

Various Approches to Expressing Motion Visually

Ishod Wair's Switch Frontside Bigspin
in Love Park, Philadelphia 2013

by Nick Shlosman

2013 was a big year for Ishod Wair, who earned himself a spot amongst the best skateboarders in the world through his prolific and powerful performances in skate videos and magazines. There were many instances that attributed to Ishod's rise in the skate world, but one moment that always stood out to me was his switch frontside bigspin over the Love Park fountain gap in Philadelphia, captured in a sequenced photograph and featured in Transworld Magazine that year.

This particular trick involved approaching the gap with the feet planted in the “switch” stance, moving in the opposite direction that one is used to, then spinning the body counter clockwise 180 degrees while shoving the board counter clockwise 360 degrees. Because a textual description of this trick causes a headache to envision, we will be looking at this moment of motion through four styles, starting with the most mimetic form of representation in its original photograph, and finishing with the most conceptual approach of Dada art. Along with sequence photography and conceptual artwork, we will also be looking at the early motion capturing techniques of Eadweard Muybridge and the art of the Cubism movement to represent Ishod Wair's trick into the Love Park fountain.

Taken by Zander Takemoto, the original sequence photograph of Ishod's bigspin was featured in Transworld's August 2013 issue and gives us an accurate photographic account of the trick's motion. Following from right to left, the photograph constructs an iconic representation of the trick from the momentary snapshots that were taken in between the seconds of its occurrence. This photograph gave me a base for the three different approaches I took to convey motion in skateboarding...

Ishod Wair, Switch Frontside Bigspin, Love Park PA, 2013

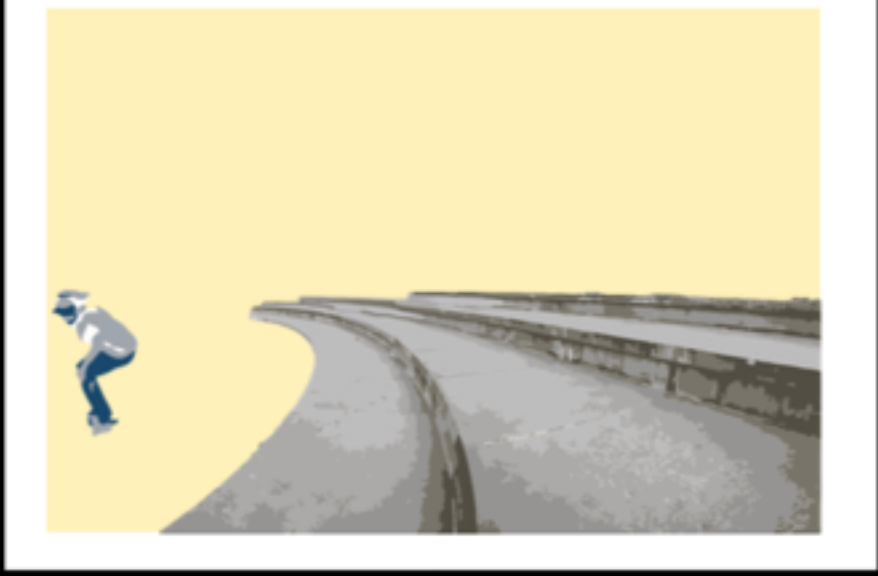


The Muybridge Approach

The first visual approach I took to express motion was through the style of Eadweard Muybridge. Working in the second half of the 1800s, the pioneer of motion photography made tremendous strides in capturing moments in time never before seen with the naked eye. By lining up multiple cameras and respective trip wires to set off snapshots, Muybridge was able to capture a series of moments within a second or two and then piece them together in chronological order. This allowed viewers to see movements like the intricate stride of a horse and simple human gestures in a never before seen way. Eadweard's technique would later become a huge stepping stone to cinematic production, but in Muybridge's time of work, these series of still pictures allowed people to follow a journey in movements and understand motion through sequential photography. To express Wair's trick in Muybridge's style, I took and repeated the constant focal point of the stair gap and chronologically pasted over instances seen in the original photo to create a Muybridge interpretation of Ishod in Love Park...

(Leslie, Mitchell. "The Man Who Stopped Time." Stanford Magazine - Article, May 2001, alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article/?article_id=39117.)

The Muybridge Approach



The Cubism Approach

Next on our journey through visual representation of motion comes the artistic style of Cubism. Along with movements such as Fauvism and Impressionism, Cubism aimed away from realistic and accurate depictions of its subject matter to instead begin exploring more conceptual ways in representing things such as motion. With no specific perspective through a single viewpoint, Cubism incorporates geometric shapes, lines, and fragmented planes to often portray motion. Artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque gained the movement popularity in the early 20th century for their cubism stills, but artists like Marcel Duchamp used the style to play with representing motion and movement in paintings. Although we do not gain a defined and realistic picture of the subject, cubism offers a flowing interpretation of motion, which is why I chose it to express skateboarding.

Skateboarders have a close and natural relationship with their board when doing tricks such as Ishod's bigspin. Along with skill and focus, years of experience with handling the wood with feet and body is needed to produce the effortless flow of motion. The tricks such as this embody an "organic and deeply natural way of living with technology"(33) as the human form and the board can merge together to execute the "manifestation of an underlying form of analytical thought"(34) when skateboarding. Through the style of cubism, I was able to use geometric shapes and scribbles to depict a representation of Ishod's bigspin that purely emphasized the flowing motion of the maneuver, blurring the separation between body and board to depict wholly their singular and organic movement across the Love Gap ...

(Williams, R. John. "Technê-Zen and the Spiritual Quality of Global Capitalism." Critical Inquiry, vol. 38, no. 1, 2011, pp. 17-70., doi:10.1086/661643.)

The Cubism Approach

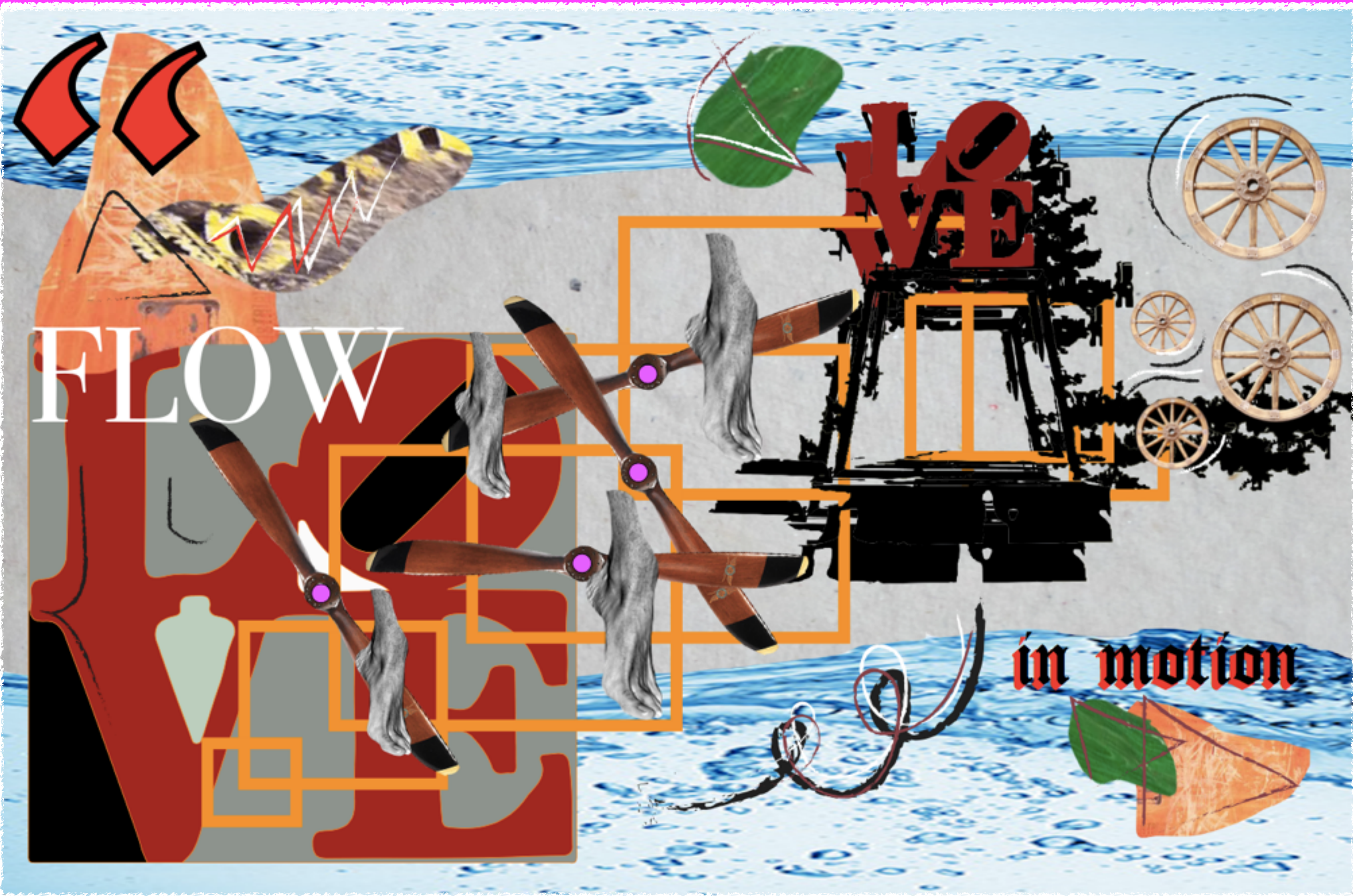


The DaDa Approach

The third and last expression of movement I decided execute is also the most abstract, and is known as Dada art. With its foundations developed by “the father of conceptual art”, Marcel Duchamp, Dada throws the rules of conservative mimetic artistic depiction out the window and purely relies on symbolism and abstract thinking to capture an image or more importantly... an idea. Straying from pure “retinal pleasure”, Dada art exists on the plane of thinking and connecting images, words, and symbols to express what an image represents and not what it accurately looks like. In my approach, I used a number of objects to portray Ishod’s trick. To establish the setting in Love Park, I included the LOVE monument and symbol to anchor where Wair’s trick begins and where it ends, moving right to left orange rectangles that scale the size of Ishod through the series of instances captured in the original photo. As Ishod approaches the gap, a set of turning wheels is put in his place to show the speedy approach necessary for take-off, and the various propellers and sets of feet are scattered along his trajectory to symbolize the chaotic yet controlled spinning of man and machine. Words like “FLOW” and “in motion” are placed to hammer messages to the viewer about Ishod’s movement, as well as the waving watery background that directs the eye from right to left and shows Ishod’s organic motion. Blotches of skateboarding wood are layered throughout the piece to provide a background of materials involved in the theme of skateboarding, and lastly, carefully selected scribbles and guiding lines were used to accentuate movement and anchor objects to create balance throughout the artwork. To represent the motion of Ishod’s trick in Love Park in the style of Dada, I incorporated all of these aspects and pieces on the basis of Duchamp’s insistence that “art should be an expression of the mind rather than the eye”...

*(“Marcel Duchamp Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works.” The Art Story,
www.theartstory.org/artist-duchamp-marcel.htm.)*

The DaDa Approach



The objective for this project was to explore different approaches to expressing motion through art, from the most mimetic to the most conceptual. The subject of these approaches was skateboarding because for me, it is a prime example of how human interaction merges with technology even if this technology is a piece of wood with wheels. Although skateboarding can be thought of as a primitive form of transportation, we can see that it can be quite more than that through the creative and powerful feats accomplished by Ishod Wair and many others in the skateboarding world.

From the sequential photographic style of Muybridge, the continual geometric merging of Cubism, and abstract symbolism of Dada, an image of a single skateboarding trick can deconstructed and put together through various artistic approaches to visually express motion from different but meaningful perspectives.

Sources

Leslie, Mitchell. "The Man Who Stopped Time." Stanford Magazine - Article, May 2001, alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article/?article_id=39117.

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