems and alarms seamlessly into the design of the sets in a highly innovative manner.

The mandatory use of fire retardant materials and associated processes has presented challenges to the project, but Neel has managed to use his years of art department skills and knowledge to accommodate efficiency and aesthetics. The new sets have presented the possibilities of using particular areas of the sets as interior 'studios' in spaces that previously had been unused.

A visit to the set of 'Ghost Whisperer' was a good demonstration of this concept. The 'back' of an exterior street set had been converted into a fire station set, so that interior and exterior scenes could be shot simultaneously.

The design of the new sets has been a long and complex process, as the sets need to satisfy the needs of many different productions, all with very particular settings. The sets have been designed with an acute awareness of period style and decoration and every angle creates a new, unique and individual setting that can be changed with set dressings to meet the production requirements. A deep and thorough understanding of period architecture and decorative style was necessary to create such a versatile 'world' of sets.

The Fellow met with Neel and Beverly Hadley, another highly esteemed Hollywood professional. Neel and Hadley have over 75 years of experience in total and in discussion with them several issues and concerns surfaced.

They both felt that young film making professionals are not gaining the 'full picture' in their training. The young professionals are being trained very well in the technical areas, especially in matters of new technologies and equipment. However, these junior professionals have very little knowledge about using sets, dressing and props to build the character and enhance the narrative of a script.

The recent trend by film schools to supply their students with equipment and set the task of producing a film with little or no supervisory input from design or art department professionals is creating a generation of film makers that are unaware of the potential of using the full complement of skills available to them. The basic concept that successful film making is a process that should encompass all possible elements to enhance the character and the story is being disregarded. This, of course, crosses over into the industry when those students move on to professional producing or directing.

They also showed concern regarding the impact that 'reality television' has had on film and television production. They commented that they see the 'reality' style as a trend, a fashion that has had a negative effect on the quality of productions. With these productions, there seems to be a perception that because the script is written in the 'reality' style, the skills of the production designer or art department are not necessary.

It was pointed out that the work of the art department is to make a set look 'real', but most importantly to support the visual storytelling. Producers have been taking what they see as financial gains by reducing or eliminating the cost of the design component, but in fact they are costing the production in aesthetics and story strength.

The International Experience

New producers, often rising from the screenwriting area, don't show the skills and knowledge of the complete process of making films, so are making poor decisions about hiring staff. There is a lack of understanding in the role that the art department plays in a production and so, in the end, there are resultant costs in efficiency and therefore funds.

There was also concern expressed by the art department people about fund allocations on productions and the increasing number of producers' titles appearing on recent productions. They believe that most of the costs on a contemporary large budget film are in producer and actor fees, not in the sets and location dressing. There is a need to rationalise this equation for good quality production to continue and grow.

The Los Angeles Film School, California, USA

Contacts:

- Joe Byron, Director of Education, The Los Angeles Film School
- Barbara Dunphy, Production Designer/Head of Production Design Department, The Los Angeles Film School

Objectives

The aim of the visit to the Los Angeles Film School (LAFS) was to collect information with regard to education and professional development studies in production design, art direction and props management and also to inspect the teaching facilities.

Outcomes

Institutional Mission

The mission of The Los Angeles Film School is to inspire students with an inventive method of education that concentrates on preparation for career opportunities in the entertainment industry. We do this with a curriculum that integrates technical knowledge with artistic exploration and creativity, taught by a staff of passionate professionals. Our education is delivered through reflective teaching methods and hands-on learning in the heart of Hollywood, the world's entertainment capital.

Our programs are designed to immerse aspiring talent in industry practices and current technologies, enabling them to discover their individual voices through collaboration and realise their career goals in the entertainment industry.

Institutional Primary Educational Objective

It is the objective of The Los Angeles Film School to provide students with the experience and knowledge of the creative art, the technology, and the business practices of the entertainment industry. We do this by offering training programs that blend artistic techniques specific to entertainment media industries with the current technological hardware and software used to support them and customary business practices utilised in these industries, to result in a skilled and knowledgeable professional prepared for entry level employment in numerous entertainment industry activities.

The Los Angeles Film School 2009 Catalogue (viewed 18 June 2009, http://www.lafilm.edu/downloads/LAFS_Catalog_2008.pdf)

The International Experience

In 1999, the LAFS started with a simple idea: prepare the next generation of creative professionals for careers in the entertainment and media industry. The school was opened by a Canadian financier and Hollywood producer who had been the President of Universal Pictures for ten years. Originally, the school was designed as a conservatory to enable students to learn the art and technology of film making. At the time there was no centralised place where the craft was taught, and entry into the industry was difficult.

The school brought in some of the top professionals in Hollywood as tutors and a very particular curriculum was developed that included six main areas. These were: directing, producing, cinematography, editing, sound and production design, and both the creative and business aspects were included in these six main areas. The philosophy was simple: students would have a better chance of surviving and being successful within the film and television industry in Hollywood if they had a comprehensive set of professional skills as a tool.

When the production design component was being developed, it was recognised that there was no film school in the USA that had any focus at all on production design, art direction or in fact what the art department does. The school saw the irony in this with film credits having endless lists of art department staff and one, or maybe two directors. They also identified that some production designers went on to be directors (Alfred Hitchcock, Tim Burton, and James Cameron, for example) but the case was, generally, not the same for cinematographers and editors. Production designers were able to make the transition because of their recognition of the artistic value in building a production and their skills in visual storytelling.

The LAFS's Associate of Science in Film Degree programme teaches established techniques while keeping current with industry developments. Students learn the art and craft of making movies from both creative and technical aspects, and the course is intensive. Students explore fundamental and advanced techniques in directing, cinematography, editing and post-production, art direction and all aspects of film production over a period of twelve months.

Despite individual student's aspirations, all must go through a process where they learn about drawing and drafting, both mechanical and computer-aided, conceptualisation, model making, set construction, props selection and research. They must visit museums, work on location and work in the studio as part of their training. The result is that all students, whatever their career path may be, discover that a script is a three dimensional place. They look at sets and locations as being as important as the characters in the broader picture. They also learn what to build, what not to build, not to overbuild and also to work within limitations.

The faculty and staff of industry professionals share their knowledge at the LAFS through insightful teaching methods and in-depth instruction. This instruction, when combined with a production process that mirrors professional studios and production companies, provides students with a comprehensive understanding of their discipline, allowing them to prepare for real industry practice and procedures while they're still in school.

The Los Angeles Film School campus encompasses four unique locations with over 150,000 square feet (around 13,936 square metres) of facilities located in the heart of Hollywood on Sunset Boulevard.

The International Experience



Los Angeles Film School, Hollywood



Main entrance to Los Angeles Film School

The facilities are extensive and impressive including a fully equipped studio set on a professional state-of-the-art sound stage. There are also prop and scenery storage facilities, a full size cinema, a large rehearsal space and many professional quality labs including a three-dimensional plotter. The Production Design Laboratory at the LAFS is equipped with ten drafting tables, an extensive library of art and design books, and a conference table.

The curriculum addresses the constantly evolving world of entertainment by combining technical knowledge with artistic exploration and creativity. By focusing on both the art and science of creating entertainment, the school provides students with a comprehensive education that allows them to discover their individual talents through collaboration and experience. As a result, the LAFS readies students for success throughout their professional lives while helping them realise their career goals in the entertainment and media industry.



Students working on projects in the Production Design Department.



Student cardboard models for productions

The International Experience



Set finishing workshop. Here students can experiment with techniques and methods in producing set finishes



Permanent set for student production of 'Faulty Towers'. The set, though permanent, is dressed and 'worked' by students under the careful supervision of practising professionals

The International Experience

Film Design International, Pinewood Studios, Buckinghamshire, United Kingdom

Contacts:

- Terry Ackland-Snow, member of The British Film Designers Guild (BFDG), Managing Director, Film Design International
- Debra Wootton B.A., Course Coordinator, Film Design International

Objectives

The aim of the visit to Film Design International (FDI) at Pinewood Studios was to collect information pertaining to education and professional development studies in production design, art direction and props management, as well as to inspect the teaching facilities. There was an additional aim to collect information in relation to the changes in processes and techniques in art direction and props management.

Outcomes

The two FDI courses teach draughtsmanship for the film and television industries. The four-week Art Direction training course is intensely practical and specially designed to give a comprehensive knowledge of film techniques on the drawing board, and essential information to enable the student to survey and pick suitable locations and measure space.

The three-week Advanced Art Direction training course is aimed at freelance art department assistants and is a continuation of the original course. This course covers all relevant topics in greater depth including every aspect of set design: how to communicate with the key production personnel on set, how to run an art department and manage the budget, and also the use of camera angles, foreground miniatures, glass shots, and computer generated imagery.

The courses are taught by Terry Ackland-Snow, the chairman of the British Film Designers Guild, who has 40 years experience in the Film and Television (TV) industries. Having worked his way up from Junior Draughtsman to Art Director, Supervising Art Director and Production Designer, and working on over 80 film and TV productions during his career, Ackland-Snow has amassed a wealth of knowledge and experience—all of which he applies to his 'Art Direction' training courses.



Student working on design drafting project at Film Design International, Pinewood Studios. The rudiments of film design drawing are considered an important foundation for career advancement at FDI.



Computer aided drafting is also taught at FDI, after the student has gained the basic construction knowledge in manual drafting and drawing

The International Experience

Recently, a new course using two dimensional (2D) computer-aided drafting has been added to the curriculum, where students develop an understanding of the core principles of computer-aided design (CAD) and are prepared for their progression to more advanced work within the art department.

The facilities of FDI are limited compared to other training facilities observed during the Fellowship study tour. They consist of two adjoining rooms creating a design office and drafting room. The location of the school, though, makes up for its limited size. It is located in the Pinewood Studio facility where students can see major film and television programmes in the making, and have access to world famous workshops on site and the famous Pinewood Archive library. The buildings themselves at Pinewood are fine examples of British architectural heritage; hence a rich source of architectural detail is immediately available.



Interiors of buildings at Pinewood Studios offer fine examples of architectural details for student reference

The International Experience



The 'Hitchcock Room' Georgian-style restaurant at Pinewood Studios. The light fittings are heritage protected as fine examples of interior decoration.



The grounds at Pinewood studios have been used for many productions over many years

The National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield Studios, United Kingdom

Contacts:

- Moira Tait , Co-Head, Production Design Department, The National Film and Television School
- Mark Raggett, Freelance Supervising Art Director
- Michelle Hosier, Production Design Course Coordinator, The National Film and Television School

Objectives

The aim of the visit to The National Film and Television School was to collect information in reference to education and professional development studies in art direction and props management as well as inspect the teaching facilities.

Outcomes

History

The National Film School (as it was first named) (NFS) opened in 1971, the culmination of four years of planning to create an institution to train new talent for the British film industry. Concerned that the UK was being left behind by Europe and the USA, where formal training for film makers was already well-established, the Department of Education and Science had in 1967 recommended the creation of a national film school for the UK, and in 1969 an inquiry began to develop the recommendation into tangible plans.

From the outset, the NFS rejected the vocational-school style, casting itself as a purveyor of in-depth film and television training. Unlike today, students did not specialise in a single discipline from the outset, but were welcomed as novices to be initiated into the filmmaking world. The curriculum in the early days was a loosely structured affair; sporadic seminars and workshops were secondary to production, with students spending most of their time doing exactly what they had come to the School to do – making films.

The International Experience

But by the early 1980s, it was recognised that the 'laissez-faire' approach no longer served the students' best interests and a more structured curriculum was introduced. Links with the Industry were strengthened, allowing students' idealism and creative talent to be matched with collaborative, financial and production expertise.

In 1982, the School changed its name to The National Film and Television School (NFTS), reflecting the fact that many of its graduates went on to make their careers in TV. In the same year it launched a pilot project for re-training freelance industry professionals. Financed by a one-off government grant, this led to the establishment of the National Short Course Training Program (now Short Courses @ NFTS), which has since been running courses on all areas of film and television production.

By the early 1990s, the NFTS had modified its original stance on course structure, deciding to provide specialisation at the time of entry. The first year still offered a general course, followed in the next two years by focused training in one of the ten specialist areas of direction, writing, editing, camera, sound, animation, design, producing, documentary and composing.

In 1992 the position of Head of the NFTS was taken over by Henning Camre, formerly Head of the Danish Film School. Camre introduced time limits, budget targets and production slots both for course projects and graduation films. Pushing the earlier decision to offer more specialised training to its natural conclusion, Camre aimed for more balanced numbers in each of the ten specialist areas, creating separate departments with their own head tutors and curricula. The different departments were put on an equal footing to reflect the way the Industry outside was really functioning. At the same time, the full-time program and the short course unit were fully integrated and television was given a much wider emphasis in the overall curriculum. Camre also secured a Lottery grant to install state of the art new equipment, positioning the School to take full advantage of new production methods offered by innovations in technology and ensuring that graduating students could compete with the best as they embarked on their careers.

Camre moved on in 1998, to be succeeded by Stephen Bayly, an NFTS graduate and film producer (Richard III, Mrs Dalloway). His first move was to re-organise the curriculum to run over two years, instead of three. After a few weeks of cross-specialist workshops, where students swapped roles to learn the basics of each specialisation, courses focused in-depth on the professional field in which students had enrolled to train. While NFTS courses had always been practice-based rather than academic, with graduates awarded a Diploma and Industry-recognised NFTS Associate status, Bayly recognised a growing trend towards a requirement for academic qualifications. The Royal College of Art agreed to validate the School's courses and 2000 saw the first intake of students who would graduate with an MA. In 2002, Bayly introduced the first of the shorter Diploma courses, established to meet an urgent industry need for properly trained sound recordists.

September 2003 saw Nik Powell, one of the UK 's leading producers (Mona Lisa, The Crying Game, Ladies in Lavender), pick up the baton from Bayly. Powell has rapidly expanded the program of new courses, introducing MA courses in Producing and Directing Television Entertainment, Digital Post-Production and VFX/SFX; and Diplomas in Production Management and Script Development, the latter a partnership venture with The Script Factory. Drawing on his extensive international network of film and TV connections, Powell has reinvigorated the program of visiting filmmakers, and set up a program of master classes run at London cinemas for NFTS students and the public.

The International Experience

He has also introduced a range of development deals with broadcasters and independent production companies to help new NFTS graduates get started and, in 2005, joined forces with NESTA (The National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts) to launch NFTS Inc, a Creative Pioneer program supporting graduates of any UK film school develop start-up businesses in the moving image industry.

Today, the NFTS has some 220 full-time students, another two dozen part-timers on the Script Development course and around a thousand a year on its short courses. The only UK film school with its own film and television studios and post-production facilities rivalling those of professional companies, its talented community of students makes over a hundred films a year on courses that are over 90% practical and unlike anything offered at any other UK film school.

National Film and Television School website, 2009 (viewed 24 August 2009, <http://www.nftsfilm-tv.ac.uk/index.php?module=Content&template=history>)

The two-year Production Design course includes study areas of screen design, art direction, props and scenery. Because the students vary widely in background and experience, they undertake a short Foundation programme before the Masters of Arts (MA) course starts. This first stage ensures that all students embark on the MA with broadly similar knowledge and technical skills. The course is based on learning and applying the craft and skills of the medium, and collaboration is emphasised so that students develop a sound understanding of how their specialist role fits into the production process. Practical work is integrated with screenings and discussions.

All courses are taught by industry practitioners, specialists in their own profession coming from the areas of film, television, commercials, music videos and events. The school also benefits from its reputation and connections to the film and television industry, with some of the industry's leading professionals invited as guest speakers regularly.

The facilities at NTFS are impressive including stages with workshops, prop rooms, seminar rooms, a cinema, design offices, construction workshop, animation stages and green screen.



Student work stations in the Production Design Department at The National Film and Television School, UK. Students use both manual and CAD drawing methods in their projects



A cardboard model of student work in progress

The International Experience



Miniature film set for a student animation production



Examples of student cardboard models



Scenic art craft workshop. Practising professionals hold workshops in the more traditional scenery finishing techniques.



Lecture and screening theatre at NTFS, UK

The International Experience



Miniature animation set ready for filming

NTFS offers work experience placements on current productions at local film studios, such as Pinewood and Shepparton, where students work in the art department alongside production designers and art directors (See Attachment 4 in the Attachments section). These placements are monitored by feedback from the art department. Postgraduate employment is monitored through a database in the NTFS library and often postgraduates will return to NTFS to teach and pass on their new knowledge.

There are also short courses offered at NTFS where industry professionals can further their careers through training courses taught by experienced tutors working in film and television and there is a large range of technical and creative courses available. The short courses are linked to Skillset Professional Qualifications (SPQs) and many of the courses offer subsidies to freelancers. Skillset also offers training grants for individuals and freelancers working in the UK's TV, film, animation, computer games and interactive media industries.

Several observations were made in a meeting with Moira Tait and Mark Raggett: first, they see the concept of pre-visualisation on new large-scale productions as having an impact on the structure and processes of the art department. 'Pre-visualisation' is where sets and the choreography of actors are developed digitally as animations in the early process of making a film. Because of their expertise with software, artists are being drawn from the post-production computer graphic imaging area and are 'visualising' the film's 'world'. Unfortunately these artists have very little or no architectural or decorative design knowledge and so need to work closely with the production designer and art department to produce a practical and logical set for the film. They are also often unaware of the costs involved in producing the 'real' sets for the production.

The International Experience

'Harry Potter' was cited as a good example where the pre-visualisation is kept within the art department. The production designer does a lot of the sketches and the pre-visualisation people are working under the direction of the production designer in concert with the director. Unfortunately, this is not always the norm, as often the pre-visualisation crew are working out of the USA for a production in UK, so there is little contact in the early stages of production.

Both Tait and Raggett see that there is a new role emerging in the art department of large-scale productions for somebody with advanced computer animation skills and a thorough knowledge of architecture and construction. It was acknowledged that the problem is a challenge for educators in the future, but also noted that there is potential for the combined skills to flow over into areas such as game design.

Second, at NFTS there are an ever-increasing number of student applicants presenting CAD drawings in their folios and it was noted that those drawings often demonstrated a lack of understanding in construction, architecture and proportion. There is a feeling that younger students tend to rely on computer software to automatically calculate design and construction details, assuming that no real underpinning knowledge is necessary. In a virtual world, structure stands on its own, with no means of support, but in the real world of set construction, a structure needs to be a part of a structural system that has both limitations and restrictions. In the film and television industry specialised construction knowledge is necessary, and entering the industry without basic construction knowledge can be seen as a hindrance to professional growth.

This lack of knowledge could be viewed as a problem that will eventually correct itself within the industry, but which requires the input of the older, more experienced designer to train the younger member of staff in more traditional methods of calculation in order to preserve aesthetic values.

Third, there was a concern voiced over the continual loss of traditional skills since apprenticeship schemes have been scaled back in the UK. Crafts such as upholstery, drapery, plastering and scenic painting are being lost in the film and television industry. NFTS has addressed such issues with the introduction of 'craft teachers' to the programmes. Highly skilled professionals are brought in to teach such crafts as painting and marbling, for example, so that the graduate not only has a basic skill, but the knowledge of the practical applications that such a technique has in a production.

Concluding Remarks

The overseas component of the Fellowship provided the Fellow with an insight into the current situation concerning the role of the art department in production for film and television, and the need to address the issues associated with working within the emerging 'digital framework' and its associated implications. It can be said that on a global level the film and television industry is in a constant state of flux, especially since the introduction of digital technologies.

The art department is the foundation of the film process—especially on large-scale, big budget productions—and the future of film design promises to offer a shift in the way in which environments are designed and arrive at the screen. Yet the creation of those environments, both real and imagined, remains the job of the designer.

The International Experience

The significance of the design input to the narrative has not diminished; in fact within the new 'digital framework' it has become even more relevant. The challenge is for designers to stay focused on the process which now closely involves pre-visualisation, visual effects (VFX), and post-production.

In regard to the art department outside the design area, technological changes appear to be slow in comparison with the more technology-based areas of production (cinematography and editing, for example) but nevertheless technology has had an impact, albeit somewhat indirectly. The means of addressing these challenges are still in progress but the industry requires a response that is both flexible and of a visionary nature, while protecting the more traditional skills.

The training needs of the future generation of art department practitioners should not be based on new technologies alone but incorporate them with time-proven traditional methods and techniques. The key to the success of the visited film schools and their graduates is in part their realisation that the art department and the associated skills play an integral role in developing the visual storytelling within a production. In Australia we should view this as a progressive way of thinking. We should move fast to save these traditional methods and teach them, along with new technologies, to the future generation of film makers.

The ISS Institute Fellowship programme has had a major effect on Belle's career plans for the future. It has crystallised her thoughts on the changes that are necessary in the Australian industry and has become a catalyst for her to change her career to self-employed education, training and consultation within the industry, to ensure that years of professional experience from many practitioners are not lost to the industry.

Knowledge Transfer: Applying the Outcomes

1. A conference or seminar of government and industry training bodies to discuss the role of the art department in contemporary Australian film and television production should be organised and implemented as soon as possible, with a view to develop strategies to include appropriate training in their respective programmes. Those invited to participate should come from, but not be limited to, the following organisations:

- Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA)
- Verve – Knowledge and Skills, the industry training advisory board (ITAB) for the arts and culture and sport and recreation sectors in Victoria, Australia.
- Screen Australia
- Film Victoria
- Professional production designers
- Professional art department members: set decorators and dressers, props persons, set construction managers
- SPAA, VSTA, MEAA and other industry associations
- Educational and training organisations including:
 - The Victorian College of the Arts and Music at Melbourne University
 - The School of Film and Television at Swinburne University
 - School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University
 - School of Creative Media at RMIT University
 - Open Channel
 - Australian Film Television and Radio Schools
 - Victorian TAFE colleges.

The ISS Institute would be the ideal organisation to act as a medium in bringing together the government, industry and educational entities necessary to conduct such an event.

2. Production of a series of educational DVDs on the art department and production design with the view to using them as an educational resource in high schools, vocational and tertiary institutes and for the general public. This project could be funded by various sources including Screen Australia and Film Victoria and be produced in association with ABC-TV.

3. Workshops should be held for emerging producers and directors emphasising the importance of design and the art department in successful film making. The workshops could be filmed and the resultant footage used in making educational resources. Government and industry funding would be sought.

4. A series of master classes to be held for art department practitioners needing to improve their craft skills. Corporate support should be lobbied from material manufacturers. The classes could be filmed and the resultant footage used in making educational resources.

It is envisaged that all of the above projects would be undertaken in Melbourne and would commence within twelve months of the publishing of this report. The ISS Institute could be seen as having a role in the coordination and management of the projects. The Fellow is available for consultation and participation in all of the projects

Recommendations

Key Statement 1 – New Technology

Governments and training bodies have recognised that new technologies continue to play a major role in the screen production industry, both as tools for production and the delivery of services in general. Technological changes within the industry have created a frenzy of activity in redesigning curriculum to accommodate the new 'digital framework'. It should be recognised though, that this enthusiasm for all things digital has all but eradicated training in traditional methods and techniques for the art department. The art department for live-action screen productions is highly dependent on these traditional skills in developing the best processes to maximise efficiency and favourable outcomes in the production design process.

Industry skills and training bodies should acknowledge that art department skills are broad and varied. The Screen Industry Training Package (CUF07) currently offers a somewhat limited range of skill competencies to suit the various roles within the contemporary art department. Using current trends as a basis, it could be envisioned that art department skills sets will need to broaden further; future teams will be smaller, and will have more tasks allocated to them than is current practice.

Government

Recommendation: Allocate funding for the development and implementation of further research into traditional art department skills and integration within the new 'digital framework' is to be established within the screen industry.

Recommendation: Consider funding programmes that target specific training in traditional areas such as set decoration, set dressing, standby props, staging, and etceteras.

Education

Recommendation: Review film making course structures to include production design and art department training for live-action screen production. Educational institutions should acknowledge that the combination and integration of both traditional and new digital skills would better serve the screen industry of tomorrow. The Fellow is available to work with TAFE Institutes to develop and implement curriculum and teaching resource materials.

Industry

Recommendation: Review and update art department industry units of competency. It is recommended that expert advice from professionals in all areas within the art department be sought in further development of the Screen Industry Training Package or similar training products. The Fellow is available to work with industry skills and training bodies to assist in developing such training products.

Recommendation: Encourage film and television companies to develop programmes of corporate sponsorship and funding for programmes promoting education and awareness in the area of art department craft skills.

Key Statement 2 – Versatile Training Products

Although there has been much work recently with the revision of the Screen Industry Training Package (CUF07), it needs to be acknowledged that training systems need to be put in place not only for those entering the industry but also for those working within the industry who need to improve their skills and knowledge base in order to advance in their chosen career path.

Recommendations

It can be said that the sporadic nature of employment in the industry does not allow for traditional methods of training, so more versatile training products need to be developed by training bodies to accommodate the freelance nature of the industry.

Government

Recommendation: Allocate funding for the development and implementation of short courses to develop existing art department industry craft skills to a broader and higher level of expertise.

Recommendation: Implement a programme of subsidised funding for those professionals in the industry wishing to undertake short course programmes to develop their vocational craft skills within the art department.

Education

Recommendation: Develop new training products to meet the needs of art department practitioners needing to improve and update their existing skills and knowledge. For example: a series of professional development short courses, in such areas as set decorating, props management, basic special effects, and etceteras.

Industry

Recommendation: Develop and support programmes that promote the pursuit of excellence for the art department craft skills of the screen industry. This could be achieved through industry awards or other similar recognition.

Recommendation: Promote industry qualifications as a means of measuring skill levels and competencies.

Key Statement 3 – Art Department Training

Art department skills are not being reflected in the current film making training available. On a standard live-action drama production the art department is by far the largest department, as the final credits will attest. On the same production there will be, for example, one director. A large imbalance can be identified given the training now on offer to aspiring directors, compared to the training offered to such people as designers, set decorators and props persons. It should also be noted that for every production designer, there may be up to thirty art department members, and the training available to those members is basically non-existent in the current training climate. It is therefore recommended that educational and training bodies work to balance the future of the industry by developing new training products to meet the needs of the art department.

Government

Recommendation: Provide funding and support to programmes promoting education and awareness in the area of art department craft skills within the Australian film industry.

Education

Recommendation: Develop new training products to meet the needs of the art department of the future. There is currently a shortfall of courses offered to those wishing to pursue a career specifically based in the art department. Courses including units of competency pertaining to visualisation, props, set construction, and etceteras should be considered.

Recommendations

Recommendation: Initiate short course programmes that include traditional skills, parallel to existing screen production courses. The Fellow is available to work with TAFE Institutes to develop and implement curriculum and teaching resource materials.

Recommendation: Initiate funding for specialist facilities to accommodate art department training. Current funds are invariably spent on camera, lighting and editing equipment at the expense of art department equipment. If training programmes are developed to accommodate training in art department skills, designated facilities should be adequately equipped to provide state-of-the-art training to students. Expert advice should be sought from art department professionals with regard to appropriate equipment for funding.

Key Statement 4 – Industry Mentoring of Trainees

Unsupervised film making by students has proven ineffective as a means of training graduates to be industry ready: students often need to be retrained after entering the professional industry. They show little understanding of the various roles of production crew members and industry protocols as they have been left to fend for themselves or given inappropriate supervision in their student projects, leading to developed methods and means that bear little semblance to those practiced in the professional industry. It is common practice to employ practitioners with little or no professional industry experience; trainers with non-professional experience may transfer misinformation through lack of understanding.

In order to produce training programmes that will adequately deal with the transfer of valuable knowledge and skills, trainers need to be drawn from highly skilled professional practitioners in film and television design and associated areas. Those near the end of their career should be encouraged to consider careers as trainers and/or assessors. This will not only help meet the needs of traditional skills transfer, but will create opportunities for additional income at the end of a freelance career that offers very little financial security.

A programme of subsidised incentive funding should be considered to allow such professionals to obtain the appropriate qualifications in order that they may be involved in industry training and education. A programme may well be developed in collaboration with Screen Australia and/or Film Victoria and the appropriate industry bodies.

Government

Recommendation: Implement a programme of subsidised funding for those professionals in the industry wishing to undertake short course programmes to develop their vocational craft skills within the art department. (*Our Vision on Screen: Victorian Screen Industry Strategy 2009-14*, p27 viewed 25 November 2009, <http://www.diird.vic.gov.au/diird-strategies-and-initiatives/victorian-screen-industry-review-and-strategy/victorian-screen-industry-strategy>)

Recommendation: Recruit and train a number of freelance career advisors from industry to develop and support careers advisors in schools, higher education institutes and within industry.

Education

Recommendation: Recruit highly skilled professionals from the professional art department area as tutors and teachers in film making courses.

Recommendations

Recommendation: It is recommended that educational and training bodies enforce adequate benchmark qualifications when employing industry trainers. Given that most industry professionals don't hold professional qualifications, a method of benchmarking might include devising a set of criteria that encompasses programme credits and current relevance of experience and skills.

Industry

Recommendation: Recruit experienced professionals with current industry knowledge to train novices. A system of industry qualification, as being currently developed, would assist in the selection of such experienced professionals.

Recommendation: Industry skills bodies should develop and distribute materials and information resources including career fact sheets, to assist in career guidance for those wishing to work in the art department.

ISS Institute

Recommendation: Skills and knowledge deficiencies remain throughout the Australian film and television industry, particularly in the area of traditional art department skills, knowledge and experiences. These deficiencies can be seen in such areas as drawing skills and knowledge in the design and art department, upholstery and soft furnishings skills and knowledge for screen productions, and a lack of a drawing standards system for set design.

Proposed Action: These deficiencies should continue to be addressed by ISS Institute through the provision of further Fellowship opportunities in partnership with the Australian film industry associations. The Fellow is willing to work with the ISS Institute to assist in developing criteria for such further Fellowship opportunities.

Further Skills Deficiencies

During the Fellowship journey the Fellow observed other skills deficiencies or related problems worth noting.

Drawing skills and knowledge in the design and art departments

During the overseas Fellowship tour the Fellow witnessed an overwhelming concern by both educators and industry professionals that drawing skills were being lost to the 'digital framework'. The concept that drawing skills are not necessary if computers are used to generate concept images and construction drawings has proven to be a hasty reaction to technological advances. It appears that manual drawing skills are being neglected as early as in high school in preference for digital imaging. This is fast proving to be a problem for the future of set design and the art department generally. As Beala Neel, Production Designer at Universal Studios stated, *"designers tell their dreams through their drawings. If they can't draw, how can they communicate their dreams?"*

Upholstery and soft furnishings skills and knowledge for screen productions

Though not common to many small productions, the area of upholstery and drapery is an important element of set decorating, especially on larger or period productions. In recent times the global furniture manufacturing industry has seen the demise of traditional skills in this area, mainly because of the availability of cheap imported furniture and other products, and this has impacted on the screen industry.

Recommendations

At all the major film studios visited during the Fellowship overseas visit, there was always mention that upholsterers with the traditional skills necessary to produce the custom pieces so necessary in film production, were almost impossible to find.

Lack of a drawing standards system for set design

It had been noted by the Fellow, previous to her Fellowship journey, that there were no formal (or, indeed, informal,) drawing standards for producing set construction drawings in Australia. The standards with which drawings are produced are basically dependent on where you studied, what book you read or where you are working at the time and these often have little semblance to Australian Drafting Standards. The overseas experience confirmed that this is a problem in overseas design departments as well. Research into this area of the Australian screen industry should be considered with a view to developing a standards system that will improve communication and efficacy on productions.

Changes in make-up techniques for digital effects

It has been observed that there are concerns from post-production staff, both here and overseas, with regard current make-up techniques. Traditional materials and techniques need to be reassessed when filming for digital effects in post-production. Make-up artists need to develop new materials and methods to properly prepare actors for post-production digital manipulation.

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Attachments

Attachment 1: The Art Department – Roles and Responsibilities

Art departments have two main divisions. The first, called the design department, focuses on conceptualising and drawing, and is where sets are designed and construction drawings are produced. The second division deals with set construction, furnishings, costumes and props. The production designer oversees both divisions, although most productions employ a separate costume designer.

In the past, special effects, such as matte paintings and miniatures, were also in the production designer's domain. As effects became more complicated, with computer generated images and other technical innovations, independent special effects departments have evolved.

The following is a list of personnel usually employed within the art department. Depending on the size of the production and the budget, the art department may vary in size from a few members up to many hundreds.

Production Designer

The production designer interprets the script in consultation with the director and producer. Further along the production process the production designer works closely with the director of photography to create the desired look and feel of the production. He/she heads the art department, which is responsible for sets, location dressing, and action props.

Art Director

Along with the production designer, the art director supervises all the working drawings and throughout the production, acts as the production designer's principal assistant. Generally, the art director is in charge of the drafting of set drawings and should be well versed in lenses, laying out studio plans, construction, have some knowledge of engineering, and decorative detail. The art director should also be able to create models, either real or digital.

Assistant Art Director

An assistant art director assists the art director and the production designer by drafting, measuring up locations, and so on. He/she should have a thorough knowledge of construction and decorative detail. The assistant art director helps make models and arranges the printing of drawings as well as liaising with other technicians on behalf of the art director.

Draftsman

Sometimes on a large production a draftsman (or many) may be brought in to assist with the task of creating the working drawings for the sets and location builds.

Sketch Artist

On very large productions, a sketch artist may be employed to create presentation drawings of the production designer's set designs for the director.

Art Department Coordinator

The art department coordinator works with the production designer and the art director to control the budget and the logistics of the art department. He/she should have an accounting background, but be well acquainted with screen production and art department practice.

Construction Manager

The construction manager supervises the construction of sets and manages the construction budget, in terms of money, labour and logistics. The production designer, the art department coordinator and the construction manager devise the construction budget. The construction manager should have professional skills in building and a sound knowledge of engineering.

Set Builder (or Carpenter)

The set builders make the basic flats, rostrum, ceilings, floors and walls of the sets. They make staircases, tables, benches, chairs, and virtually any prop or set piece required. Each production has one or more construction foremen who keep in close contact with the construction manager, the art director and his/her assistants.

Stand-by Carpenter

The stand-by carpenter is attached to the shooting unit for striking walls, unhinging doors, and so forth on the set, in order to facilitate the camera's movements and positions as smoothly as possible.

Attachments

Scenic Artist

The scenic artist is highly skilled and talented and paints the backdrops (or backings). Backdrop sizes vary from around 3 m x 3 m to 100 m x 10 m cyclorama backings. He/she may also replicate oil paintings, portraits, and literally any graphic work needed for the sets and locations on a production. A scenic artist has a thorough knowledge of painting techniques, perspective, period styles and architecture.

Set Finisher

Once the set has been built by the carpenters, and set in the studio by the stagehands, the set finishers take over with their brushes, rollers and spray guns. The painters are adept at producing any texture, colour or tone requested by the production designer.

Sign Writer

On large productions, a specialist sign writer may be attached to the paint workshop.

Stagehand

Stagehands work in moving flats, timber, rostrums, backings from the scenery store or workshop to the various studios or locations during the preparation or pre-fabrication period, and all through the shooting period of the production. Stagehands work with the stand-by carpenter in moving and striking set pieces with the shooting unit.

Rigger

The riggers erect the tubular scaffolding on which many large sets are braced and supported, especially exterior set on the studio lot or on location. They may also construct rostrums on wheels for the painters and scenic artists. They may also build rostrum floor areas for very large studio sets.

Set Decorator

On a large production a set decorator will be employed to oversee the dressing of sets in consultation with the production designer.

Set Dresser

The set dresser dresses the set with dressing props and drapery. He/she does the research into all the props, down to the smallest detail, especially on a period production. The set dresser works closely with the prop buyers in sourcing props.

Assistant Set Dresser

The assistant set dresser assists the set dresser in dressing the sets.

Prop Buyer

The props buyer works with the production designer and the set dressers. He/she hires, buys or borrows props or materials for props on the production. The props buyer has a good knowledge of sources and resources for props and possesses basic accounting skills.

Props Master

The props master works with the filming unit and is responsible for all action props for the production. He/she works closely with the props buyer and is responsible to the production designer. On location the props master has his /her own truck, well equipped with a vast array of hand props for the production. He/she should know the script by heart and make sure that all the vital props are always on hand and are on set in the shortest time possible.

‘Propsmen’

The ‘propsmen’ generally assist the set dressers with dressing the props and may assist the stand-by ‘propsman’ when preparing props.

Stand-by ‘Propsman’

The stand-by ‘propsman’ works with the filming unit under the props master, in coordination with the continuity department. The roles of props master and stand-by ‘propsman’ are often combined on smaller productions.

Prop Makers

Often props have to be specially made to meet the requirements of the production. Prop makers make objects like old parchment scrolls, a watch with an unusual dial, a futuristic computing device, an oversized teacup, or an exotic artificial plant. Generally prop makers have good sculptural and craft skills, and may have a theatre background.

Art Department Assistant

The art department assistant is usually a junior who is made available to assist all areas of the art department when necessary.

Attachments

Attachment 2: Skillset Fact Sheet – Art Department Overview

Films can be located anywhere; creating the visual world or setting for a film is the role of the art department. The look of sets or locations transports audiences into the world of the story, and is an essential element in making films convincing and evocative. These settings are rarely left to chance by film makers; a great deal of work and imagination goes into constructing appropriate backdrops to any story.

The art department usually employs the largest number of people on any film crew. On big budget fantasy, period drama or sci-fi films, the art department Offices, and Drawing and Construction Studios can occupy a vast area and employ hundreds of talented people. The production designer is the head of the art department, and works closely with the director to create the overall look of the film.

Months before the beginning of each film shoot, the production designer works with the director to decide upon the visual identity of the film, and draws up sketches which provide the inspiration for the subsequent work of the entire department. Since the work of the art department usually accounts for the biggest spend on films, the production designer also works closely with the producer to ensure that all the sets can be delivered on time and within budget.

Transforming the initial drawings to 3-dimensional sets takes an enormous amount of talent and commitment from everyone in the art department—from the production designer to the art department runner. Months are spent researching, story boarding, drafting, model making, visiting locations, building sets, ordering props and dressing sets before filming begins.

Throughout the shoot, new sets must be built and dismantled in short periods of time, and the art department must be on constant standby in case sets need to be changed or rebuilt. Most practitioners in the art department are Art School graduates, and for those who aspire to become art directors and/or production designers, experience is as valuable as talent.

The creative jobs in this department require an eye for decoration and detail, the ability to conceptualise ideas and think visually, a methodical approach to work, and excellent communication skills. Art Directors and production designers usually enter the art department as Runners, progressing to become Trainees, Assistants, and Junior Draughtsmen* before earning the opportunity to take more senior positions as Assistant Art Directors or Draughtsmen*. Set Decorators usually start as Assistant Set Decorators. There are also a number of support roles, including Production Buyers and Art Department Coordinators, which are less creative but which require excellent organisational skills.

* The terms Draughtsman or Draughtsmen are used generically and refer to both men and women practitioners

Attachments

Attachment 3: Skillset Fact Sheet – Job Profile of a Production Designer



Job Profiles for the Audio Visual Industries
Art Department – FILM

Production Designer

This is one of a series of job profiles within the **Film** sector developed by industry experts to help industry newcomers understand the different job roles and the skills required in order to succeed. We aim to keep this information as current as possible and would welcome any comments to help us improve this profile; please email us on: jobprofile@skillset.org. All Job profiles can be downloaded and printed from our website www.skillset.org.

Production Designers are major heads of department on film crews, and are responsible for the entire Art Department. They play a crucial role in helping Directors to achieve the film's visual requirements, and in providing Producers with carefully calculated schedules which offer viable ways of making films within agreed budgets and specified periods of time. Filming locations may range from an orderly Victorian parlour, to a late-night café, to the interior of an alien space ship. The look of a set or location is vital in drawing the audience into the story, and is an essential element in making a film convincing and evocative. A great deal of work and imagination goes into constructing an appropriate backdrop to any story, and into selecting or constructing appropriate locations and/or sets.

Directors of Photography and Production Designers are largely responsible for informing and realising the Director's vision. Production Designers begin work at the very early stages of pre-production and are requested by the Director and/or Producer. They work on a freelance basis, and may have to prepare detailed drawings and specifications in order to pitch for work on a number of productions before they are offered work on one of them. Although the work can be very demanding and the hours long, this is one of the most highly skilled, creatively fulfilling roles within the film industry.

What is the job?

Production Designers may be asked to look at scripts before a Director is approached, to provide estimates of the projected Art Department spend on films. When Production Designers first read a screenplay, they assess the visual qualities that will help to create atmosphere and bring the story to life. After preparing a careful breakdown of the script, they meet with the Director to discuss how best to shoot the film, e.g. to decide: whether to use sets and/or locations; what should be built and what should be adapted; whether there is a visual theme that recurs throughout the film; whether there are certain design elements that may give an emotional or psychological depth to the film; whether CGI (computer generated imagery) should be used. Production Designers must calculate the budgets, and decide how the money and effort will be spent. These discussions are followed by an intense period of research during which Production Designers and their Specialist Researchers source ideas from books, photographs, paintings, the internet, etc.

Production Designers deliver their design sketches (detailing mood, atmosphere, lighting, composition, colour and texture) to Art Directors who oversee the production of technical drawings and models, which are used by the Construction Department to build the sets and to adapt locations. Props Buyers and Set Decorators liaise closely, sourcing props and organising the manufacture of specialist items. As the start of shooting approaches, Production Designers manage a large number of individuals, prioritising the work schedule and carefully monitoring the budget. When shooting starts, they are usually on set early each morning to view each new set up with the Director, Director of Photography and Standby Art Director, responding to any requests or queries. Subsequently, in the Art Department office Production Designers check on the construction and dressing of other sets, and sign off on sets/locations for the following day's shoot. Although Production Designers usually finish work on the last day of principal photography, on larger films they may be involved for longer periods.



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Attachments

Typical career routes

As the head of the largest department on a film crew, Production Designers must have extensive experience gained over a number of years, usually by progressing through the various Art Department roles: Junior Draughtsman, Draughtsman, Assistant Art Director, Art Director. They may also have a background of working in theatre, where they learn the art of set design and construction as well as how to conceptualise ideas and create a sense of drama through visual spectacle. Graduates who have studied Film and Theatre Design may also gain experience working on short films before progressing to junior roles on feature films.

Essential knowledge and skills

Production Designers must have expert knowledge of many art and design related subjects including draughtsmanship, technical drawing, colour theory, architecture, building and construction, history of design, interior design, cameras and lenses, lighting, etc. Production Designers must also have full knowledge of computer budgeting software and computer aided design programmes (CADS).

Key Skills include:

- Excellent visual awareness and design skills
- Ability to inspire and motivate a team towards a common aesthetic goal
- Excellent management and leadership skills
- Ability to prioritise and to meet deadlines
- Good communication and presentation skills
- Tact and diplomacy
- Knowledge of the requirements of the relevant Health and Safety legislation and procedures

Training and qualifications

Production Designers are usually graduates of Art, Architecture, Theatre, Interior or 3D Design courses. Subsequently they usually complete a specialist course in Film and/or Theatre Design.

Individual course accreditation in certain subject areas is currently being piloted. As part of Skillset's and the UK Film Council's Film Skills Strategy, *A Bigger Future*, a network of Screen Academies and a Film Business Academy have been approved as centres of excellence in education and training for film. For more information, please log onto the Skillset website.

Where to go for more information

Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the Audio Visual Industries. The first sources of information for all jobs in the industry are the [National Occupational Standards](#). For information about training, links to the Skillset network of training partners, and access to the comprehensive [Skillset/BFI course database](#), visit the website www.skillset.org. **Skillset Careers** is the UK's only specialist media careers advice service; for detailed media careers information and advice, visit the website www.skillset.org/careers

Websites

- **British Film Designers Guild** www.filmdesigners.co.uk
- American Cinematographer has regular features on film design and digital production techniques. www.theasc.com

Publications

- *Ken Adam: The Art of Production Design* (Faber and Faber) by Christopher Frayling
- *Production Design and Art Direction* (Focal Press) by Peter Ettedgui
- *By Design: Interviews with Film Production Designers* (Greenwood Press) by Vincent LoBrutto
- *Film Architecture: From Metropolis to Blade Runner* (Prestel Publishing Ltd). Edited by D. Neumann
- *2001 Filming the Future*, (Aurum Press Ltd) by Piers Bizony
- *The Invisible Art: The Legends of Movie Matt Painting* (Chronicle Books) by M. Cotta Vaz and C. Barron

Attachments

Attachment 4: Pinewood Studios, UK, 2008, Work Placement/Experience Policy

Work Placement/Experience Policy as from 1st August 2008

Pinewood Shepperton plc and its subsidiaries ("Pinewood Shepperton")

Work Placement/Experience Policy

1. Introduction

Work experience is normally a period of time spent in a workplace while engaged in full time education.

Students are often required to undertake such placements by their schools and colleges. This work is usually unpaid. Employers receive requests for placement opportunities from both educational institutions and the students themselves.

2. The Benefits of Taking Work Placement/Experience Students

In accepting work experience placements, the Pinewood Group is fulfilling a vital role in helping students to prepare themselves for a life after school/college. Such experience will assist with building their confidence in the working environment, developing vital skills and abilities in and gaining knowledge of the work environment and, in particular, the Film, TV and Media industries. There are also recognised benefits for the Pinewood Group

- **Recruitment**

Work placements can be an important recruitment source for the Pinewood Group, either directly from vocational, or professional courses, or indirectly by informing school placement students of the range of career opportunities within the film, TV and Media industries and the Pinewood Group particular.

- **Publicity**

Work placements can generate positive publicity for the Pinewood Group and raise the awareness of the Company and its services.

- **Motivating Existing Staff**

Work experience placements can provide important learning opportunities for Pinewood Group staff to develop their skills by supervising the students. This can be extremely rewarding for supervisors and other staff working with them

3. Types of Work Experience Available at the Pinewood Group

Work experience is defined in two ways. A 'Work Placement' is an opportunity for someone studying in higher education and a 'Work Experience' is considered an industry insight for a young person aged under 16, normally in year 10 and studying at level 2.

3.1 Work Placement

The Pinewood Group offer a year round programme of work placements. It is likely that this person will be studying a relevant course at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Work Placement/Experience Policy as from 1st August 2008

Pinewood Shepperton plc and its subsidiaries ("Pinewood Shepperton")

Placements will take place at prearranged dates and all candidates who apply for a work placement will be asked to complete a 'Work Placement/Work Experience Application Form'. We will then shortlist applicants and invite them to meet us before building a bespoke programme of opportunities for the successful student. Work Placement students will not be cross-departmental. They will work solely with one division on projects.

Students who complete a work placement at the Pinewood Group will receive a certificate of completion and a reference from us to assist in their job search on completing their programme of learning.

A contract will be issued between the student and the Pinewood Group that will outline what we expect from them and what they can expect from us.

3.2 Work Experience

Work experience will be offered to young people from Years 10 to 13 or equivalent (maximum age 18) and is a National Curriculum standard and learning outcome.

In order for students to qualify for work experience, they must live within a two mile radius of the Pinewood site.

All candidates who apply for work experience will be asked to complete a 'Work Placement/Experience Application Form'.

The Pinewood Group can offer 25 work experience placements each year (maximum of 1 student per week). Work experience placements will be cross-departmental and of a general nature.

A contract will be issued between the student and the Pinewood Group that will outline what we expect from them and what they can expect from us.

All Work Experience and Work Placement enquires to the Pinewood Group must be processed and authorised by the HR Department.

4. Learning Objectives for Work Placement and Work Experience Students

The following are suggested objectives for any work placement:

- Students are valued, treated as adults and made to feel comfortable in a work situation.
- Students are given the opportunity to accept responsibility and work independently where possible during the placement.
- Students are given the opportunity to work as part of a team.
- Students are given the opportunity to experience and/or understand the demands of working under pressure of time and consistently attaining required quality standards.

Work Placement/Experience Policy as from 1st August 2008

Pinewood Shepperton plc and its subsidiaries ("Pinewood Shepperton")

- Students are given the opportunity to understand the importance of good customer care to providing effective services.
- Students are given the opportunity to understand the importance of effective management to providing effective services.
- Students are given the opportunity to work to standards and norms of behaviour expected in a work environment.

5. Health & Safety

PSP acknowledges its responsibility for the Health, Safety and Welfare of students during the period of Work Experience, and complies with all the provisions of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and its relevant statutory provisions, including the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, the Health and Safety (Young Persons) Regulations 1997, the Education Act 1996, the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, and any other relevant statutory obligations or official guidance.

Work Experience Students must be fully briefed beforehand as to the employer's premises and the range of tasks they will be expected to carry out as defined in a job description, with an emphasis on the learning aspects of the work experience.

5.1 Risk Assessment

Students on Work Experience are given the opportunity to do a job alongside and to some extent in the same way as the other people employed at their work placement. However, these young people may be particularly at risk from:

- Their possible immaturity and inexperience of work;
- Being unaware of the potential risks to their Health and Safety;
- Being eager to impress or please other people in the placement.

In accordance with Regulation 19 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (Protection of Young Persons), Pinewood - Shepperton will carry out a Risk Assessment before Work Experience commences. This assessment will take into account the typical characteristics of a young person and the likelihood that they will be encountering the work environment for the first time.

In light of the Risk Assessment, PSP will ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the Health, Safety and Welfare at work of all their employees by providing adequate training and supervision. Appropriate measures will be introduced and maintained to eliminate or control the risks found.

The Risk Assessment will include PSP's arrangements for protection of the student from any significant hazards in the workplace, even if the work experience is not directly affected by them.

Work Placement/Experience Policy as from 1st August 2008

Pinewood Shepperton plc and its subsidiaries ("Pinewood Shepperton")

5.2 Duties of Students

Students participating in work experience have the same duties as other employees in the workplace. They must take reasonable care of their own Health and Safety and that of other people who may be affected by their acts or omissions.

Students must at all times adhere to all safety, security and other regulations laid down by PSP, either through instructions and training or displayed.

Students employed on Work Experience must hold in confidence any information about PSP's business that they may obtain whilst employed, and must not disclose such information to another person without the Studios permission.

5.3 Duties of Parents/Guardians

Parents / Guardians must inform PSP of any relevant information relating to their child's medical or behavioural conditions. This information should include:

Does He/She:

- Have any restrictions of normal physical activity or games?
- Have skin allergies or eczema?
- Have bronchitis, asthma or chest complaints?
- Have a hearing disability?
- Have heart disease affecting the capability for physical tasks?
- Have diabetes?
- Experience fits or fainting attacks?
- Have significant colour vision defect or other visual disability?
- Have a learning disability that might affect their ability to understand or act upon instructions?
- Have any other health problems, including the need for regular medication?

PSP will take into account any information supplied by parents/guardians relating to medical conditions, physical and learning disabilities so as not to create a hazard either to the student or its employees.

Parents/Guardians must be aware that it is a condition of work experience that students do not receive payment and will therefore not be entitled to the industrial injuries benefits of the Social Security Act, 1975, in the event of an accident whilst taking part in work experience.

5.4. Provision of Information

PSP will ensure that all students are informed of emergency procedures with regard to fire, accidents and first aid. They will also receive relevant information regarding toilet and hand washing facilities, drinking water, rest and eating arrangements.

Work Placement/Experience Policy as from 1st August 2008

Pinewood Shepperton plc and its subsidiaries ("Pinewood Shepperton")

PSP will inform all Work Experience personnel about the risks to their Health and Safety as identified by the Risk Assessment, and the measures put in place to control them.

PSP will also inform their parents/guardians with the key findings of the risk assessment and the control measures introduced to minimise, or ideally eliminate, any significant risks before placement is taken up, in compliance with statutory law.

5.5. Supervision

PSP will appoint someone to have overall responsibility for Work Experience Students who will clearly define the nature of the work, and suitable and sufficient arrangements will be made to ensure students are given appropriate supervision by a competent person.

The work experience will be planned beforehand, and students will be given appropriate instruction. At the commencement of their placement, students will be given Health and Safety induction into the workplace that will include hazards and control measures, fire, emergencies, first aid, accident reporting and security arrangements.

All students will be provided with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment/Clothing, and will be instructed on its correct use.

Students will not undertake any work prohibited by law or operate dangerous machinery.

5.6 Induction

PSP will ensure that all Work Experience personnel understand the necessity for Health and Safety controls in the workplace, and will be explained in more detail as part of induction.

Before the commencement of work on the first day, they will undertake the BBC Safety at Work computer based health and safety training and be issued with a Risk Assessment specific to the work activities they will be undertaking.

Students will be made aware of the work activities to be undertaken and any associated significant risks, and the necessary Health and Safety instruction and training will be given. Students will be informed as to who has day-to-day responsibility at the Studios for supervising them, who has responsibility for their Health and Safety while they are carrying out their Work Experience, who they will need to see in the event of illness or accident.

5.7 Personal Protective Equipment

PSP will provide any Personal Protective Equipment/Clothing identified by the Risk Assessment as necessary to reduce the risks, so far as is reasonably practicable, to anyone on Work Experience. Students will be instructed on the correct use of this Equipment/Clothing.