

Krystal De Souza
COMD3503 – Topics in Graphic Design
Prof. M. Trofimova
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Midterm – Graphic Design Lecture

I attended the Teen Design Fair at Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum on Tuesday, October 16 from 4:30 – 7:00 pm. I must say, despite it being a “teen design fair” and mainly targeted to high school students and college freshman, it was very informative. This Design Fair was used as a platform to introduce and bring awareness to the many different avenues one can explore in the Design field. Speakers from all different design backgrounds were there so I was given the opportunity to hear a few of their stories and interact with them on a one to one basis. Some also brought samples of their work, along with their business cards which were handed out at the end of their presentations.



Figure 1 - Cooper Hewitt Teen Design Fair Welcome Greeting

Kristen Henriksen was one of the first designers I spoke to. She works for David Stark Designs. Originally she attended Kansas State University and majored in Interior Design. Now, she is working in Exhibition/Scenic Design. Her clients are mainly corporations and just to name a few - the Brooklyn Museum and Target are a part of her clientele. Her company specializes in visual presentation and exhibition/ scenic designs so they usually design the space for social/corporate events – as she put it – “they design the experience”. I had not thought of that field as a part of design but after looking at the mockups they created from simple designs made out of toilet paper, the connection was clear that this indeed was another field of design. Also, she explained that their first approach to any project was mind mapping. They were big on mind mapping and I know that our professors at City Tech, have always told us to use mind mapping as an approach to any design problem because it is a very effective tool. So that point she made also made me feel a connection with this particular field.

Bryan Chou, a Landscape and Program Designer, was another designer I spoke to. He attended the University of Washington and then went to the Rhode Island School for Design. He explained to us that after he took an environmental planning course, he immediately became interested in his surroundings and how design can fit into the scheme of things. Bryan said that

people who usually chose to be in this field were very much interested in looking at the environment and seeing how you can make things better through design.

It therefore is fitting that he works for a company called MikYoung Kim Design – consisting of about 15 employees who specialize in landscape architecture and urban design. He said they usually work for and with architects; work on a city scale; and also work on an international level. For example, they were given the task to create an interior garden for a children's hospital in Seattle. They took many things into consideration before they started designing such as the area where this garden will be housed, and the general climate of that area. Since it rained most of the time, they decided that building a structure that can utilize the rainfall would be ideal. They worked with a lot of fabricators (or people that build the actual mockups) which resulted in S-shaped structures (see fig. 2) that when people stood near it, it would light up and release a mist over the garden. Bryan's particular field of design was also another interesting field that I did not know existed prior to today.



Figure 2 - Mini Mockup of Interior Garden Design for the Children's Hospital

I can relate to Bryan on a certain level because like him, I realized my passion for art after taking an Art History class in high school. This really sparked my interest and that is when I considered actually pursuing a degree in Design. Although I wasn't quite sure what field of design I wanted to be a part of, I just knew that whatever it was, it would involve me creating something visual.

Amongst the other designers I listened to and interacted with, I must say Cyrene Mary – Senior Graphic Designer at Benefit Cosmetics, was the most relatable to what I am currently studying in school. She mentioned that she attended the University of San Diego and majored in Fine Arts, with a concentration in Graphic Design. It is there she learnt concept and the importance of typography. She became obsessed with typography, illustration (was always doodling), and photography.

One of the first questions Cyrene posed to us was what is the difference between a graphic designer and other designers? Or what separates us (graphic designers) from the other designers out there? She said it was simple – a love for typography and story telling. It's all about how well you can tell a story using typography and other graphic design elements. When she said that, I instantaneously remembered all my design professors (including you, Prof. Trofimova). At the end of the day, you want to make effective pieces of design that solve the client's problems and result in effective, concise, and attractive messages to the consumers.

Cyrene went on to explain that it was not always easy finding a job in the field. She found herself having quite a bit of spare time on her hands, which led her to attend grad school and study Art Direction. She said she realized that she was too shy and wanted to gain more confidence and knowledge in the field. One day she was approached with a temporary freelancing gig as a Production Designer with Benefits Cosmetics. Her daily tasks mainly consisted of putting together photography and type into book form/catalogue design. She explained that because they were short staffed, she had to wear many hats and successfully too, which is why she ended up in the fulltime position she is in now – Senior Graphic Designer. Even though she did not complete her graduate degree, she had working knowledge of a little bit of everything and was able to rise to the challenge every time. She said she absolutely loved her job (mainly does packaging design). On average, she normally worked on 10-12 projects, all with different deadlines, and that required different things. Therefore, she sometimes solicited the help of an illustration on some projects to help conceptualize her idea. She noted that she has had several successful product launches where the products she designed had several years of shelf life.



Figure 3 - A few packaging design pieces Cyrene worked on for Benefits Cosmetics

Another valid point she made was that we as design students should never give up. She said it was not always easy for her but because of her passion and love for design, that kept her going and pushing forward. She also said that we should learn about resources you can use to make your project come alive – again, it's all about telling that story!

Overall, I am quite satisfied and happy that I chose to attend this particular networking event. It was very enlightening and encouraging. Being among so many professional (relatively young) designers made me realize that "hey Krystal, this will be you some day". It also broadened my horizon as far the areas of graphic design that I just might want to see myself working in, in a few years down the road. Also, I've learnt that not because it's a temp job, means that is the end of it after a couple of months. This may actually be my dream job waiting to happen so I need to be more open minded. So many of the designers there mainly got their current fulltime jobs from temping at a company, and not necessarily temping in what they really wanted to do

either. But one thing led to another and they ended up finding their path to fulfillment and success.