Creating Motifs for a Narrative Image

Review the vocabulary words for this section: **narrative image**, **motif, aggregate narrative**, **iconic**, **symbolic**, **indexical**.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/159qWlTNXdo6wXtaCTpJtQV7dVNJpkSxH7z7KmXu6ISA/edit?usp=sharing

We'll be creating a narrative image in *Shape-fitting a Narrative*, by aggregating different motifs centered around one story. This exercise will provide some prompts to help you call-up a story and create motifs related to that story.

Humans are story-making machines: everyday you create, listen, and tell stories to make sense out of the world around you. Below are just a few prompts to help you reflect and bring those stories out.

I.   Part One: Brainstorm Your Story

You can work with partners or by yourself (depending on if you're verbal or better with brainstorming by writing). Pick any of these prompts that speak to you:

1. Make a list of what you've been thinking about every morning this week.
2. What was the most memorable thing you heard from a friend recently?
3. What news headline caught your attention this week?
4. What is a lyric from your favorite song?
5. Name 1 movie or book that made a strong impression on you. Summarize its plot.
6. Has anything kept you up worrying at night?
7. Where and when did you last stay up and watch the sunrise? What happened the night before?
8. Has anything made you so frustrated that you wanted to scream?
9. Can you remember one time you laughed really, really hard? What was the cause?
10. When did you last cry and why?
11. Who do you miss the most? What's a great memory of this person?

II.   Part Two: Word Clusters/Free-Association

Once you have a central story, write it down in 1-3 short sentences. Next, create a word cluster around your sentences, using single word/short phrase descriptions. Let your brain free-associate and write whatever words come to mind. They don't have to make literal sense. Write whatever pops into your mind–as many words/ideas as you can until you run out of ideas.

Pick 3 of these words/phrases from your cluster that jump out most to you.

III.   Sketches: Iconic, Symbolic, or Indexical

Next, do some quick idea sketches (don't worry about making them perfect) and draw any combination of iconic, symbolic, or indexical images related your words. These sketches will help you pick the type of images you want to use and plan combinations. These are not your final motifs so don't worry about the quality of your drawings–think of them as visual notes.

The following slide, from Daniel Molnar's *Narrative Image: The How and Why of Visual Storytelling*: http://www.danielamolnar.com/project/other-stuff/narrative-image/#1, is a great example of the differences between iconic, symbolic, and indexical images.
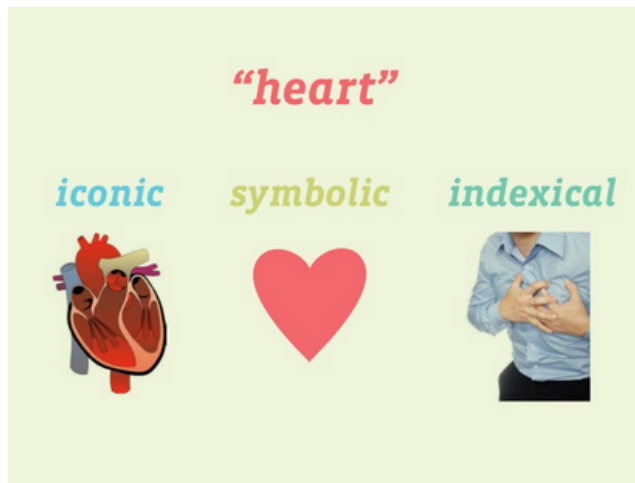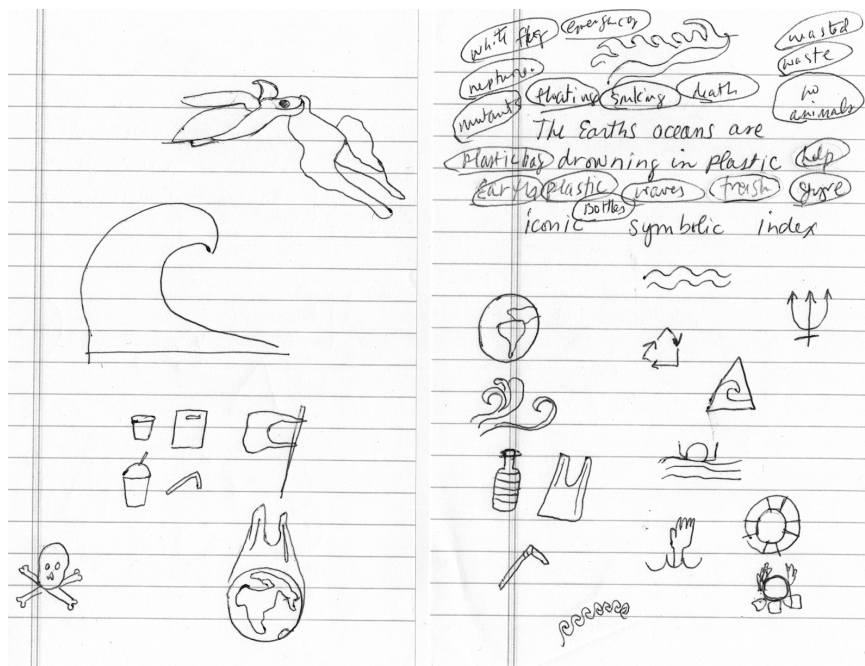

Image credit: Daniela Molnar

Here's an example of a word cluster and some sketches that we made in response.

IV.   Motif Compositions:

Look at your sketches and start to organize the items into motifs by combining them together in interesting ways.

At this point you can decide how you will create your final motifs.

- Will they be hand-drawn or will you use digital found images (online) to collage and trace? Tip: see the **Shape-fitting a Narrative** handout to plan out how you want to work.
- What will the visual style be? Tip: for papercuts, simple shapes or lines work best.
- Which paper colors will you use?
- Think about scale and composition within each motif.
- Use the circle guides to make sure your motifs fit within the circles of the circle-packing algorithm. Will the circle shape be obvious or implied?
- If hand-drawing, do it in pencil first, then trace the final in black ink for scanning.
- Make a total of 4 motifs. The motifs should be ordered from simple to complex:
    - The simplest image should have only 1 item and be legible at a tiny-tiny scale; the most complex will be an image with many elements (a picture in itself).
    - See the papercut samples so you have an idea of how the algorithm works and plan your motifs accordingly.

Example of a set of four motifs for "The Earth's oceans are drowning in plastic" (from most simple to complex):

Don't worry about having finished motifs. Tomorrow, during the Studio section, you will use these sketches to inform your final designs.