

SPICE UP YOUR PORTFOLIO WITH STORY!

ASIANS IN ANIMATION · NOTES FROM THE EVENT

About The Event

Friday, NOVEMBER 13TH @ 7 PM PT/10 PM ET

Team Members: Alisha Syed, Kristian Bansil



Having worked on some of your favorite animated shows in the past decade at major studios across the industry (DreamWorks Animation, Walt Disney Animation Studios, Disney Television Animation, Netflix Animation, and Cartoon Network - just to name a few!), join **Grace Kum** and **Teny Issakhanian** as they spill the secrets on strengthening your portfolio - with story!

Learn more about the portfolio tips and tricks that have fueled their combined 13+ years in animation, letting your art do the talking, what productions look for in hiring their artists, and how to make the portfolio creation process a little easier!

About Our Guests



Grace Kum (she/they) is a Korean-American Los Angeles native, working as a Visual Development and Character Artist for studios such as Netflix Animation, Gaumont, Cartoon Network, Dreamworks TV, and Disney TV. Alongside her anxious cat 'Good Boy' Haru and her manic 'Dowager Dutchess' guinea pig Jjubi, she likes huddling up hiding behind her way too many plants and stacks of 'way too many (never too many)' books.



Teny Issakhanian is a Los Angeles based illustrator, working as a storyboard artist and visual development artist in the entertainment industry. She currently works as a story artist at the Walt Disney Animation Studios. Prior to that, she worked for DreamWorks TV Animation, Disney TV Animation and the Jim Henson Company. Graduate of UC Berkeley (2011) and Art Center College of Design (2015). She enjoys storytelling in any shape or form, reading scientific research articles, learning languages and sticking googly eyes everywhere. She wants to learn everything there is to learn about everything.

PART ONE: Teny on Story Portfolios

Notetaker Note: Even if you're a visdev artist, this information can also apply to you!

- Teny is centering this talk about story to boost your designs and boards for your portfolio, but also to talk about:
 - What shows / companies are looking for.
 - Strong storytelling
 - Ways to tell a story visually
 - “How to make words pop off the page”
- Story in a storyboarding portfolio is a direct necessity.
 - One thing very critical in displaying your portfolio from a recruitment standpoint is to show your story has a beginning, middle and end. Show you can show your story as A B and C. You are finding issues, working on fixing things in a story.
- One thing about story and portfolios is do what you love.
- Find two strong pieces to put into your portfolio
- Studios will always look for diverse portfolios.
- When creating stories, pull from your personal experiences.
- The strongest characters in stories are specific characters. Specific characters are characters with a specific viewpoint.
- Tailor your characters to individual personalities. No character will be sitting in a chair the same as another character.
 - Example Analysed: <http://tenyai.com/oh-brother>



EXAMPLE ONE

- Teny shows us a storyboard of a girl experiencing the trials of a maturing body (period), Teny explains how everyone has a different perspective / view on subjects.
 - <http://www.portlynntagavi.com/story-portfolio-1-1>
- What are you saying and what do you want your audience to take away from it?
- If you have a very unique way of storytelling, please nurture it. If you have a piece that has been tailored to what the studio will like, adding your flavor into it will strengthen your work.
- You should be experiencing the narrative from the perspective of a character. This will be the way you craft the story.
- Be cognizant of the tone (comedy / tension / etc) of the story. Make sure you relay the information that will honor the tone.
- Every choice has to be made to reinforce the story, theme and character. This is a tool when problem solving in story.
- “I try to board in a way that if the viewer had the movie on mute they’ll still be able to understand the story. Answer the question: How can I show that visually?”
- A lot of what we learn and notice is the very nuanced details.
- Examples analyzed:
 - <http://sethboyden.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html>

EXAMPLE 2 from WIZARDS: TALES OF ARCADIA

<http://dwooman.com/storyboards#/wizards-merlins-lesson/>

- Teny showed us an intro to the main character of Douxie Casperan (Storyboard by David Woo/dwooman).
- Teny makes an example of the character acting showing nervousness and clumsiness + humbleness.
- Character emotions are developed as the story progresses.
- Storyboards should show off the world, aspects and details of a world should be honored.
- When building strong narratives, showcase character specificity and nuance. Pull from personal experiences. Have a beginning, middle and end to your story. Studios will (rarely) take chances on artists who they’re not sure are strong on the subjects of their current projects.
- Be cognizant of story, tone and theme.
- Be cognizant of what you want your audience to feel
- Take a look at what you're doing. Is it doing it well? Can I do it better?
- Is the information clear? Can the information be read easily?



PART TWO: Grace on Character Design and General VisDev



- There are different design rules especially in TV, layout, etc..
- Apply personal experiences for little nuances in characters in visdev and general design. If your character is clumsy, ask how you can show that clumsiness. Look within yourself or see yourself in a similar feeling.
- On a production, Grace is offered a storyboard panel, then sees how much they can design out of that scene. You'll be offered scripts, boards etc and you'll be designing off of those notes.

Breaking Down a VisDev Portfolio

- Grace breaks down approaching a portfolio: **divide and conquer**. (Steps below)
- First: find your story
 - Don't force yourself to do a story others enjoy. Make a story you enjoy.
 - It's easier to find inspiration when developing stories you like telling
- Break down the story into sets, characters, props, key events.
 - Key events are a character development breakthrough.
- Mark everything by priority.
 - Focus on your specialty. If you want to focus on character design, focus on character design
 - If you want to focus on visdev, don't do more than a page of one specific criteria (backgrounds, sets, props, characters, etc)
- Put together research
- Character research
 - 3-5 keywords to get the essence of your subject. Make it easy to visualize the character you want to design.
 - Research existing characters in animation
 - Research existing characters in film
 - Grace recommends researching live action films. Researching other animated films will leak too much into your designs.

- Grace shows us that they get a storyboard or panel then the director / prod. Designer will give further notes on their vision or inspiration.
 - Rough designs, sketches of beat moments
 - Explore how you can play with the camera, angles
 - What is the tone of the setting
 - What is the character feeling?
 - How is the environment reacting to the character? Vice versa
- Paint the beat scene
 - Add elements that you feel would fit the story, tone, setting and theme.
- Breaking down scene / props
- You will be shifting gears through different genres, tones, categories.
- Be able to break down scenes into modular segments

Approach to Character Design

- Grace shows us her character design approach. Roughing out character ideas, the directors will pick out their favorite elements of the roughs. That'll help grace narrow down the design to what the directors will like.
- A majority of your time will be spent doing turnarounds
- Show our characters holding props to sell your character a lot.
- Make your designs look quite different from each other.
 - The goal is to show directors multiple different designs / information so they're able to visualize what they're looking for.
- Character interactions help the audience / director understand what the character dynamics will look like on screen.
- One strong character breakdown is recommended
 - Mouth / expressions
 - Mouth poses
 - How does the full body articulate? What is the movement or expression range of the character's design?
- **Other Links Referenced:**
 - <http://www.grace-kum.com/higher-than-the-sky>
 - <https://www.jacki-li.com/>
 - <https://illustrationchronicles.com/al-hirschfeld-broadway-s-king-of-caricature>
Al Hirschfeld

QnA

- **For a vizdev portfolio, could we do entirely environment vizdev work or is it recommended we include some character designs?**
 - Grace - you don't have to do character designs. You can plop in bodies in the painting to sell the scale or what i'll look like to see what it looks like lived in
- **QUESTION FOR TENY: you mentioned that you create a visual language for your boards. I understand it for visdev but how do you do this for the boarding phase?**
 - Teny - Visual language in a portfolio or story means assigned symbolic reference in any story. How can I use all elements of visual language to accentuate the character interactions and story?
 - Example: People in advantages should be shot at an up angle. Disadvantaged people should be shot at a down angle. Once they come to an equal standing point I'll shoot at eye level.
 - It is very much up to you, there are no rules for this.
- **What are some sources that you would suggest to either like, board from, or maybe do character studies from; i've gotten some advice in the past of maybe finding scripts or audio, but would there be any other methods you suggest?**
 - Teny- for studying storyboarding, i recommend you do retroboarding where you pause a film and board it out. It allows you to understand how they film, cut and write their stories. It's basically studying film. I find it to be helpful to learn and absorb new information. I like to do it when my personal output becomes stagnant. (e.g.[Every Frame a Painting](#))
- **When starting a character design and doing initial explorations and iterations how do you avoid same face syndrome?**
 - Grace - usually what I end up doing is that once you're done with the initial sketches and see which elements are similar to each other. Go back and adjust the angles a little bit more. I recommend messing around with the hair or clothes. For the head shape, make them as weird as possible. I find that I try making designs work way too much. I need to mess up so I know what does and doesn't work. Make faces elongated, triangular, boxy and you'll find yourself surprising yourself.
 - Teny - Come up with unique face shapes I would pull from pieces of art with interesting shapes. I would pull them and mess with them.
 - Grace - There's a reason I don't show my initial rough drawings. They're scribbles, literal tangles of thread. I use these to loosen up and mess with shapes to find something interesting as a result so I'm not just sticking to my guns all the time.
- **💡 Q for Grace 💡 Would you suggest portfolios that reflect diverse styles? (Mix of TV & feature)**
 - Grace - These days I personally feel like that line has been blurring between TV and feature. People are realizing it's possible to make higher budget TV series. I did the work that I wanted to do. I designed the work that I wanted to do. That also means that I find different types of stories that I like to enjoy and depict them differently. It doesn't have to be project based.
- **If I wanted to make more boards for my portfolio and not just studying, do you have any suggestions as to what to board (my own ideas, other sources, etc.)?**
 - Teny - There's multiple ways to tackle this. You can play with the idea of character intros or characters meeting. Keep it simple, usually story portfolios you'll want to contain it to 150, max 200 panels. Make it containable and tell it well. In terms of tropes, they are a tool. Make sure these tropes work well for the story. Think of a character you want to introduce, then for the rest of it think about things that are interesting to add to it.
 - Grace - Show directors what they do and don't want.

Thank you to everyone who attended! We hope you enjoyed this event! 🤍 - The AIA Team