

Jean-Marc Gauthier - Teaching philosophy

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I had the great opportunity to create a graduate program in Singapore for New York University Tisch School of the Arts Asia and to be the Chair of the department during the past 6 years. Because of my personal involvement in defining this project, I would like to talk about this program as the presentation of my teaching philosophy.

This Animation and Digital Arts program (ANDA) belongs to New York University Tisch School of the Arts. It was the first graduate program granting a Master degree outside New York and offering a new curriculum outside of Tisch School of the Arts New York. I was part of the team that created Tisch Asia in Singapore in 2008 and became Director of the Animation and Digital Arts graduate program when it opened in Fall 2009. This graduate program required thinking beyond the blueprint of an existing department at New York University.

The goals of ANDA

The main goal of the program is to create a new kind of professional - comfortable with analytical, communicative and creative ideas. A professional who will demonstrate leadership skills, the capacity to work alone or in teams, to manage projects and to produce high quality creative projects.

Learning core values about animation and digital design

The practice of animation and digital design both require a rigorous learning of the foundations which takes place at school. This is different than the learning of creative thinking that will continue to grow with them throughout their lives. Students follow a curriculum with exercises that help them to develop their own creative process.

These exercises include:

- learning how to learn
- listening, observing, asking questions, developing a conversation on a topic
- developing the capacity to see creativity as an intrinsic feature of all human activity
- understanding human organizations and individual initiatives
- bridging theory and practice about design

“That imagination, not calculation, is the “difference” that makes the difference.” Red Burns

Seed ideas of ANDA:

Some of the seed ideas for the program include creating content about asian cultures, developing student interests in different cultures, history and collaborative practices and exit strategies for post graduation.

We were careful to create all of our courses from scratch and presented courses that reflected advances and tools in the industry. Our main concerns were bridging eastern and western culture and question the place of western culture in eastern culture. For example, the integration of new structures of storytelling that were not based on the western tradition of telling a story in three acts were very important. Six years later, some asian students from the department create interactive storytelling projects that combine the use of traditional asian puppets and technology.

Why ANDA is different?

From our mission statement: “Students are immersed in a unique creative environment that teaches the traditional forms of the art of animation while exploring a sandbox of advanced techniques and digital technologies.”

Storytelling and technology?

The foundation classes taught during the first semester of the first year are based on learning the art of traditional animation, storytelling and communication. I think that mastering storytelling and the art of animation are excellent foundations for digital arts, production, games and design. As stated by ANDA faculty, ‘...story is the foundation of everything we design, and vice versa, everything we design tells a story’. One of the foundation courses that I taught is “*Digital Tools for Communication*” which focuses on design, storytelling and the interdisciplinary qualities of digital media.

During the second year, students reinforce their storytelling skills thru sequential animation projects and new media projects covering interactivity and diversification of media. For example, ANDA students are introduced to the creation of storyboards in my *"Motion Capture"* class using 3D animation techniques and markerless motion capture. These topics were presented at Siggraph Asia in Singapore (2009). Some of the work created in class was presented during a joint presentation with Organic Motion, a motion capture company at Siggraph in Los Angeles (2010). My class evolved into *"Introduction to Interactive Animation"* which covers interactive animation in 2D and 3D. Some of the students works were presented at the symposium on "Diversifying Digital Film and New Media" at Hongik University in Seoul (2012). This application of motion capture for storyboarding animation has been used by Ubisoft, a leading game company.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration with other departments at Tisch Asia?

ANDA has strong support from the other departments of Tisch Asia Film, Dramatic Writing and Producing. Michael Burke, Chair, TischAsia's Film Department wrote *"The Animation and Digital Arts Department has been a very vital addition to our community since its inception. Grass-roots collaborations have taken place throughout the cohorts with Film and ANDA students and ANDA's presence has encouraged Film students to challenge their own notions of filmmaking and encouraged them to "think outside the box". Elective courses open to Film have allowed our students to deepen the collaborative spirit and artistic and intellectual exchange fostered by the department and to also explore new, cutting-edge, technologies and new approaches to their own art form."*

Bill Kovacsik, Chair, TischAsia's Department of Dramatic Writing writes: *"Over the past five years, the Animation & Digital Arts program has produced some outstanding young artists, whose work has been marked by originality and depth. The winter and spring ANDA shows have always been one of the highlights of our work at Tisch Asia; it is surely a mark of success when the entire community, including both faculty and students from other departments, gather together in such celebration of the work of their colleagues."*

Jean-Marc and the members of his faculty have created a world-wide network of professional contacts for their students – a network that enhances the education of students in the program, and creates professional opportunities for those who have graduated and are making their way into the working world."

Support outside Tisch Asia?

ANDA has been recognized by other schools, museums, art institutions, major animation and game studios, and various partners from the industry.

- Industrial Light and Magic Singapore and ANDA collaborated on a visual effects project entitled *"Carrot Cake"*

- ANDA students and faculty were invited in 2013 to show interactive art pieces at the Affordable Art Fair,
- the ArtScience Museum, Marina Bay Sands, and
- a group of students created *"Caption"*, an interactive street installation for Digital Nights in Singapore.

Most of these projects were initiated in two of my classes *"Aesthetic of Apps for Small Screens and Mobile Devices"* and *"Introduction to Interactive Animation"* and were developed with the support of *Interactive Art* taught by Emil Polyak.

ANDA graduates created animations for a television series in Singapore entitled *"The Diary of Amos Lee"* which is now followed by children books and digital content published in Singapore. ANDA students have invited to show their animations at the main art museums in Singapore. Every semester, Industry Day offers a one day review and evaluation of student demo reels and projects by professionals in the industry. These types of activities are what have lead students towards successful internships over the past years, and part of what I deem as important for the diversification of their portfolios and how they share their work with the world outside of school.

ANDA faculty give back to the Singapore community by teaching open workshops for Singapore students coming from the various polytechnics and universities. (Singapore Poly, Nanyang Poly, NUS)

Beyond the lab?

ANDA has also encouraged collaborations with professionals from all other the world as a preparation for future professional life. This starts with the Friday talks that I organize almost every week during the semester. Students, faculty and often groups of students from schools and universities in Singapore meet face to face with a professional from the industry, an artist, or a teacher, during one hour at the end of the week. This is an opportunity for students to increase their "360 degrees awareness of the world" and to

develop their curiosity about “transmedia” topics. The topics range from ‘financing projects using crowd sourcing’ to ‘the art of the story by Blue Sky studios’.

We have developed special relationships and collaborations through master classes by stars and accomplished professionals from the Melbourne animation community (Australia), the New York animation scene (USA), the Folimage studio (France) and visit to the Bangkok animation community (Thailand).

For example, this past semester, a group of second year students and I spent two weeks in Bangkok for a traveling animation studio experience. The students were based at the Vithita Animation Company, a local studio in Bangkok, where they produced their own short animations. The students were inspired by daily visits of the city, visit with animation studios and meetings with professionals.

The online education component has also been an important part of our teaching and attracts new opportunities for collaboration. Examples of blogs and forums that the students and I created for the classes can be found below,

[Texts from students](http://blogs.nyu.edu/blogs/jfg201/digitaltoolsforcommunication2010/) <http://blogs.nyu.edu/blogs/jfg201/digitaltoolsforcommunication2010/>

[Projects from students](https://blogs.nyu.edu/blogs/jfg201/dt4c2011/) <https://blogs.nyu.edu/blogs/jfg201/dt4c2011/>

[Tutorials for students](http://blogs.nyu.edu/blogs/jfg201/i2ia/2012/03/) <http://blogs.nyu.edu/blogs/jfg201/i2ia/2012/03/>

ANDA thesis students, who have their entire thesis development and proposal available online, have been able to start online collaborations with music composers at the Berklee School of Music (USA). The increase in our student’s own ambition and determination to bring their projects to the next level was heightened by the incredible talent of the music composers with which they were able to work. This type of collaboration with people from different disciplines is something I encourage for the the students to increase their own awareness of their work.

More detailed information about ANDA can be found at

Web: <http://www.tischasia.nyu.edu.sg/page/animation.html>

Videos: <http://vimeopro.com/nyutischasia/anda>

References: <http://www.tinkering.net/ANDA/>

Other links:

[Goals](http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/goals.pdf) <http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/goals.pdf>

[Presentation of some of the graduates](http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/graduates.pdf) <http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/graduates.pdf>

[Students in festivals and conferences](http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/festivals.pdf) <http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/festivals.pdf>

[Masterclasses](http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/masterclasses.pdf) <http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/masterclasses.pdf>

[Industry partnerships](http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/industrypartnerships.pdf) <http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/industrypartnerships.pdf>

[Museums and Art Shows](http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/art.pdf) <http://www.tinkering.net/portfolio2013/art.pdf>