

TH220 Designing for the Theatre
Fall 2020

Mon, Fri 1:50-3:25

Class zoom:

<https://smcvt.zoom.us/j/99828243771?pwd=NINKcVlrbmZURU0TmZlemkxR3l3dz09>

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Office hours: Monday and Friday 9:45-10:45

Office hours zoom:

<https://smcvt.zoom.us/j/96875911528?pwd=QlZrVHEzeFdWK0cvM1R6THR5VU9mZz09>

Required Texts:

Robert Edmond Jones, The Dramatic Imagination.

Jones is one of the most influential designers of the twentieth century.
This book lays out his philosophy of design in a highly readable format.
The ideas expressed here have bearing on all aspects of productions.

David Ball, Backwards and Forwards.

Ball's book is about script analysis and design. Since all of a designer's work grows out of a script (or the rehearsal process), the capacity to parse the script and see clearly where the director and production team are going with it is vital to the design process.

Austin Kleon, Steal Like an Artist.

An unlikely self-help title...

Recommended Texts:

Klaus, Carl et al. Stages of Drama.

This anthology has a lot of scripts from a wide range of styles

Paul Carter, The Backstage Handbook

This is a reference book with materials covering the spectrum of theatrical work.

Additional required supplies:

- colored paper—preferably of a middling tone, (must be gray, pale blue or pale brown—paper bag color; this is a mid-value paper for rendering) and **NOT** bright. Occasional use of black paper is acceptable too for experimentation
- *some* of the following: pencil, pen, color pencils, conté, pastels, crayons, chalk or charcoal, watercolor or acrylic paints
- a folder with pockets for your weekly projects and commentaries

Additional optional supplies:

- work gloves (may be cotton)
- furniture or lighting template(s)
- drafting tape
- vellum
- mechanical pencils and erasers

If you don't supply your own imagination and actively engage the projects
no amount of expensive art supplies will compensate and ensure success.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

This is an introduction to designing for the stage. Theatre is a collaborative art form which sets it apart from many of the other fine arts. The complexity of working closely with other artists challenges us to find new and better ways of communicating with each other on every project we undertake. In this class we will concentrate primarily on fundamental methods of communication used in the profession which include written, drawn, drafted, colored, modeled and orally presented work. The more of these basic tools you have at your disposal, the more likely you will be to successfully realize your ideas on a stage. You are not expected to master these communication tools, but you are expected to commit to each form of communication and do your level best with it; mastery of one or some will come with far more time than we have in this class. It is especially important to realize that at this stage of your education failure to communicate an idea is often a more valuable learning tool than success, and the most important aspect is to commit to your ideas and expose yourself to risk. Being a theatre artist is a lifelong learning process. What I like best about it is that you can continue to learn new things throughout a career; and if success is fleeting, then so too is failure.

OBJECTIVE

By the end of the course, students should be able to read, analyze and discuss scripts from a variety of design points of view. The student should be able to develop a conceptual approach to designing a production and present those ideas effectively to a director and other members of the production team using a variety of communication tools. You will be able to respond critically to each other's work with an informed point of view shaped by common reading and writing assignments. And, you will gain an appreciation for the collaborative nature of theatre design and production.

SKETCHES/DESCRIPTIONS

Each Monday you will submit on Canvas and exchange via email images of two sketches done "from life" of one subject from different perspectives (the subject must be "in context," not "floating" on the page). You will also submit on Canvas and exchange via email a **typed** 100-300-word essay that relates specifically to the sketch. For this essay, you must pick at least one but no more than three of the elements of design (**line, shape, direction, size, texture, color [hue], and value**) or principles of design (**balance, gradation, repetition [rhythm], contrast, harmony, dominance and unity**) identify them, and focus your written essay on your investigation of that aspect of design in the sketch. Note: your sketch may (and should) reflect something of each element and principle, but your essay should be more focused. Your sketch must be on approved off-white paper (no garish colors, no near white, no black). *Date and put your name on all paperwork* handed in.

You will type your comment about your classmate's sketches and essay on a separate document and you are encouraged to also do a small thumbnail sketch to help illustrate your comments, and include an image of that sketch. You will turn in your comments on Canvas on Friday. You will email your comments to your classmate. I will comment on all sketches, essays and comments on Canvas by the following Monday. Late work will not be accepted, will receive a zero, and the classmate scheduled to comment on it will receive full credit for their comments.

There are a total of **12** sketches expected over the course of the semester. Five of them *must* include pencil, charcoal and/or chalk; five *must* include pen or ink; the other two may be other media of your choice, with at least one (and no more than two) being a computer generated hard copy. I encourage you to mix your media and experiment with new ideas and techniques. The subject matter may be repeated in different media.

The object of this semester-long practice is to exercise the ability to communicate both visually and linguistically. It is surprising how poorly or sloppily we tend to utilize these common skills—and how important they are to designers and technicians. The more you exercise them, the better you will be not only at expressing yourself, but also understanding others trying to express themselves. By focusing on the elements and principles of design, I hope you will consciously think more about them as you do your own work through the semester. Sketches, essays and comments will be graded on a one-point scale. As the semester progresses, I will expect to see improvement in your capability to handle the form of the sketches and essays--we all improve with practice! Therefore, the standards for grading will go up during the semester. Both sketches and essays may be revisited and revised at your convenience and resubmitted at the end of the semester. You may choose to respond to written comments from your classmate or me in writing for inclusion with the revisions submitted at the end of the semester.

PROJECTS

Over the course of the semester there are seven projects (including the final) which you will complete. The projects will be based on the seven plays you will read over the course of the semester. The first five plays will be from the following periods (the final two groups are TBD):

1. Greek, Roman, Medieval (not Everyman), Italian Renaissance, Spanish Golden Age
2. 20th Century Continental, 20th Century British
3. 18th Century, Romanticism, Mid-Late 19th Century, Irish
4. Elizabethan, Jacobean, English Restoration, 17th Century France
5. Contemporary Canadian, African, Asian, Caribbean

The projects are designed to exercise a variety of communications skills, and they will get progressively more involved (each will build on the work done in the previous projects, and carry through several common elements). The projects will be presented to the class as poster sessions on the day they are due: you will assemble visual materials and present your concept to the class. Remember: every aspect of your presentation is a design opportunity and should reflect your interpretation of the play. There is a 6 minute time limit for your presentation. You will be expected to respond critically and

respectfully to your classmates work, and your response will be figured into your class participation grade.

Within 24 hours of each presentation you will write a brief self-evaluation exploring how well you thought your presentation went and what you might do differently if you had it to do again based on the class reaction. These will be submitted on Canvas.

The final project is the “Final Exam” and will be presented during final exam week. As the culmination of your semester’s work, there will be higher expectations and more work required for the project. You will be given several class periods to work actively on your projects. There is a high chance that this “Final” presentation will be “open to the public.” Projects are eligible for display at KCACTF, where they may compete for regional awards, and at the end of the year scholarship symposium held by the College.

PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Presentation | Problem solving skills demonstrated |
| Finished form (craftsmanship) | Graphic skills |
| Progress and improvement | Overall skill of communication—oral and written |

PLAYS TO READ FOR CLASS PROJECTS:

You must pick one play from each of the 7 groups noted above. You will submit a two-to-four-page response to each of the plays you read on Canvas. You must incorporate at least **two** sources *in addition to the script* in your critical response to the play. [Wikipedia, Encyclopedias and Dictionaries *will not count* toward your additional sources, but they might be used to stimulate ideas for searches in journals and books.] You must include the short bibliography at the end of your paper and you must credit where your ideas and quotes come from in footnotes or endnotes. Due dates are noted on the syllabus but you may work ahead if you wish. Be ready to discuss your plays as they relate to the period and use them as illustrations on exams.

GRADING

- 20% written responses to plays
- 15% weekly sketches
- 45% six design projects
- 10% Final project
- 10% Participation and Attendance

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Punctuality and dependability are important in theatre and in class. You are “allowed” one excused absence. After that each absence will result in a loss of three points from your final grade. For example, if your work averages an 84 (a B average) but you have two unexcused absences, you will receive a 78 (a C+ average). Whenever possible email me or call my office and leave a message indicating why you are not in class. If you have a total of five absences, you will automatically fail the course. Any work you miss due to

minor illness is expected to be made up within one week of your return to class--all other late assignments will be downgraded one grade per day, or partial day, late (ie: work that would normally earn an A will only be capable of earning an A-).

Showing up is only part of the challenge of this course. You will be expected to participate in in-class exercises. In addition, you will be expected to discuss and respond to work presented by me and by your classmates in a responsible and constructive manner.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

All students are subject to the College policy and procedure on academic dishonesty. Plagiarism may result in failing this course and/or expulsion from the College. I urge you to err on the side of caution in citing your sources for scholarship.

LEARNING DIFFERENCES

If you have a documented learning difference, please feel free to make me aware of it. I will be happy to make any accommodations necessary for you.

Please feel free to drop in to chat about this class at any time.

(Working) CLASS SCHEDULE

| WEEK ONE | | | |
|------------|-------|---|---------------------|
| MON | 8/31 | introduction/what is design | |
| FRI | 9/4 | working with shapes--bring tools to class | |
| WEEK TWO | | | |
| MON | 9/7 | elements of design | Project 1, sketch 1 |
| FRI | 9/11 | in class exercise (using Molly Bang) | sketch 1 comment |
| WEEK THREE | | | |
| MON | 9/14 | Elements of composition | sketch 2 |
| FRI | 9/18 | 3D exercise: cooperative communication | sketch 2 comment |
| WEEK FOUR | | | |
| MON | 9/21 | observations of nature/perspective lessons | Project 2, sketch 3 |
| FRI | 9/25 | observations of nature/human body | sketch 3 comment |
| WEEK FIVE | | | |
| MON | 9/28 | research—possible field trip to library | sketch 4 |
| FRI | 10/2 | special film presentation | sketch 4 comment |
| WEEK SIX | | | |
| MON | 10/5 | developing a concept | Project 3, sketch 5 |
| FRI | 10/9 | process—moving from a sketch to a drawing | sketch 5 comment |
| WEEK SEVEN | | | |
| MON | 10/12 | drawing—work in class | sketch 6 |
| FRI | 10/16 | introduction to drafting: tools and materials | sketch 6 comment |
| WEEK EIGHT | | | |

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|------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| MON | 10/19 | drafting in class | sketch 7 |
| FRI | 10/23 | drafting in class | Project 4, sketch 7 comment |
| WEEK NINE | | | |
| MON | 10/26 | drafting in class | sketch 8 |
| FRI | 10/30 | drafting in class | sketch 8 comment |
| WEEK TEN | | | |
| MON | 11/2 | drafting in class | sketch 9 |
| FRI | 11/6 | drafting in class | sketch 9 comment |
| WEEK ELEVEN | | | |
| MON | 11/9 | introduction to color | sketch 10 |
| FRI | 11/13 | color/rendering | sketch 10 comment |
| WEEK TWELVE | | | |
| MON | 11/16 | Work with color | Project 5, sketch 11 |
| FRI | 11/20 | TBD | sketch 11 comment |
| WEEK THIRTEEN | | | |
| MON | 11/23 | TBD | sketch 12 |
| FRI | 11/27 | NO CLASS THANKSGIVING | |
| WEEK FOURTEEN—intentionally remote | | | |
| MON | 11/30 | Work on presentations | sketch 12 comment |
| FRI | 12/4 | Presentations | Project 6 |
| WEEK FIFTEEN—intentionally remote | | | |
| MON | 12/7 | Work on presentations | |
| FRI | 12/11 | Work on presentations | |

Final Presentations for Project 7 TBD