DESIGN IS IN THE PROCESS

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Designers don't possess a magic wand that creates a final outcome, they use a variety of methods that lead them to the right (or sometimes wrong) solution. With the increasing number of tools available, everyone can be a designer making the design process a valuable asset to professionals.

In my role as a design educator I introduce students to an array of methods, models, and techniques as a way for them to practice navigating what is known as the "design process". Approaching the process as a series of artifacts adds value to something that could be overlooked or disregarded. In some cases, artifacts created as part of a process continue to evolve and change into another form or message.

Some methods may stick with a student once they transition into practice, others may not. Students may continue to use these methods but perhaps at a rapid speed where it might not produce evidence but create a spark that they act on in another way.

Critical thinking before and during a project are always important. Sketching, concepting and organizing are always vital. Maybe "methods" come and go, but the way you think as a designer is important and grows with your experience.

Process can also become a shackle if it creates tunnel vision.

I have let go of the idea of "finished." The process IS the product now.

EFFICIENCY
FLEXIBILITY
SELF REFLECTION
INTUITION

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
<1
4
7
10
13
16<

in-house designer
motion designer
user experience designer
print designer
interface designer
visual designer
software designer
interaction designer

understand

ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED AS A MEANS OF UNDERSTANDING

METHODS

conduct a workshop
create archetypes or metaphors
get expert advice
observe users
review pre-existing analytics
look at other professions for insight
competitor analysis
conduct interviews
write
visit site
form storm
poll stakeholders
trend-scoping
visit library
photograph objects/situations/people
store trend shopping
concept map
experiment
have conversations
talk to people
read
make lists
make hypothesis
work with non-dominant hand
develop contextual testing
word associations
review fashion forecasts
review existing product
conduct user tests
online searching
ethnography
prototypes
brainstorm
iterate
mood boards
analog sketches
critique
site maps
digital sketches

scenarios
project briefs
user personas
case studies
scholarly articles
relevant articles and materials
work outside the design profession
design blogs
as a volunteer or a consumer

TOOLS & RESOURCES

3x5s
thesaurus
pencils
dribbble
Slickplan
veer
istock
sharpie
getty images
Balsamiq
Edge Animate
whiteboard
tumbler
dafont.com
big paper
google docs
shutterstock
google
small paper
post-it notes
color index (book)
Pinterest
typekit
dictionary
markers
Basecamp
post-it notes

plan

ARTIFACTS MADE AS A MEANS OF PLANNING

METHODS

storyboards
wireframes
user tests
concept maps
test workflows
schematics
diagrams
style tiles
flow diagrams
video
project briefs
user personas
thumbnail sketches
paper mockups
mind maps
user journey maps
brand standards
hi-fi mockups
motion piece
3D models
inspiration pages
design library
typography
sketchbook
research boards

UX elements
images
textures
grids
templates
analog inspiration
colors
typography
patterns
icons
coding

stakeholders
partners
audience
clients
users
directors
peers
team members
experts

PEOPLE ENGAGED IN THE PROCESS AS A MEANS OF COLLABORATING

collaborate

FORMS OF DESIGN AS A MEANS OF DELIVERING INFORMATION

METHODS

posters
trade show booths
POP materials
web sites
on-line marketing campaign
brochures
publications
packaging
software
creative strategies
guideline materials
mobile applications
interfaces
flyers
print pieces
community engagement strategies
motion graphics
display signage
marketing kits
exhibitions
forms
games
logos/identity systems
in-store signage
infographics
branding campaigns
maps
3D animations
presentations
digital projects
experiences
design standards

physical installations, typically for cultural institutions

deliver

Design making is design research. Intuition gets a seat at the table. Form follows concept (except sometimes, concept arrives out of form). Context is queen!

I don't think its possible to work solo as that implies working in isolation. Simply by using Google images for inspiration you are being influenced by others thoughts and ideas.

I find that I'm thinking about the projects more when I'm not working on them.

POSTER DESIGN PROCESS

Through the design of this poster, I diagrammed the variety of methods and tools used in the design process. I surveyed designers of their preferred processes and determined the ways in which these methods might evolve with experience.

42 professional designers participated in the online anonymous survey via survey monkey. The survey was emailed to my contacts and posted to twitter and facebook. The questions are shared here.

Please take a post-it note and contribute your methods to the poster.

STEP ONE:
had a conversation

STEP TWO:
write & submit poster abstract

STEP THREE:
write survey

STEP FOUR:
become a certified researcher at MSU
in order to conduct "human research"

STEP FIVE:
set-up survey online

STEP SIX:
share survey with contacts

STEP SEVEN:
read survey responses

STEP EIGHT:
make lists

STEP NINE:
organize content

STEP TEN:
make several analog sketches

STEP ELEVEN:
text marty for support

STEP TWELVE:
build structure in Illustrator

STEP THIRTEEN:
chat with marty for editing

STEP FOURTEEN:
design

STEP FIFTEEN:
print

STEP SIXTEEN:
engage peers