



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHY IN PORTFOLIO DESIGN COURSES

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Abstract

Portfolio Design is a product which represents the visual design language of the design students, in the fine arts education. The main aim of the portfolio design courses is to design a portfolio which can communicate strongly with the viewers. The visuals and the details of the design idea have to be perceived by anyone who is viewing the portfolio.

The proper photography is one of the vital element of the perfect visibility. Since a student's portfolio includes 3 dimensional products such as; packaging design, book design, promotion design, illustrations on walls and etc., the photography of the products become an important point in the portfolio design. In the proper photography approach to the products, the main purpose is to reflect the dimension well enough to the viewers.

The main purpose of the photography is to give the all perspective of the design products without losing their three dimensional structures.

Keywords: Fine arts education, portfolio design courses, photography, student portfolio.

INTRODUCTION

Graphic design exists to communicate with people and these people include; viewers, users, clients and so many other target audience (Twemlow, 2008: 8). The initial communication tool of a graphic design or a visual communication design student is her/his portfolio. Portfolio design represents and shows the creativity and productivity of the designer.

Due to the various kinds of design works, oversized or three dimensioned works, that should be included in the portfolio, the design student must use proper photography to reflect them. Klimchuk and Krasovec (2012, :218) states that; in the portfolios the works should be shown by high resolutioned photographic images but for the academic program interviews they advise to include the actual pieces inside the portfolio and only use their photographs if the pieces are oversized. Therefore, convenient photography is essential for the portfolio design. And nowadays in portfolio design courses photography of the design products is getting more importance and attention. "Today, photography is probably the most popular form of image in visual communication" (Landa, 2011: 112).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the usage and importance of photography in the portfolio design courses. Due to this research; design student's portfolio design projects were examined and aslo expert views were taken on the importance, existence and future development of photography (as a sustaining probable new named course) in portfolio design courses.



METHOD

For this study, qualitative research methods were used for analyzing and collecting the data. This research is mainly based on the portfolio design courses that I have directed for seven years in Gazi University, faculty of fine arts, department of visual communication design. The data, samples and students' works were selected and taken from this course's collected archives. The visual examples were selected from approximately 105 student's project works that were made during this course.

Since this qualitative study is based on the importance of photography, expert views were taken from 11 academicians from 8 different fine arts faculty. These 11 academicians (Numbered as A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A9, A10, A11) have given portfolio design course in visual communication design departments and graphic design departments. Expert views were taken from 8 academicians depending on the 5 research questions.

Portfolio Design And Portfolio Design Courses

The basic definition of portfolio is; "A body of work used by the visual communication profession as the measure of one's professional ability" (Welsh and Welsh, 2013, s.379). Portfolio is important for many disciplines but for design area it is a necessity. By the assistance of the portfolio, a designer or a design student can summarize her/his brief history of the works and visual language. Ambrose and Harris (2012: 146) defines portfolio as a selection that presents the designer's talents and abilities to the clients and a communication method that shows what a designer can create with the work samples. For a design student portfolio design course is a vital training before graduation or an important design jury.

In visual communication design or graphic design education, portfolio design courses mostly exist in the final semester / year when the students are mostly able to accumulate their design projects. After 4 years of undergraduate education, the design students are able to compose many project works from 3 dimensions to digital environment. With the help of the portfolio design course students are able to organize their works for a proper, effective and a creative presentation.

Importance Of Photography In Portfolio Design

The impression of the portfolio depends on its creativity (Elden and Özdem, 2015: 220). For a creative portfolio design one of the most important obligations is to have the proper and convenient visuals of the design works that will take place in the portfolio. With the start of a portfolio design the prior step is to review and form the visuals of the works. At that point the design student faces a problematic; photography of the three dimensioned and oversized works.

Since there are various design products inside the portfolio and it is difficult for a design student to take all these three dimensioned, complex, giant works with him/her to the interview. That's why proper photography can represent an absent work that the designer can not carry with the portfolio during a meeting / jury. These dimensional products can be counted as; packaging designs (Figure 1), book designs (Figure 2), music graphics (Figure 3), promotion designs, various projects involved with environment, etc. The complexity of these design products makes the photography become an important point in the portfolio design.



Figure 1: Photography of a Packaging Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Ekin Can Acar, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.



Figure 2: Photography of a Book Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Ekin Can Acar, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.



Figure 3: Photography of a Record Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Müge Betül Keskin, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.

The proper photography of a design product can reflect the design concept. As a powerful tool to investigate a problem and expose a point, photography is possibly needed to transmit a point of view or sell a product (Arnston, 2007: 170). As photograph is used to express feelings, carry information and connect with the viewers, it is a very useful tool. Naturally, photograph is used for many causes and has many categories in itself. "Whenever the intent of photography is to promote or sell a product, it is called product photography" (Arnston, 2007: 173). Since it is focused on the design, product photography is mostly preferred in portfolio design.

Important Items and Steps in Photography of the Design Products

When it comes to product photography or photography of the works for the portfolio, there are some steps and key items. According to Bashar (2013) the steps of photographing the portfolio works are: finding inspiration, finding a focus point, setting up the camera, experimenting with different compositions, photographing in high places. There can be various steps and decision for the photography. But the initial step is to decide a concept for the portfolio design, afterwards it is a proper decision to arrange the shootings for the decided concept. "All successful and innovative design is created against a clearly defined message and a focused set of objectives" (Oldach, 1995:3). And also as Paul Rand says "design is a relationship between form and content" (Kroeger, 2008: 18).

Depending on the concept the student should make a second decision for making the photography in studio or outside with the daylight. For each environment (Figure 2 ,3) and point of view the results will be variable. "....., Every photograph is, literally, a point of view; every photograph implicitly says, 'look at this', and 'look at in this way' (Salkeld, 2014:150).



Figure 4: Photography of a Packaging Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Figen Çiçek, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.



Figure 5: Photo Shooting the Portfolio Designs by Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.

When it comes to photographing the product, the student should focus on the angles, the framing, the composition, the background choice, focusing /close up shootings, lightening. All these elements are important since they effect the result. Diprose and Robins (2012: 288) states that the subject's and camera's position must be arranged carefully since they can change the image's perception. And also Rissler (2014:104) explains that the combination of the opposites make the harmony in a photograph and also the existence of the elements at the same time such as; spacing, brightness, texture, orientation, length, shape that vary from each other generates propriety.

In the student's projects (Figure 6, 7) it can be viewed that many different camera angles and close ups photography shootings were made to make an impact to the viewers to understand the product's design.



Figure 6: Photography of a Book Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of İrem Bilgi, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.



Figure 7: Photography of a Cd Cover Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Esra Oğuz Yılmaz, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.

In another product photography, different background colours, contrasts and spacing that were used can be seen (Figure 8, 9).



Figure 8: Photography of a Packaging Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Sena Karakaş, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.



Figure 9: Photography of a Packaging Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Kübra Akşan, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.

Below there can be seen a close up shooting (Figure 10) and trials of the different compositions (Figure 11) of the design products can be viewed. At the end of the shootings the students have various version of the photographs. Since the portfolio design has to be an individualistic course and based on forming a personal statement of works, students have to make some design decisions on their own; such as which photograph should be take place inside the portfolio. “A teacher must create a program that will encourage his students to learn how to learn, and then know when to leave the rest up to them”(Heller, 2003: xi).



Figure 10: Photography of a Packaging Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Emre Mutlu, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.



Figure 11: (middle, right) Photography of a Packaging Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Selim Küçükkutlu, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.

Another item for the photography for a portfolio is taking the photograph of the stages/using steps of the product. With that kind of photography we can visualize the usage of the product. Book and Schick (1997: 73) defines the basics of the visualization as showing the product; alone, in a setting, in use and it's benefit.



Figure 12: Photography of a Packaging Design Project for the Portfolio Design. Project of Damla Düzel, Student of Gazi Univ. F.A.F. Department of Visual Communication Design.

The final step after finishing the photography is editing the photographs in a pixel based computer programme. This editing process provides the designer to extinguish the mistakes of the photography. Ambrose and Harris (2013:46) explain photography as a image based content as it supplies information and manipulation with computer programmes.

FINDINGS

To take the expert views 5 research questions were formed. The 11 academicians (Numbered as A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A9, A10, A11) who have given portfolio design course in 8 different fine arts faculties, visual communication design departments / graphic design departments, answered these 5 research questions. The questions and the responses are:

1.The works which will be included in portfolio should be specially photographed again within the portfolio design courses.

First of the research question was "In your opinion, should *the works which will be included in portfolio specially be photographed again within the portfolio design courses?*"

The academicians A1, A2, A4, A5, A6, A7, A9, A10, A11 answered as "Yes, they must be photographed again". A4, A5 and A7 emphasized that the works haven't been photographed well enough at their first production date that's why new photography is needed for the portfolio's concept. A3 and A8 answered as; can be photographed depending on the project and if they are dimensioned works.



2. The photography style should be different for each design products such as; packaging design, exhibition design, book design, letterheads.

The second research question was *“Should the photography style be different for each design products such as; packaging design, exhibition design, book design, letterheads?”*

The academicians A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, A7, A8, A9, A10 answered as “Yes”. A1, A3, A4, A5 also specified that works must be photographed interplaying with environment and people with special lightening and proper background. A6 clarified that; it can be different but there must be integrity in between the photographs. A11 answered that they can be photographed same or different, depending on the portfolio design. A8 also said there has to be editing and colour correcting after photo shootings. A3 said that the design products such as; packaging design, book and promotional designs should be photographed on a background and lightening that is proper to their colour palette.

3. Portfolio design should be enriched with the photo shootings of the visual communication design products with different environments and angles such as: in studio space, outdoor space, close up shootings.

The third research question was *“Should the Portfolio design be enriched with the photo shootings of the visual communication design products with different environments and angles such as: in studio space, outdoor space, close up shootings?”* A1, A3, A4, A6, A7, A8, A10, A11 answered as “Yes”. A3 also mentioned that different environments and angles that are used in photography enriches the portfolio design. A7 underlined that this practice can enrich but also may cause caotic results unless planned properly. A2 answered as “No”. A9 said “photography from the best sight angle is adequate”. A5 made no comment for this question.

4. In portfolio design mock – ups are better than the photography of the products.

The fourth research question was *“Do mock – ups substitute for the photography of the products in portfolio design?”* For this question A1, A2, A4, A8, A11 answered as “Yes depending on the Project, time to time”. A5’s answer is; “%50 yes/no” but added that the originality of the photography is uncomparable. A10 also said “It may not substitute”. A3, A6, A9 said “No” adding that photography can’t be compared with mock-ups and mock-ups can’t substitute for photography. A7 said that it is not right to compare these two techniques and mock-ups can bu useful in some conditions.

5. Opening a course named “Portfolio Design Photography” contributes Portfolio design course.

The fifth research question was *“Does opening a course named Portfolio Design Photography contribute Portfolio design course?”* A1, A4, A5, A8, A9, A10 said “No”. And they mostly offered as a workshop, a case study in portfolio design course or a chapter in advertising photography course. A2, A3, A6, A7, A11 said “Yes” and supported the idea of seeing portfolio design photography as a course. A6 said after specifying the different properties from advertising photography, portfolio design photography course can contribute to portfolio design course in case they are performed parallel.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Photography is an important area in visual communication design and graphic design. It has many options for a designer to visualize and reflect the concept of a design product. “The endless choices of film stock, filters, lightening, depth of field and processing, allow photographers –and designers working with photographers- to imprint immediate atmosphere and character before the subject matter is even considered.”(Newark, 2007:92).

Can be counted as one of the final design projects, portfolio design is a necessity for a design student before graduation. As mentioned before, photography has a significant role in portfolio design courses.

As it can be understood from the findings; it is quite important that the works which will be included in portfolio to be specially photographed again within the portfolio design courses, since they haven’t been photographed during the production time. Also most of the expert views indicates that the photography style should be different for each design products such as; packaging design, exhibition design, book design, letterheads. In the expert views, most of the academicians said that portfolio design should be enriched with



the photo shootings of the visual communication design products with different environments and angles such as: in studio space, outdoor space, close up shootings. It is seen from the expert views mock – ups can also substitute photography but three academicians strongly said mock-ups can't substitute for photography. When it comes to final finding; 5 of the 11 academicians strongly agreed opening a new course named "Portfolio Design Photography" that can contribute portfolio design course. One of the academicians also said if it is specified well enough it can be an option as a course. But the rest of the expert views indicated that forming it as a workshop, a case study in portfolio design course or as a chapter can be a better suggestion.

In sum, it may be said that photography is vital and important in portfolio design courses. It also may be a good option to specify and indicate portfolio design photography, as a new area besides product or advertising photography in the future.

WJEIS's Note: This article was presented at 7th International Conference on New Trends in Education - ICONTE, 13- 15 May, 2016, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 7 Number 3 of IJONTE 2016 by IJONTE Scientific Committee.

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