

EBOOK

TIMO FECHER

MOTION GRAPHICS DESIGN ACADEMY THE BASICS



FREE EDITION

CROSSFEYER

Motion Graphics Design Academy - The Basics
Silver Edition

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All gender-specific terms refer to both the feminine and the masculine form. I'm not a sexist, racist, terrorist but a little bit of a perfectionist. No animals were harmed during the production of this book.

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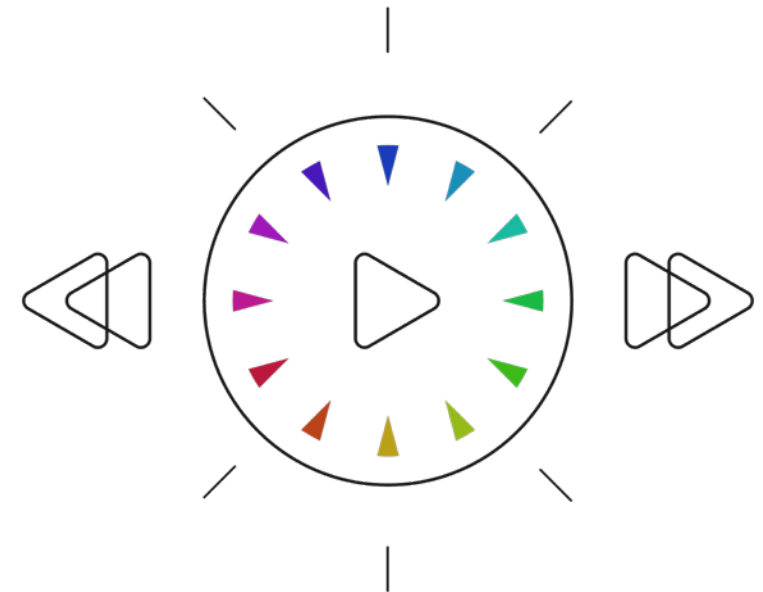
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1. Introduction

We see a square. It rotates and fluently transforms into a logo that is perfectly presented on a background of moving elements. Everything appears to be in harmony. Colors, shapes, movements, sound, typography. Every single detail is loaded with meaning to support a message. It feels like a story from an author whose tools are not limited to words and sentences. A story from a painter whose tools are not limited to brush, canvas and colors, but who has access to another amazing artistic form of expression: the creative world of *Motion Graphic Design*.

What is *Motion Design*, *Motion Graphics*, or *Motion Graphics Design*? For convenience we will stick to the phrase “motion graphics” in this book. It



is the art of transforming static elements like graphics, images, texts and logos into moving designs by adding another dimension: time.

Great intro, isn't it? I can imagine that you, dear reader, are now expecting some thoughts on the history of motion graphics. And about the fact that artists from various eras always had the ambition to illustrate motion in their paintings. We even know cave paintings from the Stone Age that show people and animals portrayed with several legs to give these illustrations a sense of motion. However, this is not exactly how I want to start this book.

I believe you are reading this because you want to improve your own design skills. And you probably do not have endless time and frankly neither do I. I am writing this while sitting in the airport departure lounge waiting to board a plane. To be honest, I think the stern looking lady at the end of the hall will be instructing us to board the flight



Ancient cave painting showing a jogger with his smartphone

shortly and I want to at least finish the first chapter of this book before granting the responsibility of my life to a person I have never met before. So this is why we will dive right into the subject, leaving the historical background in the past and dealing with the fear of flying in the future for now. Just for the record: since the first days of mankind, people have tried to illustrate motion in static pictures. Nowadays, we have all the techniques needed to create real moving images. All we need to learn is how to deal with designs and how to use our tools the right way to transform our imagination into visual art.

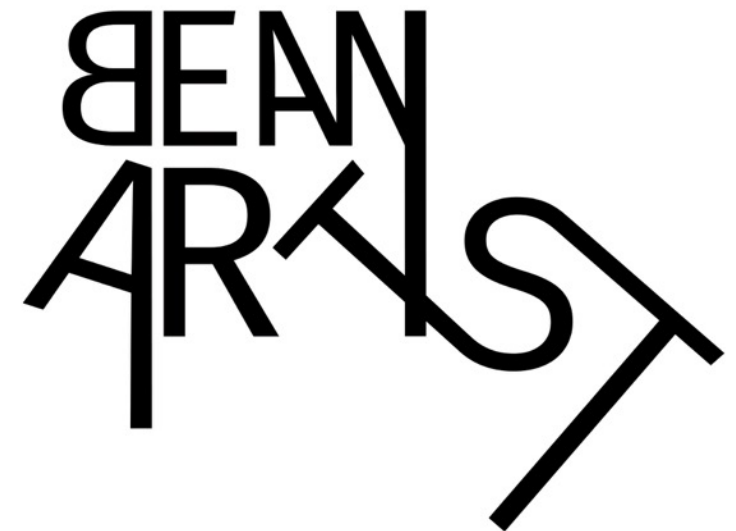
Why am I writing this book? More than ten years ago when I began to discover the creative world of motion graphics, I was overwhelmed by its artistic and narrative powers. Never before had I experienced a comparable form of media which is capable of seamlessly uniting meaningful graphics, emotion eliciting sounds and exciting motions into one piece of art. Immediately I needed to become part of this new and

exciting medium. I immediately started consuming everything I could about this new topic. Unfortunately, the only resources I could find were video tutorials and step by step instructions for specific designs. But I watched and followed every tutorial and created the most beautiful motion graphics imaginable. What I made looked nearly as good as the creator's originals. Tutorials are a great way to learn more about the tools available and become a master. However, there is one thing they do not teach you: *how to design*.

Tutorials have you recreate the designs of great artists who have been kind enough to share their experience with you. But beware! There are also video channels where individuals try to sell motion graphics they have clearly copied from tutorials. They made slight changes to the design, changed the colors and then repackaged it as their own work. People who are new to the industry might possibly never recognize this is in fact an illegal act. Please don't copy other people's work.

Tutorials taught me a lot and I want to thank all artists who share their knowledge with others. But tutorials are just the beginning. Finding more and more repeats of tutorials around the web, but then realizing my designs were also undeniably influenced by these tutorials, I started to rethink my personal design process. I decided to change my approach. Instead of thinking “Oh, that’s a great design and there is a step by step tutorial on it I can follow”, I started designing from scratch. There was nothing in front of me but an empty screen. Understand, this was actually pretty scary as it is so much easier to just follow something that is laid out for you! But in order to express your creativity you have to step out of your comfort zone at some point and start working on your own designs. Without direction, using only your own ideas. Be an artist first!

During the course of this book I will not go into too much detail on various software and how they work. There are plenty of resources



available to help you with that. What I really want is for you to view software as a tool; only as a means to an end. In fact, don't restrict yourself to only one software package. They are all interchangeable in a way, and all do some other things better. Your knowledge about design and how it works is what is not interchangeable. That is why I will concentrate on you as an artist and the improvement of your skills. In terms of software: try to see this book as a plugin or an upgrade for yourself and not for your tools. I hope it is compatible with most of you and that there are not too many bugs in it. If you think it needs an update please inform the system administrator.

A little bit about me: I'm a filmmaker ever since I can remember. I love telling stories. During my studies in film production and digital media, I got more and more interested in the art of motion graphics that tremendously helped me to improve my moviemaking and storytelling skills. Now I have been a self-employed VFX and motion graphics artist

for almost ten years and I still love my job. I've worked on numerous projects for small companies right up to big and famous movie and game production studios. With my website "Crossfeyer" I want to establish a platform that I would have liked to have while learning the art of visual effects and motion graphics. A platform to support creativity and to encourage artists by improving their skills with innovative training. Besides filmmaking, I'm interested in the newest technology trends (Virtual Reality is great!), photography, cooking (coconuts are awesome!) and composing music.



Combining my education in art, my studies in the field of media and design, and the knowledge I accomplished from many resources about motion graphics, I developed my own design process. A detailed plan which helps me create my own motion graphics, that carry my personality and are always something special. With my plan as a guide, I have worked on plenty of motion graphics for various projects. Every

design was one of a kind, individual and with a purpose. For the sake of unique art I decided to share my knowledge and my detailed design process with everyone, to give you, my dear reader, an inside look into what I have learned through my experiences over the last few years. Hopefully this book will save you time and help you through those frustrating moments, when you do not know what to do next. May this book give you some thought-provoking impulses and inspire you to create your next unique and amazing motion graphic.

Alright then, here we go. We can finally board the plane. Fortunately, the battery of my new laptop is fully charged so I can write the next chapter from above the clouds. In flight mode of course... don't want to upset those stern employees from the airline... see you there!

2. Basics

So, I have switched my laptop to flight mode and downed a delicious tomato juice. Strange that tomato juice tastes so much different on a plane than on the ground. However, in the first chapter of this book I would like to give you an overview of basic design rules. Many of these rules are not restricted to motion graphics and are commonly used in all kinds of artistic projects. Of course it is not mandatory to follow all of them all the time (especially in the field of art, rules are meant to be broken), but for me these rules have always been a helpful guideline through any design process. We will take a look at the background information you need, outline a step by step plan for your work and determine which are the most important rules you should follow. So let's dive right in and create some (e)motion(al) graphics!



2.1 The four “W”-questions

Many artists I know like to jump right into their software and try to create a design without a plan or by copying something they have seen in other videos. Or even worse, they do something similar to a previous job. But this is not what we want to do. We want to build something unique. Something that perfectly fits the message that we want to tell and does not simply look like another design being “inspired” by another video we saw on the internet. And by “inspired” I mean “copied from”. And by “video” I mean “Adobe® After Effects® Tutorial”¹. We want to find our own style and our own individual way to develop designs and animations. Well now, before we launch our design software, there are four “W”- questions I recommend you find an answer to.

¹ Adobe® After Effects® is the industry standard and most frequently used software for motion graphics. As I have said, we are not going too deep into software details but when I refer to software it will usually be Adobe® After Effects®.

Who is your target group?

From the very beginning you need to think about who your audience is.
The target group that is the focus of your work.

Why are you doing this?

The next question you need to ask is what is the purpose of your design.

Where is your platform?

The third question you need to think about examines the medium in which your work will be viewed.

What are your restrictions?

In terms of the last question, you generally have to make a list of all technical specifications, outside influences and artistic restrictions which are not under your control.



Only after knowing the answers to these questions should you start and develop your project. These factors determine the quality that all the other elements you work with need to have.

Not the most urgent question when you start, but still good to know as soon as possible: What is the output format for the final video.

Is the material you are working with (all the design elements, textures, fonts, etc.) protected by copyright or do you (or your client) hold all the rights to them? I assume you know how problematic it might become when using material you do not own. Remember! There are people making money by searching the web specifically for copyright infringements. Believing that “nobody will recognize this picture in the background” or “when I change it a little bit it’s technically my own work” is a huge mistake. These materials were created by people who know their own work even after it has been manipulated. So simply do

only use design elements which have been produced by you, or for which you have written permission or license. We will talk a little more about this along with the resources for design elements you can safely use in a following chapter.

And finally: How much time do you have to work on the motion graphic? What is your deadline?

Some answers to the four questions may seem obvious to you. Nevertheless I recommend you write them down anyway. Making a small list with the answers to these questions is the best way to begin the actual design process. And who knows, maybe you will get your first artistic inspiration from this very list!

2.2 The motion graphic commandments

Being in the creative business of art and graphics – and mainly motion graphics – for more than ten years now, I figured out some significant rules I would always recommend you to follow. These are basic rules for creative work and do not exclusively apply to motion graphics. Look around and do some studying! You will notice that the best designers of the world hold on to these relatively simple guidelines. Try to keep them in mind while building your designs and I promise you will immediately improve your results!

Eyecatcher

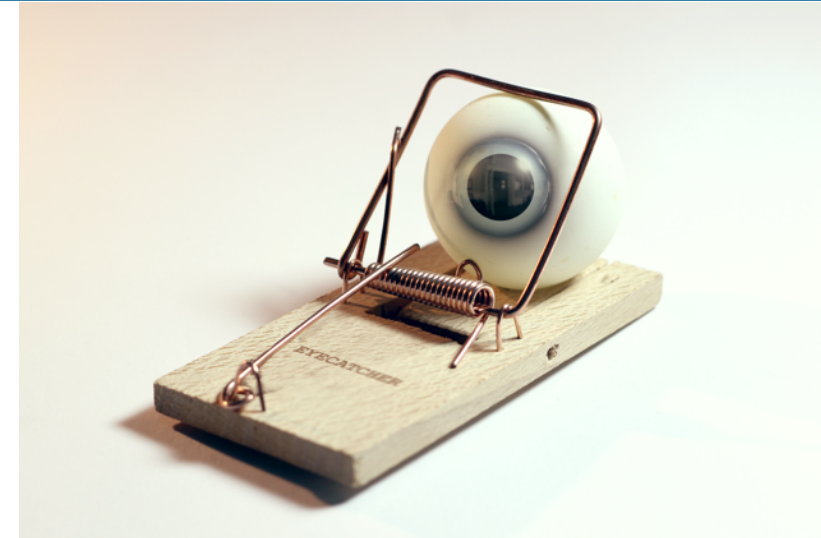
Let's start with the eyecatcher that is supposed to attract the attention of your audience and gives them a starting point to look at. This is simple to explain: You need to have something that dominates your design. Something that sticks out of your work and is the first thing the viewer perceives.

Groups

The second rule I would like to mention is about groups. It is essential that you organize your designs in a useful way. Put together what belongs together, and separate elements that can act alone.

Managing time

Timing is everything! How long is my motion graphic going to be? How much information do I have to illustrate and what are the most crucial contents? Do I show everything in a row or at the same time? The latter



is usually not the best idea. How much time do I give every element on screen? How long will my graphics take to appear and disappear? How fast do they move? In which order do they appear?

Asymmetry creates tension

This one is a very old rule and I've learned it from my favorite teacher of fine arts. She certainly did not invent it – nature did – but she was the first one to tell me about it. She was the first one trying to persuade me to dismiss my urge to keep symmetry. I loved symmetry, I still do. There is nothing more pleasant than symmetrical designs. But when it comes to creating tension and causing a sensation you have to think out of the perfectly symmetrical box: Asymmetry! Be brave and break the symmetry!

Repetitions for recognition

The headline speaks for itself, doesn't it? But maybe it implies a bit more than you assume: Repetitions, just like the eyecatcher and groups, help your audience to orient themselves in your designs. Stick to a certain color selection or font and use recurring elements! Repeatedly using your elements and styles not only helps your work to be recognized but will also help you to portray yourself as a confident artist who is proud of his works.

Natural and reasonable

The last rule is about the importance of motion graphics being natural and reasonable. Try to give everything you create a slight amount of imperfection, or variation. Nothing in nature follows exact, strict rules, which distinguishes nature from technology. Do not try to create your designs like a computer would, or there will always be an unpleasant undertone of artificiality in your works.



Everything is about telling a story. And your graphic elements are your tools for narrating. So every element must absolutely contribute to telling your message. Dark and cold colors tell different stories than bright and warm colors. Fonts immensely affect your story, as well as the style of your animations. Your message is about velocity? Then adjust your animations to match that theme! Your message is about love? Adjust your colors and fonts! Keep those rules in mind from the beginning, construct your graphics accordingly and you will master the high art of (e)motion(al) graphics. Damn, I love that bracket-thing! Although it's hard to hit the right keys at the moment. This pilot must either be drunk or he is flying through some serious turbulences. Let's just hope he is not flying through those turbulences while being drunk.

2.3 Fire the starting pistol

A lot of people are always struggling with the questions “how do I start” and “what should I do next” when it comes to a design process. In the following chapters we will go through an exemplary production pipeline that I figured out to be effective for motion graphics. Hopefully this workflow will help you to eliminate time wasting when pondering over your next steps.

Roughly speaking I would always suggest these basic principles: Work from background to foreground, from big and relevant elements to small and detailed elements and from static graphics to animated ones. The exception proves the rule! By working that way you will have much faster results that you can show your clients. Your clients will either approve your work and you can start working out the details or they will give you



Rough drawing of a starting pistol

instructions to change things or even make you reconsider the whole design. In any case you will save a lot of time while being able to present the look and style of your work in an early stage. But keep in mind that these steps depend on each other and that it is sometimes necessary to make adjustments to a previous step.

The whole design process can be split up in the great three “p”-words: Preparation, Production and Post-Production. And now prepare for the most important steps of creating exceptional motion graphics. Damn, that tomato juice has given me so much energy, I think I’m going to write during the whole flight.

Enjoyed reading this?

To read on and learn more about Graphic-& Motion Design, you can get a full version of this ebook on www.crossfeyer.com/ebook!

Please also check out our Gold Edition of the Motion Graphics Design Academy. This version includes 200 pages additional content, a useful production checklist and a written tutorial for our ebook trailer. Cheers!

