

GEECT Symposium – Teaching Production Design | Report

:: Brief Overview

The GEECT Symposium in Teaching Production Design took place at the National Film School, IADT, Dún Laoghaire, Dublin on 12th and 13th March 2015. 44 delegates from 19 countries took part in the two event, as well as our keynote speaker Alex McDowell and the National Film School's own staff who chaired most of the sessions.

:: Keynote Speaker

Alex McDowell, RDI

Professor of Practice, USC School of Cinematic Arts, Media Arts + Practice
William Cameron Menzies Endowed Chair in Production Design
Director, USC World Building Media Lab, USC 5D Institute
Creative Director, 5D Global Studio at Wondros

Alex Mc Dowell was the keynote speaker for the event, giving an inspiring talk on his work at USC and set the tone for two days of discussion and debate. Alex McDowell RDI is a narrative designer and creative director working in multi-platform experiential media. Throughout his 30-year career of production design, McDowell collaborated with directors including Steven Spielberg (Minority Report, The Terminal), Tim Burton (Charlie and the Chocolate Factory) and David Fincher (Fight Club), among many others. In many ways, Minority Report solidified his process of world building, as the film's broad requirements for empirical context (future reality, not science fiction) demanded the development of an entire narrative space, at the same time as new digital processes enabled revolutionary non-linear and immersive creative environments for design visualization. He is Professor of Practice in Media Arts + Practice at USC School of Cinematic Arts, where he teaches world building. He is director of the USC World Building Media Lab (WbML), where McDowell and his interdisciplinary students engage in funded research to build immersive worlds for storytelling and vast collaboration for synchronous media technologies. The WbML was awarded the prestigious Future Voice Award at the 2014 Interaction Awards. He also leads the USC World Building Institute, renowned since 2007 as the preeminent knowledge space for designers and creators in cross-platform narrative media. He is recipient, from George Lucas, of the USC William Cameron Menzies endowed chair in Production Design. McDowell's 5D GlobalStudio at Wondros are high-end peddlers of modern-day magic. In a multi-platform, cross-discipline design studio practice, he and his team combine emergent technologies with highly interactive storytelling to create deeply immersive experiences that surprise, provoke and delight. 5D GlobalStudio imagines a clearer vision of the future for clients and creates holistic experiences that enact those futures--now. McDowell applies world building across multiple industries with clients including Al Baydha Development Corporation, Boeing, Intel, Royal Shakespeare Company, Warner Brothers, among others. As Visiting Artist to the MIT Media Lab (2005-2010) he designed the renowned robot opera "Death and the Powers" which premiered in 2010 at the Salle-Garnier in Monte Carlo. He is a Getty Research Institute scholar and an executive board member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Design Branch. In 2006, he was awarded Royal Designer for Industry by the UK's Royal Society of Arts and, in 2013, was given the UK Designers & Art Director's Presidents Award.

:: Activities

The symposium started on the evening of 11th March with registration and a welcome meal at The Royal Marine Hotel. Bert Beyen, President of GEECT and Donald Taylor Black, Vice-Chair of GEECT and Symposium Director both gave a welcome speech, outlining briefly the programme for the two days.

The symposium began on Thursday in earnest with Alex McDowell Keynote speech on his work at the World Building Institute in USC where he is developing new ways to create narrative structures through his World Building programme. This was followed by a talk by Liam Doona, Head of Department of Design and Visual Arts at IADT, on the National Film School's course on Design for Stage and Screen. This was followed by an exhibition of Design for Stage and Screen students' work and a tour of the school, including the National Films School's new state of the art production studio.

Afterward we held a Pecha Kucha style where most film schools gave a brief overview of Production Design at their school. The session was chaired by Senior Lecturer at NFS, IADT, Jean Rice. This session was followed by a panel discussion "Teaching Production Design to Non-Designers". The panel was chaired by NFS, IADT lecturer Dr. Elaine Sisson and included panellists: Petra Lebdušková (FAMU), Jane Barnwell (Westminster), David Munns (Arts University, Bournemouth). The end of the day wrapped with a dinner in Dun Laoghaire.

The second, and last, day of the symposium began with a panel discussion on VFX and Production Design and was chaired by Irish Production Designer Tom Conroy (Vikings, Titanic Blood and Steel) and included panellists Uli Hanisch (IFS, Cologne), Tanja Bastamow (Aalto University, Helsinki) and Michel de Graaf (Netherlands Film & Television Academy). This was followed by two Best Kept Secrets Sessions, whereby delegates would share a project, or "best kept secret" they use in order to teach a certain aspect of Production Design.

The first session was chaired by Bert Beyens, President of GEECT and included presentations from: Moira Tait, Christine Moore, Samantha Babrowskie and Sergey Ivanov.

The second session was chaired by NFS, IADT lecturer Barry Dignam and included presentations from: Jean Vincent Puzos, Michael de Graaf, Eli Bo, Prof. Jorge Manuel Paixao da Costa and Heizo Schulze.

The second day closed with a recap of the two days, chaired by La Fémis Director Marc Nicolas, with Moira Tait, Alex McDowell and Liam Doona on the panel.

After this session the delegates were given a tour of "In The Making" an exhibition curated by Irish Year of Design 2015 at the Coach House, Dublin Castle. Curated for the Design Museum by Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby, it captures objects mid-manufacture and puts the aesthetic of the unfinished centre stage.

(<http://www.irishdesign2015.ie/programme/single/in-the-making>)

The symposium then closed with a farewell dinner in the city centre,