Guest Editor’s Letter

The Big Blur

Guest editor Nate Young brings the Big Blur into focus.

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Cover: Detail, “Tamara” poster. Lori McMichael, Advertising, third term. For full image, see page 29.
Gradually, I learned not to fear the Big Blur. Instead, I embraced it.

What is the “Big Blur?” In order to define it, let me tell you something about myself. Before attending Art Center College of Design in the early 1980s, I was an art director in Chicago. I trained for this role from the ground up and rose through the ranks, learning about teamwork and the creative give-and-take as I went. It wasn’t a formal graphic design education, but it was very effective.

After four years, I revised my portfolio to attend Art Center and live my dream of becoming an automotive designer. In 1984, I entered the Transportation Design program. My first three terms were all about relearning the basics of drawing, perspective, form, color, scale and proportion. I took academic classes in history, humanities, English composition and basic engineering. I found these early months at the College humbling because I thought I already knew what I was doing. I had, after all, made a living with my skills back in the Midwest.

I had a lot to learn.

But learn I did, under the wings of some incredible mentors like Strother MacMinn, Ted Younkin and Joe Farnen. After interning at General Motors, I stayed busy during my final terms by applying the whole creative process to sponsored projects and tough assignments, which were intended to build a portfolio that would get me a job.

Upon graduation I decided to go to work for an upstart automotive supplier in West Michigan rather than pursue a more conventional design position at a big car company. Why?

The Big Blur.

While I attended Art Center, I developed skills that were outside my Transportation Design curriculum. I became interested in team dynamics and leadership. My GM internship gave me the desire to develop a small team from scratch. I wanted a career that was different from what Art Center had supposedly prepared me for, but ironically, Art Center had also prepared me for the career I ended up pursuing.

In other words, I arrived at Art Center with some specific expectations, which were promptly ... blurred. The longer I stayed, the blurrier it got. But I loved it. And gradually, I learned not to fear the Big Blur. Instead, I embraced it.

Frankly, it was a surprise. When I completed my GM internship, I drove back to California from Michigan. For most of the trip, I ardently hoped that GM would offer me a job. But by the time I got to Las Vegas, I had changed my mind. Originally, I had feared a blurred working environment, but my emerging desire to work in a smaller design context had shown me that the Blur was nothing to fear. In fact, it was the non-Blur that worried me more than the Blur.

The Big Blur has served me well. During my 14 years in the automotive business, I went from being a staff designer to an executive vice president of a Fortune 100 company responsible for industrial design, consumer research and new product planning worldwide. The Big Blur was never far from my mind. In 2000, I started my own company. After I sold it three years later, I was reminded that my core values concerning design were all developed at Art Center. That’s why I came back to be the chief academic officer, and why today I stress my experience with the Big Blur.

Because I haven’t just taught the Big Blur—I’ve lived it.

My story is not unique. In fact, as I have traveled around the world on Art Center’s behalf, I have met alumni who have also experienced the Big Blur. Graphic designers who own companies. Product designers who specialize in brand strategy. Transportation designers who have become prominent publishers of books and tools for entertainment design. Illustration designers who are creating virtual worlds for game developers. Fine artists who have become curators. Environmental designers starting furniture companies in China . . .

I could go on and on. Art Center graduates just seem to adjust faster than students educated elsewhere. What has allowed us to do this? Why haven’t the massive changes in technology, media and the global economy adversely affected our students as they strike out in search of design careers?

The Big Blur.

This issue of DOT will investigate the implications of the Big Blur as it applies to Art Center’s educational mission and the College’s role in the larger world. By taking a closer look at the Blur, I hope we can offer some clear ideas about the future.

Nate Young
Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, Art Center College of Design
Millennial Opportunities

Remember Generation Y? This demographic group has a new name. Tagged “Millenials” by cultural observers, they’re shaping the future, one iPod at a time. But who are they? Millennials were born between 1982 and 2002, and the first wave graduated from high school in 2000. It is a very large group of about 80 million, which is 33 percent larger than the Baby Boom generation. Research shows that they tend to be team oriented and more likely to work on projects or homework in groups. Millennials and their involved parents also see themselves as consumers of education, having been exposed to learning in infancy, with Baby Einstein videos and Leapfrog baby computers. They’ve never known a world without instant connectivity, and they consider email for old people (they prefer instant message (IM). Access to international travel and the growth of Web-based communication mean that Millennials do not see national borders as barriers.

Approximately two-thirds of Art Center students are Millennials. Their views are reshaping impressions of what it means to become an artist or designer. For example, there has been a clear increase in the proportion of Art Center students who intend to be financially well-off, develop a meaningful philosophy of life, help others and influence social values and political structure—all at the same time.

Art Center has responded to the needs of Millennials. The transdisciplinary (TDS) focus of the curriculum appeals to their need to make sense of knowledge in context, not in isolation. Funded Educational Projects (FEPs) allow students to work in small groups, seeking solutions to problems with corporate partners. Generalizations about any social group should be undertaken with caution. But if the research is correct, the Millennials are a generation that may very well broker world peace and end hunger, all while multi-tasking on their Blackberries and PDAs. Optimistic, connected, prosperous and demanding—this generation promises, if nothing else, to redefine their educational experience.

The SelfCenter Generation

Art Center students require technology that serves academic as well as social and professional needs.

Art Center expects great things of its students. But students also have expectations, particularly where technology is concerned. Increasingly, in this area, it isn’t other schools that represent the competition. It’s iTunes, YouTube, Google and MySpace—all for-profit entities that have made a lucrative business of quickly adapting to the needs of their young customers.

“For today’s student, if we don’t exist in the online world we’re simply invisible,” explains Art Center’s chief technology officer Michael Berman.

To create a more responsive technological environment for students, the College has created the Art Center Online initiative. Overseen by Berman, the initiative seeks to satisfy the demand for services while at the same time helping Art Center to work in a more efficient and responsive way.

Art Center Online brings the campus up to today’s technological standards. But in order to prepare for the next step, participants in a summer 2006 seminar in the Graduate Industrial Design program were asked to develop a future vision of technology services at Art Center. Their proposal, based on extensive research into the life of Art Center undergraduates, was called “SelfCenter.” Moving far beyond “bread and butter” services, such as payment and course registration, SelfCenter envisions using technology to connect students to each other, both socially and professionally.

“1The older generation thinks of technology as impersonal, but for our students technology is an essential tool for learning about each other, building bonds and connections, advancing their education and improving their entire experience at Art Center and beyond,” Berman said. “We’ve been inspired by the ideas put forward by our talented and insightful students, and challenged to provide technology that’s as good as they are.”

Change Agency

Change is nothing to be afraid of. It is a natural part of the creative process. But it can be intimidating when we think of career change.

For example, there was a graphic designer who graduated at the top of her class more than 20 years ago. She went to work for a prestigious firm, but left after five years to raise her family. When her children were grown she began to feel an urge to once again engage her artistic side.

Art Center at Night’s Public Programs were developed for just this type of individual. “There was an aching in my heart to be creative,” this student said on her first night of class. Other students have found that although they have not left the workforce, their jobs are limiting their creativity. There are also plenty of professionals who are interested in adding new skills, so they can become more competitive in their fields.

One course offered through Public Programs to assist mid-career professionals is “Crafting a Meaningful Career.” It is structured around rediscovering passion, examining the intersection of personal and work histories and analyzing creative strengths and weaknesses to discover realistic career options. This class has helped its participants go on to more productive, satisfying careers because of the unique opportunities that Art Center provides, and because of the support of the class members who continue to get together even after the term has ended. And by the way, the former designer and mother who had the ache in her heart? She’s now a member of a group of women artists who meet regularly and are joining forces to have a gallery showing in the spring. Sometimes, successful change speaks for itself.

A New Scale for Synergy

What happens when a global company with a quarter-million employees meets a school with barely 2,000 students and faculty? In the case of General Electric and Art Center, mutual opportunities for innovation that neither would find anywhere else. Since last year, GE and Art Center have built a relationship that elevates the value of Funded Educational Projects (FEPs) to a new level. The FEP for the fall 2006 term represented the best of the GE–Art Center shared vision, resulting in many unexpected ideas.

What was once called “bread and butter” services, such as payment and course registration, was called “SelfCenter.” Moving far beyond “bread and butter” services, such as payment and course registration, SelfCenter envisions using technology to connect students to each other, both socially and professionally.

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Click here to read the Spotlight on the LeftView Design in the Fall 2008 issue of Dot 15.
Why does Art Center do such a good job of preparing students for the Big Blur—the breaking down of the traditional boundaries between life and work, and even between discrete tasks within life and work?

Obviously, it’s an enormous question, fraught with enormous implications. When I arrived at Art Center three years ago to take on my new responsibilities as the chief academic officer, students, faculty, staff and alumni would ask me what I believed to be the main challenges for the school and how we would take on those challenges. Once I got past the more mundane issues, I found myself thinking about the Big Blur and Art Center’s role in it. I understood from my own experience that Art Center’s rigorous approach to foundational skills provided an essential element to our students’ confidence. Once they left the College and entered the blurry realm in the real world, these skills then became transformational. They accommodated the five skills, as well as to similar information and markets. Fortunately, Art Center has always sought out the producers of the “number one” hit in the world at any given time is...
encounter. This preparation appeals to potential employers. Another interesting statistic is that Art Center alumni tend to move around a lot, and the majority of graduates end up diverging from their skill-set. If you fear the Blur, this might seem alarming. Are alumni, once they enter the real world, leaving design? Not exactly. What’s happening is that graduates are using their experience with the Big Blur to explore other areas in the creative world. Our alumni report that the foundational design education and creative training they received at Art Center, combined with the ongoing opportunities in their profession, have given them the ability to leverage almost any personal goal they sought. Design, for them, is just the beginning.

Dreamweavers
This flexible, Blur-inspired training puts Art Center in the dream business. Students are attracted to Art Center because they see a place where passions can be transformed into reality. But dreams aren’t easily realized. We first teach students the discipline and rigor they require to master design as a profession, and then we unleash them on projects that enable them to obtain entry-level positions when they graduate. We are committed to making sure that the pedagogical structure of Art Center is always subservient to the requirements of students and their futures. You will never find ivy growing on our walls, because we change them too much. Our graduates fulfill their ambitions, realize their passions and anticipate their dreams because they are aggressively encouraged to change. That’s our secret. That’s what makes Art Center different, and that’s what will ensure our future.

One of the most important reasons why design disciplines have blurred in recent years is because we’re now more engaged in designing overall experiences, rather than just discrete objects. So a single project might call for the integration of objects, services, communications, sound—everything that constitutes an environment. And it’s likely to be delivered in at least several different media. This kind of project is by definition transdisciplinary—not only across the design disciplines, but including the humanities and social sciences as well, since the focus is on the human experience. This shift from product-based design to human-based design in our multi-modal world will continue to blur the disciplines, but it will remain important that deep, differential skills and knowledge in each discipline are not lost. Everyone needs to bring something different to the table."

—Mark Breitenberg, Dean, Undergraduate Education

“There is no term that better describes the Art Center experience for students than ‘blur.’ Many think that sleepless nights and too much caffeine are the cause of the personal blur, but the reality is that it is both globally experienced and unavoidable. The emotional messages posted on a friend’s blog, witnessing video of the suffering in places like Darfur, images of the daily violence in a city on another continent—none of these experiences can be easily defined in a singular manner. Today’s generation of students seeks knowledge in totality, not in separate pieces. Our educational response must address this blur. Student Affairs helps make sense of what students learn in the studios and classrooms and challenges them to bridge the divide between the heart and the mind.”

—Tracy P. Tambascia, Dean of Students and Vice President, Student Affairs
As a production designer in animation, my daily job involves not only creating artwork, but more importantly, communicating to both artists and non-artists a broad range of artistic ideas, solutions to problems and discussion of artistic possibilities. The design and execution of an animated film, to me, revolves around keeping the artists and technicians working on the film artistically inspired and informed. Every fundamental class I took at Art Center—design, composition, color, life painting and perspective—gave me the building blocks, concepts and vocabulary I use on a daily basis to ensure our films have the creative spark and visual richness they are known for.

Illustration alumna Kathy Altieri is now a production designer at DreamWorks Animation, having previously held numerous positions at Walt Disney Pictures.

What does it mean to prepare for change? In the case of the Art Center graduates whose stories follow, it means expecting that students’ educational training will equip them to do excellent work—but that it might also entice them to do something entirely different. The fact is that in today’s rapidly evolving professional landscape, artists and designers need to make the most of everything they have, even if that implies that they will move in unexpected directions. The trick, of course, is to imagine that the unexpected is really an opportunity—life’s way of keeping everything interesting, not to mention fresh and exciting. What sets Art Center graduates apart from others in their fields is their appetite both for preparation and for change. In the end, it’s not terribly important if you studied to be one thing but ended up doing something else. That’s what your education was all about. That was why you came to Art Center in the first place.

BEYOND DISCIPLINE

The Lion King (1994), Walt Disney Pictures

Over the Hedge (2006), DreamWorks Animation
Tim Kobe graduated with a degree in Environmental Design in 1982 and founded Eight Inc., where he has undertaken a broad range of projects, including architecture, interior, exhibition and graphic design.

Getting a degree in Environmental Design from Art Center shaped my thinking about cross-disciplinary design pursuits. Our studio is a truly cross-disciplinary practice that would not have been possible without the exposure to diverse creative efforts and the work ethic that Art Center instilled. I believe my career development was marked by the range of opportunities offered to me because of the experience I gained at the College. The design principles I studied were a significant part of my education, but they were balanced by a number of other factors—confidence, integrity—that were of equal importance. I still refer to these design principles on a daily basis.

Wilhelm Oehl, principal at Eight Inc., attended Art Center Europe and later transferred to the United States, where he studied at Hillside Campus in Pasadena and graduated in Industrial Design in 1994.

The skills I acquired at Art Center, both on the European campus and in Pasadena, gave me a solid foundation for what was to come in the design world following graduation. The exposure to the creative process from start to finish showed me how to develop ideas on paper and then see them through to a scale model or digital execution. The opportunity to participate in sponsored projects and engage in direct contact with clients gave me a taste of the consultancy business and provided a chance to improve my presentation skills. In my work, I now focus on designs that are simple, honest, emotional and relevant to each client’s needs.
Art Center challenged us to reconsider what people believe cannot be done. We learned to dream big and create a credible and compelling path to that future. A business partner once called me a “pragmatic visionary,” which I liked. I think that’s an outcome of the skills taught at Art Center, an outcome that enables us to be innovative in a variety of forms. At the College, the constant pressure on creative problem solving, personal accountability, high-caliber execution and rigorous critique repatterns our minds. In my experience, those skills provide unique value outside of traditional design. Combine that with a tolerance for career and business risk, and all kinds of doors open to us.

Filmmaking is incredibly challenging. But it can also be hugely rewarding. I have a pretty good idea what it takes to survive in the movie business. To date, I have produced or executive produced some 25 feature films. What did Art Center do to prepare me for my producing career? Confidence was the greatest gift. If as a student you can survive the deadlines, the grueling hours, the exacting assignments and the critiques from peers, then you will have gotten your money’s worth. Francis Coppola’s advice on my first day as a producer was, “Keep your eye on the ball.” It took me many years to figure out what I think he was saying. You always have to keep a clear picture in your mind of where you’re going. It’s easy to get lost along the way.

Transportation Design alumnus Lloyd Walker is principal of Precurve, LLC, a consulting practice that helps companies develop strategies that utilize design to envision the future of their businesses.

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Bring up the term “research” in casual academic conversations and most people will instantly flash back to the pile of note cards and stack of library books they amassed when they were pulling together various long and complex college papers. If they’re a bit more sophisticated—that is, if they’ve been paying attention to the changing nature of academic institutions over the past few decades—they’ll acknowledge that research is the new frontier: an area in which colleges and universities are uniquely positioned to deliver insights to both the public and private sectors. At Art Center, research is an integral component of graduate and undergraduate education. Undergrads learn how to survey their disciplines and glean vital information from how, for example, people drive their cars, view the world through film and photography or interact with technology. Once they move on to become graduate students, the intensity goes up. The goal here is to bring together everything from sociology to marketing in an effort to provide a suggestive matrix from which powerful behavior models can be developed. The results are often the antithesis of dry (though essential) statistical surveys; instead, Art Center grad students who participate in research projects aim to shatter preconceived techniques and establish new, and usually intensely visual, approaches to researching diverse issues, such as environmentalism or pre-teen attitudes. At the College, Andy Ogden (chair, Graduate Industrial Design) and Anne Burdick (chair, Graduate Media Design) have joined forces to supply a point of view—sometimes confluent, sometimes divergent—on how graduate research can react to, shape and even define a world increasingly dominated by the Big Blur.
"Let's go across the hall and see what we've been doing."

An innocuous enough invitation. If Anne Burdick were a chemist, she might be readying a visitor to witness a new polymer under development, or study a breakup of a thorny genetic puzzle. Her lab at Art Center—called Super Studio—is a little different, however. Instead of centrifuges and electron microscopes, she has . . . walls. But what walls! One might as well have stepped into an art gallery. At first, the experience is disorienting. What, exactly, is all this stuff? There are charts, models, drawing, photographs, panes of glass with writing on them. The inevitable impression is that some kind of creative process is at work here, but what is it?

Welcome to design research, Art Center-style. The project that Burdick is explaining concerns attitudes toward the environment. An extremely hot topic—a pair of quasi-academic fields that have gained popularity in recent years. Although both buzzworthy practices have captured the fancy of corporations seeking to understand their customers, they make up only one component of design research as it is conducted at Art Center.

"Research, as we practice it, isn't meant to deliver cold, hard facts," Burdick says. "In the predesign phase, we're trying to locate opportunity spaces, areas where we can ask 'How are these concepts used and understood, and by whom?'"

While the environmentalism project is still under development, the most recent Graduate Media Design projects that Burdick worked on, "Tweens: Technology, Personal Agency, Engagement," the product of a year-long collaboration with Hewlett-Packard’s Consumer Applications Lab, has been published.

"Designers see the world differently and can communicate their ideas through visual representation," the study maintains. In total, 22 “tweens”—children who are just exiting preadolescence but have not yet become full-fledged teenagers—were interviewed. They were asked about who they are, their habits, their everyday experiences, and perhaps most importantly, their values.

Several insights come through clearly in the published documents, a large-format amalgamation of images, charts, quotes and photographs. First, tweens are not minimalists; they inhabit a blurred universe of signs, symbols and, for want of a better term, stuff. Second, tweens are obsessed with communication and maintaining their social networks, often through the use of new technologies, such as cell phones and social-networking websites. Finally, the tweens surveyed have linked their identities to lifestyle far more extensively than previous generations.

Traditionalists might be disturbed at these results, but that’s the point; research, of any sort, is meant to illuminate the previously unexplored. Tweens, as a new social unit, are something of a great mystery to parents, educators and marketers (not to mention ethnographers, psychologists and sociologists).

“We’re not trying to be scientists, and we don’t want to provide a new version of the research method, which is well-established,” Burdick says. “But we feel that qualitative research in the science and our approach to using design are not separate from each other, not discrete. They are on the same continuum. We’re working shoulder-to-shoulder with sociology and ethnography, bringing to the table our ability to visualize things differently.”
At the moment, Ogden and his students are working on what might at first seem like an unlikely project for industrial designers: tea.

“We’re operating on the assumption that tea is the next coffee. How do you make that happen? How do you use design to convert more of the world’s coffee drinkers to tea?”

To achieve that goal, as Ogden describes it, designers need to examine the full range of experiences associated with tea consumption, everything from brewing technologies to business issues to flavor distinctions.

“What is it about tea?” he asks. “In order for us to know, we need to do system analysis and system design. We need to understand the whole system that is tea and anticipate where the consumer’s head will be in the future.”

Not surprisingly, designers have special skills in this area: highly developed abilities to engage in visual and functional discrimination. Because they aren’t scientists, they can execute research that allows for a much higher level of fuzziness—fuzziness that, as it happens, often allows them to come up with lightning-bolt insights that more overtly empirical methods would miss. Designers also tend to be natural futurists, always casting an eye toward what people will be doing, rather than what they are doing at the moment.

As far as the ultimate objectives for Art Center and its research efforts are concerned, Ogden thinks that it’s essential for the College to leverage its numerous advantages. “This is how we will differentiate what we do,” he says. “We have to come up with a unique point of view about what people need, but we also have to connect that with a mandate for human-centric design. This is payback time. Designers must make up for what we didn’t think about 20 or 30 years ago. We have to gather as much information as we can to get as smart as possible.”

This is where the stakes for design research leave the studio and begin to have an effect on the real world.

“We are being pushed to a place where research isn’t just important, it’s indispensable. The intersection of global hypercompetition and pressing questions about matters like sustainability mean that we have inherited a huge challenge. But in design we have always understood that if you don’t do your research, the things you don’t know will come back at you, sometimes in disastrous ways.”

Illustrations on pages 20–23: Selection of pages from the research project “Tweens: Technology, Personal Agency, Engagement.”
“This photo was an exercise in lighting technique and finesse. The key to this shot was timing: The olive entering the gin had to be synchronized with the release of the shutter.”


“Producing this image to satisfy my artistic vision would not have been possible without my friends. Once friends and I built this room in my backyard and attached the yard hose to a fire sprinkler, the fun began. When I developed the film I had a fantastic realization that I would be a photographer for the rest of my life.”

2. Casey Stroud, Photography and Imaging, first term. “Cannonball,” Instructor: Steve LaVoie

“‘Depotting’ is a condensed urban community experience that promotes Metro ridership by offering an onboard valet of goods and services in addition to choice among public and private spaces.”

“My work explores the isolation and fragmentation that occurs in the modern landscape, the way people live with a blindness or veil that separates them from relational and environmental realities.”

Sarah Awad, Illustration, sixth term. “Chicken and Milk.” Instructors: Tom Knechtel, John Millei, Adam Ross, Aaron Smith

“I developed this piece in a series, working from a kind of visual journal format. It’s meant to express the imaginative qualities that go into feeling and thinking through everyday events. Some of it is literal, and a lot of it isn’t. Mainly it’s meant to be read like a map that leads you in circles, so that you’re left with questions more than anything else.”

Mike Bertino, Illustration, seventh term. “Journal.” Instructors: Mark Todd, Esther Watson

“Easy to link, easy to learn. I designed ‘Link-O’ as an educational toy for use in the water. By linking the fish, kids will have fun learning the sequence of numbers and how to count. Intended for kids ages two to four, ‘Link-O’ develops both their mental and physical capabilities.”


“Our team sought to create a seamless design that works with the entire Hewlett-Packard product line. Our solution, ‘Unifying the Family Through Connectivity,’ applies to both the families of customers as well as the family of HP products. New packaging brings warmth, color and easy-to-follow instructions to the existing HP brand.”

Wayne Chang, Graphic Design, eighth term; Lee Nguyen, Product Design, eighth term; Sammy Pyo, Product Design, eighth term; Tammy Tan, Graphic Design, seventh term; Amanda Thompson, Environmental Design, seventh term. Packaging and product line for Raku team concept “Unifying the Family Through Connectivity.” Instructors: Rob Ball, Liliana Becerra, Todd Belle, Dan Hoy

“The project was to design educational material for children ages two to ten. Using patterns, color gradation and number waves or cuts, ‘Shape Builders’ teaches color, shape, size, sequence and problem solving.”

Jiaren Hui, Graphic Design, fourth term. “Shape Builders.” Instructors: Candice-Leigh Baumgardner, Norm Schureman
“The history and struggle of the Korean people inspired me to make a film exploring the gray areas of humanity. Through research and collaboration with a culture outside my own, I further defined my voice as a filmmaker, telling intimate stories with epic significance.”


“This film is about the seniors’ personal stories, rather than being just another promotional piece. We knew that visually the film would look beautiful and fluid because of all the movement in the water. In a lot of ways it was like a dance—we were dealing with movement and rhythms, and the whole piece has a nice flow to it. I believe we delivered a professional film that the YMCA can share with the community for years to come.”

10. Brian Thomas Barnhart, Film, first term; Chris Buongiorno, Film, first term; Jeremy Lundborg, Film, first term. “Senior Swim.” Instructor: Gabor Kalman

“This poster was inspired by a location described in Italo Calvino’s book Invisible Cities, wherein Marco Polo informs Kublai Khan of the types of places in his vast territory. Polo’s depiction of Tamara is about cities and signs, and the relationship of the city dweller to the experience of the urban environment. The same semiotic elements thrive here and define our visual world, which is the feeling that I tried to capture in this piece.”


“This project further defined the relationship between different majors at Art Center. Creating a graphic poster for The Da Vinci Code in an advertising class allowed me to use both conceptual and design skills, which I enjoyed. I also realized that films use words and visuals to move an idea forward, similar to advertising.”

“Images don’t act neutrally within the spaces we receive them. Critical awareness of these interactions of meaning is the only way to avoid passive reception of their influence.”


“To affect a surface by its meeting with another plane, and the collision of this meeting reverberating indefinitely in all directions. In terms of forces like these, something like a lie is as tangible as a structure’s foundation and yet can make that structure disappear.”

My core concept is process. Students come wanting to learn how to make their work. I am more interested in teaching them how to work. Susan Sontag once wrote, “Style is simply the decisions you make while working as an artist.” Being in process is being decisive in the moment. Process is all about inquiry, imagination, play and risk; it embraces the idea of changing one’s mind. The responsibility of the artist is to always make himself or herself more interesting. Having my photography students survey work being done in design, graphics, illustration, art and film, as well as being aware of the culture around them, opens the possibility of spontaneous, creative collision. I want the question of “What if?” to be at the core of their artistic process.

Steve LaVoie, Faculty Council Co-chair, Photography and Imaging Department

The best way to prepare for change is to expose yourself to it all the time. Don’t get too attached to one thing, because things can always be different. It’s important to maintain an open-minded, excited attitude about change. Remember that societies (as well as individuals) who resist change are historically very detrimental. In my classroom, I try to support experimentation and engage in discussion that fosters the recognition of change. I try to challenge my students to understand how to apply and promote positive change in their own lives and to promote change in the service of humanity. As designers and artists, we should be creating a better world, not recreating the same world.

Micol Hebron, Faculty Council Co-chair, Liberal Arts and Sciences

There are a number of behaviors I try to practice to prepare for change. First, I do my best to anticipate possible changes and plan accordingly. To do this, I try to stay up to date on the events and trends that are currently in motion, as well as those that are expected. Second, I try to learn consistently, not just about design, but a variety of subjects. I’m a big believer in interconnectedness, and broader knowledge means greater awareness of connections and opportunities. Lastly, while some changes may be unwanted, one of the most important things to remember is that change always brings opportunity. Since life is constantly changing, that means there are also constant opportunities—which is welcome news to a designer.

Josh Nakaya, third term, Product Design; President, Art Center Student Government

The Last Word


“This project’s premise is that in the future, architecture in Japan will continue to develop by layering itself on top of and around existing buildings. Cameo hotel suites are individual units that are inserted into existing buildings and cantilever out over the busy streets of Ginza, providing unexpected views and an exciting metropolitan experience.”


“The ReadyMade playground focuses on distinction, transformation and reuse. Instead of the newest and latest goods, ReadyMade uses the idea of nostalgia to make everything look familiar. Whether it’s a table, chair, bucket, phone or record player—each piece can go beyond its normal function to become something extraordinary.”