

Starting a career in:

GRAPHIC DESIGN

for

FILM & TELEVISION

Presented by Leah Spencer • August 13, 2022

WHAT WE MAKE

- Anything with text or imagery
- Can be for film or TV (live action or animation), commercials, or music videos
- Graphic Designer = Graphic Artist = Computer Artist

PROPS: items actors interact with



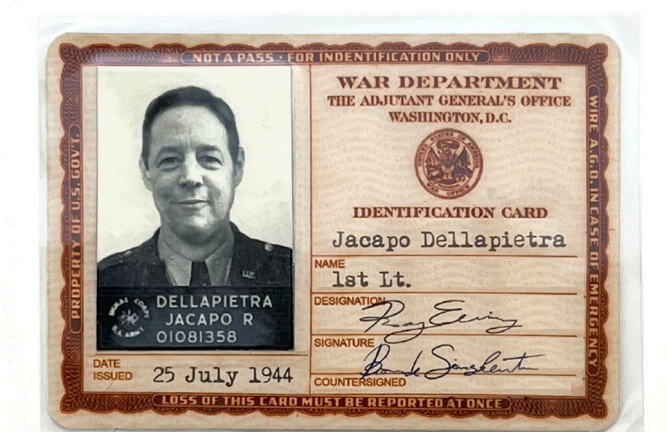
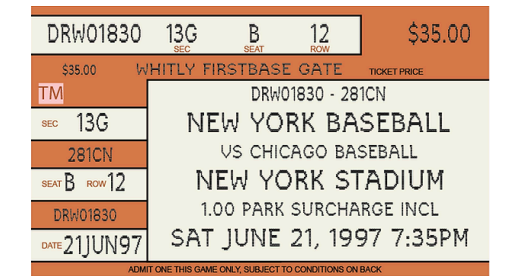
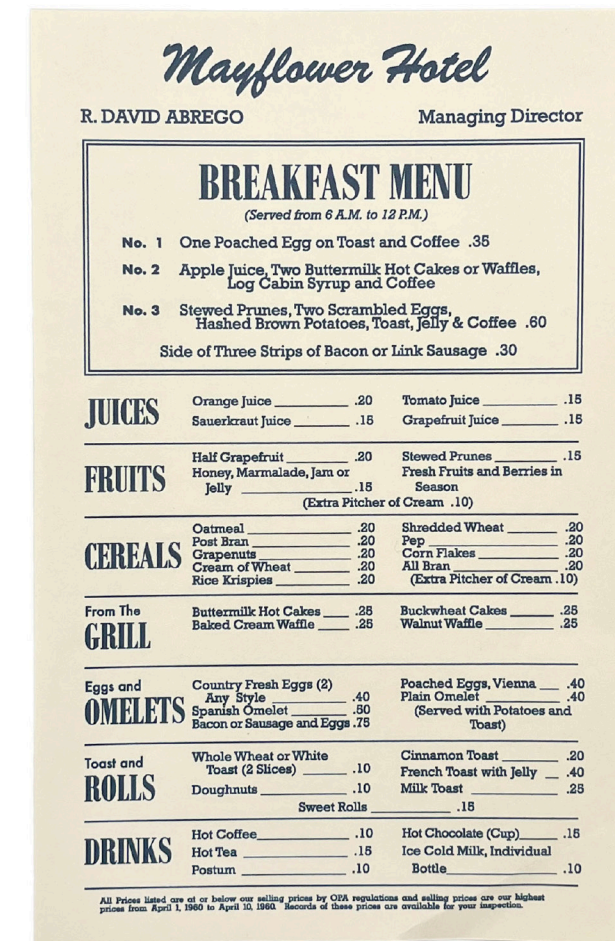
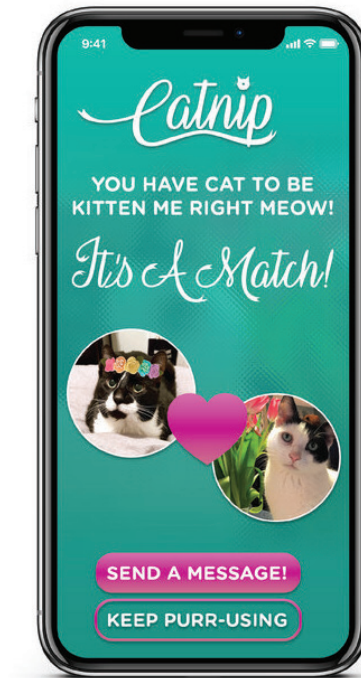
SET DECORATION: items in space around actors



WHAT WE MAKE

As “graphic designer”

- Packaging
- Posters
- Logos
- Calendars
- Book & magazine covers
- Brochures
- Vehicle wraps/decals
- Menus
- IDs/badges/patches
- Computer screens/interfaces
- Phone & tablet screens
- TV screens
- Ads

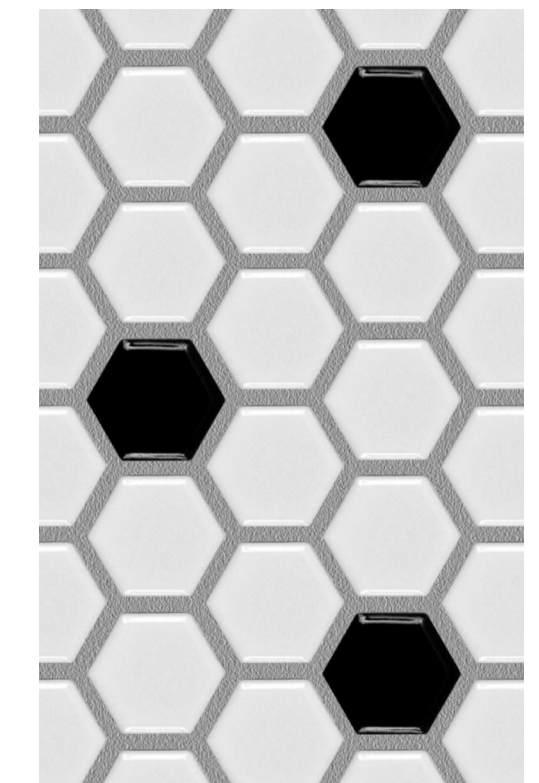
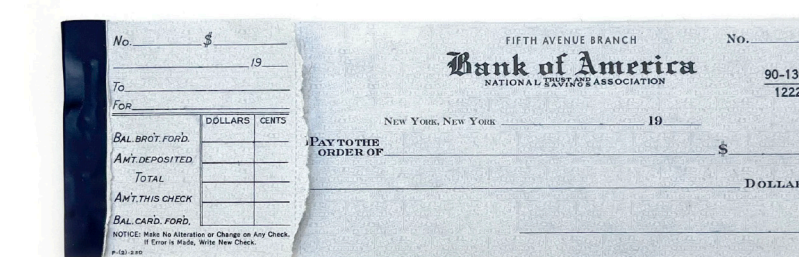
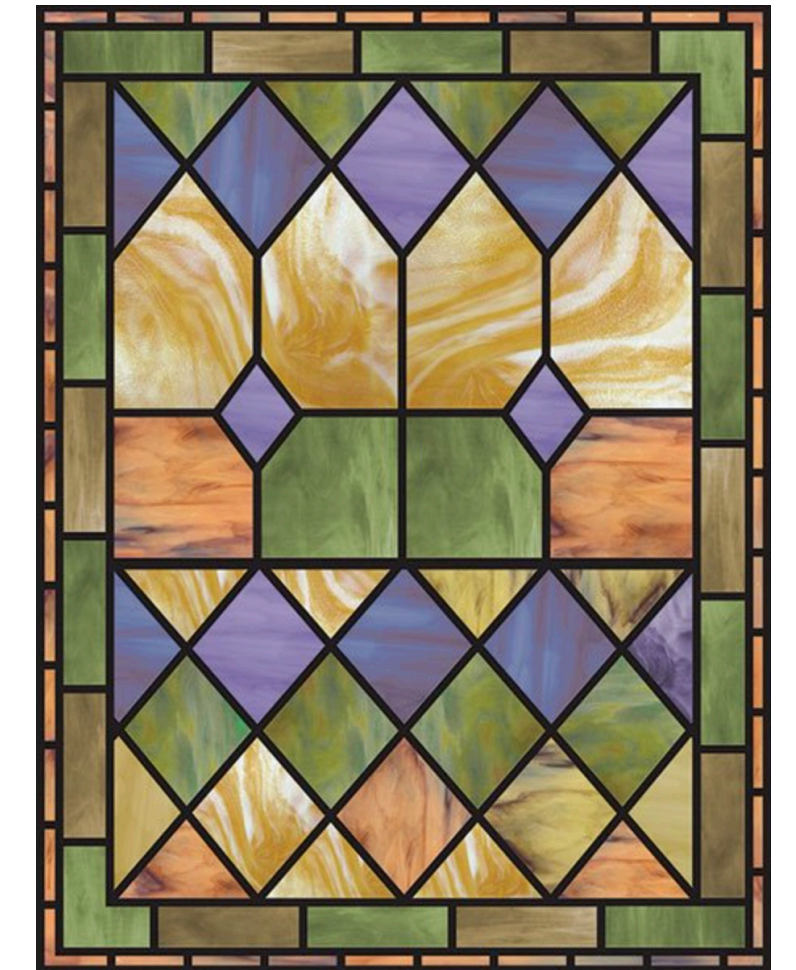


Graphics by: [Amanda Boucher](#), [Kayta Austin](#), [George DuPont](#), [Leah Spencer](#)

WHAT WE MAKE

As “craftsperson”

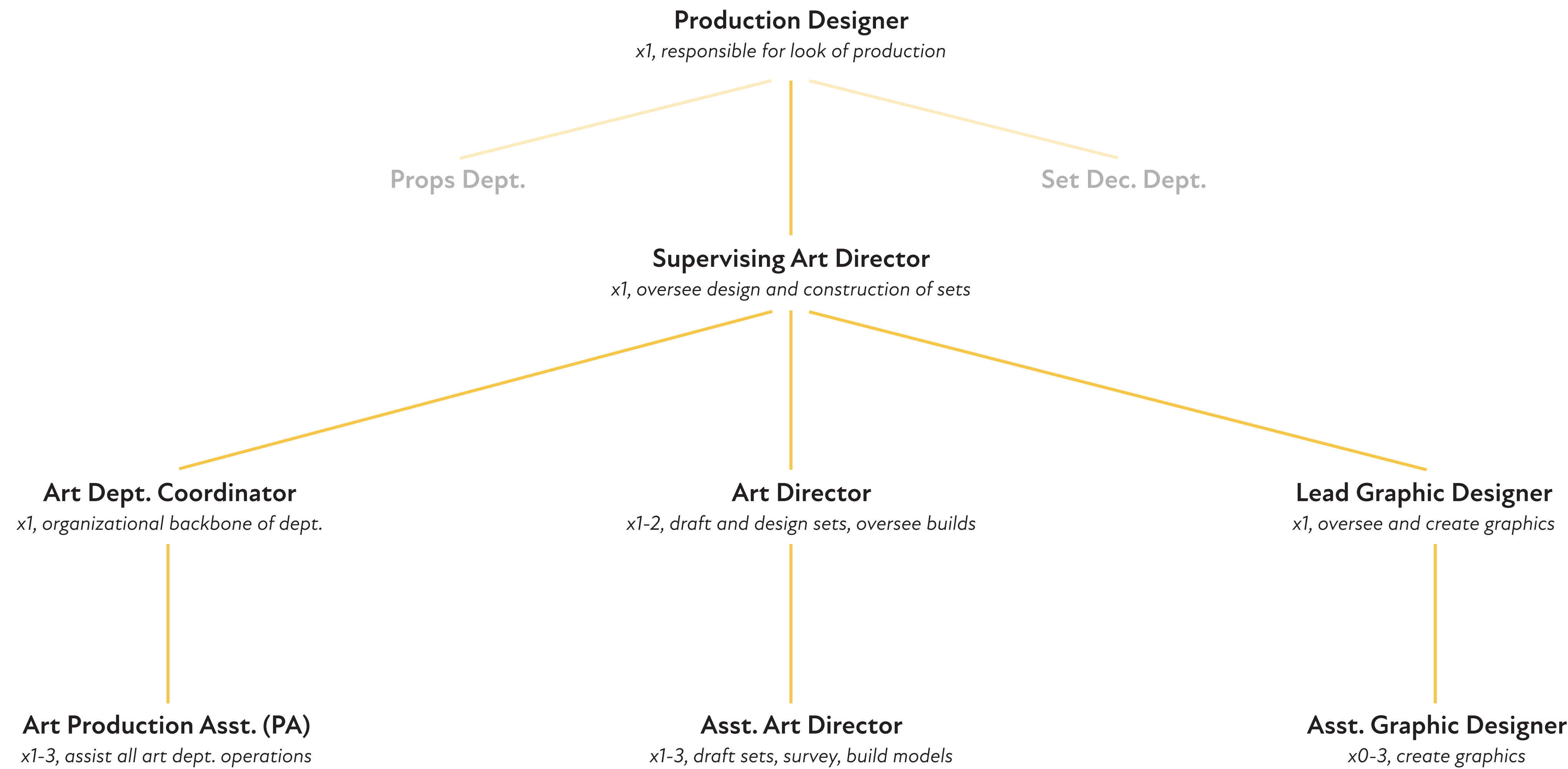
- Newspapers
- Storefront signs
- Tattoos
- Sign painting
- Faux tile floors
- Patterned textiles
- Currency, cheques, postage
- Photo composites
- Colorized photos
- Exit signs
- Directional signage
- Maps
- Stained glass



Graphics by: [Keith Endow](#), [David Tousley](#), [Ginger LaBella](#), [Leah Spencer](#)

THE ART DEPARTMENT

[a simplified view]



THE UNION

- IATSE: International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees
 - » Covers all crew who work in film, tv, and theater in US and Canada
 - » USA 829: northeastern US local for CAs, scenics, set designers, costume designers, lighting designers, and ADCs
- Membership necessary to work on all union productions (i.e. pretty much all productions that have a graphic designer)
 - » Exception: PA work
- Costs: entrance exam, initiation fee, quarterly dues, weekly dues
- Not a job pool/doesn't provide jobs, but does give you access to private listings
- Membership only covers a certain region and local is based on where you permanently reside; may have to join new local if you move
- Because we're freelancers, we don't have an HR, so the union fills a similar role
 - » Runs benefits programs
 - » Accountability point for productions



WHY BE AN ART PA FIRST

- Open to all; can get PA jobs before you have union membership
- Gain understanding of art dept. and production structure before you're on the line for graphics work
- Make connections
- Learn from graphic designers
- Learn how to use wide format printers
- Strengthen your qualifications for CA exam
- Gain understanding of how PAs work for when you're a GD and rely on their help
- Alternative: working on indie films



GETTING ART PA JOBS

- Email ADCs, attach resume
 - » Can access ADC email addresses from 829 members list
 - » Tailor descriptions of previous work to highlight pertinent skills for PA-ing
 - » Optional: attach 1-2 portfolio images to show what you're working towards, but clarify you understand that PA work isn't graphics
- Contact as many people as you can; may take a while to contact the right person at the right time
 - » Track who you reach out to when and with what results in a spreadsheet
 - » Starting to build relationships is really important
 - » Be polite, but persistent; okay to follow up once a month or so with those who seem receptive
- Can also contact Graphic Designers
- ADCs keep a spreadsheet of available Art PAs and communicate with each other, so an ADC with no openings may be able to refer you to someone else
- ArtCube, mandy.com, staffmeup.com, backstage.com, Facebook groups
- Alternatives: PA-ing for set dec or props (or any other dept)

The screenshot shows the website for United Scenic Artists Local 829. The header includes the organization's logo and name, along with links for Member Login and Employer Login. A navigation bar contains links for About Our Union, Showcase Gallery, Member Search (highlighted with a yellow circle), Contracts, Events, Safety and Training, and News. The main content area is titled "Basic Member Profile Search" and includes an "ADVANCED SEARCH" link. The search form has several input fields: "Art Department Coordinator" (with a dropdown arrow), "20 miles radius from '11205'" (with a dropdown arrow), "First Name", "Last Name", and "Search by Keyword, Skill, Specialization, or Language". There are also checkboxes for "Available Members Only?" and "Return Only Exact Matches on Keyword Search". A "Member Categories" section lists various roles: All Classes, Allied Crafts, Art Department Coordinator (highlighted), Computer Artist, Costume Department Coordinator, Costume Designer, Industrial Member, Lighting Designer, Projection Designer, Scenic Artist, Scenic Designer, and Sound Designer. At the bottom, there are fields for "Location" (set to 11205) and "Radius" (set to 20 miles), with a "CLEAR" button. A large "SEARCH" button is at the bottom right, and a link to "Expand your search with the advanced search" is at the very bottom.

ART PA WORK

- 8:00 a.m. - 6:30 p.m. generally
- Have to be on site/cannot be remote
- Trimming, mounting, wrapping, writing on gak, research, ordering materials, getting lunch, delivery/pick runs, bringing stuff to set, distributing drawings/set lists/work notes, payroll assistance, stocking crafty, stocking art dept, organizing office
- Cannot do graphics, but you can do graphics-adjacent work
- May very occasionally be asked to work on a weekend day
- Utilize time as a PA to learn about graphics
 - » In downtime: ask to observe graphics tasks, make your own version of a graphic from script, make master copies
 - » Express graphics goals to Graphic Designers; may get opportunities to participate in projects as you can
- Standard Art PA rate: \$15-16.25; 11 hours typical but always paid for 12
 - » \$20-25 kit fee per week typical (for laptop)
 - » 1.5x rate over 8 hr
 - » Lunch & crafty provided
 - » Low pay and long hours can be restrictive factors in being able to pursue this route



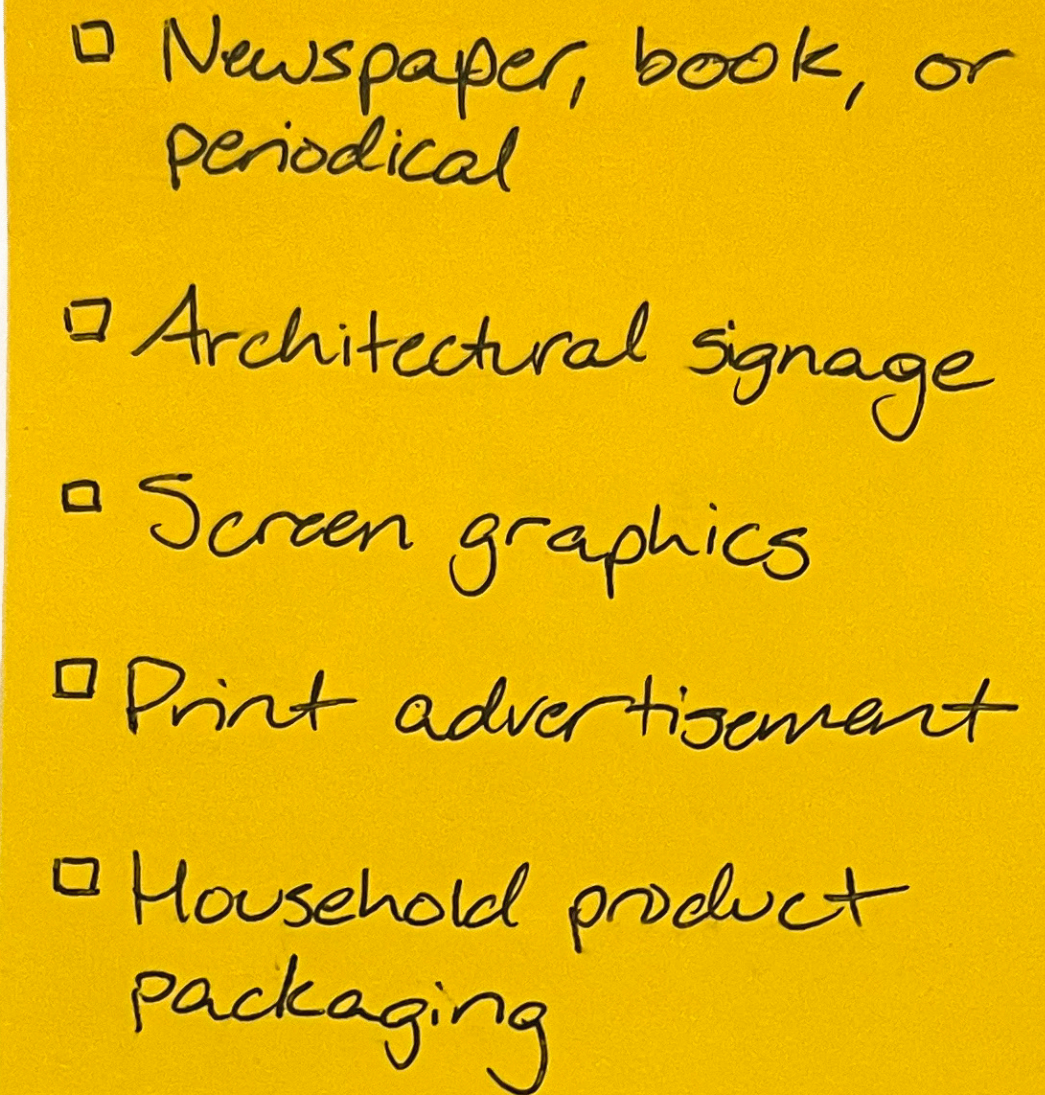
829 ENTRANCE EXAM

- Computer Artist category (CA = 829's term for graphic designer)
- Entrance exams are held twice a year, process takes 4 months
- If you don't pass any stage, you can restart the exam in the next round at that stage
- There's no limit on how many people are accepted
- Strongly encouraged to have graphics experience
- Beneficial to have film/tv experience, but not necessary
- Follow directions carefully and submit everything on time
- Committee wants to know you have the fundamental skills and knowledge to be able to hit the ground running and grow; you don't need to be a perfect fully-formed CA
 - » Chances are good if you have solid AI and PSD skills, understanding of what film & tv graphics is, and demonstrate genuine interest
- Once you pass: fill out forms, pay \$500 initiation fee + \$330 dues and fees, get sworn in, go through New Members Seminar, and start working
- Possible to join without exam if you get a CA job offer, but much higher initiation fee and is relatively unlikely

THE EXAM PROCESS

STAGE 1: PRESCREENING PORTFOLIO

- *Next round: due Sep. 2*
- Submission of forms, resume, \$200 application fee, and prescreening portfolio
- Prescreening portfolio includes specific list of items to design
 - » Untimed; take your time to do good, tidy work

- 
- Newspaper, book, or periodical
 - Architectural signage
 - Screen graphics
 - Print advertisement
 - Household product packaging

THE EXAM PROCESS

STAGE 2: PRACTICAL EXAM

- *Next round: Oct. 15*
- Will receive a list of projects at 9 am to design and submit by 3 pm on a designated Saturday, done remotely
- Lots of work to complete in the 6 hours, represents half of a busy day
- Projects will have specific parameters, all to be created with AI and or PSD; digitally submit everything/nothing is physically made
- Don't have to be 100% perfect to pass; focus on following instructions, being efficient, demonstrating solid base skills, and making educated guesses for anything you don't know
- Show attention to detail and prioritize good work over rushing

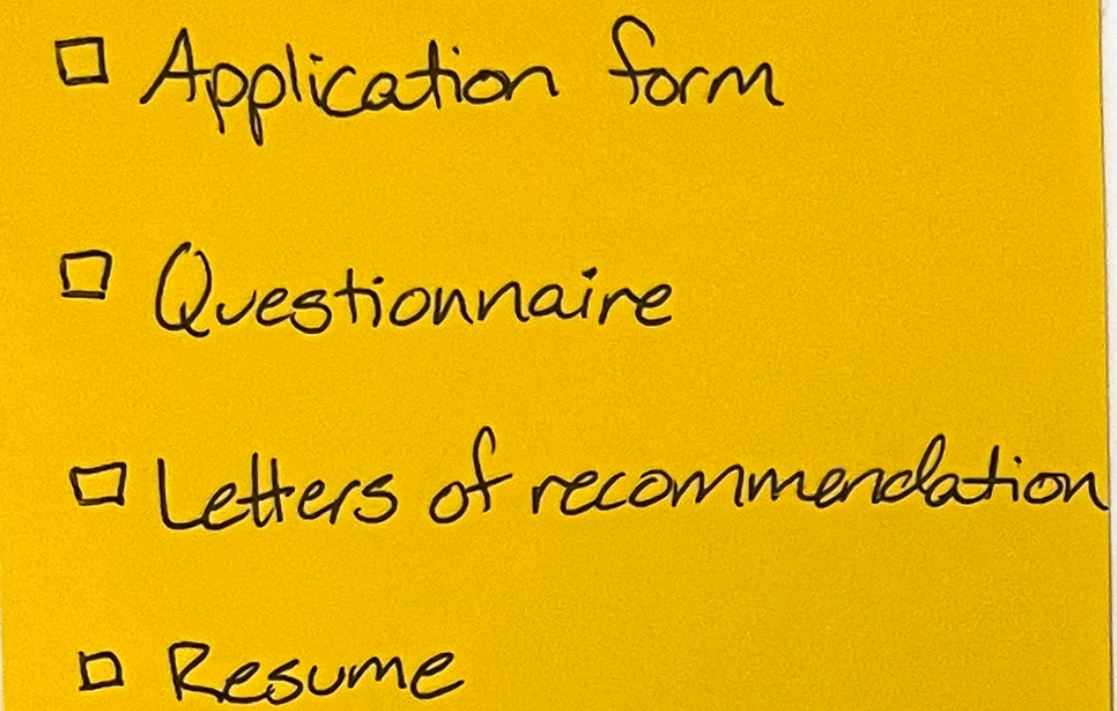


[super secret]
😊

THE EXAM PROCESS

STAGE 3: COMPLETE APPLICATION SUBMISSION

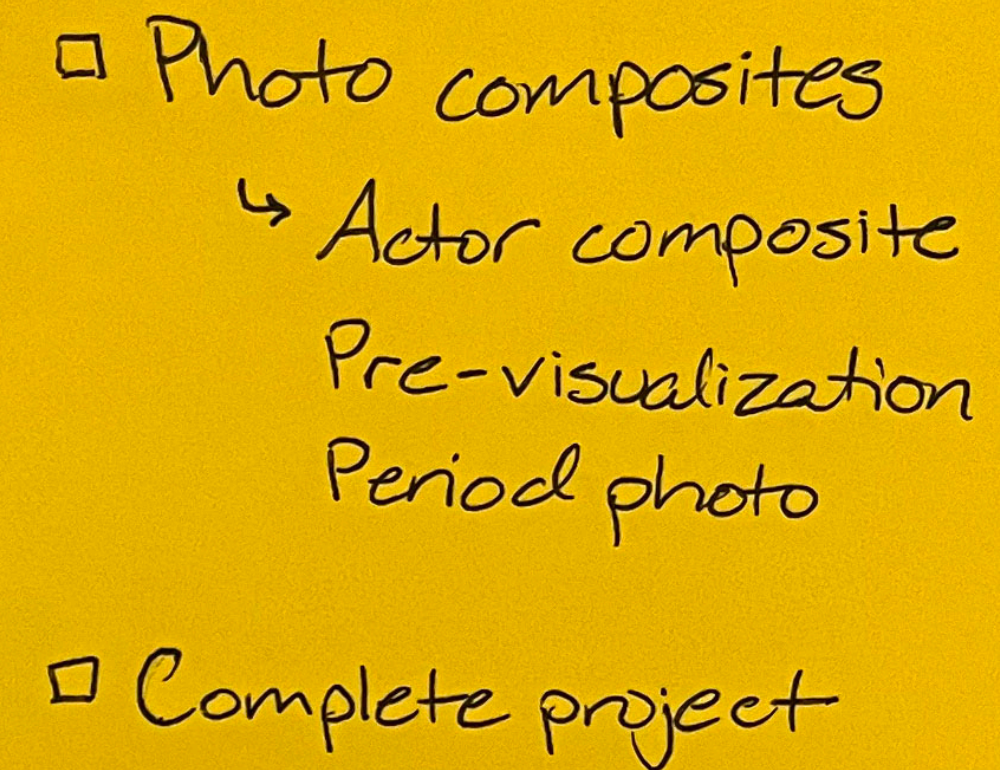
- *Next round: due Nov. 11*
- Submit forms, letters of recommendation, and resume
- Letters can be from bosses/coworkers/professors outside of film & tv if you haven't yet gotten film & tv work

- 
- Application form
 - Questionnaire
 - Letters of recommendation
 - Resume

THE EXAM PROCESS

STAGE 4: FINAL PORTFOLIO REVIEW & INTERVIEW

- *Next round: Dec. 5-10*
- Can ask a graphic designer you work with to review your portfolio with you beforehand
- 5 CAs and sometimes exam chairs will sit in on your presentation and then ask you some questions about your portfolio and your skillset
- Via Zoom, have 20 minutes to present
- Required: required portfolio elements + complete project
 - » Can highlight things you're passionate about, but demonstrate versatility: show variety in things like programs used, aesthetic style, time period, item type, and creation method
 - » Optional: have a few pieces physically made to show on camera (also good learning experience to physically make)
- Can include corporate graphic design, illustration, animation, etc. that demonstrates relevant skills
- Show your creative process
- There isn't a set number of items you should have; focus on having a good amount of content for 20 minutes

- 
- Photo composites
 - ↳ Actor composite
 - Pre-visualization
 - Period photo
 - Complete project

GETTING GRAPHICS JOBS

- Can be hired by Lead GD or Sup. Art Director
- There aren't public job listings like there are with corporate jobs; all by word of mouth and private listings
- Can get jobs by marking yourself available on CA availability spreadsheet, reaching out to art director with portfolio and resume from gearing up productions in 829's Feature Film & TV Report, marking yourself available on 829 members list, cold calling/emailing lead CAs
- Once established: they will reach out to you more
- Interview conducted: will outline the job, ask about experience
 - » When you're interviewing for your 1st/2nd job: they know you're new and are interviewing you because your portfolio and or work background demonstrates ability
 - » Confirm there's a lead GD on board so you'll have guidance
- Resume eventually becomes just a list with dates and names
- Can be hired as a day player or for a whole season/production (average 4-5 months)
- Often have little notice before getting hired/starting job, 1-2 weeks common
- More detailed info on graphics jobs will be provided later in process

USA-829 FEATURES: FILM & TV REPORT

ACTIVE PRODUCTIONS

THIS REPORT IS BASED ON INFORMATION THAT IS CALLED INTO THE LOCAL - PLEASE UPDATE US ABOUT YOUR JOB

As Of: 08/09/2022

Title FEATURES	StartDate	Shoot Dates	Location	Crew	Notes
Contract: <div></div> Producer: <div></div> Prod Manager: <div></div> Line Prod: <div></div> Prod Superv: <div></div> Contact #: <div></div>				PD: <div></div> AD: <div></div> CD: <div></div> AC: <div></div> Chg. Sc: <div></div> ADC: <div></div> CDC: <div></div>	
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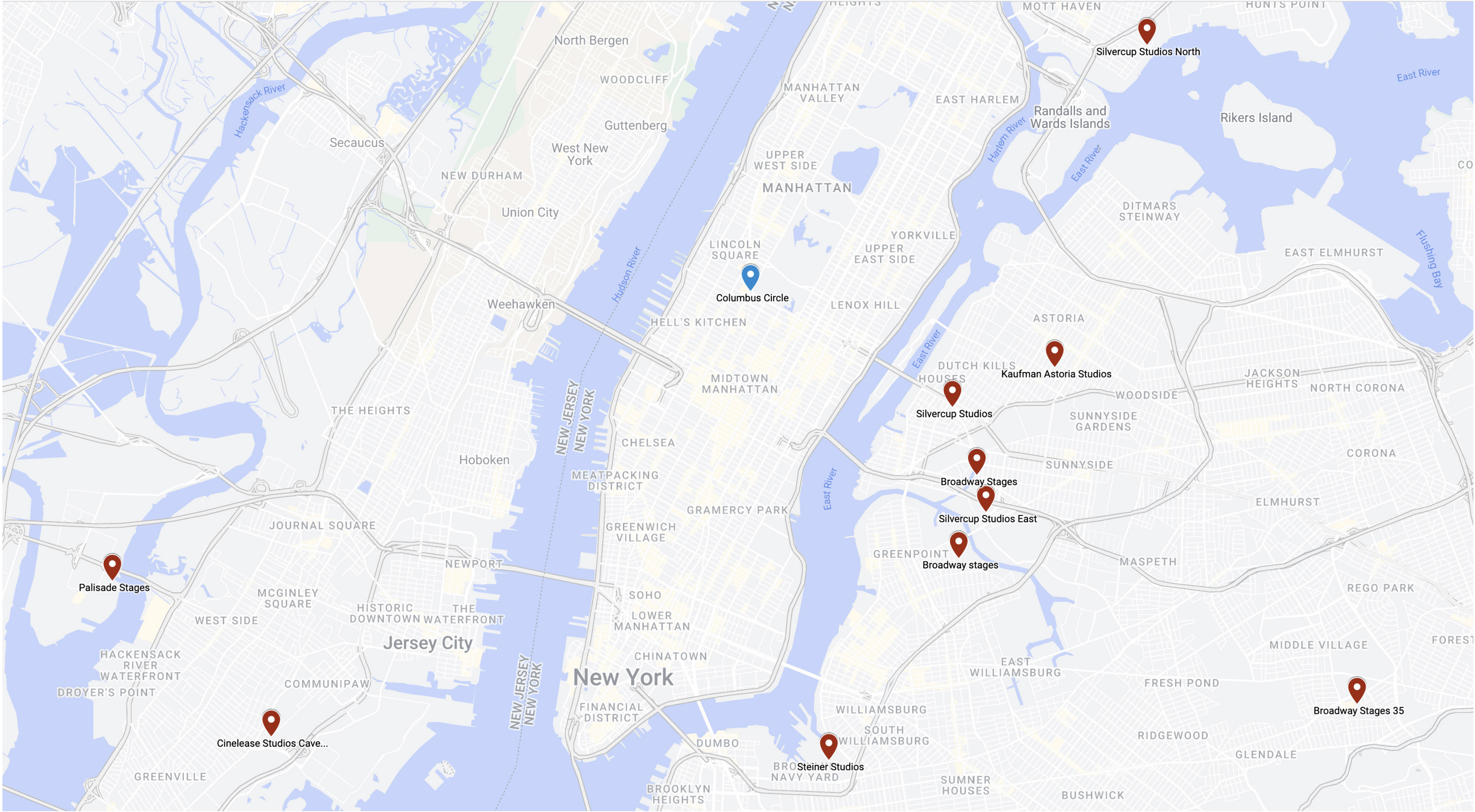
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N.Y. LOCATIONS

- NY: Steiner, Kaufman, Silver Cup, Broadway Stages (mostly Brooklyn & Queens)
 - » Central places to live: Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Long Island City
- NJ: increasing work from tax credits and studio development
- CT: some, mostly lower budget
- Having a car is helpful, but not necessary; parking is often available at studios but not always; transit and carpools
- Art dept typically in an office building adjacent to stages
 - » Other offices typically in office building: set dec, props, production, post, locations, costumes
- Typically only go on set to check on placement, see empty areas that need stuff, take measurements, etc.
- Some GDs can be remote, but mostly only available to those with seniority and or screen graphics specialists
- Work is local vast majority of time
- Some offices are dog-friendly
- Dress code is casual



N.Y. LOCATIONS



HOURS

- Typical 9-10 hr days, 8 am - 5:30/6:30 pm
 - » 1.5x over 8 hours; doing 10 hours instead of 8 increases pay ~30%
- 30 min lunch unpaid, lunch provided (art dept orders from restaurant, \$13-\$15 cap)
- Tricky to take vacation or leave for appointments while on a job
- Occasionally may be asked to work more hours or Sat/Sun
- Typically necessitates care arrangements for parents, caregivers, and dog owners
- All federal holidays off and typically Christmas week and 1 week in April, only paid holiday is MLK Day (8 hr)



RATES

- Determined by tier/union contract
 - » Majors = highest budget
 - » Tier 3, 2, and 1 = lower budget (1 is lowest)
 - » Area Standards: Boston rates
 - » Some networks have their own contracts, like HBO and Netflix
- Annual income from working full time in NY is generally 6-figure
 - » Generally ranges from \$28 - \$83/hr
- Paid same rate as asst. art director (title on pay stubs)
- Kit fee: rental rate production pays you for your equipment
- Funds deducted for union (2% week on Majors + \$125 per quarter)
- IATSE National Benefit Fund: for health, annuity, and pension
- Receive a W2 for hourly wages and a 1099 for kit fee

Example Majors Pay (in NY, 2022)

$$\begin{array}{rcl} \$83.25/\text{hr} @ 9 \text{ hrs} \times 5 \text{ days} & = & \\ \hline 3996 & \text{gross wages} & \\ - 1557 & \text{taxes} & \\ + 200 & \text{kit fee} & \\ - 80 & \text{union dues} & \\ \hline \$2559 & \text{take-home} & \end{array}$$

KIT

- Expected to have your own set of tools and materials
- Paid daily rate for “kit rental/fee” - \$40-50/day, negotiable
- Necessary: computer w/ accessories, 13” or 17” printer, software (Adobe CC, Dropbox), phone, tape measurer, font library
- Nice to have: scanner, Wacom tablet, Cricut/Silhouette, lightbox, paper trimmer, backup hard drive, Pantone swatches, reference books, reference ephemera, art tools/supplies
- All consumables (ink, paper, mounting material, new fonts, stock imagery) are bought by art dept



LEAVING A SALARIED JOB

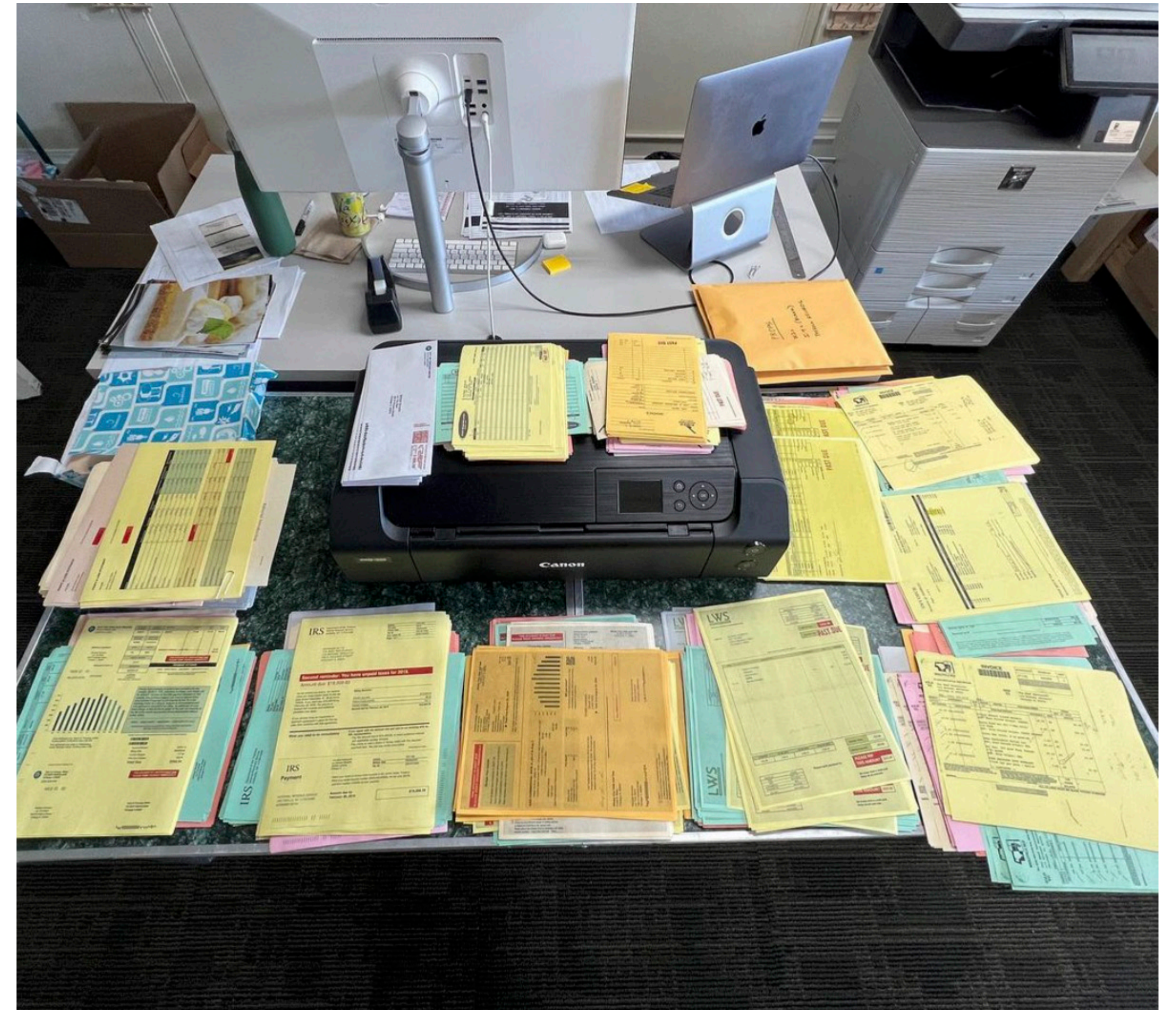
- Predictability and stability
- No PTO
- All-consuming during the week, occasionally weekend work
 - » Harder to slip away for a couple hours to go to appointments
 - » Hard to go to or call the bank, IRS, post office, customer services, etc.
 - » Typically can't take vacations while on a job, and also hard to plan vacations since time periods between jobs frequently change
- We work as freelancers, so all benefits are through the union and are contingent on continuous-ish work
- 26+ yr: won't have benefits as a PA until you're in the union
- Higher taxes (self-employed)
- Benefits are generally a little less robust than corporate jobs
- No 401K match (though there is annuity fund)
- Can't really pick one convenient/close place to live
- Regions you can get work in are more limited than for corporate graphics or most other jobs; largely limited to cities
- A lil' more nepotism
- Longer hours; 50 hour weeks are typical
- More stressful
- Responsible for supplying your own kit

BENEFITS OF FILM & TV WORK

- Lots of variety (not bored after 6 months)
 - » Amass a really wide range of design abilities from designing so many different things
- Working with your hands
- Higher pay than most corporate or freelance graphic design
- Get to choose who you work with, can form a core group
- If you don't like something or someone on a job, it's only temporary
- Meals and snacks provided (often have leftovers for dinner; need to buy less groceries)
- Creating so much so quickly helps build a portfolio quickly
 - » Cannot publicly share your work until movie/show has aired, but can share work privately with art directors or lead graphics for interviews
- Pay equity from union rates
- More respect from other departments compared to respect from sales and marketing teams
- Can have a large chunk of time off between jobs for relaxation, side projects, traveling, etc.
 - » May not have to work year-round to satisfy income goals
- It's cool

WES ANDERSON FILMS VS. BASICALLY EVERYTHING ELSE

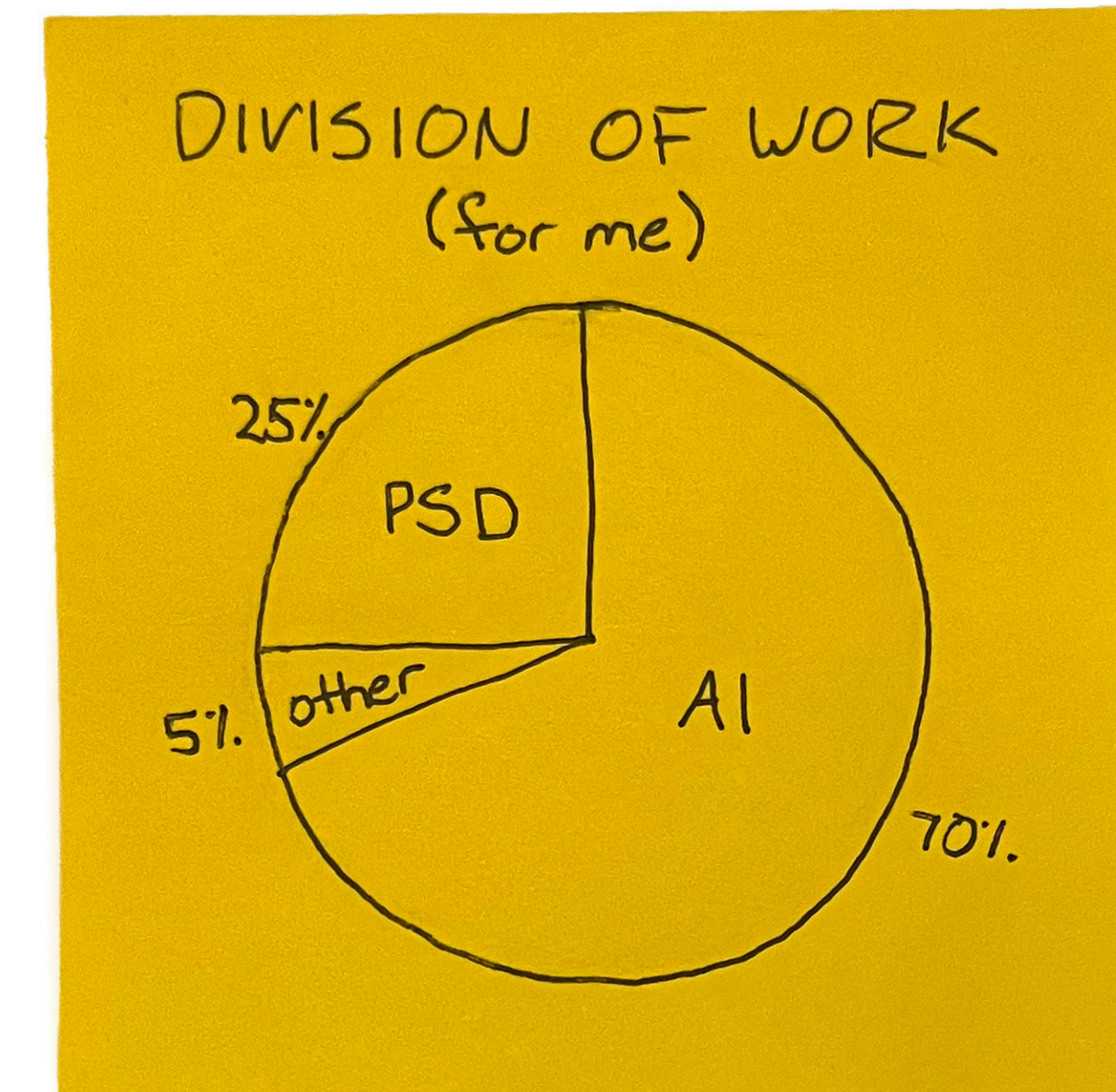
- Lots of utilitarian non-glamorous graphics (bills, exit signs, paperwork, texting screens, mail, etc.)
- Not allowed to paint, age, or install graphics like GDs in the UK do because of US's union structure – scenics and set dressers do it
 - » Can still be beneficial to age/paint/construct a couple portfolio pieces to become mindful of process
 - » Physical creation skills are not as important here as they are in the UK, but a strength is a strength
- Time and resources aren't typically allocated to sign painters and other craft specialists; have to digitally approximate their work
- Graphics are low priority for most directors
- Even hero graphics are often not seen closely on camera; inserts can be rare
- Work is largely on the computer



Graphics and photo by [Mary Hayes](#)

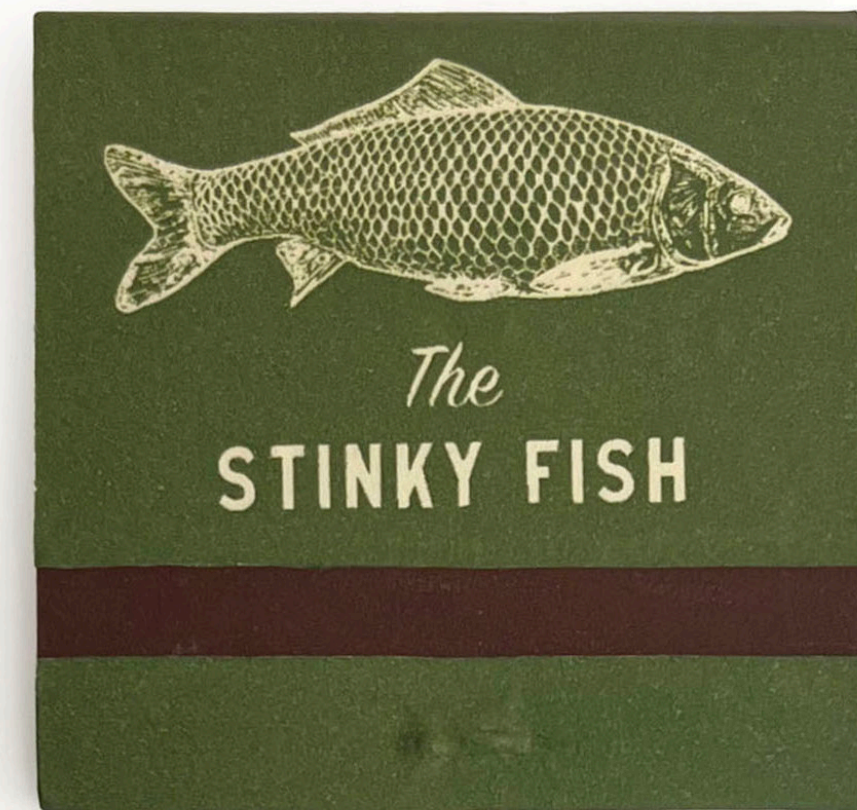
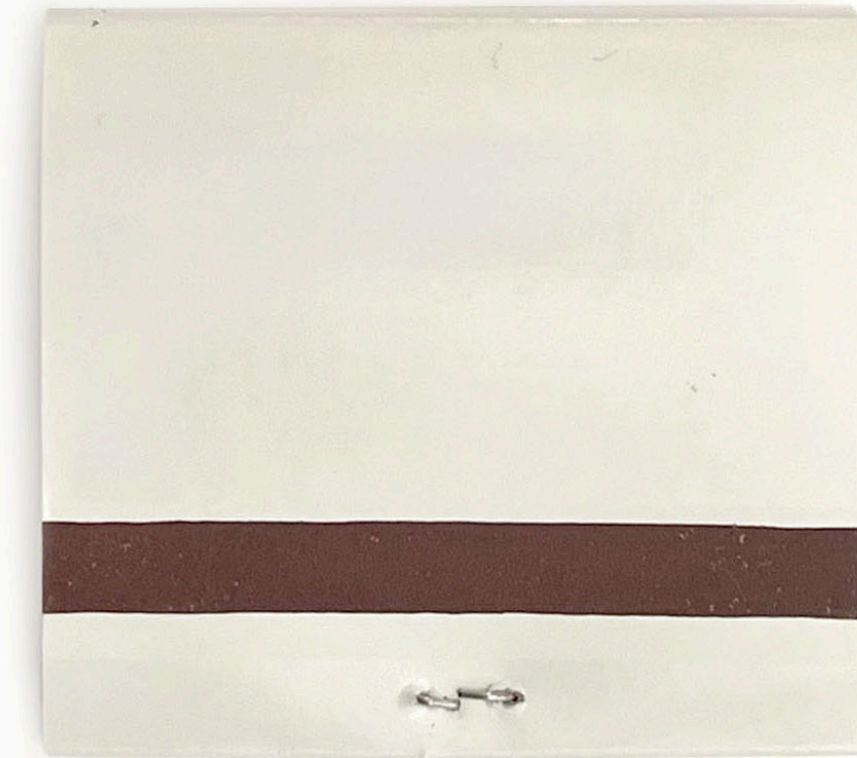
COMPUTER SKILLS

- Primarily use Illustrator and Photoshop
 - » Most important for me: being really fluid and fast in AI and being able to google my way through anything I don't know how to do
- Illustrator
 - » Text handling
 - » Vectorizing raster images
 - » Outlining + embedding
 - » Replication (for period work: not really plagiarism)
- Photoshop
 - » Photo comps
 - » Photo manipulation
 - » Basic drawing
- AfterEffects/ProtoPie/other motion graphics programs
 - » Still screen graphics
 - » Motion screen graphics
- InDesign
 - » Not necessary skill, but makes typesetting and paginating booklets faster and easier (can alternatively be done in AI)



PHYSICAL PRODUCTION SKILLS

- Generally more important on period productions than contemporary
- Operation of wide format printers (load paper, change ink, troubleshoot)
- Trimming with crop marks
- Wrapping items (books, magazines, paper cups, matchbooks)
- Material selection (does it need to be waterproof, stiff, thick/thin...)
- Construction of boxes and other 3D items
- Handwriting/script



LEARNING CURVES

- Fast pace of work (usually don't have time for brainstorming, sketching, drafts, etc. like you do in corporate and academic graphics)
- Timing and prioritizing to get everything to ready in time
- Frequently making things you've never made before
- Understanding artistic vision of PD
- Individual preferences in props, set dec, and scenic
- Who to ask about what, who to give what to, when things are needed, how many things are needed, etc.
- Becoming familiar with vendors and their materials
- All the work outside of designing (getting approval, clearance, getting quotes, following up with vendors, tracking down graphics that have disappeared, etc.)
- Working with higher-ups who make requests without knowledge of the design process
- Letting go of individual visions; being the maker of others' ideas

Leah-
Can you make us more file
labels!!!

8 more sheets

Ok!

Call me when ready-
Make 12 sheets

Asap names and title's

TIPS

- If you currently have a salaried job: build up your savings, stick it out at current job while seeking PA work, prepare to get onto COBRA benefits, and quit once you get a PA job
- If you don't yet have graphics experience: take 1-2 years to get work experience and take classes
- Take graphic design continuing ed courses, particularly for typography, layout, color theory, and Adobe CC programs
- Design exercises: master copies and "timed design"
- See if you can do informational interviews or site visits
- Write down everything you're told, always ask, and stay organized
- Get to know other departments
- Show up and do good work
- Be aware that visas can be tricky for film & TV work
- Take NDAs seriously; keep track of printed scripts/schedules and only dispose of in shredder bin; be very careful with social media posts
- Be persistent and a self-starter

Old Style Serif
Transitional Serif
Modern Serif
Slab Serif

RESOURCES

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

- Online learning
 - » [Adobe tutorials](#), library resources, YouTube, [LinkedIn Learning](#)
- Graphic design continuing education
 - » [RISD](#)
 - » [Cooper Union](#)
 - » [The New School](#)
 - » [Pratt](#)
 - » [MassArt](#)
 - » [CalArts](#)
 - » [Royal College of Art](#)
- Annie Atkins
 - » [“Fake Love Letters, Forged Telegrams, and Prison Escape Maps”](#)
 - » [Workshops in Ireland](#)
 - » [99% Invisible: “Hero Props”](#)
- Erica Dorn [talk](#) & [other talk](#), Tina Charad [interview](#)
- Gina Alessi’s [course](#) (coming soon)
- Instagram: [@graphuckery](#)

REGIONAL INFORMATION

- NY & Boston: [IATSE USA 829](#)
 - » [Exam info](#), CAexam@usa829.org
- LA: [IATSE ADG 800](#)
 - » Andrew Stumme: 818-762-9995, andrew@ADG.org
- Atlanta: [IATSE 479](#)
- Pacific Northwest: [IATSE 488](#)
- Mid-Atlantic: [IATSE 487](#)
- Florida: [IATSE 477](#)
- Chicago: [IATSE 476](#)
- Texas: [IATSE 474](#)
- In US, but region not listed: ask [IATSE](#)
- Canada: [IATSE 891](#)
- UK: [Graphics Union](#)
 - » info@graphicsunion.co.uk
- Elsewhere: search “[location] film and tv commission”

TERMINOLOGY

ADC Art Department Coordinator

CA Computer Artist; USA 829's term for Graphic Designer; term usually only used in union-specific contexts

CALL SHEET daily outline of what's shooting where and with whom

CLEARED/CLEARANCE status obtained from legal team that a graphic is okay for use (not infringing on copywrites and not in offense of brands or identities)

CRAFTY "craft services"; food services; will have on-set crafty that serves snacks and catered meals, and office crafty with just snacks

DAY PLAYER someone who is hired for one or a few days

DRAWING architectural plan for set construction

GAK "general area coverage," background graphics made in high volume to cover sets; ex. lots of mail, paperwork, and bills for an office set

GATORBOARD an extra-rigid type of foam core used for mounting graphics; not waterproof

HERO PROP a prop that is scripted to have a visible and significant interaction with an actor

IATSE/IA/THE INTERNATIONAL International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees; union that covers crew who work in film, TV, and theater in U.S. and Canada

INSERT a close-up and focused shot of a graphic

INT or EXT "interior or exterior"; where a set is in its fictional world (a playground set built inside a soundstage would be EXT)

LOCAL chapter of a union that covers specific jobs within a specific geographical area

MOTION GRAPHICS screen graphics that are animated; animations may be timed/programmed or may be controlled by actor or by playback; ex. phone screen with texts popping up, heart monitor, flight controls, browsing website

MYSTERY BOX graphics that cover 3D objects on location that cannot be removed, like exit signs, fire extinguishers, or fire hydrants

ONE-LINE/ONE-LINER schedule breakdown of production

PA Production Assistant; in almost every department

PLAYBACK the person/team who controls motion graphics for the camera

PRE-VISUALIZATION "pre-vis," an image Photoshopped to show how a set will look when built and dressed

PROP items that are touched by actors (includes all vehicles and animals)

SCENICS people who paint sets, create faux finishes, age graphics, cast and sculpt objects, paint lettering, and more

SCRIPT BREAKDOWN a distilled list of graphic needs that are specified or suggested from a script

SET DRESSING decorative items that have been placed within a set, including graphics

SET LIST table with basic info on sets for an episode/film

SHOW CARD matboard; commonly used for mounting graphics; not waterproof

SINTRA rigid plastic sheets used for direct printing graphics on; waterproof

SPOTTING PLAN a drawing that shows the layout of all of the sets on a soundstage

SOUNDSTAGE a large cavernous building in which sets are constructed and shot in