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Senior Project Dissertation Essay

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Tempest:

A Graphic Designer's Exploration of Music Entertainment Design

My mission for [my senior project](#) creatively was to create authentically pieces where I could learn and apply new art and design skills, and ultimately be proud of. I was inspired by music artists that create songs and perform their craft allowing themselves to be seen, heard, vulnerable and related to. I was thrilled by the idea of using my visual design craft to support, blend, and collaborate creatively with those who are craftful and creative in auditory and performing ways. The ways in which the visual and performing arts intersect is an area that piqued my interest and inspired me to delve deeper into this realm. Intrigued by the convergence of visual, performing, and audio arts coming together to create impactful and moving experiences, this intersection of arts has drawn me to explore a sector I had not previously considered: music design branding. For my final project I explored creating visuals for the music entertainment industry. My mission was to challenge myself to explore new creative tools, such as Blender, advance my photoshop knowledge, and motion design knowledge and apply the graphic design knowledge I've gained from my four years of study. In this essay I will dive into my research process, the creative thinking surrounding my design choices, challenges I faced, career approaches and explorations, and the creative solutions that resulted in my final project presentation on view at the Senior Visual Art Showcase *Joy Ride*.

I was first excited about creative collaboration in the Community Design class here at Purchase, a junior level graphic design course in which our graphic design students connect with purchase's performing arts and theater department to create branding signage and visuals for their showcases amongst other real world design applications. In this class I had the opportunity to design the poster for

student theater performances including the Attic, and Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. To get a better understanding of the theater production team's vision for the poster, I attended the theater design meeting which felt like I stepped into another world of creatives that I was previously unbeknownst to. There were various creative teams who presented on their respective areas of expertise, lighting, costume, set design, sound engineers, each whose artistic and/or creative abilities were necessary and like a dance coordinated the entirety of the experience planned for the performance, and I being a part of that as well, designing the poster and promotional elements. Every contributor's respective creative expertise was valuable and elevated the experience of the performance overall. Attending that meeting opened my eyes to the ways of creative collaboration, whose various creative skill sets can converge into creative elaborate and elevated experiences. It was inspiring and was an experience that left me excited to consider how I can use my visual arts and design skill set to connect with other artists and create moments of magic blending my design visuals and sound and identity.

My design process for this project, an exploration in music design visuals, began with selecting an artist. I chose to create designs for the music artist Tempest, an emerging music artist from Long Beach California who makes sensitive, vulnerable, and fun R&B music. The assets I would make would include: a motion graphics lyric video, animated and conceptual cover art, a looping stage visual, a poster, and merchandise. The next step of the design process was delving into the music and understanding the artist's current established visual and auditory identity. Tempest, as previously mentioned, is an emerging artist so I had to do some research to find out more about her establishing identity and collect images I could use for the promotional aspects of this branding project. I watched her music videos, listened to her full discography, and read articles about her to do this. One article I read was by LA Weekly entitled *Tempest is So Gone* written in 2022 by Brett Callwood. This article gave me a broader understanding of the artist and I was able to find more high quality images of the artist based on the photo credit which was accredited to Macy Bryant. Finding the photographer's instagram allowed me to source more photos of the artist on their page that I was able to utilize for different parts of the project. After that research of understanding the prospective client, it was time to begin the design process. I began to explore creating concept cover art visuals. This was a great first deliverable to work on because the visuals I established

here helped me define the visual identity I expanded upon further in the rest of the project. I started brainstorming cover art concepts, exploring how visuals could convey the evocations of the music. I drew inspiration from the artist's existing visual identity, the lyrics of the music, and the artist's own interpretations of their songs as documented in interviews. Elements like handwriting, film photography, and hand sketching became thematic visual elements that I noticed and incorporated into my creative process. Designing the cover art concept began with using Photoshop to edit an image I found of the artist herself. I used film overlays and light leaks and played with blending effects to achieve the image. The next step: typography. I spent some time looking for a typeface that had a lot of character, a display face for this piece of work. This was a challenge and led me to explore other creative ways of exploring designing the text and imagery. I felt that handwriting reflected the personal, authentic, expressive nature of the music Tempest makes. I am also in an Aerosol Art class which inspired me to see how I can incorporate this aerosol medium of writing into my design practice. After sourcing a scrap piece of wood and yielding a black spray paint can in hand, I wrote the artist's name *Tempest* onto the board.

The rawness and texture and grit felt relatable to the context of the songs. It was a rewarding experience to integrate the physical tactile process of creation with the digital and I was so proud of the outcome. This piece became the cornerstone of the visual library of music design assets I created for this artist. This became a cornerstone to the branding design that followed. I explored how it could be implemented and applied to the various design deliverables. I fell in love with the authentic and raw feeling created by spraypainting and so to animate the cover art I recreated this spray painting effect in after effects by utilizing a stroke effect. Next I created a second cover art concept for an unreleased song I came across on the artist's Soundcloud entitled *Babyluv*. This design inspired me to explore learning new Photoshop skills. For this cover art I used thematic imagery such as an image of a car window, thinking about the car as a symbol of the fleeting nature of relationships and emotion. The car as such is a theme used within the majority of the final design deliverables including the poster, lyric video, and this cover art design. I also layered images and effects that touched on the visual elements in Tempest's current image including film photography elements such as light leaks. I also created a liquid-like typography effect for the title of the song which was a rewarding learning experience to learn to do in

photoshop. I learned a new way to achieve a three-dimensional water like effect manipulating the image and with the available digital tools. Learning more ways to utilize photoshop for creative endeavors was another goal of this project as it is integral to music and entertainment design as designers in this industry often primarily work with photographic assets and imagery.

The next deliverable I designed for this music artist was a 3D rendered loop featuring the artist's name covered in dazzling disco ball tiles. This project marked the beginning of my exploration with a new creative tool for me: Blender. Blender is a powerful 3D design tool used to create and animate three-dimensional designs, often resulting in lifelike and immersive scenes. I chose to do a disco ball effect thinking of the mirrored tiles a symbol of reflection, of truth, of vulnerability as the artist is in her songs, but also of fun and creating light out and joy of experiences we encounter and reflect on. Her music often has an uplifting unapologetic spirit despite any adversities mentioned.

Venturing into three-dimensional visuals was a creative endeavor I wanted to explore in this project as a new way to create dimensional designs, especially for motion graphics, which are popular within the music graphic design industry and beyond. I started by stylizing the artist's name and transforming those vectors into 3D objects that could move in space. This process involved learning how to convert 2D designs into 3D models. I also learned how to apply reflective materials to these vectors, mimicking the look of disco ball tiles. This added a dynamic and eye-catching quality to the artist's name, making it stand out with a shimmering effect. Additionally, I created lighting that complemented the reflective surfaces, enhancing the overall aesthetic. I experimented with different lighting setups, camera angles, and animation techniques to bring the 3D wordmark to life. This process included setting keyframes to animate the movement of the 3D objects, adjusting the timing to match the desired rhythm, and fine-tuning the reflective materials to achieve the perfect balance of sparkle and clarity. One of the most challenging yet rewarding aspects of this project was mastering the use of materials and lighting in Blender. I learned how different materials can change the appearance of an object, making it look metallic, glossy, or matte. I also experimented with various lighting techniques to see how light interacts with the reflective surfaces, casting shadows and creating highlights that added depth and dimension to

the scene. This deliverable was a huge learning experience for me. Previously, my experience was limited to designing motion graphics in After Effects, where I moved two-dimensional objects in a simulated 3D space. Blender, however, introduced me to a whole new realm of possibilities by allowing me to create animations with actual 3D objects in a true 3D space. This shift required me to understand concepts such as 3D modeling, texturing, lighting, and rendering, which are crucial for creating realistic and visually appealing 3D scenes.

My next creative pursuit was designing a lyric video for one of the artist's most popular songs, which surprisingly didn't have any visuals posted online. I eagerly embraced this opportunity, excited to bring new life to the music through visual storytelling. Starting my design process for this project with the cover concepts was beneficial because it led me to research and understand the artist, the music, and its meaning deeply. This process allowed me to document a visual library of assets within the same family that I would apply to this video to create visual harmony across the final deliverables. The image of a car window that I used in the 'Babyluv' cover concept sparked my creativity for the intro of this lyric video. In an interview about the meaning of the song, Tempest had mentioned the song being inspired by an argument with a lover in a wing stop parking lot, which led me to think about the idea of a peaceful drive before or after such drama. Each step of the design process was interconnected and narrative-driven, visually telling the story created by the artist. To maintain consistency and enhance the overall aesthetic, I gathered film distortion overlays, which are a common theme in the artist's existing visual identity. The video begins with an evocative scene of a car driving through a city at dusk, setting a contemplative mood. The artist's name appears in the same style as the graffiti seen in the animated cover art concept, creating a sense of synchronicity within the project.

Designing the motion and typography for this video was a significant learning experience for me, as it was the longest piece of motion design and video editing I had created thus far. The After Effects file contained hundreds of layers, with each part of the lyrics on its own layer. This intricate layering taught me valuable lessons in organization, as I needed to go back and edit parts that interacted with each other. Color-coding layers proved invaluable, allowing me to manage the complexity of the project effectively.

Additionally, it was a lesson in timing and composition. I created different points of interest to move the viewer's eye across various areas of the screen, incorporating various typographic effects. I used layer masks and effects to add diversity to the visual experience, ensuring that the video remained engaging throughout. My favorite part of the video is at the one-minute mark, where I dissolved the background photo and used type, masks, and effects alone to create a rhythm that matched this section of the song. This technique not only aligned with the music but also highlighted the lyrical content in a visually compelling way. This particular song was ideal for creating a lyric video because it doesn't repeat itself much, and each part of the song is unique. This variety allowed me to experiment with different visual styles and effects, keeping the video dynamic and interesting. I also incorporated subtle animations and transitions to maintain a smooth flow. I am incredibly proud of this lyric video because I had never created anything like it before. Designing it significantly expanded my After Effects knowledge. I explored various advanced features such as keyframing, masking, and using effects to enhance the visual appeal. This project not only improved my technical skills in After Effects but also boosted my confidence in my ability to tackle complex design tasks. This lyric video project was a pivotal experience in my creative journey, pushing me to innovate and refine my craft.

The next deliverable for my music design project was merchandise for the artist Tempest. This phase of the project was particularly exciting because it allowed me to blend my interest in music design with creating tangible items that people could connect with. My primary goal was to ensure that every piece in this collection felt harmonious and cohesive, reflecting a unified body of work from the artist despite the use of different photographs in each item. To achieve this, I meticulously incorporated similar color schemes and consistently utilized the wordmark that was previously created across all other deliverables. This consistent branding helped to create a strong visual identity for Tempest's merchandise. For the T-shirt design, I began with a high-resolution photograph of the artist herself. The first step involved carefully masking out the background, which allowed me to isolate her figure and create a clean, focused design that highlighted her presence. To add a unique and visually striking element, I developed a star pattern that produced a halftone effect. This effect not only added texture but also gave

the design a retro yet contemporary feel, which I felt resonated well with Tempest's artistic style and audience.

Additionally, I employed various Photoshop tools to enhance the design further. Using the selection tools and paint buckets, I color-blocked specific areas such as the eyes, hair, shirt, and eyeliner. This technique added depth and vibrancy to the design, making each element pop and ensuring that the T-shirt would stand out. I also experimented with different blending modes and opacity settings to create subtle yet impactful variations in texture and color. Expanding my Photoshop skills to design merchandise was a significant aspect of this project. Prior to this, my experience with Photoshop was relatively limited; I had primarily used it for basic photo manipulation and object cutting. This project required me to delve deeper into the software's capabilities. Through extensive research and following several advanced tutorials, I significantly broadened my understanding of what Photoshop could achieve. I learned how to use the software not only to manipulate images but also to create compelling and intricate designs. Throughout my research, I discovered numerous techniques that were previously unknown to me, such as advanced masking, the use of layer styles to add effects, creating intricate patterns, and utilizing gradient maps to achieve dynamic color transitions. These techniques opened up a new realm of possibilities and allowed me to experiment creatively. I also explored the use of custom brushes and textures, which added an extra layer of complexity and sophistication to the designs. This project was an invaluable learning experience, pushing me to explore and master new Photoshop techniques and apply them creatively in designing merchandise that truly represents the essence of the artist Tempest. It not only enhanced my technical skills but also boosted my confidence in my ability to undertake complex design projects. The process of creating this merchandise collection was challenging yet immensely rewarding, and it has inspired me to continue exploring the intersection of music and design in future projects.

A deliverable I dedicated considerable time to researching, yet ultimately omitted from my final library of deliverables, was a landing page web design tailored for artists. My research involved an in-depth analysis of various landing pages for music artists, discerning elements of success and failure. A

landing page functions akin to a portfolio for artists, serving as a platform to showcase their identity and work. Notable examples of successful landing pages include Doja Cat's, featuring a captivating full-screen video trailer for her latest song, accompanied by a subtle 'enter' prompt. The page seamlessly transitions to promote her latest album, with clear calls to action for streaming and merchandise purchases. Since my initial research, her site has changed and still has all the character and charm to highlight her debut deluxe. A website is a great way for artists to highlight their unique brand identity. In my research I practiced designing layouts of a successful artist landing page.

The final deliverable that successfully made its way into the project showcase was a vibrant 24 x 32-inch full-size poster meticulously crafted for the artist. This endeavor proved to be a delightful exploration of design, where I seamlessly blended the capabilities of both Photoshop and Illustrator to bring forth a visually captivating piece. Beginning with a striking image of Tempest leaning out of a car window, I embarked on a journey of creative experimentation, drawing inspiration from the conceptual foundations laid out in the cover art concepts. Through the adept application of layer styles, light leaks, and color effects, I endeavored to imbue the poster with a sense of dynamism and depth, ensuring it resonated with the artist's unique aesthetic. At the forefront of the design, in an arc above Tempest's poised figure, I positioned the text that says, 'No, the album isn't done yet'. This carefully chosen phrase not only serves as a central focal point but also encapsulates the essence of Tempest's ongoing artistic journey. It's a playful nod to the artist's frequent engagement with her audience on social media platforms like Instagram, where she keeps her fans eagerly anticipating the forthcoming album using the same line. By strategically positioning this quote, I aimed to imbue the poster with a sense of narrative intrigue, inviting viewers to delve deeper into the artist's world and immerse themselves in the anticipation of what's to come.

Once I assembled my array of design deliverables, the next step was preparing for the senior showcase installation. This involved meticulously gathering the necessary technology to bring my vision to life. Equipped with my own projector and aided by Jerzy, who graciously provided a 32-inch screen, I set the stage for my digital presentation. On the screen, I showcased a looping video featuring the

animated cover art adorned with spray-painted typography effects, alongside a captivating 3D-rendered loop of Tempest's name. With the projector strategically positioned on a pedestal and aimed at the parallel wall, I was able to ensure optimal visibility for my work. Securing a corner for my showcase, courtesy of Bill Deere, proved instrumental, as it provided the ideal setting to showcase the projection without obstruction from passing attendees. Following the digital display setup, I turned my attention to curating the gallery wall. Carefully selecting sizes, I printed the poster in various dimensions until I found the perfect fit for the space. Additionally, I printed the cover art concepts to scale, suitable for CD covers, and one to the size of a vinyl record, acknowledging industry standards. Initially intending to screenprint the T-shirt designs, I encountered a setback when the print lab ran out of photo emulsion. Undeterred, I improvised by meticulously crafting a realistic mockup using an exact-o knife, creating the illusion of a tangible garment.

With the design elements meticulously arranged, I turned to the logistics of hanging everything securely. Drawing from past experience at the Forum Art Space, I utilized a combination of nails and magnets to ensure the poster remained firmly in place. However, the CDs and T-shirts required additional reinforcement, which I promptly addressed the following day. Jerzy also provided headphones for the projector, for which I fashioned a makeshift stand using a cardboard box weighted with a brick, ensuring stability and ease of access for attendees. I also printed out a sign reading 'put these on', guiding viewers to engage with the auditory component of my installation. I stayed up until 4 a.m. the night prior to installation, making small edits to my files, reprinting, resending, until everything was perfect. With everything meticulously arranged, plugged in, and powered on, my project stood ready to captivate audiences at the showcase. Through planning, creative problem-solving, and attention to detail, I had transformed my vision into a tangible and immersive experience for viewers to engage with and enjoy.

The senior showcase reception, commencing on May 11th at 1 p.m., marked the culmination of months of dedication and creative exploration. As I stepped into the bustling halls filled with eager students, proud family members, and supportive friends, a sense of joy washed over me. It was a moment I had eagerly anticipated, eager to share my artistic journey and immerse myself in the collective celebration of our

achievements. Watching attendees engage with my installation filled me with a profound sense of joy and fulfillment. Being able to interact with them, sharing the inspiration behind my work, and witnessing their reactions was immensely gratifying. It reaffirmed my passion for artistic expression and fueled my aspirations to continue showcasing my creations in future exhibitions. This experience served as a reminder of the power of art to connect, and inspire.

Reflecting on the journey that led me to this point, I realized how far I had come from the initial apprehension that once hindered my creative pursuits. Embarking on this project, I confronted my fears head-on, determined to transcend the confines of my comfort zone. Each step of the way, I challenged myself to delve deeper, to push the boundaries of my creativity, and to see my visions through to fruition. This project served as a catalyst for personal growth, instilling in me a newfound sense of confidence and self-assurance. It taught me the importance of perseverance, of committing to my artistic vision wholeheartedly, and of embracing vulnerability as a catalyst for authentic expression. Through sharing glimpses of my creative process on social media and beyond, I am embracing the role of fearlessness. Moving forward, I am committed to embracing replacing fear with ambition, and embracing every opportunity to create, innovate, and inspire. As I continue on my art & design journey, I am guided by the belief that true fulfillment lies in doing things scared, in pushing the boundaries of what is possible, and in seeing every creative endeavor through to completion. With newfound determination and unwavering passion, I close this essay with gratitude to myself and the staff and faculty that made this possible. I can't wait to show you what I create next. Keep up with me at designwithmelanie.com.

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