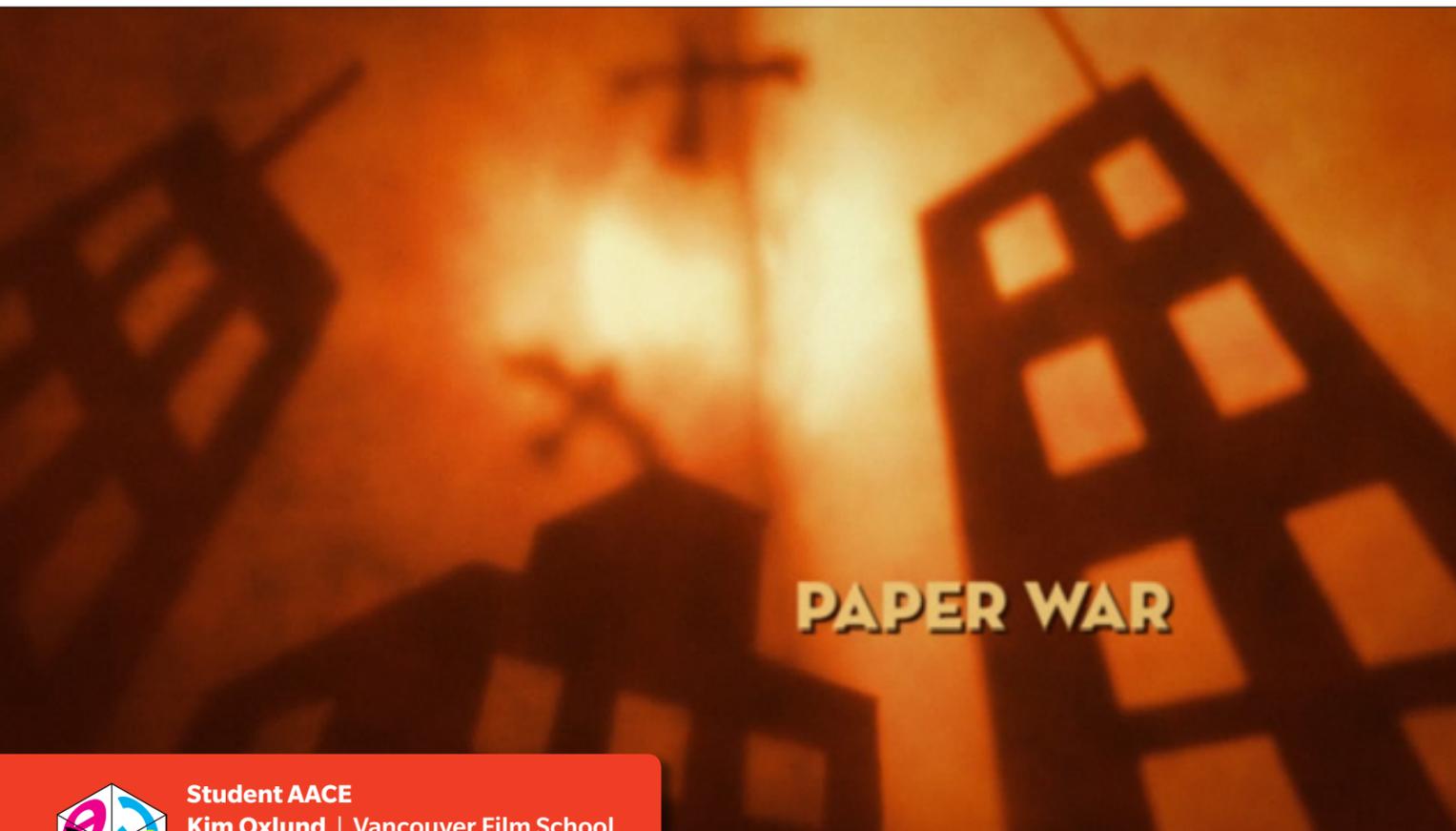


THE WHY GENERATION

Designer and Vancouver Film School grad Kim Oxlund shares his alma mater's motto that a project's purpose counts more than the process

by Sheri Radford



Student AACE
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Call it an ideal match. In 2011, Kim Oxlund, who was taking the Digital Design program at Vancouver Film School (VFS), needed a fourth-term school project. His wife had just written a script called *Paper War*, in which a mother goes insane over the loss of her child and starts filling her apartment with origami weaponry. Oxlund tasked himself with creating a title sequence to accompany the script. His project turned out even better than anyone could have anticipated, winning a Salazar Award from the Society of Graphic Designers of Canada (BC) and top honours in the student category at the 2013 AACE Awards.

To craft the eerie, evocative title sequence, Oxlund used construction paper, fabric, lights and a video camera. "Since the protagonist in the film was creating all these things out of paper, it felt like a natural way to go," Oxlund says. "I wanted to do something analog, to get away from the computer for a while." He adds, "I like to create places that I want to go to."

Oxlund incorporated the idea of shadow puppetry into the credits, but took the concept a step further: "Traditionally, you just have one plane in shadow puppetry. I thought it would be interesting to create a bit more depth and parallax, to have the different components moving in this world." With a grin, he says, "I like to challenge myself. I get bored fairly easily."

Despite all this complexity, it took Oxlund just a single weekend to create the *Paper War* title sequence. "Everything was static. All the paper cut-outs were very simple," he says. He composed the haunting, childlike music equally quickly: "Sometimes you get an idea and you're able to bang it out instantaneously, while other projects can go on forever and ever and you really struggle with them."

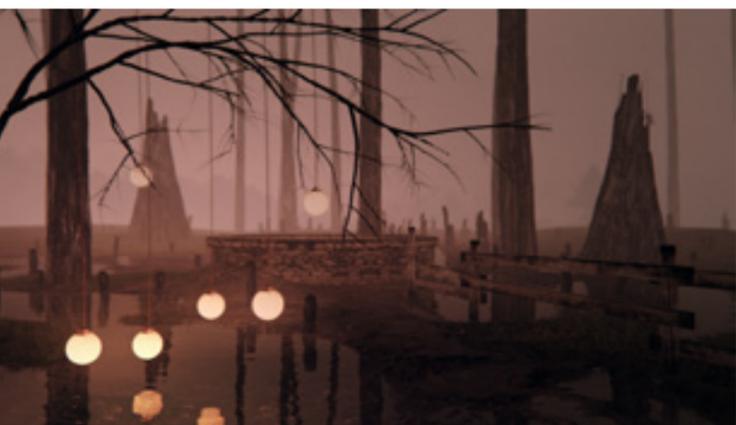
Unlike some of the students at VFS, who arrive fresh out of high school, Oxlund had a wealth of experience under his belt when, in 2010, he moved from his native Copenhagen, Denmark, to Vancouver. He'd already worked in a variety of jobs, everything from fireman to touring musician, and he'd spent two years doing design work in the advertising industry. He enrolled at VFS to sharpen his already considerable skills and to network with industry contacts.

◀ (and right) *Paper War*: This is a title sequence for a fictional film. Following the death of her daughter, a detached woman finds an outlet in the obsessive and excessive production of origami weaponry. When an unusual man arrives in town, he brings magic to her world again. The piece is heavily inspired by shadow puppetry techniques and made with construction paper, various kinds of fabric and tiny lights.



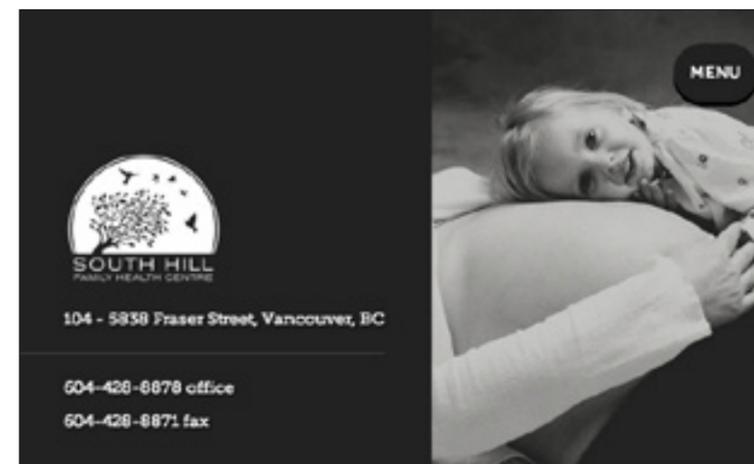
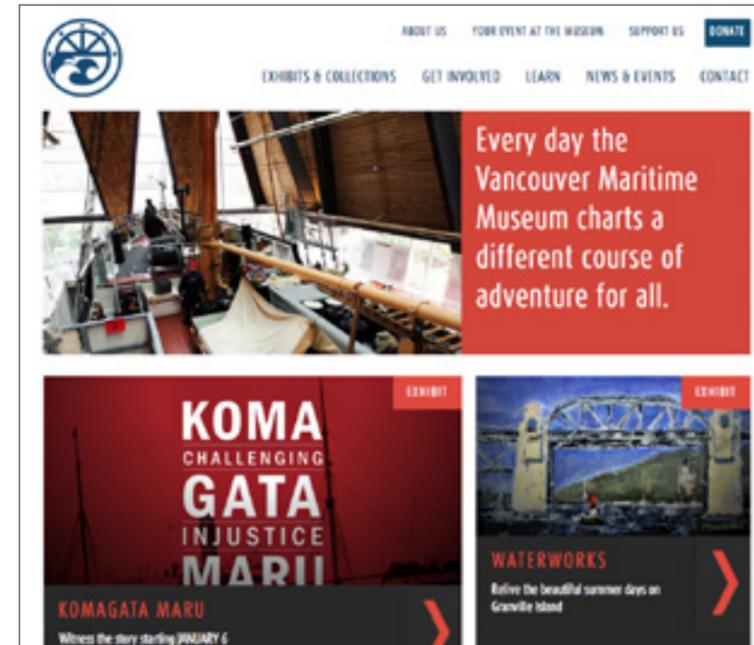
► *Cover Me*: Oxlund created this personal project with his wife. A music video for a cover version of the Bruce Springsteen song, it features a line from the song slowly appearing from melted water. The piece was done using letter shaped ice-cubes, a single light, sparkles and a reflective black surface. They did a time-lapse of the ice melting, played it backwards and coloured it.

▼ *The Little Mermaid*: This award-winning project is a horror spin on the original fairytale and has travelled the world in festivals. Oxlund created all the CG exterior scenes, music and sound design, despite at the time having little background in 3D and CG graphics. "It did fool quite a lot of people, so I would say the goal was accomplished," Oxlund says. Currently, the short is being developed into a feature film.



The program at VFS attracts a broad range of students, some entering the working world for the first time, some switching careers later in life, and everything in between, says Miles Nurse, head of Digital Design at the school. For the staff, the emphasis is on "understanding the needs and personalities and experience levels of the students," he says. With a one-year time frame, the Digital Design program is intense for students and instructors alike, constantly changing to meet the needs of the evolving industry. Structured less like a traditional school and more like a fast-paced agency, the program features instructors with considerable industry experience.

The program employs a unique three-pronged approach, covering communication design, interactive and user experience, and motion design. Students study all three disciplines in the first four months before specializing in one area for the final eight months. Nurse describes the strong, broad foundation as bene-



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ficial to students: "We're building a platform for lifelong learning."

In contrast to schools that teach software but nothing more, VFS teaches the why behind the tools, emphasizing creativity. "The tools will perpetually change," says Nurse. "We're always challenging students to be creative. Ultimately, if you're not creative, and you can't figure out how to embrace your creativity, then mastery of the tools is only going to go so far." According to Nurse, "Kim was a great example, because he didn't go to the tools first." Oxlund could have created *Paper War's* title sequence using 3D animation, "but it would have been ten times the work and it probably wouldn't have felt as organic as it did." Ultimately, a chosen tool should be secondary to the creative vision.

And Oxlund's creative vision is a strong one. "I usually know what I want," he says with a laugh. "It's hard to convince me to do otherwise." He finds design inspiration all around him: "It can come from a piece of music I hear. It can come from a face I see on the street. Inspiration is everywhere. You just have to keep your eyes open."

Since graduating from VFS, Oxlund has been sharing a studio space with two talented guys he met at school, sometimes

▲ *Vancouver Maritime Museum Website*: Oxlund worked with the Vancouver studio Designstamp to redesign the museum's website. He says the biggest challenge "was to figure out how to make it look contemporary but with a classy and nostalgic twist."

◀ *South Hill Family Health Centre Website*: Oxlund created a website for this Vancouver medical centre. "They gave me a blank canvas to work with," he says. "I used this opportunity to experiment a bit and try to break free from my usual design habits."

► *In Love With A Snowman: Oxlund is currently working on this stop-motion music video, a personal project about a girl who falls in love with a snowman and her constant attempts to make him return her feelings. "It's an evolved version of 'Paper War,' [as I have] more time to explore the world and the techniques," Oxlund says.*

collaborating, sometimes working on his own projects. "Being my own boss has a big advantage," he says. "I can decide for myself what I want to do. But there's also a great deal of uncertainty." Over the past year he's worked on several projects he's passionate about, but non-disclosure agreements prevent him from saying anything more.

He does offer some advice for students embarking on a design career. "You see a lot of people going into school with the intention of learning this piece of software and that piece of software, and in the end it doesn't matter, because you can do that at any time," he says. "The why is always more important than the how."

Sheri Radford is a magazine editor, freelance writer and author based in Vancouver (sheri@sheriradford.com).

To see more of Kim Oxlund's work, go to the Current Issue section of appliedartsmag.com

