Visual Reference and Inspiration

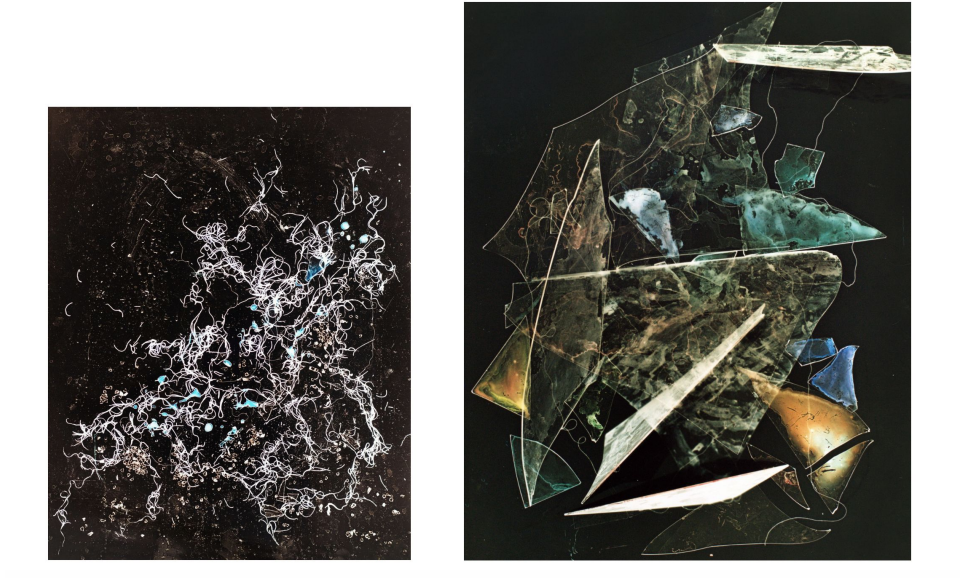
Inspiration

Whether or not you're actively working on a project, as a visual artist you should always be looking for inspiration and keeping a reference folder or site. Here are a few starting points.

Design Blogs

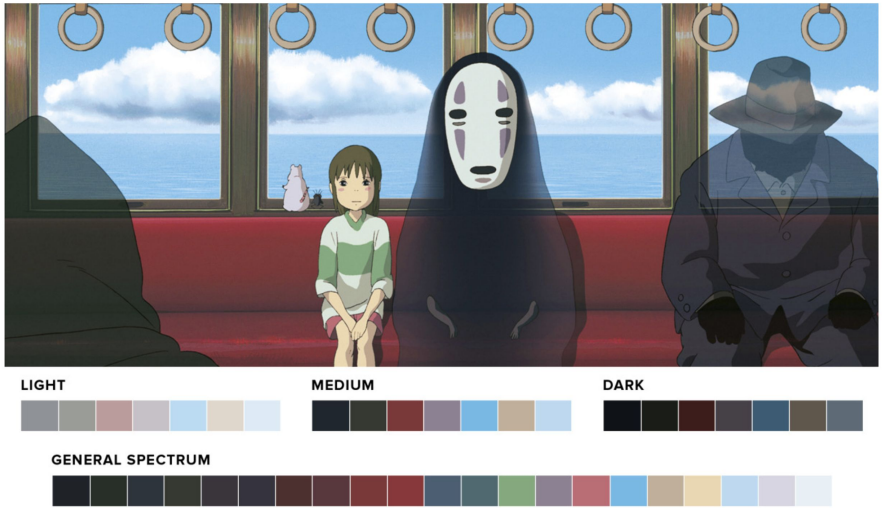
gurafiku

All struggle is against impermanence

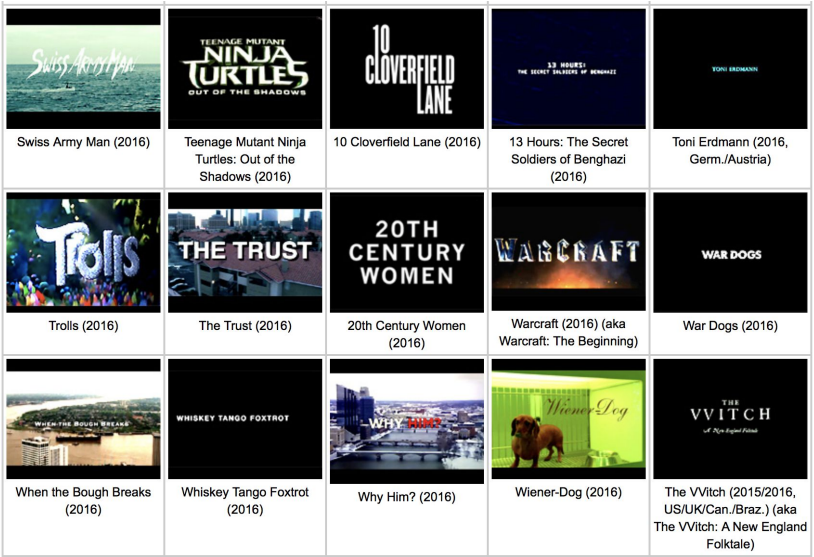


butdoesitfloat

Design Blogs

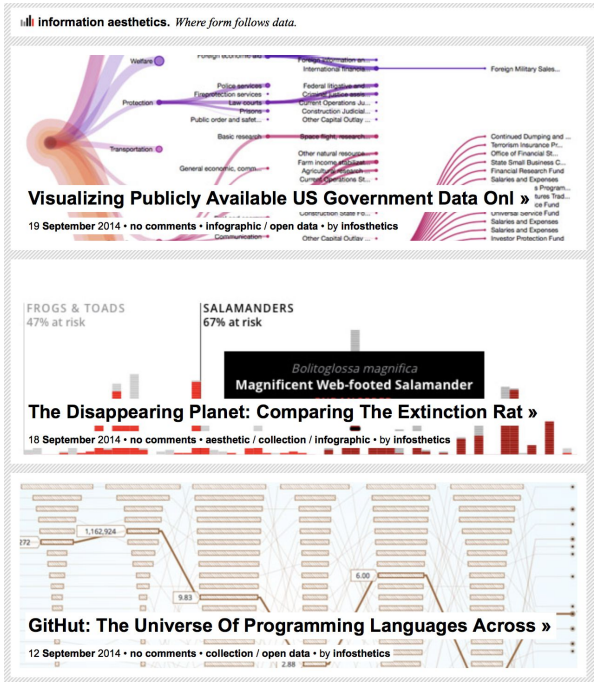


Movies in color

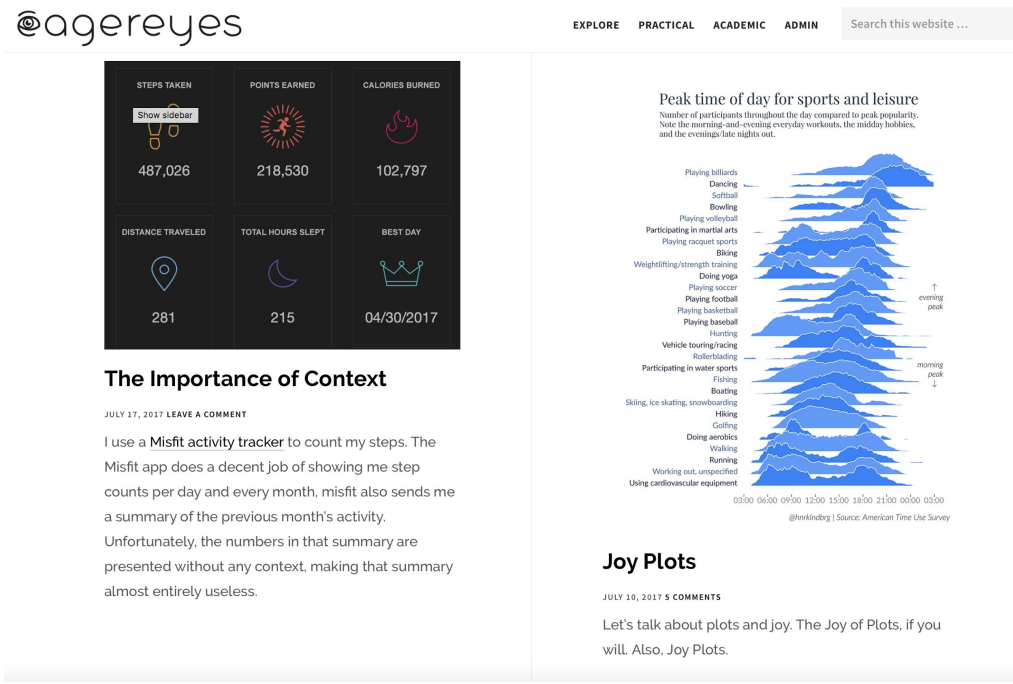


Film title screen database
(http://www.filmsite.org/movietitlescreens.html)

Design Blogs



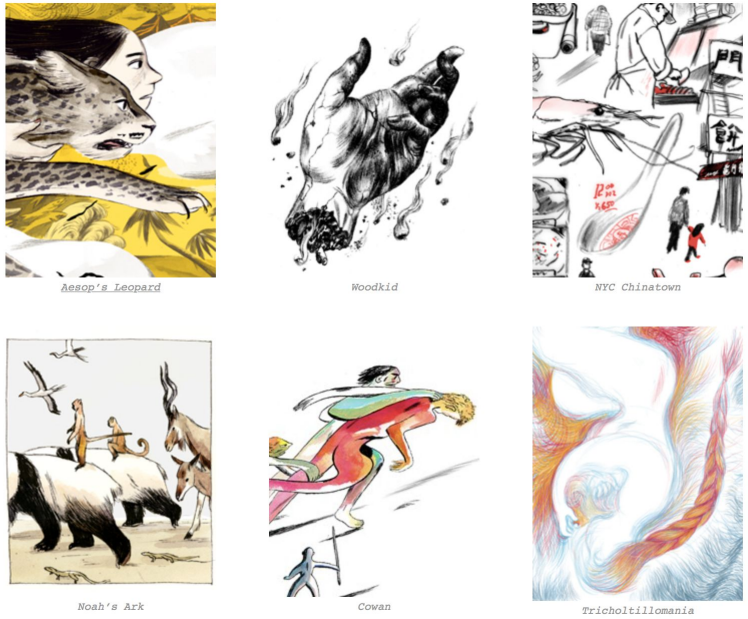
infosthetics



eagereyes

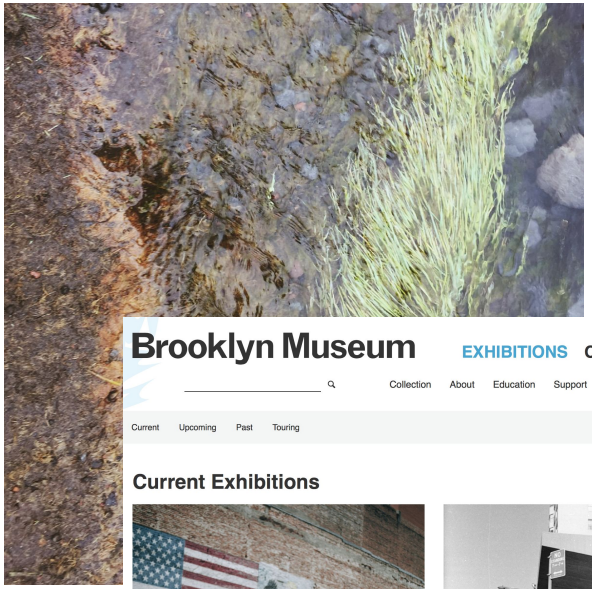
Individual Artists

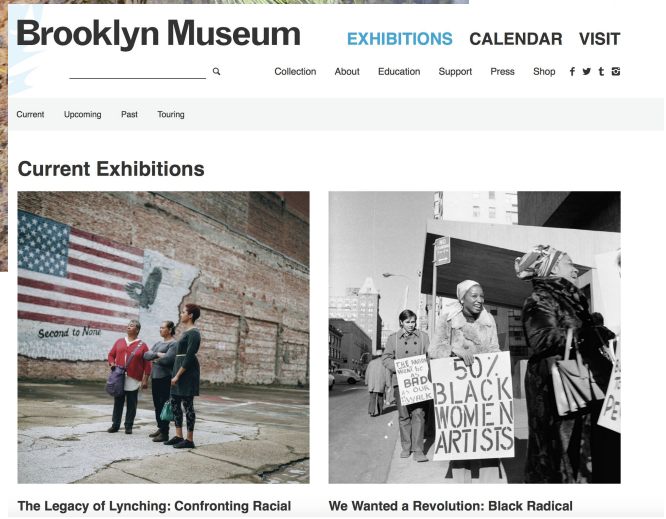
Sartorialist



Jillian Tamaki

Literally The World





Mood Boards

Mood boards are used in a variety of fields, from advertising to web design to game design. It's a fairly straightforward technique of finding and compiling visual reference into one organized place, to help us start to conceptualize our aesthetic before we dive into production.

Building a Mood Board

There are a ton of techniques for building a mood board. Some are single collage with more key / relevant images taking up larger space. Others are highly organized, tightly designed layouts broken into specific sections. This depends on your needs -- Is it for your own use, your team's reference, or to sell someone else on an idea? will you be there to guide a client through the board, or will it need to be self explanatory? Are you trying to communicate and abstract thought or emotion, or is it closer to a design and style guide?

What to Include?

The best mood boards are going to have a mixture of a bunch of different stuff. Consider including the following:

- Words that you associate with your project. What are the primary feelings associated with your player experience goal? Consult collaborators here.
- Imagery that you associate with that main feeling -- this could be photographs, illustrations, or other game reference.
- Color guides
- Character and UI Reference

A suggested process

- Decide 5-10 words associated with your game. Think about both the results of the game system (is it frantic, oppressive, calm?) and the kind of world you want to create.
- Finalize a setting.
- Pick a color palette that fits those words.
- Look for reference imagery. Focus on specific elements of the game. Environment vs. characters vs. props / objects.
    - Use the words and colors as limiting factors on these. Do they fit my aesthetics, or meaningfully contrast them?
    - If you find an image that fits your character but not your palette -- try recoloring it.
- Find reference fonts that fit with the artwork and with those words.

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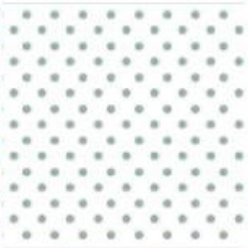
- calibri

Soft
Clean
Cozy
Light
Delicious
Warm



Explore

One mood board can certainly be helpful as reference for a game -- especially when you're working with a team and you can evolve it into a more organized style guide, but even when working alone. It's worth making more than one. What is the version of this game that focus more on a hand drawn art style, what is the more realistic? What about a more fantasy-leaning take, or one inspired by rubix cubes?

Assignment

Pick a prompt for a hypothetical game and create a four page mood-guide for an art concepts. Turn them in in a single PDF.

- Page 1
  - General concept name
  - Key aesthetic goal words (e.g. frantic, calming, asphyxiating, sweeping)
  - Visual reference for environment and setting
  - A basic color palette guide
- Page 2
  - Visual reference for characters and props
  - Basic color guide for main character and enemy schemes
- Page 3
  - Visual reference for UI
  - Sample fonts
- Page 4
  - A simple screen mockup (collage)

Prompt 1

2D side-scrolling pacifist action platformer

We've got a really strong prototype of our 2D pacifist action platformer. We're not married to the main character being a literal pacifist, but they do not attack in the game -- you press x to jump, z to dash, and c to dodge. The goal is to progress through a series of rooms until you can touch the goal (not sure what this might be yet), and then you'll move on to the next level. It's a fast paced, dexterity based game that requires a bit of tactical knowledge and a lot of skill. We're pretty wide open on theme -- The only thing we know for sure is we want to avoid comparisons to common side-scrolling platformers -- no robots or gothic castles, please.

Prompt 2

Small Business Simulator

We're working on a simulation game and we've got most of the mechanics laid out, the user taps to place sales kiosks for special items, manages the space throughout which characters can move. Players can choose what's on offer, staff the store, and decide what should be on sale every month. The only catch is, because of an existing intellectual property conflict, we can't use humanoid characters.