Image

Overview

By thinking expansively, one can imagine new realities and create images in the minds of others. Visualization adds value to things. People say seeing is believing. By rendering something visible, it's easier to comprehend it fully, to understand its potential.

Designers excel at creating inventive, compelling, and believable images to begin manifesting realities. With that can come great power and responsibility. What realities should one manifest? It's easier than ever today to create and even be fooled by a "fake image."

Understanding authenticity in images used to be easier. In ancient Rome, for example, purple was the color of royalty. Purple clothing dye was expensive because it came from snails. To produce this Tyrian purple dye, the snails had to be boiled for days in giant vats, producing a terrible smell. So in those days, there was no denying the status of someone wearing purple.

This course is part studio and part seminar. Students will take a hands-on approach in creating, choosing, and sequencing images to complete three separate creative projects and begin understanding the many layers that often go into image production. Through these projects, we will look at images on multiple levels—by themselves or singular, as a collection or collage of multiple, and finally as a set algorithmically created by a set of rules or a program. Through lectures and reading discussions, they will become familiar with the issues in contemporary artistic dialogue surrounding images, approaching them with a critical eye and mind. Together we will learn techniques and tools to better decode many different types of images in the world today, looking into their metadata, unraveling their many layers.

Note that this is an art class. Therefore, the quality of your work depends at least as much on your original, inventive thinking as it does on satisfying all requirements of a project. You are expected to take risks and experiment, as there is no recipe or linear path for completing creative work. You are also expected to be an active participant in the class in both dialogues about readings as well as critiques of other students' works.

Ideally, everyone who takes this class will never look at an image living in the world the same way again. Today, images are abundantly everywhere, let's ask ourselves: what kind of images should live in our world? What is a thoughtful image?

Projects

p1. Billboard
singular image

p2. Album
multiple images (collecting, curating, sequencing)

p3. Generation
infinite images (finding data, creating taxonomy, making rules, programming)

Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. A finalized schedule will be handed out at the beginning of each project.

February 3
Lecture — Introduction
Exercise — Image Descriptions

p1. Billboard

February 10
Lecture — Billboards
Reading — Primo Levi, "Psychophant" (1990)
Assign p1. Billboard

February 17
Working on p1. Billboard
Reading — David Reinfurt, "Before the Billboard Ban" (2019)

February 24
Final p1. Billboard

p2. Album

March 2
Lecture — Albums, "Image to Text and Back Again"
Reading — Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image" (2009)
Assign p2. Album

March 9
Working on p2. Album
Watch — Oliver Laric, "Versions" (2010)

~ Spring Break ~

March 23
Guest — Shannon Finnegan
Working on p2. Album

March 30
Final p2. Album

p3. Generation

April 6
Lecture — Image Generation, Algorithmic Images, Programming Images
Guest — Aarati Akkapeddi
Assign p3. Generation

April 13
Working on p3. Generation

April 20
Working on p3. Generation

April 27
Final p3. Generation

May 4
All final work due

Symbol

When I first heard I might be teaching this course, I thought it would be nice to find a symbol for it. I eventually arrived at "egg." An egg can be about beginning—a new creature rests inside, waiting to emerge. There is surprise at who is born and what it becomes, although we can study the egg for clues.

Visually, eggs are quite stunning. They are a natural, everyday object yet entirely themselves—nothing else in the world looks like an egg. They are an incredible feat of natural engineering. They have a hard exterior and a soft interior. They can become a living creature if fertilized and nurtured, or they can be used as food. They speak about time itself—sometimes when I look at a bird egg, I remember dinosaurs also produced eggs. Pokémon all lay eggs too.

I liked that eggs could be a good beginning for us as a class—they are a primordial symbol with many art historical references we could explore together. Indeed, many artists and designers have used eggs in their works—surrealist Salvador Dalí used eggs in many of his paintings, and an egg sculpture sits atop his home (now museum) in Spain. People speculate that he was interested in eggs for how they symbolized the individual, inside and out—with a hard exterior, full of defenses, but a soft, layered, changeable interior.

Eggs might be small, but they are also worlds. They contain a whole ecosystem of a growing creature. Similarly, a single image can imply a world—a different way of life. This is their power.