

Social Media as a Networking Tool for Designers

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## Table of Contents:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Chapter One: Introduction.....                               | 1  |
| Chapter Two: Instagram as a Designer Networking Medium ..... | 3  |
| Chapter Three: Personal Report from Using Instagram.....     | 5  |
| Chapter Four: How Other Designers are Using Instagram .....  | 19 |
| Chapter Five: Is It Worth It? .....                          | 29 |
| Works Consulted .....  | 33 |
| Appendix 01 .....  | 35 |
| Appendix 02.....   | 38 |
| Appendix 03.....   | 41 |

## List of Figures:

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Figure 1. Screenshot of my Instagram page.....</i>  | <i>5</i>  |
| <i>Figure 2. Screenshot of my Instagram page, continued.....</i>                               | <i>6</i>  |
| <i>Figure 3. Screenshot of a post on my Instagram page.....</i>                                | <i>7</i>  |
| <i>Figure 4. Screenshot showing the editing capabilities of the application InstaSize.....</i> | <i>8</i>  |
| <i>Figure 5. Screenshot of Instagram showing the Insights on a post.....</i>                   | <i>9</i>  |
| <i>Figure 6. Screenshot of my Instagram video post.....</i>                                    | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Figure 7. Screenshot of my Instagram Stories archive.....</i>                               | <i>11</i> |
| <i>Figure 8. Screenshot of my Instagram Stories archive, continued.....</i>                    | <i>12</i> |
| <i>Figure 9. Screenshot of a post on my Instagram page .....</i>                               | <i>13</i> |
| <i>Figure 10. Screenshot of an Instagram post on the “ladystagehands” account.....</i>         | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Figure 11. Screenshot of the UVA Department of Drama location search.....</i>               | <i>15</i> |
| <i>Figure 12. Screenshot of the “#scenicdesign” hashtag search.....</i>                        | <i>16</i> |
| <i>Figure 13. Screenshot of scenic designer Jason Sherwood’s Instagram page.....</i>           | <i>19</i> |
| <i>Figure 14. Screenshot of scenic designer Michael Harbeck’s Instagram page.....</i>          | <i>20</i> |
| <i>Figure 15. Screenshot of scenic designer David Korins’s Instagram page.....</i>             | <i>21</i> |
| <i>Figure 16. Screenshot of New Jersey based paint shop, Infinite Scenic.....</i>              | <i>22</i> |
| <i>Figure 17. Screenshot of the New York Theatre Workshop’s Instagram post. ....</i>           | <i>23</i> |
| <i>Figure 18. Screenshot of faux finish painter Jon Gluck’s Instagram page .....</i>           | <i>24</i> |
| <i>Figure 19. Screenshot of scenic artist Dusty Terrell’s Instagram page.....</i>              | <i>25</i> |
| <i>Figure 20. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.....</i>                                  | <i>26</i> |
| <i>Figure 21. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post .....</i>                                 | <i>26</i> |
| <i>Figure 22. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.....</i>                                  | <i>26</i> |

*Note: Images that have been screenshotted from other artists’ Instagram pages are obtained with the permission of the artist.*

List of Figures, continued:

*Figure 23. Screenshot of Terrell's Instagram post.....26*

*Figure 24. Screenshot of Terrell's Instagram post.....26*

*Figure 25. Screenshot of Terrell's Instagram post .....26*

*Figure 26. Screenshot of designer Es Devlin's Instagram page.....27*

*Figure 27. Screenshot of an Instagram page.....28*

*Figure 28. Screenshot of an Instagram page.....28*

*Figure 29. Screenshot of an Instagram page .....28*

*Figure 30. Screenshot of an Instagram page.....28*

*Figure 31. Screenshot of an Instagram page.....28*

*Figure 32. Screenshot of an Instagram page .....28*

*Figure 33. Screenshot of my Instagram Impressions page .....29*

*Figure 34. Screenshot of my main Instagram Insights page.....30*

*Note: Images that have been screenshotted from other artists' Instagram pages are obtained with the permission of the artist.*

## Chapter One: Introduction

Networking is an important part of building a professional design career. Through interaction with people in a variety of contexts, connections with individuals and businesses can be made. Traditional forms of networking include: attending career-related events, participating in professional conferences, and going to receptions or other social gatherings. In today's age, networking also extends into the digital and virtual world.

In recent years, the Internet has brought us instant gratification and the ability to connect with people immediately, through many social media platforms. Some of these platforms include Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Social media has allowed us to create a professional online presence and connect with businesses and people. This transition into the digital world also created a need for a digital portfolio or website to showcase work.

One primary purpose of networking is employment. Most employers require a portfolio, resume, and references to be considered for a job. A traditional approach to meet these requirements is a hard copy portfolio, with printed images and samples of work included. This portfolio would be brought to interviews and conferences where it would serve as a showcase of your work and who you are as a designer. While this method is still practiced and sometimes preferred with certain employers, a website is also requested in most applications both for jobs and entrance into academic programs.

Website building tools such as SquareSpace, WordPress, and Wix make it fairly easy to create an online portfolio. Most of these programs tend to gravitate toward showcasing visual fields such as art, photography, design, and real estate. The way we organize and edit our work online can set us apart from other candidates in our field. In our current time, most colleges and universities request an online portfolio. Creation of a website is strongly encouraged in most university programs as well.

Websites allow the flexibility for a candidate to edit information quickly, update their website according to their prospects, and also share photos and videos instantly. This has made applying for jobs, sharing information, and searching for specific types of work very easy. However, the formality of a website still remains. It is a curation of work that is sometimes limiting for a candidate to showcase their workflow, versatility, and progress

photos. Social media has started to fill that gap and serve as a medium to curate content for a designer's online presence. In today's world, a website simply isn't enough to get noticed in your industry. Applications like Instagram are a way to supplement the curated content on your website with additional photos and videos of personal work, behind the scenes work, photos showing the design process, and anything else that would get you noticed by a potential employer or person of interest in the industry.

Platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook have made it extremely easy to share videos and photos. Instagram users can upload photos, videos, and GIF-like animated posts to their account. From there, you can apply digital filters, geotag your location, and add hashtags to posts, which link the photos to other content on Instagram featuring the same topic. In addition to posting your own work, you can follow other accounts or hashtags. In the application, there is an "Explore" tab, which shows trending content related to your search history and hashtag topics. This curates your feed by allowing you to see what Instagram recommends for you. Instagram has become a tool to create a professional, work-based online presence. It can be a way for designers to update their work and create their individual profile online.

Many designers and visual artists have been using Instagram to supplement their portfolios and create a personal brand that could make them appealing to an employer or company. "Carving out a career as a successful creative isn't just about doing great work and building up an impressive design portfolio, you also have to make sure the right people see it. Getting your name and face known is central to building your career" (Wyatt).

Content curation for social media can be revolutionary in terms of networking. Creating an online presence is key for a designer to network, showcase their original content, and develop a personal brand. This can be achieved through the active use of Instagram.

## Chapter Two: Instagram as a Designer Networking Medium

Instagram's interface allows you to have a profile and connect with other people. On your profile, you can make a photo, video, or a GIF-like post. According to the NPR Podcast *How I Built This*, the founders of the app, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, wanted to use filters to differentiate this app from other photo sharing tools. They wanted to focus on the user's photography and highlight their best work. Instagram now has add-on applications like Collage and Boomerang, to create different photo and GIF layouts. All of these features allow a user to post curated content relatively easily. "In its early days, Instagram used to be all about filtered pictures of your lunch and your pets, but since then it has grown into an immeasurably useful creative tool. Nowadays Instagram can be used for just about anything, and a lot of creatives have opted to use it as a catalogued portfolio of their work and a platform to network with others in their field. From handcrafted typographers, illustrators and painters, right through to animators and 3D designers, there is an Instagram page for just about every creative niche" (Stribley).

The photo sharing app also uses hashtags to categorize posts and users. When making a post, you can choose to write related hashtags to then put that post into a deeper, searchable category of posts. For example, a scenic designer may use the hashtags "#scenicdesign" or "#artistsofinstagram" in order to put their work into a pool of searchable content. Another way to search on Instagram is using geo-tags, which uses a location to archive a post. For example, a painter can location tag their post at a specific art studio they work in, and another employer can search through posts made in that art studio; therefore having that painter's post available to them. An example of Instagram's location geotags can be found in Figure 11. Instagram's "explore" feature is also available to anyone with an account. This is a personalized feed of public posts that Instagram puts together based on searches, hashtags, and types of posts the user makes. This is a way to find users that you may otherwise have not known about. Furthermore, as with most social media platforms, you can friend and follow accounts to stay updated with people and companies of your choice.

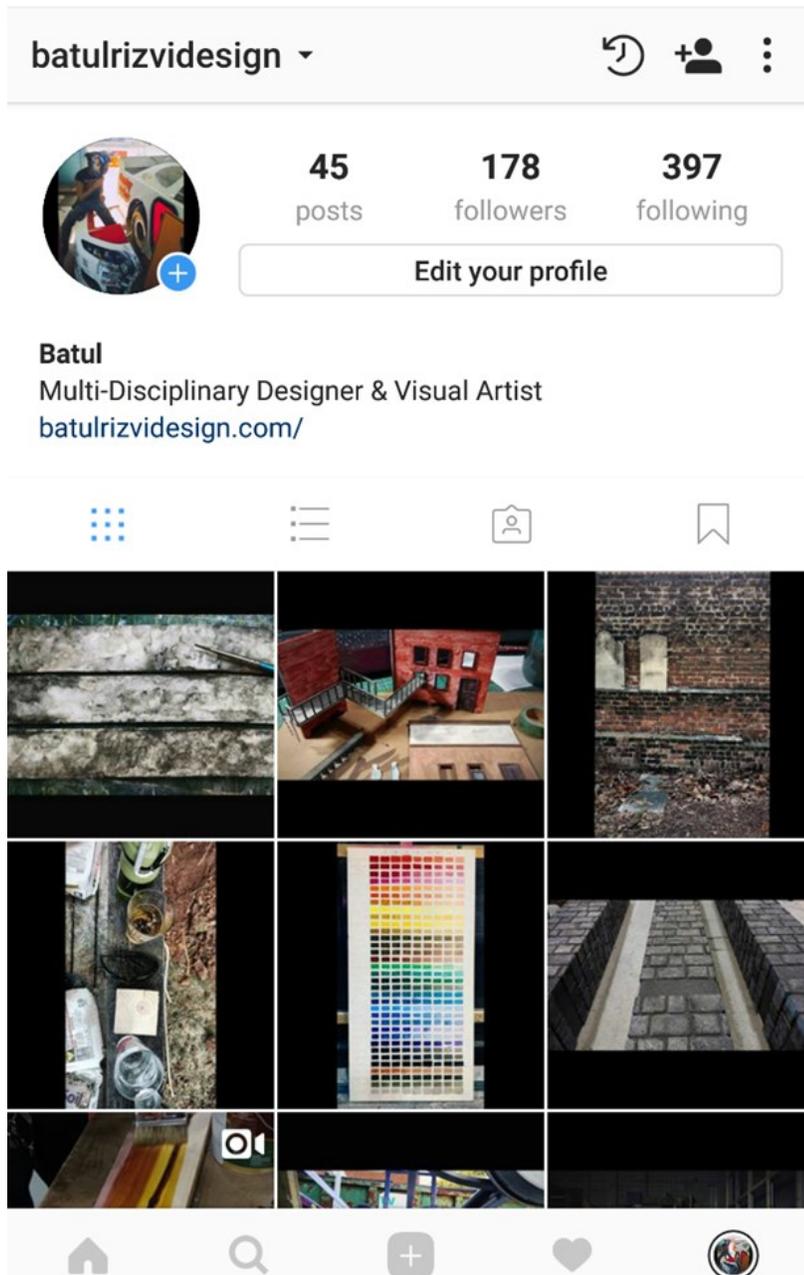
Instagram also offers an option to switch your account from personal to business. As designer Chris Rhoton suggests, this switch might be of value to someone who uses the application to network (See Appendix 01). Switching to a business profile allows you see the

demographic information of your followers, which posts gain larger views than others, and also how many viewers click on your website if it is located in your bio. Business profile users can also promote their posts. This costs money, however, allows a post to get views that it otherwise may not have gotten.

Instagram's features and tools create an interactive form of photo and video sharing. This creates an excellent platform for networking and creating an online professional presence. The capabilities built-in to the program allow Instagram to be used as an effective networking tool for designers and artists. In order to fully understand the capabilities of using Instagram, I chose to create my own page, specific to my design and artwork. In the next chapter, you will be able to see screenshots of my journey with the application.

## Chapter Three: Personal Report from Using Instagram

There is a copious amount of advice available online pertaining to how to set up your Instagram page for the best result. I will employ some of these techniques as part of my journey with Instagram.



*Figure 1. Screenshot of my Instagram page, showing the main display featuring a bio, follower count, and profile picture.*

Figure 1 shows a screenshot of my Instagram page, taken on September 17, 2017.

I've started to develop a unified visual aesthetic for my posts. I've used black borders on all my posts, and shared not only design related posts, but also scene painting in an effort to expand my hashtags and viewers. I've also linked my website in my bio in hopes to connect interested viewers with the rest of my work online.

My follower count is 178, with 45 public posts. Theoretically, both numbers should grow together; the idea is that with more posts, you can gain more followers.

Taylor Loren, blogger for Later.com, notes, “To help you curate Instagram and have your feed flow naturally, you should have a consistent approach to editing your photos. This doesn’t mean you have to choose one filter and one filter only, but limiting yourself to a few will help you stick to your chosen aesthetic” (Loren).

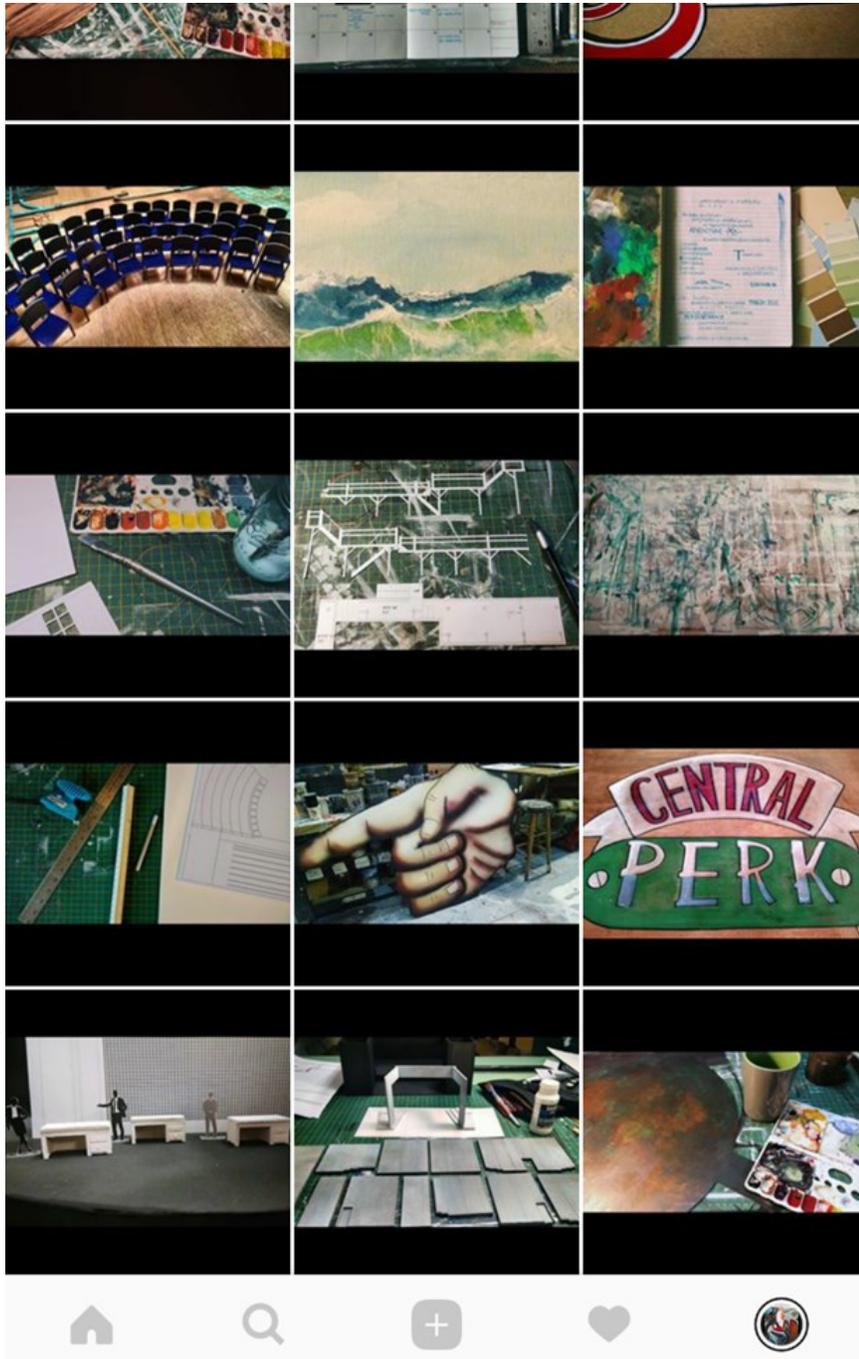
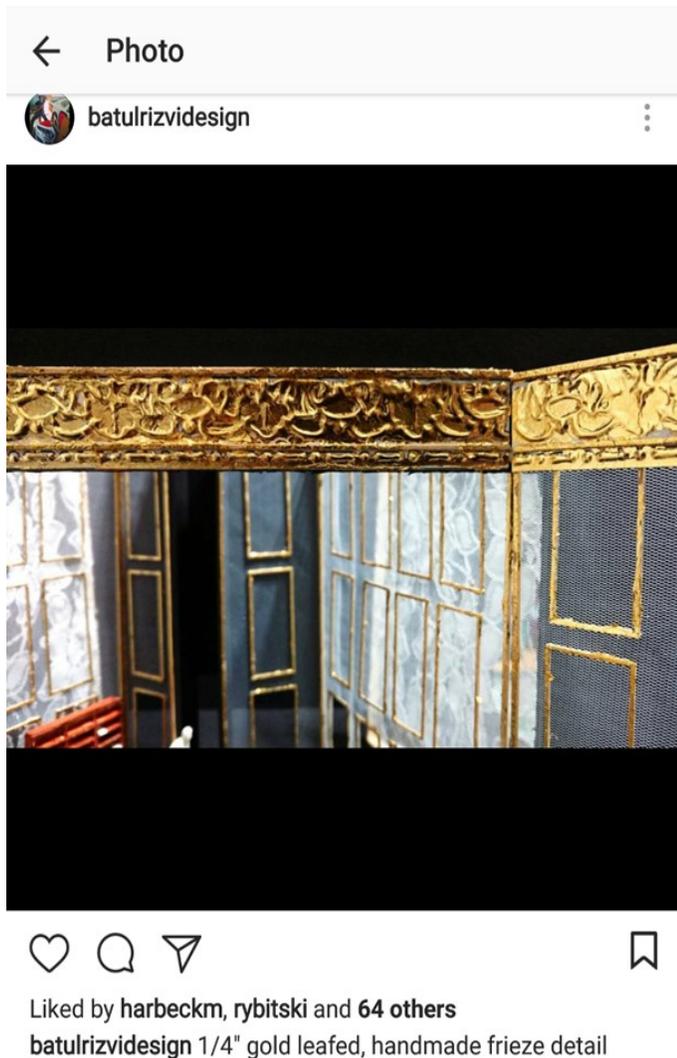


Figure 2 displays another screenshot of my Instagram page. To implement Loren’s technique of consistency, I’ve used my cutting mat as a background in my photos to unify the whole composition. This also allows a more visually appealing page layout, as each photo is composed horizontally. In this screenshot (Figure 2), you can see the mix of types of posts; some are geared towards model making, others are paintings and process shots. This type of layout can show an employer or viewer the versatility of your skillset.

*Figure 2. Screenshot of my Instagram page, continued.*

Figure 3 displays a screenshot of a post I made on my Instagram page. This post features a photo of a scale model of *A Doll's House*, designed for a class project in 2017. I



*Figure 3. Screenshot of a post on my Instagram page, showing the number of likes and a caption that I created for the post.*

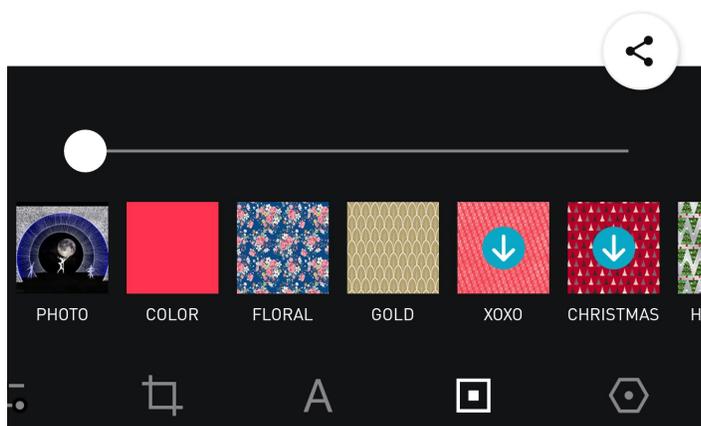
decided to highlight the frieze detail I had made for the model, as this was a potential way to capture interest from Instagram users. I added a caption with information about the post, and added hashtags such as “#scenicdesign”, “#scalemodel”, “#goldleaf”, and “#artistsofinstagram”. These hashtags allow the post to be viewed by more people than just those who follow my account.

This type of post would not be helpful on my website, as it does not show the whole model, nor the design concept. However, on Instagram, it’s beneficial to show process photos and close-ups to attract attention and showcase a skillset that may be too specific to note on a website. In this case, the skillsets shown are gold leafing and detail model making.

This post has 66 likes, as seen in Figure 3. The likes are from both followers and users who accessed the post from searching hashtags. The process of

categorizing your work with hashtags is worthwhile, as it does attract more traffic on your posts. This particular post also has relatively good image quality, which makes it more attractive in presentation. The quality of your post can set you apart from other Instagram users. It’s important to make sure photos are not grainy, pixelated, or out of focus. Instagram has image editing built into the upload process, where you can adjust saturation, contrast, cropping, color, and add filters to your posts. While these are helpful, there are also more applications that do this, with more options than Instagram offers.

One major downside to using Instagram is that it automatically crops your images into squares. This fits with the application's layout of each page. A way to bypass this is to use an image editing application to add a border or background to your post. This will allow you keep your rectangular aspect ratio, which makes a clean overall layout as seen in Figure 2. A rectangular aspect ratio is common in most set design related photos, such as model photos or production photos, due to the composition of the proscenium.



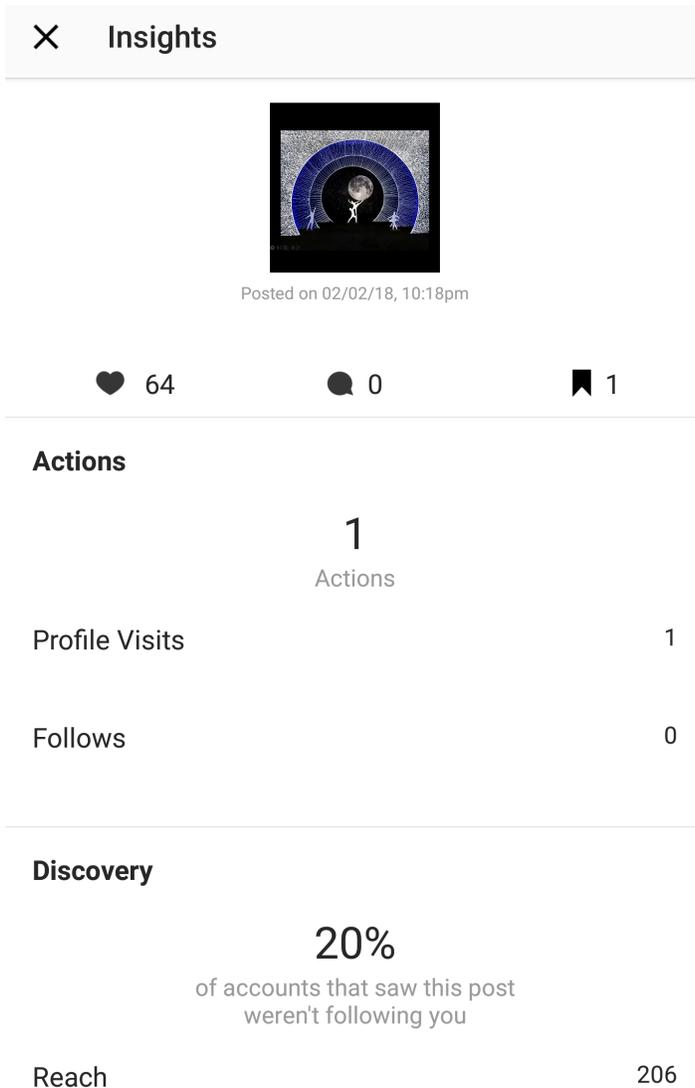
*Figure 4. Screenshot showing the editing capabilities of the application InstaSize.*

I use an application called InstaSize, which I downloaded from the Android Play Store. As shown in Figure 4, you can add borders to your post and apply patterns to them such as floral and gold. I opted to add a black border on all my images I post to Instagram to maintain a consistent look. InstaSize also has image manipulation capabilities such as contrast, darken, filters, brightness, rotation, and cropping.

There are plenty of applications that will allow you to manipulate photos prior to uploading to Instagram. To obtain more likes and followers, it's important to make the extra effort to edit your photos into looking the best they can.

Some Instagram users prefer the traditional grid look, seen in Figures 27-32. A grid layout without any borders can look professional, if the aspect ratio of the original photo is a square or can be cropped without losing quality.

After editing the post in InstaSize, I uploaded it to Instagram. In Figure 5, you can see the Insights page that pertains to that post. This information is important to know if you are trying to figure out which types of your posts gain more attention than others.

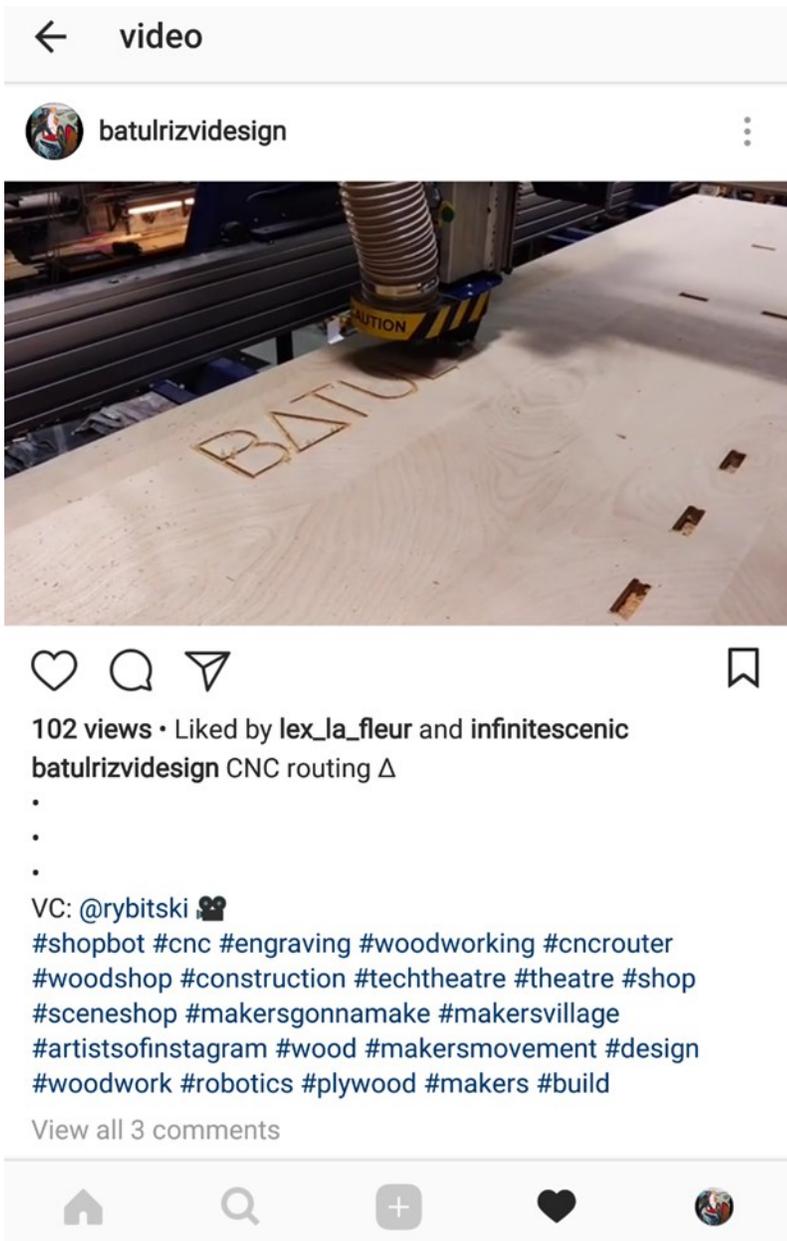


**Figure 5.** Screenshot of Instagram showing the Insights on a post, featuring the number of likes, profile visits, and amount of accounts the post has reached.

For this particular post, you can see it gained 64 likes and reached 206 Instagram accounts. Under the Discovery section, you can see that 20% of accounts that saw this post weren't following me. This is most likely due to the hashtags I applied to the post, such as "#design" or "#blue". Broader terms like these are more likely to attract users. This could help inform what hashtags I should continue using to draw in more users into my page.

So far, we have looked at hashtagging a post, editing photos prior to uploading, statistics on a post, and the overall layout and composition of my main Instagram page. Instagram also allows video uploads, which can attract more viewers and traffic on your page. "Your video content is where you can stand out and put your uniqueness and creativity on display. Don't be afraid to use current popular

hashtags as well" (Sheridan). Video content lets you explore different ways to showcase your work. For example, you can show a 360 view of a stage design, you can narrate a process you have for painting, or you can do a walk through video of a set during tech. There are countless numbers of capabilities video content has over photos and Instagram allows you to share video as instantly as photos.



*Figure 6. Screenshot of my Instagram video post, showing amount of likes and hashtags I used to categorize the post.*

catching action, your logo, a flash of engaging text, and more. There are plenty of successful Instagram videos that have music or speaking, but your message shouldn't be predicated on sound because some people may not listen at all" (Sheridan). I chose a thumbnail for this video that had enough information to keep a viewer interested. The thumbnail shows the actual CNC router, as well as a bit of what it is routing.

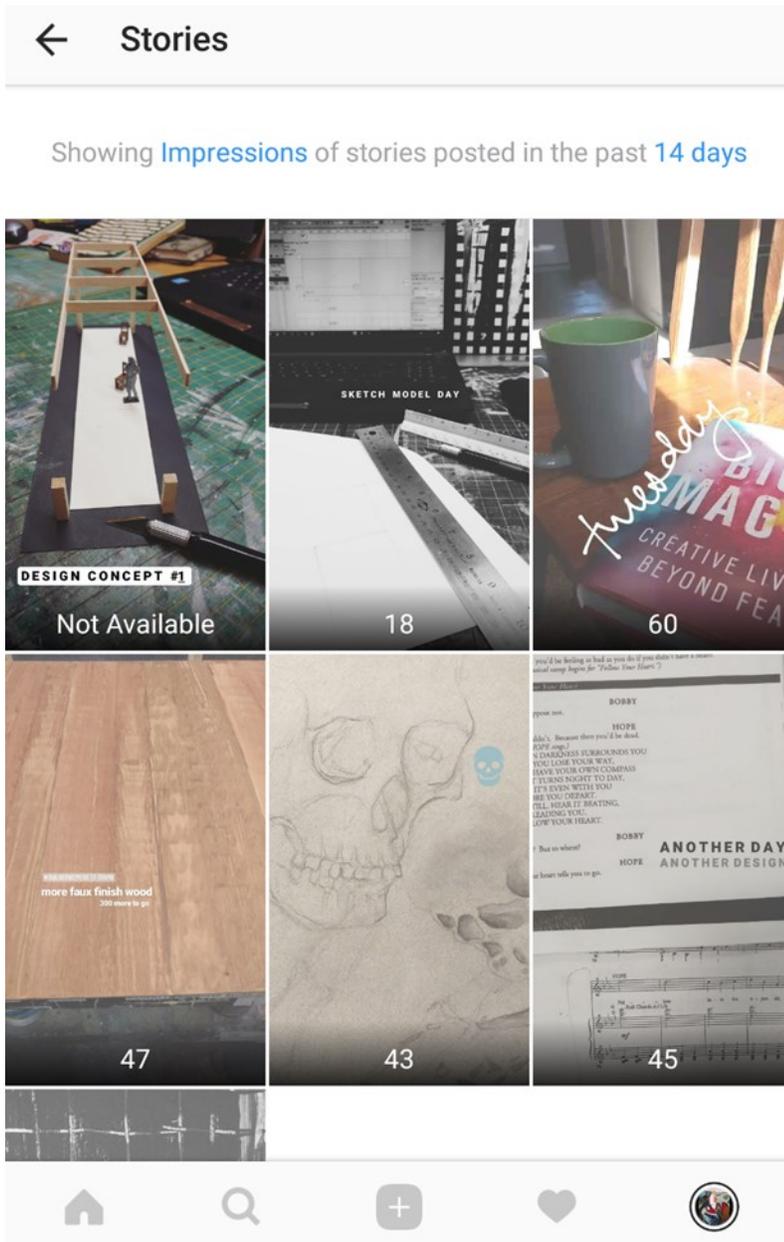
This video that I posted, shown in Figure 6, had 102 views in 24 hours. The hashtags I associated with this post are largely viewed (i.e. #woodworking, #cncrouter), which helped expand the view count on this post.

The video is roughly 5 seconds, which makes it easy to digest and also something that is a low commitment, instant gratification post. This makes it more convenient for the viewer to like and view the post. A mix of photo and video posts can increase the amount of viewers for your page.

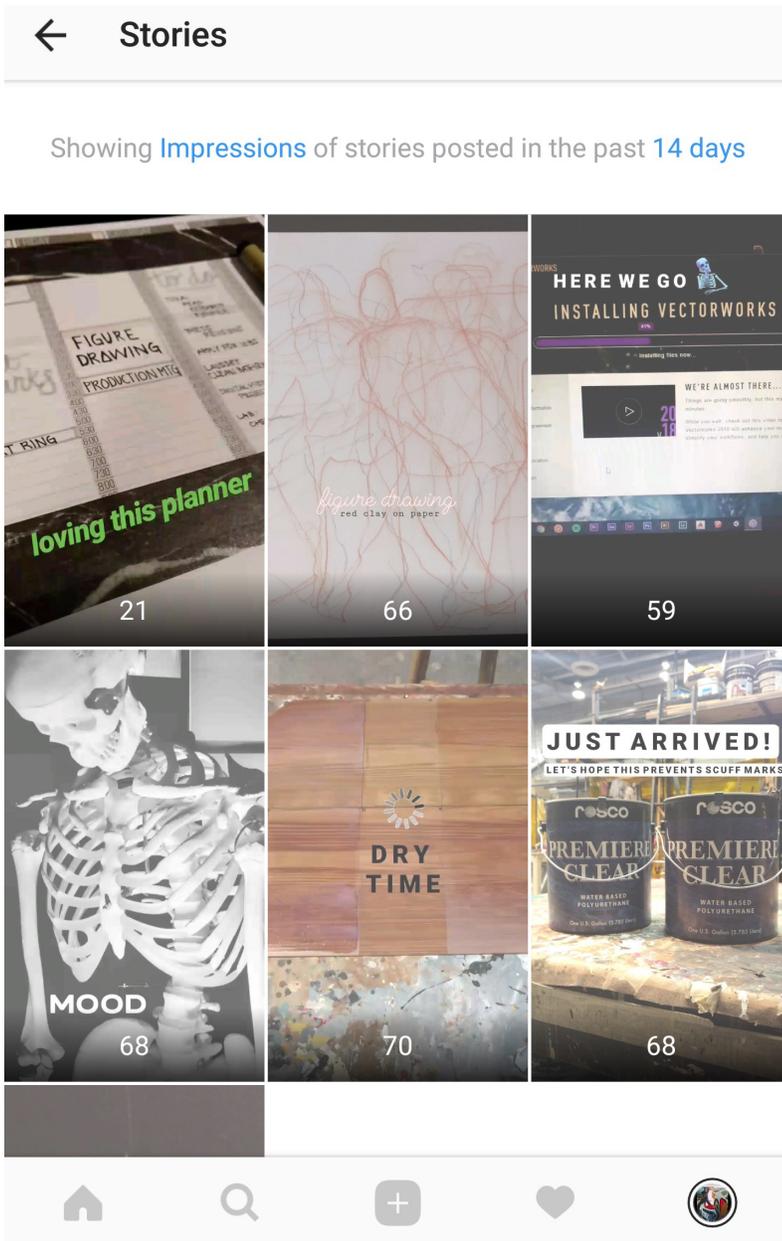
Video content that is visually engaging is extremely popular on Instagram. "Because Instagram videos need to be tapped on to start the sound, your initial attention-grabbing elements should present immediately. These may include vibrant colors, eye-

Another form of video content can be shared through Instagram Stories. This feature allows each user to upload photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours. Therefore, users are more likely to upload photos and videos that are bit more unrefined and could offer a more behind the scenes look at their daily lives. A designer could use this feature to post a model making process shot, a video of shop tour, a quick studio update, or even a glimpse outside the studio window into something unrelated to their work. Because it does disappear after 24 hours, there is no pressure for this post to be as well edited and

polished as a normal post. “Creativity is always appreciated, so try adding a twist to your Instagram video marketing strategy with Boomerangs or Instagram Stories. The videos in your Instagram Stories will be short-lived, but this gives you an opportunity to experiment with different approaches without cluttering up your feed” (Sheridan). In Figure 7, you can see a screenshot of my Instagram stories. These stories are process photos of painting and modeling, and also posts of scripts and books I’ve been reading lately. The hope is that my followers get to know my style, hobbies, interests, and lifestyle a bit more. This could let an employer know a bit more about my work ethic and work process before a potential interview.



*Figure 7. Screenshot of my Instagram Stories archive, displaying view count under each story thumbnail.*



**Figure 8.** Screenshot of my Instagram Stories archive, displaying view count under each story thumbnail.

Another element of Instagram Stories is the archive that displays the view count. Both Figure 7 and 8 portray this feature below each post thumbnail. In Figure 8, we can see a range of view counts from 21 to 70. This feature, as with most statistical analysis tools Instagram has, allows me to figure out which types of posts gain more attention.

Your voice can be difficult to portray with a hard copy portfolio or even through a website. Instagram presents us with tools to portray our style, voice, and work in a way that is easy to be viewed by other people. Sheridan notes “Instagram is a great platform for sharing videos that educate your audience, attract more customers, and help to express your brand voice”.

Instagram Stories offers an interactive feature between users.

You can add a reply or comment on another user’s post. This was helpful in a post I had made about a scene painting product. Another user commented about his experience with the product, which was immensely helpful for me. This type of interaction shows that Instagram is not only a photo and video sharing tool, it also encourages conversation and interaction, which is a form of networking. This messaging capabilities extends past Instagram Stories. You can comment directly on any post or video, making it very easy to start a conversation.

Figure 9 displays a post I made on my Instagram page. This post is a photo I took of a galaxy paint treatment in process for an arcade system. I used broader hashtags for this post, such as “#diy” and “#artist”; doing this helped this post reach more accounts than my normal posts, which use hashtags such as “#scenedesign” and “#scalemodel”.

An account by the name of “1340dylan” commented about the opportunity to be

featured on an art page.

Although the comment that “1340dylan” made sounded to me like a bot or fake account, it was worth going to their page to send them a message. I followed up with this account and they promoted my work on their Instagram page.

Simple interactions like this can make connections with users that may get your work noticed by more users. Promoting work on other pages in this way could also facilitate a networking connection with a theatre, other designer, or director who may be looking to expand their team. Producing more Instagram posts with broader hashtags and well edited photos can get you noticed by more accounts and create relationships without even having to network in person.



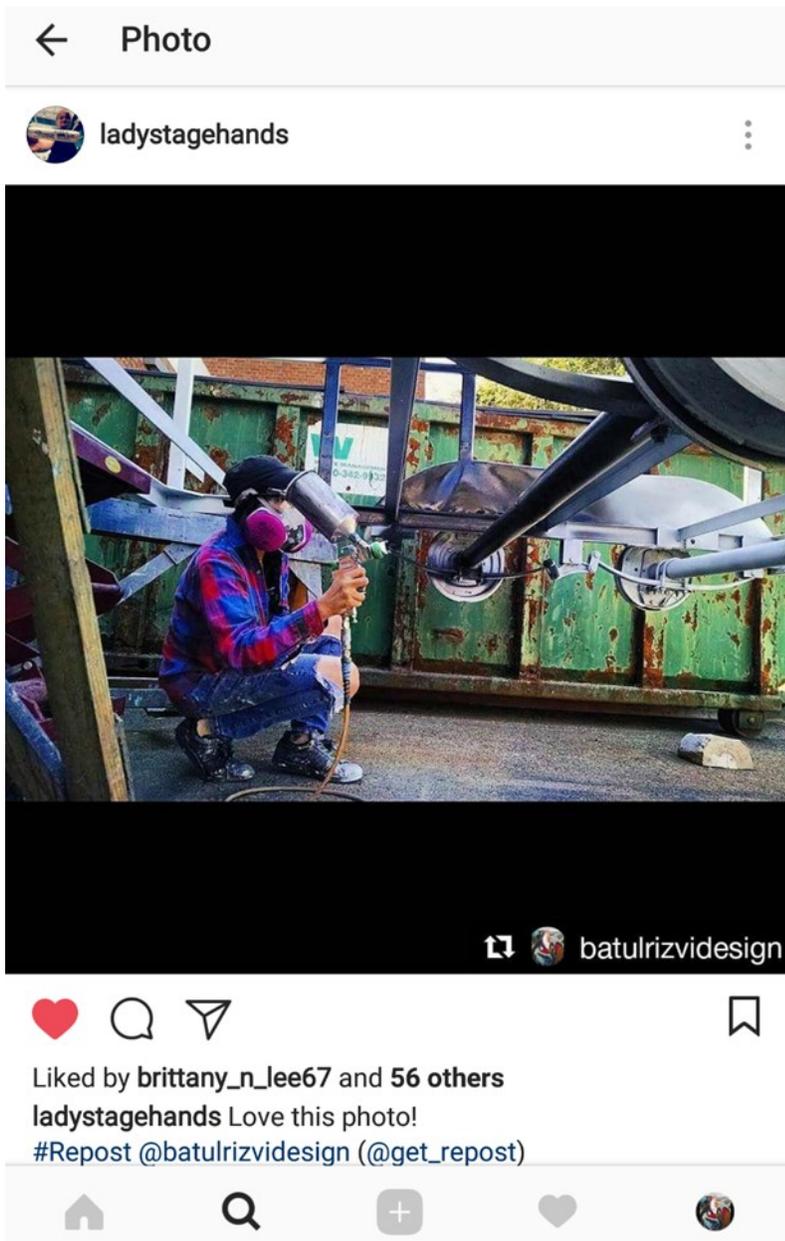
Liked by paulksweet, macyrosemartinez and 17 others  
**batulrizvidesign** galaxy painting (before the high gloss finish)  
on this hand made arcade, built by @rybitski •

- 
- 
- 

#arcade #galaxy #galaxypainting #space #spacepaint  
#spacepainting #scenicpainting #miniarcade  
#arcademachine #diy #artistsofinstagram #painting #art  
#paint #artstudio #studio #makersgonnamake  
#makersvillage #maker #artist #scenepainting #blend  
#spatter #spraypaint #wip #work #artistsoninstagram  
#instart #dailyart #create

**1340dylan** Hello! They have asked me to select talented artists to be featured on our 1340art profile. Interested? Click the link in our bio.

*Figure 9. Screenshot of a post on my Instagram page, showing all hashtags used, as well as a comment made by a user.*

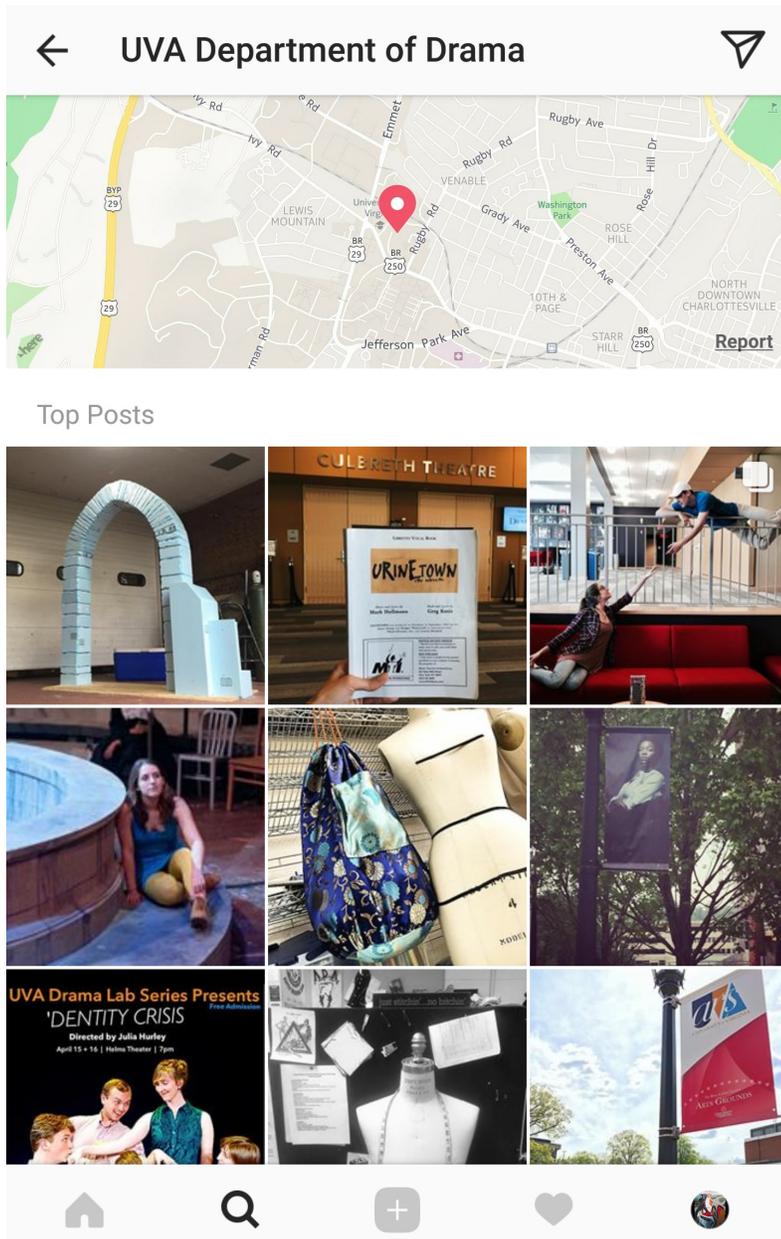


*Figure 10. Screenshot of an Instagram post on the “ladystagehands” account, featuring a post I had made on my page.*

Through my experience with using Instagram, I made a connection with an account by the name of “ladystagehands”. This account compiles photos from Instagram users who are women working in the entertainment industry. Figure 10 displays a screenshot of the “ladystagehands” Instagram page, where my post is featured. This post has 57 likes, most of which are from accounts who do not even follow me. Being reposted on another user’s page is a neat way to gain exposure. “Instagram is, in many ways, the perfect social media app for designers. The mobile photo-sharing platform lets you upload images of your work, then tag them to get maximum exposure through search and the ‘Explore’ tab. These features also help you connect with similar designers and find inspiration within your craft” (Wegert). Instagram makes

it so easy to connect and search for your interests and industry. I have found many designers and artists by searching for them, and now I can follow their design process into execution. The search function also allows you search by location, which makes it very straightforward to see what other studios, theatres, and even restaurants are up to.

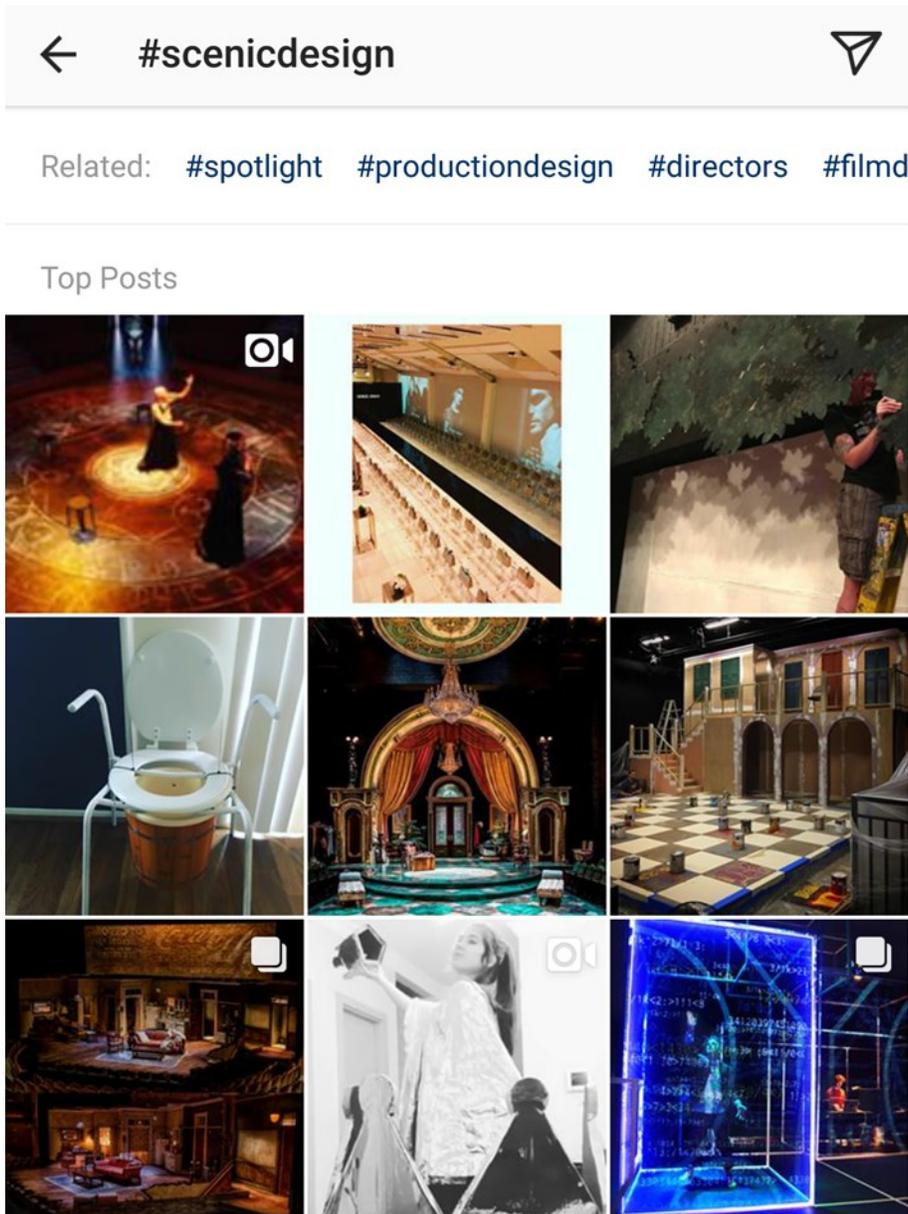
When you upload a post on Instagram, you have an option to add a location to your post. This will categorize it into a geo-tag, which is later searchable by location. For example, Figure 11 shows a screenshot of what Instagram looks like if you search the “UVA Department of Drama” by location. You can see various types of posts that people have taken in the theatre, the lobby, and even near the parking garage.



*Figure 11. Screenshot of the UVA Department of Drama location search on Instagram.*

This is helpful for researching different theatres to explore what type of work is done there, and what types of theatres a space might offer. A restaurant designer might want to search that restaurant by location to gain insight into what the restaurant looks like from the point of view of people who visited there.

Instagram search features separate it from other applications. On Instagram, not only can you search by location, you can also search by hashtag. This, as discussed with Figures 3 and 9, allows posts to be found by users you wouldn't even realize exists. We explored hashtags in Figure 3, where we put them as captions to be searched by other users; conversely, we can search hashtags to find posts that are of interest.



*Figure 12. Screenshot of the “#scenicdesign” hashtag search on Instagram.*

Figure 12 exhibits the search results from browsing the hashtag “scenicdesign”. In this screenshot, we can see various types of posts made by users who presumably, work in theatre.

From this search, you can click on a post and find a user, location, or more about that post. This is a way to network as you are browsing and exploring different designers and their work. Searching by hashtag can allow you to follow the designers that bring you inspiration or that you strive to work with. In addition, the screenshot displays similar or related hashtags to search. In this

case, it shows “#productiondesign” and “#spotlight”. These are terms you may have not thought about to search, however, Instagram’s algorithm provided you with the information you might need to continue your search deeper. As a set designer, this search function became part of my design process. I use this feature to search “#blackandwhite” or “#ledlights” to browse content related to my design for inspiration. Overall, the search functions on Instagram allow you to connect with accounts, content, and related work that offers the serendipity a designer needs to accelerate their career.

Thus far, Instagram has been a convenient tool to creatively share content. As a designer, I appreciate the customization options that Instagram allows. For example, I can edit my photos and post them in a way that suits my design aesthetic. Researching what other Instagram users do with their pages was helpful in determining how I could be using the app to obtain more followers and traffic. Once I started to edit my photos, post at certain times of the day, and hashtag my posts with relevant information, I noticed a peak in my follower and like count. My first Instagram post was on December 10, 2017 and that post only has 6 likes on it. Currently, my posts are collecting anywhere from 40 to 90 likes and I have 271 followers. While this isn't a particularly large number of followers or likes, it has drastically increased since the date I started to record this data.

Numbers aside, I have also seen a lot of new and exciting work that artists and creatives have been doing. Creatives is a term I have seen used a lot, particularly on blogs and social media accounts focusing on artwork and craftsmanship. Through Instagram, I have connected with other scenic painters and have asked about material choices, techniques, and product troubleshooting. It's extremely easy to comment on a post and connect with other people on Instagram. The app has also allowed me to search specific theatres and see what type of designs they produce. Currently, I am searching for jobs and freelance work; being able to use Instagram's geo-tagging capabilities to see what types of designs a theatre is doing has been very helpful in determining what theatres I would like to work for.

Another example of how I've found the app useful is to connect with professionals in the industry that I may have come across at one point in my career. This is a common reason to attend conferences or events, however, it is much easier via social media. For example, last year I had the opportunity to learn charcoal and pastel drawing from an artist in residence from Australia, Damien Shen. This was about a two week workshop. Months later, I was able to connect with him via Instagram. We've shared our work and commented about drawing techniques on each other's posts. Instagram made finding him really easy, and now I am able to see his current work without feeling like I am searching for it.

I have found the process of using Instagram enjoyable but the app does have some problems. Although this has not happened to me personally, I can foresee it being extremely easy for someone to screenshot your work and post it as their own. This is a common concern for anything on the Internet and creatives are vulnerable to this type of

infringement. There is the option to watermark your images, however, you do lose a certain genuine quality to your work. Watermarking changes the appearance of artwork, and could interfere with seeing the original work. I do see this as a downside to the program, however, not enough to deter me from using the app.

Another downside to relying on Instagram for networking is that you will never be able to reach everyone through this one application. For starters, not everyone uses the program. The designers I have found using Instagram are mostly in their 20s-40s. This excludes a large number of people that would be worthwhile to network with, especially in the theatre industry. Another logistical problem with Instagram is that it is not desktop friendly and not even available on Windows phones, Linux, or Blackberry. For these reasons, I would advocate for networking through Instagram as a supplement to in person networking.

For me, Instagram has been a successful networking tool as a designer and creative. As discussed in chapter one, networking is more than just a job search. It allows connections to be made, creative discussions to be had, and also the opportunity to gain exposure in a non-committal way.

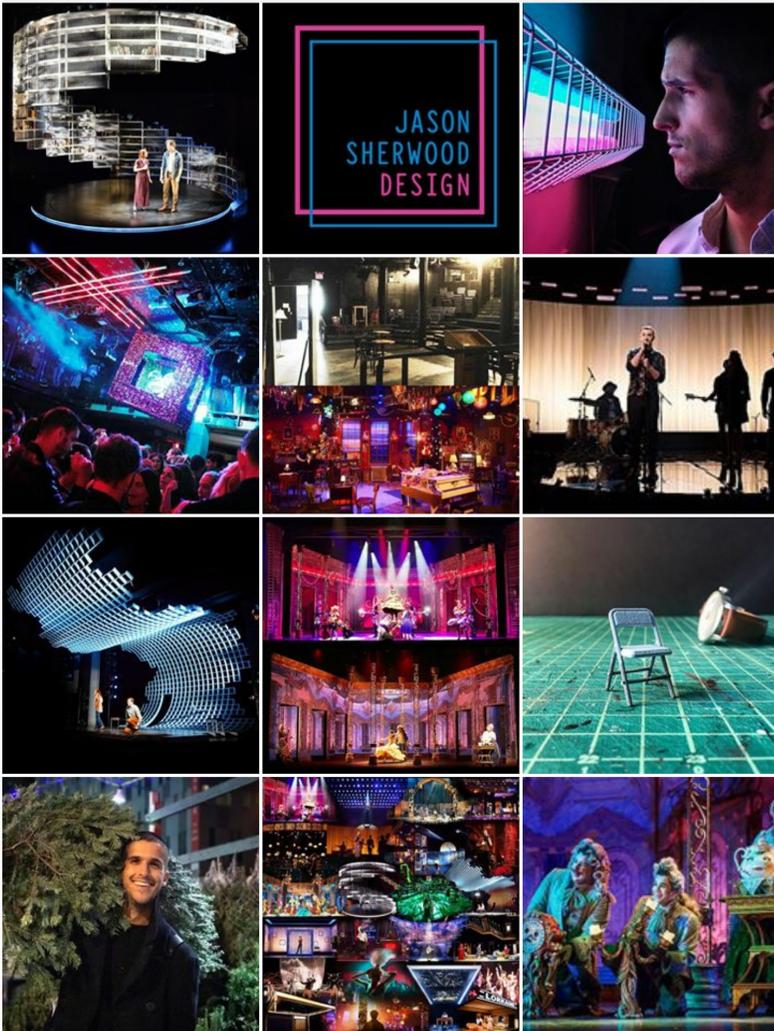
## Chapter Four: How Other Designers are Using Instagram

The benefit to using Instagram over another social media outlet is the customization options that it provides. While creating and maintaining my personal Instagram page, I stumbled across many artists, creatives, designers, and photographers who are using the app in ways I had never thought to. These customization options include types of layout, color schemes, and posts that show process chronologically over the course of many days. This creates a level of engagement with viewers that isn't possible over traditional methods of networking.

By posting about the same project over the course of days, viewers may come back to the page wondering about the project you are working on. By creating a consistent color

scheme, it absorbs the viewer into your page and makes them want to scroll down to your previous posts. In this section, we will take a look at other users' Instagram pages to see how the application is used across industries.

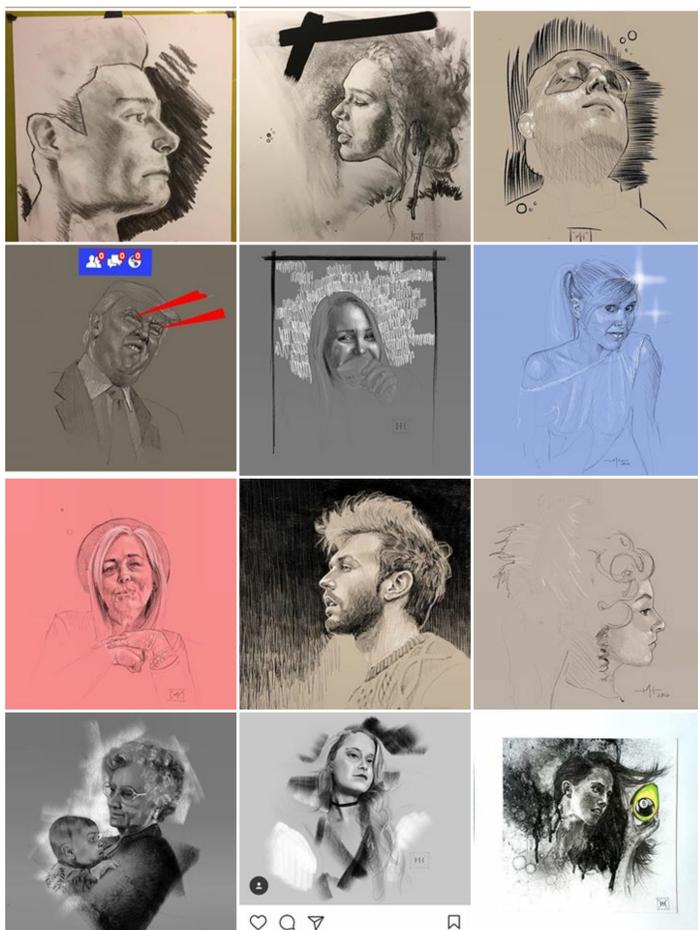
Figure 13 shows a screenshot of Jason Sherwood's Instagram page. Sherwood is a NYC based designer with credits including a collaboration with Oscar and Grammy Award winner Sam Smith on TV appearances, NY Fashion Week, the Old Globe, a stage adaptation of *Frozen* for Disney, the Culture Project, NY Stage and Film, the Alliance, Goodspeed Musicals, Portland Center Stage, and many others.



*Figure 13. Screenshot of scenic designer Jason Sherwood's Instagram page.*

Sherwood’s Instagram page, shown in Figure 13, displays a variety of images. Most of his images are production photos of his designs with a similar color palette, in this case ultramarine, pink, amber, and green. Loren suggests, “instead of choosing a theme for your Instagram, settle on a common aesthetic that weaves through all of your photos”. In Sherwood’s case, color is the main unifying element. His page also displays his logo, which matches this palette. Introducing a typographical element into your page can help break up some of the busyness that a production photo innately has. “There is an art to creating a cohesive Instagram layout. Most of the art comes from creating balance between your posts. This gives a sense of visual stability and always gives a cleaner aesthetic” (Stribley). Sherwood’s design Instagram has 5,687 followers and counting.

Scenic designer and Illustrator, Michael Harbeck, uses Instagram to upload a specific artistic style he produces, as seen in Figure 14. He creates all of his work with an application for his iPad and mainly works in black and white, with pops of color. “Balance is all about creating contrast so each post can stand out equally instead of all meshing together into a big mess” (Stribley). This consistency is visual appealing and indicates a strong artistic style. If an employer was looking for an illustrator who focused in this particular style, Harbeck would be a candidate for the position based on the amount of work produced in this style. Harbeck’s Instagram page has 819 followers with 458 posts.



**Figure 14.** Screenshot of scenic designer and illustrator, Michael Harbeck’s Instagram page.

Some designers and creatives are using video content to show behind the scenes looks at their set designs, artwork creation, or studio lifestyle. Figure 15 shows scenic designer David Korins with the set of *Hamilton*, in the build process at Hudson Studios in New York. Korins is an award-winning Broadway set designer, who also specializes in film, opera, and television design.

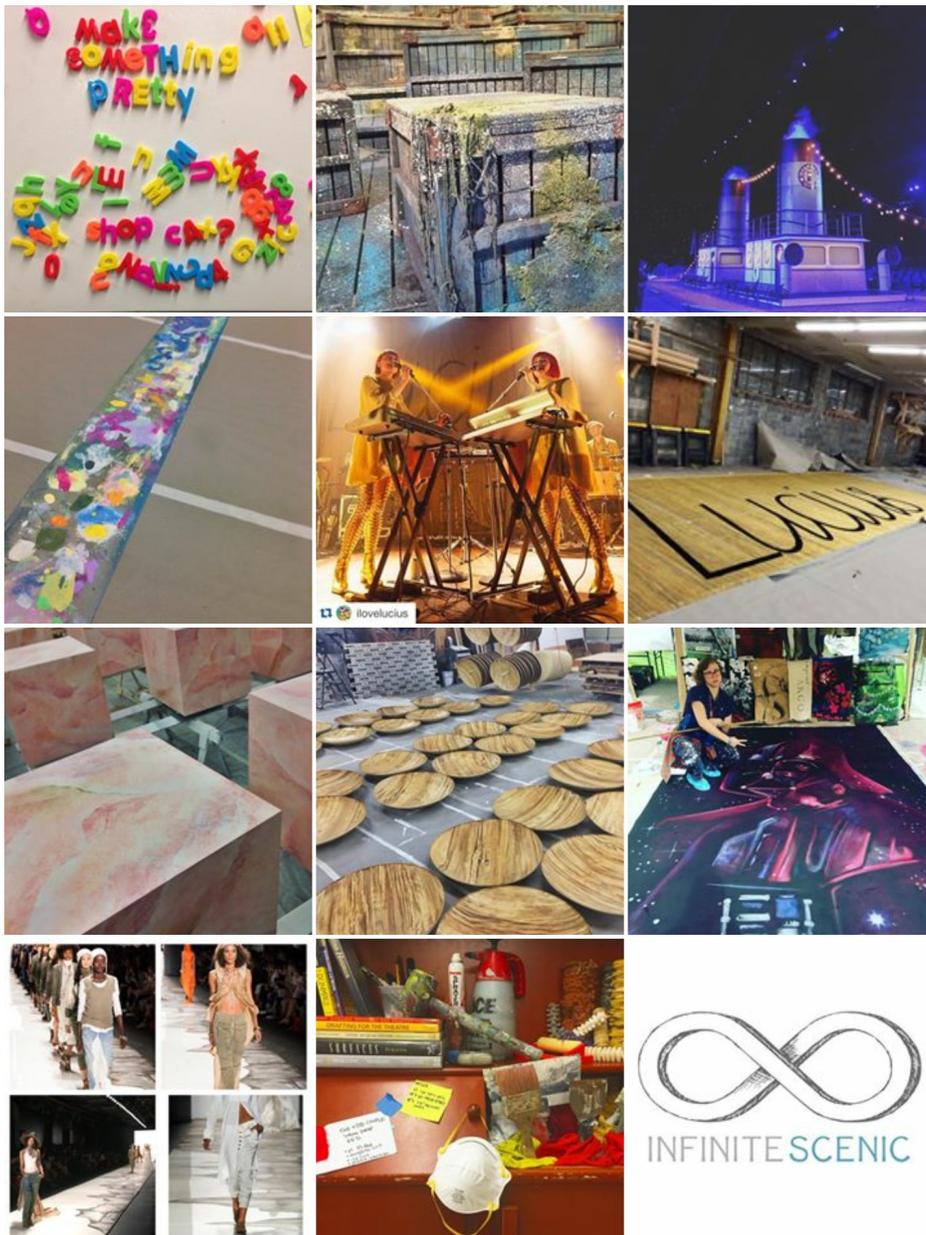
In this video, Korins breaks of the illusion of the wall of bricks. He pokes at it, and it becomes apparent that the wall is a fabric curtain with a brick texture applied to it. Sharing



content like this is an effective way to engage with viewers. Users who work in theatre might find this interesting, and receive inspiration to apply to their own work. Conversely, those who don't work in the theatre industry could also find this illusion fascinating. In addition, this is an indirect way to market the musical, *Hamilton*. Korins used hashtags in his post to share it to a larger audience; however, the set designer has 109k followers and counting, so his posts are already widely viewed.

*Figure 15. Screenshot of David Korin's Instagram video post, showing the materials of the Hamilton set in New York.*

Instagram is useful for artists and designers to display their personal work, as we've seen with both Sherwood and Harbeck's Instagram pages. Both designers operate independently; whatever they choose to upload on their pages represents them as individuals. While researching multiple Instagram accounts, I stumbled upon pages representing companies, not just individuals. One person may run the Instagram page for the company, making them responsible for representing their company in the best way possible.



*Figure 16. Screenshot of New Jersey based paint and fabrication shop, Infinite Scenic.*

Figure 16 displays a screenshot of Infinite Scenic's Instagram page. The company has clients across different fields of the entertainment industry, including theatre, film, fashion shows, trade show events, and concerts. This versatility of skills is represented in their Instagram page. As we can see in Figure 16, there are examples of sign painting, wood grain, and UV painting. The company also includes images from their lunch breaks or team building events, which makes them more personable and approachable as a company. Instagram allows the flexibility of

displaying professional work and behind the scenes photos in the same page, without it feeling out of place or visually busy.

In addition to promoting their services, companies can also advertise job openings on their Instagram pages. Figure 17 displays a search result from the #theatrejobs. The post is from the New York Theatre Workshop advertising an opening for a job. This bold, eye-



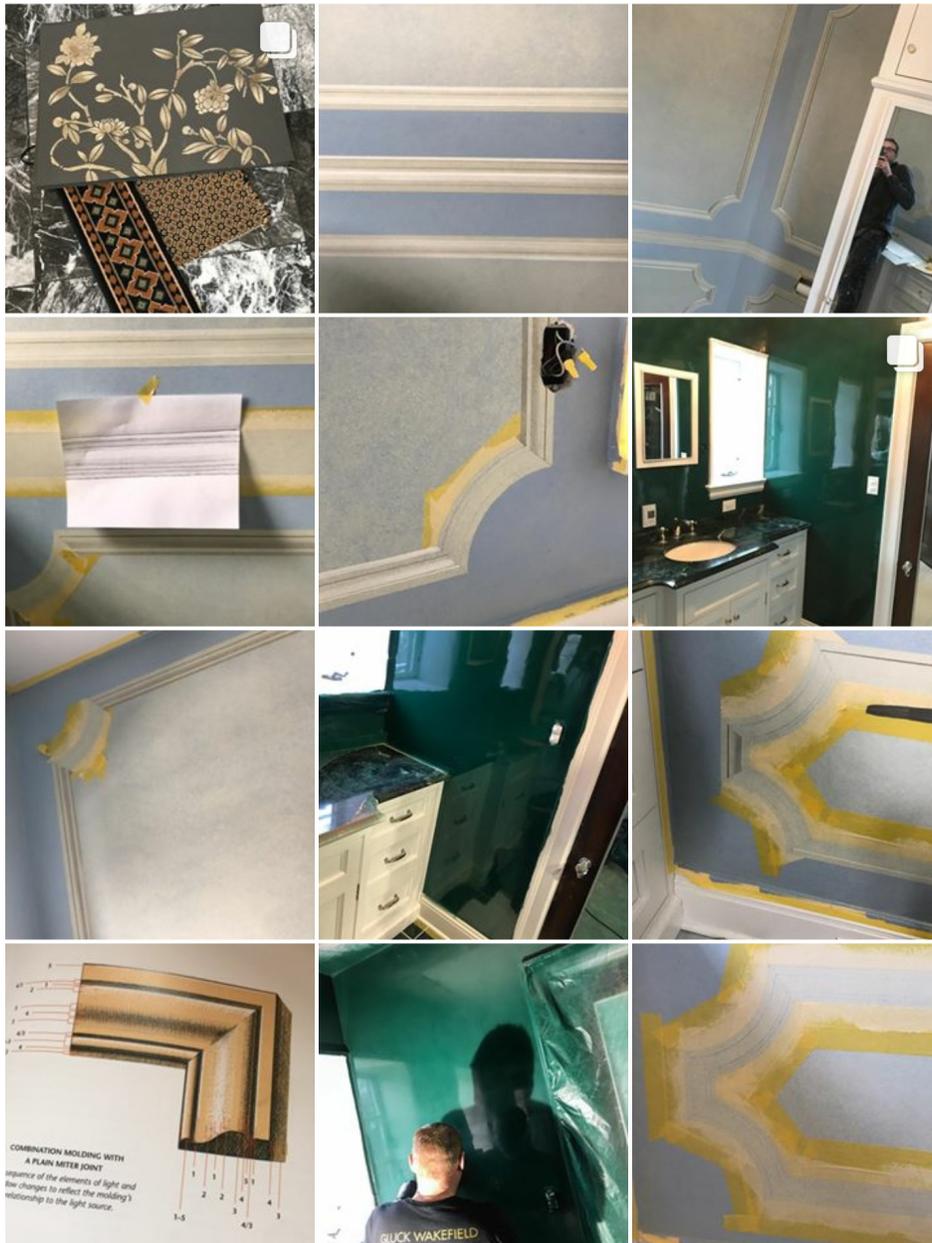
*Figure 17. Screenshot of the New York Theatre Workshop's Instagram post.*

catching visual attracts a viewer, and encourages them to look for more information in the caption about the job, which is an opening for an Operations Manager. This job search feature makes Instagram an appealing application to take part in.

Companies, theatre and otherwise, are always coming up with ways to use Instagram to promote, advertise, inform, and engage. "With 700 million monthly active users, there's no denying Instagram's power and reach. What was once a simple photo sharing app has transformed into an immersive experience that allows users to explore a company's visual identity" (Stribley). Some companies even repost

images from their employees, which creates a stronger bond with the audience and employer base. For example, a theatre company might want to repost images from designers, actors, and technicians to offer their audiences a behind the look scenes of a production. As a designer, posting visually appealing, good quality images in reference to a company might a way to promote yourself and your work through a company.

Another example of a company using Instagram is shown in Figure 18, Jon Gluck's Instagram page. Gluck is the co-founder of Gluck Wakefield Artistry, a faux finishing

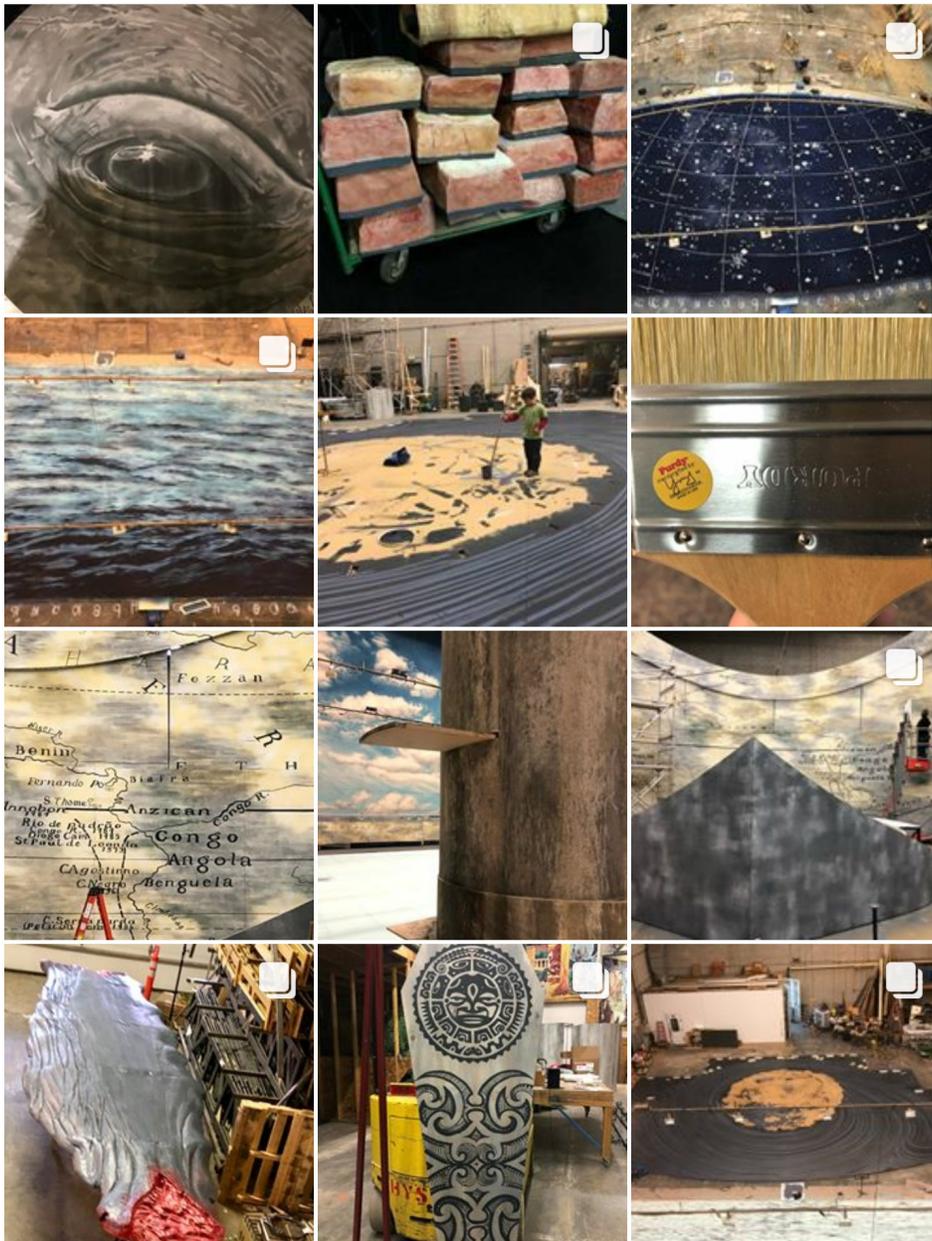


**Figure 18.** Screenshot of Pittsburgh based faux finish painter, Jon Gluck's Instagram page.

company in Pittsburgh, PA. Gluck states, “my knowledge of my trade was very limited for a number of years until I joined Instagram. I immediately started to see decorative work that blew my mind. The bar for me was raised quite a bit higher. Over the past five years, I have learned more from connections with other artists via Instagram than any other source, or all others combined” (See Appendix 01). Gluck's Instagram page shows numerous process photos of his work, sometimes formatted as a sequence. This makes his page a

resource for other painters to learn techniques, as well as an archive for him to access later. “My feed has always served as documentation I can go back to refresh my memory. I use my IG portfolio to show clients various projects from the past while I suggest finishes for their current project” (Gluck). As a designer, this archival use of Instagram could be extremely helpful when interviewing with a company or director. You can simply provide your Instagram page as a portfolio, which already has a concise layout and color scheme to it.

Scenic charge artist and scenic designer Dusty Terrell uses Instagram to show process photos of her work at the Utah Opera, shown in Figure 19. Her painting progress with the production of *Moby Dick* can be followed chronologically on her page.



**Figure 19.** Screenshot of scenic artist Dusty Terrell's Instagram page.

The majority of her posts have captions with more information about the process, including specific paint colors, techniques, sizes, and materials. Providing such information allows a viewer to replicate that treatment in their own work, as well as add questions or comments about her paint techniques.

Terrell's method of using Instagram offers a closer look at her work style while engaging the viewer in a behind the scenes look into a paint shop. Although some of these process photos would be helpful in a hard copy portfolio or online website, posting

them on Instagram allows users to comment, like, feature, share, and engage with Terrell from the comfort of their home. The added benefit of posting process photos for the same show is that in turn, your Instagram page should be unified with a similar color scheme and artistic style.

Terrell’s process photos are embedded into a single post. By swiping left over the post, a viewer can look through up to 10 photos. This carousel feature is ideal for showing process photos, before and after photos, and any post that requires a comparative analysis of each photo. In Figures 20-25 below, we can see Terrell’s process on a star drop for *Moby Dick*. Each photo is taken from a similar vantage point to clarify differences between each step in the process.



Figure 20. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.

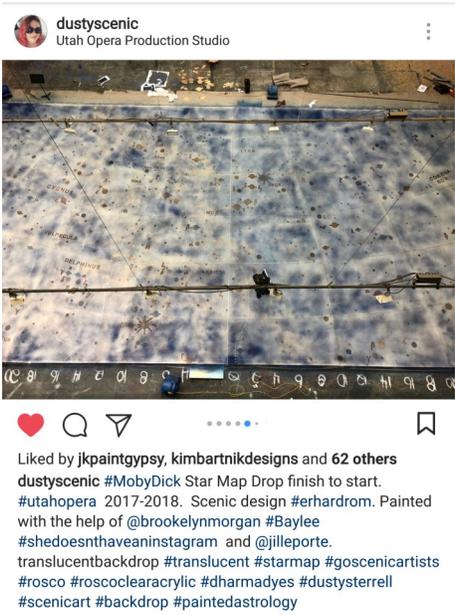


Figure 21. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.

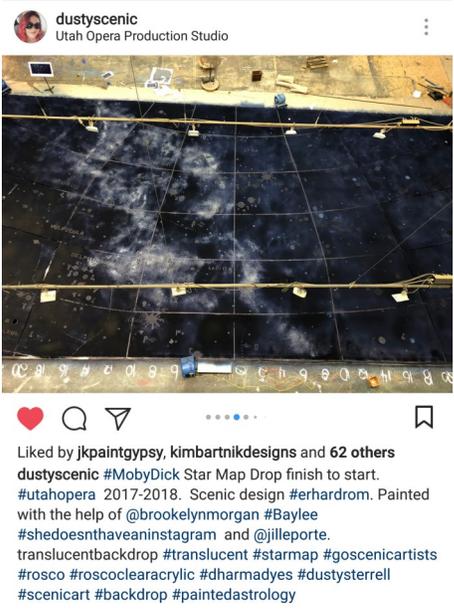


Figure 22. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.



Figure 23. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.



Figure 24. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.

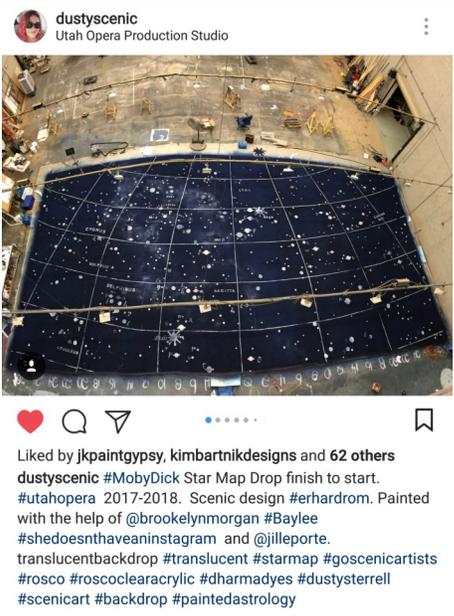
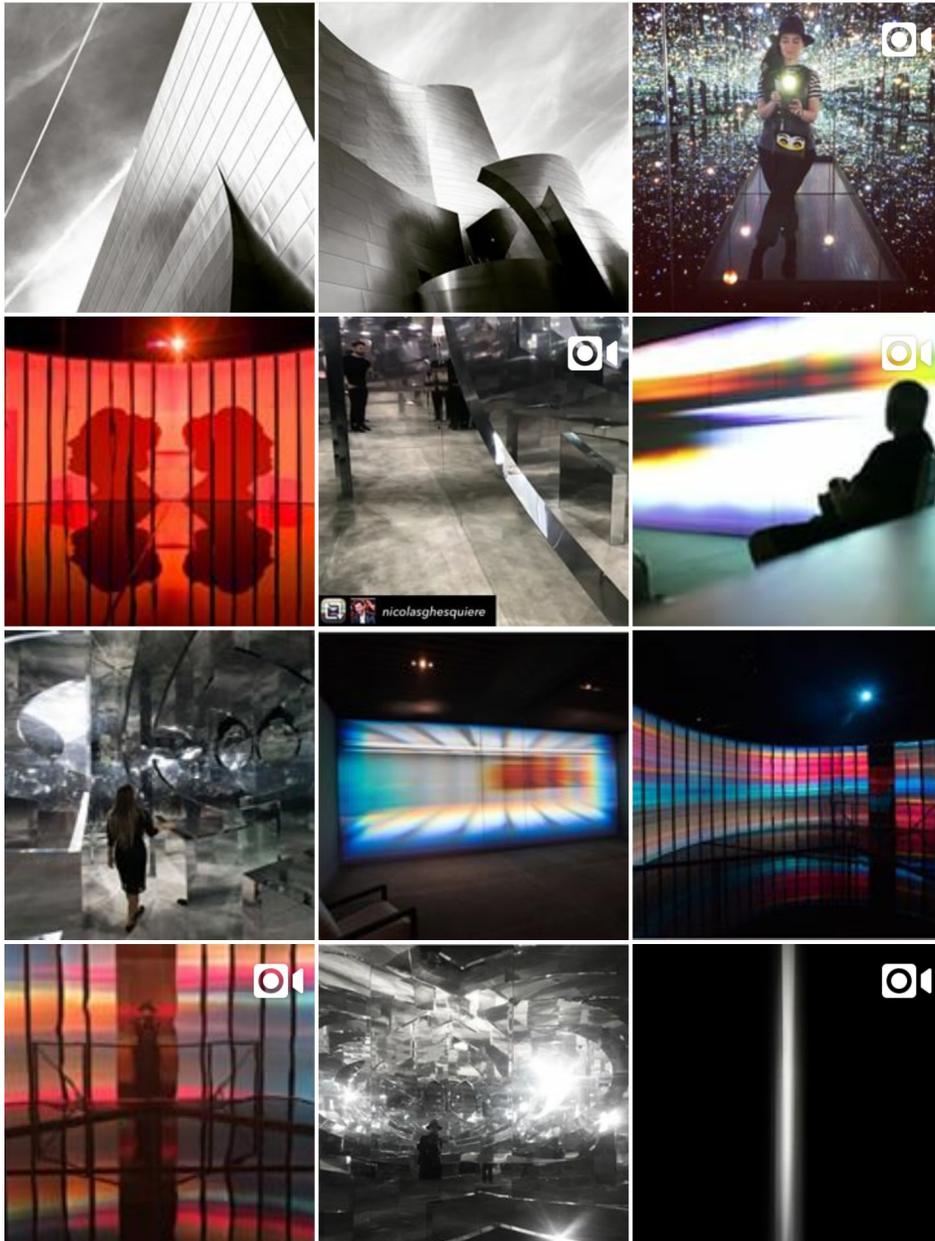


Figure 25. Screenshot of Terrell’s Instagram post.

Stage designer Es Devlin uses Instagram artistically, not only to display her own work, but also images that inspire her. Devlin is a London based designer who has worked with artists including Kanye West, Adele, Beyoncé, U2, The Weeknd, and Jay-Z. She has designed the opening ceremony for the Olympics in Rio, as well as the closing ceremony for the Olympics in London.



*Figure 26. Screenshot of designer Es Devlin's Instagram page.*

Figure 26 displays a screenshot of her page, where we can see a mix of video and photo content. Her work primarily focuses on kinetic stage sculpture, so Instagram's capability to share video content is immensely helpful to portray her work. Devlin's page features a mix of black and white photos with pops of neon, electric color. This aesthetic not only captures her design style, but also unifies her Instagram layout together.

Thus far, we have looked at designers and artists who use the program practically; to share their work, display their styles, and provide supplemental information

not fit for a website or hard copy portfolio. Looking at other artists' Instagram pages has not only inspired me to post more often, but also encouraged me to post more unrefined work that wouldn't necessarily be featured in my portfolio.

Many artists are using Instagram to showcase their creativity through visual striking layouts and color schemes to capture attention and traffic on their pages. External applications such as Layout allow a user to upload photos to a grid and upload them to Instagram sequentially. This lets you preview what your Instagram page would look like prior to uploading. Figures 27-32 show screenshots of Instagram pages created by photographers, designers, woodworkers, and artists. All of these users have over 1,000 followers. These users have carefully chosen and edited their posts to remain in a strict color palette, or type of post. This essentially puts a brand on the content you output, which is helpful when explaining the type of work you do to an employer, colleague, or company.

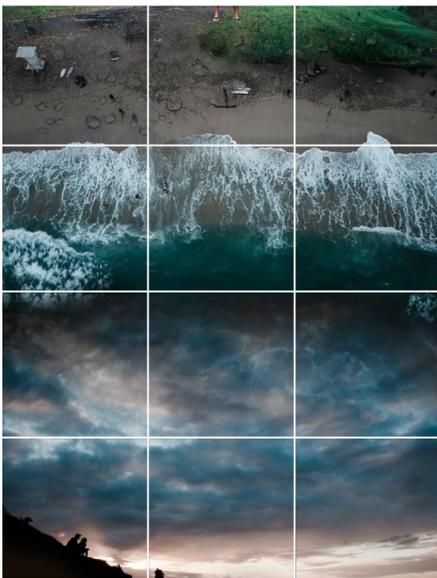


Figure 27. Screenshot.



Figure 28. Screenshot.

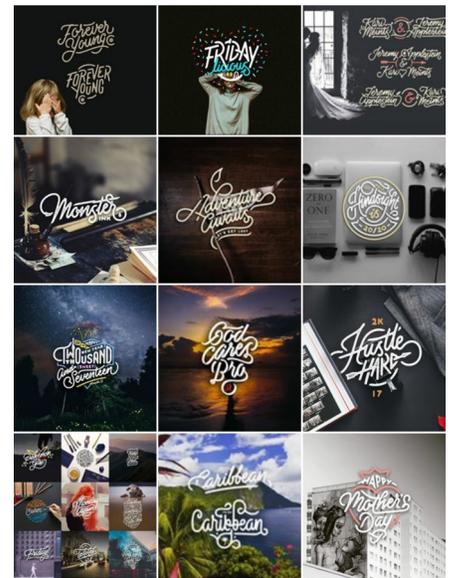


Figure 29. Screenshot.

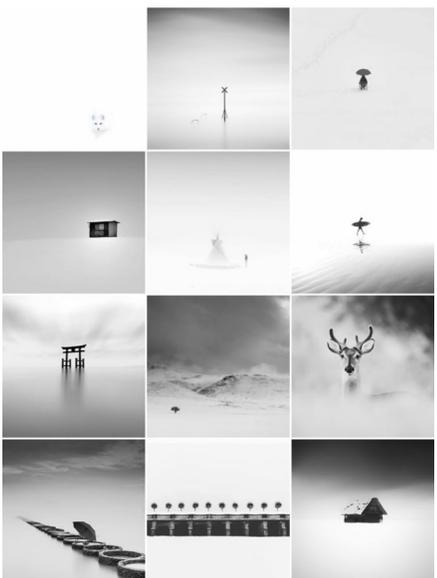


Figure 30. Screenshot.

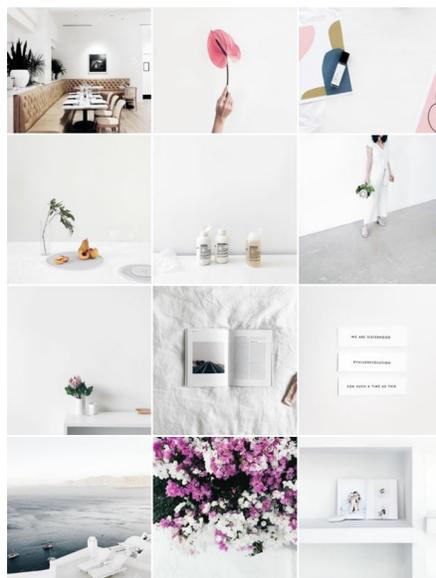


Figure 31. Screenshot.

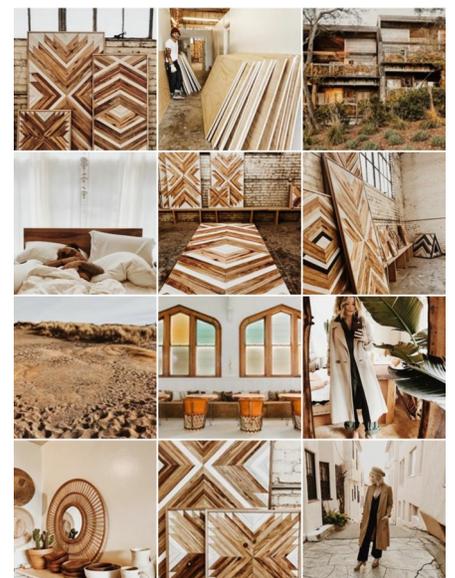


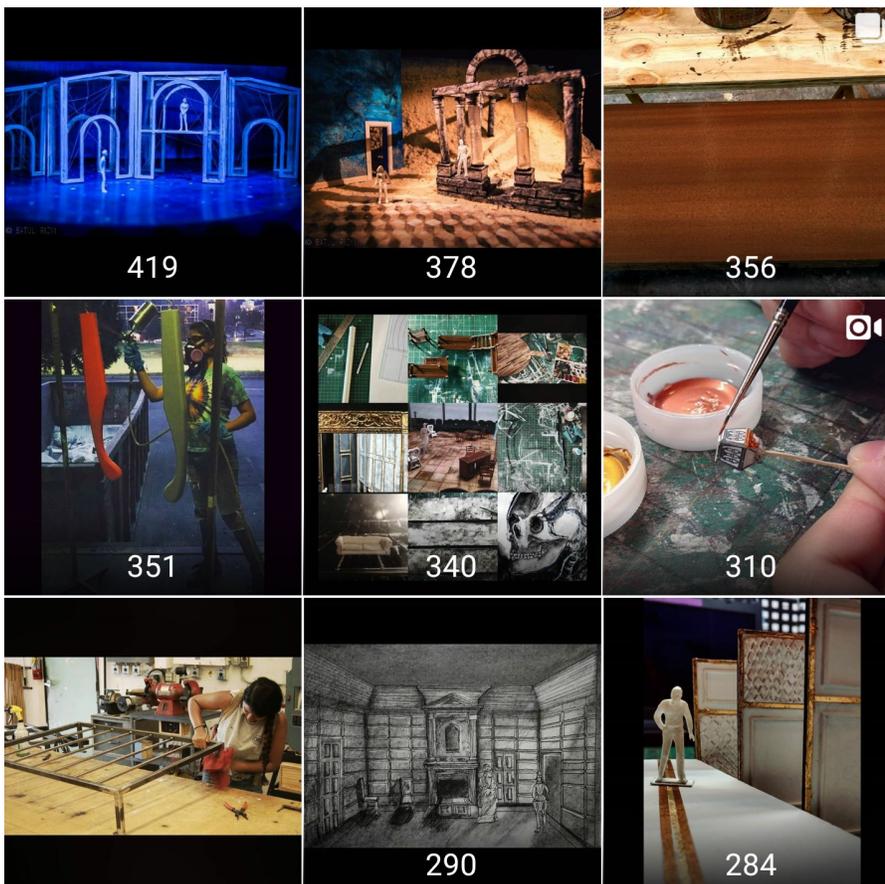
Figure 32. Screenshot.

## Chapter Five: Is It Worth It?

Having an active Instagram account is absolutely worth it for a designer or visual artist to pursue. We have seen how various designers, including myself, have benefitted from using Instagram; both to boost their online presence, but also to create connections with people they otherwise would not have encountered.

Figure 33 displays a screenshot of the Impressions page for my Instagram posts. Below each thumbnail, there is a number correlating to the amount of views each post received. This number below each image is pertaining to unique accounts viewing each post, eliminating the concern of the same user viewing the post multiple times.

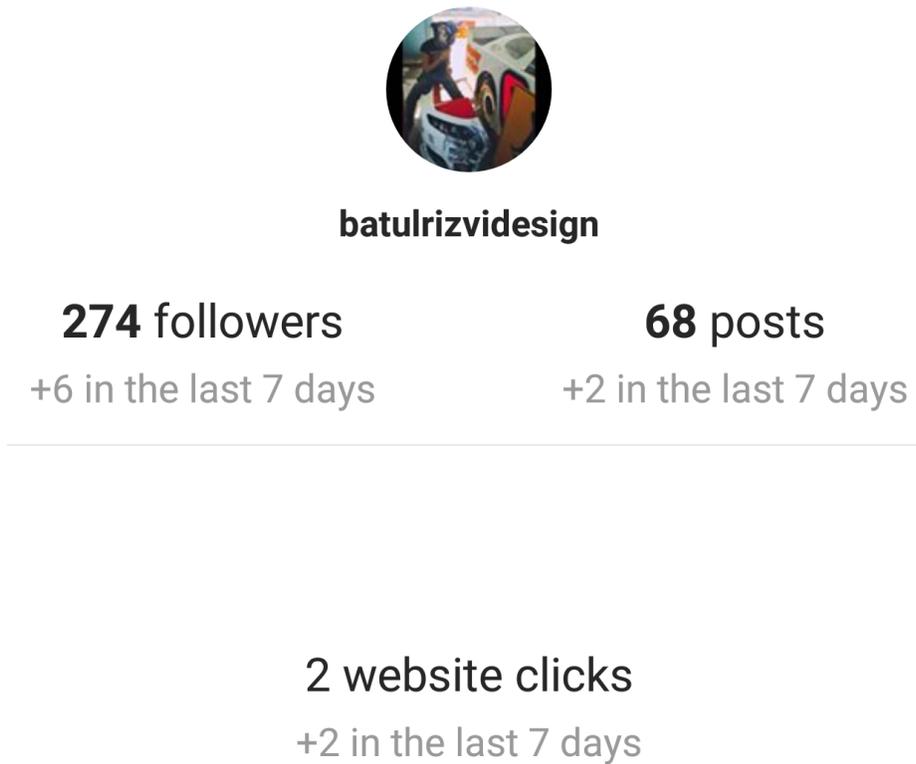
My top two posts are of model photos, which are images from my website. By



posting the same photos from my website on my Instagram page, I can output my work to different audiences, who most likely won't be looking at my website. Instagram is an effective networking tool as it allows your posted content to reach numerous accounts, remain searchable by subject or location, offer open commentary and conversations for each post, and provide an archive to access your content for a client or interview in the future.

*Figure 33. Screenshot of my Instagram Impressions page, showing the view count below each of my posts.*

An additional statistical feature of Instagram is the main Insights page, showing your follower count, post count, and number of website clicks, as shown in Figure 34. The Insights page shows the fluctuation of these numbers over the course of a week, which informs your level of engagement with other Instagram users.



*Figure 34. Screenshot of my main Instagram Insights page, showing the number of followers, posts, and users who clicked the link to my website.*

Instagram's integration with other social media applications and online web links also make it an appealing networking tool. You can easily add a website link in your bio; this is a subtle way to promote the rest of your more refined work. Most theatrical designers post their resumes online on their websites, so this is a great way to have information available for those who want to know more about your work.

Instagram can also connect with other social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. Although these applications are not as portfolio friendly, creating and linking to accounts on other social media platforms may be a way to grow your online presence.

In this investigation of social media as a networking tool, we have looked at setting up an Instagram page, how other creatives are using Instagram, and how Instagram is a worthwhile pursuit. Some may argue that Instagram is not worth the time it takes to build a community of followers. As we saw in chapter three, setting up an Instagram account and editing photos for optimal visual interest does take quite a bit of time; however, one could also argue that any sort of portfolio or networking effort also takes a lot of time.

Instagram, therefore, may not be for every creative; however, the program's versatility makes it an ideal location to invest time into. "In 2015, there were approximately more than 77.6 million active Instagram users in the United States. This figure is projected to surpass 111 million in 2019" (Wikipedia). The number of people that actively use Instagram is growing exponentially. As a designer of any sort, it's important to stay on top of both digital and tangible trends. Communication is central to a designer's workflow. Through Instagram, not only can work be shared for job promotion, but thoughts and inspirations can be communicated in order to build an online community and a personal archive that better captures a designer's aesthetic. "Due to the app's visual nature and high user engagement rate, Instagram is also a valuable social media marketing tool. As of March 2016, 98 percent of fashion brands had an Instagram profile" (Wikipedia). Fashion might be a completely different industry than set design; nonetheless, both industries thrive on the idea of sharing work, whether it is to consumers or other creatives. Instagram provides a platform to share this type of work in a creative way that lets users know that the company or designer is up to date on marketing tools. As the number of Instagram users grow, the importance to stay active on this social media also increases.

A concern of using such a rapidly growing social media platform to post photos was introduced by scenic artist, Rachael Claxton (See Appendix 3). "At my last theatre, we were told not to post any photos of our work online, unless it was on our portfolio websites. The reason we were told had something to do with the contracts that the theatre had with the union regarding the sharing of photos" (Claxton). Due to strict employee policies, some companies are dealing with similar issues. This may seem like a dead end, however, it does not mean you cannot use the application. Instagram can be a valuable resource to post images and videos of work done outside the theatre or company that prohibits internal photos from being posted online. In fact, this could be an advantageous way to build a personal brand and let an Instagram user know your lifestyle beyond work.

As a designer and creative, I believe that Instagram is a worthwhile and effective networking tool. I created my Instagram page in September 2017 with 178 followers. As of February 2018, I have grown my follower count to 312. I have made 70 posts with an average of 60 likes and 320 impressions per post. Instagram has allowed me to make connections with artists that I would have never encountered otherwise.

Instagram has also been a resource to provide artistic inspiration in my design process. Due to the app's tendency to show you posts from people you do not follow, I have seen so many projects that other people are working on that helped me with my own work. For example, a faux finish Instagram page that specialized in faux wood treatments came up on my feed while I was in the process of creating a faux wooden stage floor for a production at the University of Virginia. The techniques used in the faux finish Instagram page were exactly what I needed to create the type of grain requested for the production. I employed some of the techniques used and was pleased with the results. This is just one of the ways that Instagram has helped me become a better artist who is more engaged with a community of creative individuals.

Overall, I encourage every creative to make an Instagram account and start posting their work and their process. Being part of a community is invaluable to being an artist. The ability to virtually connect with people in your industry is certainly networking at its most efficient. Instagram allows you to do this very easily, through sharing, commenting, liking, hashtagging, and posting online. In today's age, having an online presence that is professional and curated to represent your artistic style is imperative to networking and being a successful artist.

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## Appendix 01: Interview Transcripts conducted through Instagram Direct Messages

Eleanor Kahn, Freelance Scenic Designer, Chicago, IL

**Has Instagram helped you gain a network or has served as a portfolio for you?**

Eleanor: “This is a brand new experiment for me as well. I’ve chosen to use it as a supplement to my website ([www.eleanorkahn.com](http://www.eleanorkahn.com)). The website showcases final product while I’m using Insta as a visual blog for process and more day-to-day project/other ways I incorporate or use art in my life; things I wouldn’t necessarily have on a website. I did it in hopes that it would help network and get me out there more! It’s only been a couple of weeks and am not always sure what followers are real companies/people vs. robots”.

Alexander Whittenberg, Scenic Design Student, SUNY Purchase

**Do you think using Instagram has helped you in anyway similar networking?**

“Yes, I think social media plays a huge role in how we communicate as humans and, in turn, as visual storytellers. I use it as an extension of my “personal brand” and although it often gives me great anxiety, I do believe it helps to get the work out there and develop creative/collaborative/professional relationships.”

**Do you have a specific example of how Instagram has helped you develop relationships or get any jobs?**

“There’s a lighting designer in NYC that was an acquaintance of mine and we followed each other on Instagram. He started to see my work and I would see his – we instantly become fans of what we were seeing. We’re now collaborating on a project in NY that I can’t really talk about yet. This collaboration is wonderful and we already trust that we know what we’re doing from the online content. We can dive straight into the deep end of the collaboration. Although I’m based on Orlando, I visit NYC on a regular basis now to work on that project”.

Jon Gluck, Faux Finish Painter, Pittsburgh, PA

**I am a painter and designer doing my MFA on how Instagram can help build a network and become a portfolio. I was wondering if you could shed some light on your thoughts with this.**

“I have a Bachelors in Fine Art from Maryland Institute College of Art, class of '99. I became involved in the decorative arts shortly after by taking a job doing restoration of the Pennsylvania Capitol's decorative finishes. Later, I moved to Pittsburgh and started my own business shortly thereafter. My knowledge of my trade was very limited for a number of years until I joined Instagram. I immediately started to see decorative work that blew my mind. The bar for me was raised quite a bit higher. Over the past five years, I have learned more from connections with other artists via Instagram than any other source, or all others combined. It did not happen overnight, but rather over several years of heavy participation, which is key. I have connected with dozens of artists I met through Instagram. We text, phone calls, Skype, WhatsApp, and face to face. Whatever it takes. Half my skillset can be attributed to techniques I have learned from other artists, starting with Instagram. It has connected me with artists not just all over the country, but on every continent as well. This has been invaluable to me staying current. My feed has always served as documentation I can go back to refresh my memory. Lastly, I use my IG portfolio to show clients various projects from the past while I suggest finishes for their current project.”

David Goldstein, Off-Broadway Scenic and Lighting Designer, NYC

**How has Instagram impacted your networking? Have you gained any connections?**

“Social media has made a major impact and influence. It's gotten me connections, jobs, and “clout” in the industry.”

Christopher Annas-Lee, Freelance Lighting Designer, DC

**Would you say Instagram has worked for your networking in any way?**

“I hopped on Instagram a long time ago to use as an extension of my website. It's basically where all the photographs that don't make the cut on there go. It's hard to say if gigs come out of Instagram specifically, but most people who hire me do cite seeing photos of my work as the reason (I also take all my own photographs, which is equally important in getting shots that work for the portfolio).”

Chris Rhoton, Freelance Scenic Designer

**How has Instagram helped/hindered your work? Have you gained a network? Does it serve as a portfolio for you?**

“I actually just switched my profile from personal to a business profile, which gives me additional insights and ways to promote yourself. I’ve actually gotten jobs from people seeing my work on Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest.”

**What do you think got you those jobs, specifically Instagram? Is it related to your editing style/photo choices or through liking/following/commenting and being an active user?**

“No, it’s all about the work. People contact me when they’re impressed by my designs. I’ve had the most people contact me from Pinterest because of my designs gets re-pinned there a lot. And the image links to my website. I’ve only really started using Instagram to promote my work in the last few months because I realized how valuable that could be.”

## Appendix 02: Interview Transcripts conducted through the Facebook Group “Women+ in Theatre”

### **Post on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at 10:15am:**

Hi everyone! I'm currently doing my MFA thesis on social media as a networking tool, specifically Instagram. I figured this group would be a neat way to ask about this – if you have any thoughts on this, please let me know. I'm trying to gauge how many people use Instagram “professionally”.

- + Has anyone had success and failures with using Instagram to network?
  - + Do you share photos of your work through Instagram?
  - + If you have an Instagram, how often do you use the “stories” feature?
  - + Have you connected with other theatre artists through Instagram?
  - + Is there a benefit to posting process photos on Instagram v. your website?
  - + Have you gotten any jobs or side work from being an Instagram user?
  - + Do you think it's worth it to “market yourself” online in today's social media driven world?
- Anything along those lines would be helpful, thank you!

### **Jazmyn Arroyo, Actor, 1 Step Theatre Project**

“One of my theatre company's favorite stories is that we actually found one of our company's current staff members on Instagram! When we first started, we did lots of “liking” of posts with hashtags like #indietheatre #nyctheatre #offoffbroadway #offbroadway etc-- he saw our “like”, checked out our page, made a donation, and stuck around to create things with us. We often post about our work and other artists' work on our account, as well as casting notices, show promos, etc. We use “stories” for live events like tech rehearsals, seeing shows, etc. To be honest, if theatre co's have not made the transition into the social media world, they should start! Marketing is changing!”

### **Penny Jackson, Playwright, MFA Stanford University**

“Hi Jaz - I found FB more helpful than Instagram to promote plays. But then I'm an Instagram newbie so maybe I just don't know how to use it.”

**Jazmyn Arroyo**

“Same, actually! But, I like Instagram because it's better access to people we don't know, who see our posts because of its #hashtags, as opposed to posts on Facebook that only get viewed by the same folks who I am already friends with. In this case, we found a total stranger who ended up working very closely with us.”

**Lirit Elizabeth Olyan Pendell, MFA Costume Design Student, UT Austin**

“For what it’s worth, I also use Facebook more than Instagram - and I do get job offers or invitations to apply based on social media, friends of friends, etc. My online presence is a website (a few shots of favorite work, progress, renderings, geared toward design jobs), an external photo gallery linked in my website (more content and in-depth galleries, geared toward photography jobs, but if you're curious about one project on my site you can find every photo ever in the gallery and go right to it), and Facebook. I *should* start using Instagram and I'm super curious to follow your results and conclusions.”

**Kelsey Rose Gilchriest, Company Management Intern, La Jolla Playhouse**

“I use Twitter rather than Instagram. In fact, I booked my first equity show because I DM'd a director I admired on Twitter!”

**D'Arcy Harrison, Hair Designer, Emerson Salon**

“Marketing a show right now and Facebook tops followers, Instagram next then Twitter. I usually rely on Twitter as a public platform but I was proven wrong with the ease of gaining legit followers. But use tons of hashtags and link to a website.”

**Kristen Morgan, Assoc. Professor of Theatre, Eastern Connecticut State University**

“I use Insta pretty much exclusively for my design, travel, and photography. I'm not looking for jobs, though, so I can't speak to that aspect.”

**Danielle Marie Ferguson, MFA Design Student, Saint Mary's College of California**

"I use Instagram as a way to share both my professional work and my life with friends, family, and employers. My website has a link to my Instagram. During tech I try to share photos as the show progresses and use a ton of related hashtags to expand who sees it. I have connected to other artist that I have previously collaborated with and artists that I am interested in collaborating with.

My cohort and I decided to present our final thesis projects as a Dance Festival this past June and we used Instagram as a way to promote that as well as share behind the scenes/ process photos of the individual projects and artist bios."

**Grace Austin, Director and Professor, East Central College**

"We get a lot of response on our Instagram. I'm in academia but I run the department Instagram, Facebook and website. I share a lot of photos of work through Instagram, I also share videos of the process and things that I think my followers would be interested in. I have not gotten any jobs or side work, but that hasn't been really my focus. It's 100% worth marketing yourself online. I'm at @ecctheatre!!"

**Liz Hastings, MFA Prop Technology Student, Ohio University**

"Honestly I use Instagram more privately. Meanwhile, I help cultivate a community of theatre technicians on Tumblr and it has turned out to be a great tool for networking, teaching/ helping younger technicians, sharing work, and acting as a forum for problem solving. Also at theatre companies I've worked for we've typically used FB and Twitter in marketing and that seems to be far better and able to reach more people than Instagram."

**Miriam Avital Levenson, IATSE Local 15 Member**

"My Instagram is @spacebar\_cadet and I use it exclusively to post about my theatrical endeavors. A lot of woodworking and theatre instas have followed it, and it's what I refer people to in terms of working social media. I feel like it's really important to have one solid social media platform for work, and I just happened to choose Instagram. I don't think it's actually helped me make connections or find work, but it's a really nice and easy thing to refer people to so they can get a quick and easy gauge of the work I do."

Appendix 03: Interview Transcripts conducted through “Guild of Scenic Artists” Forum,  
Online

**Rachael Claxton, Scenic Artist, Actors Theatre of Louisville**

“I love using Instagram to share photos of my work and look through other peoples work as well. I've found the hashtags #goscenicartists (woohoo!), #scenicart, and #scenicartist help me find some other pretty amazing scenics. In addition to finding other painters, I've discovered other shops I was unaware of, broadening my knowledge of who's who in the industry and just generally getting an idea of the cool work that's being done outside of my city. Because I'm not currently looking for employment I don't actively try and market myself on Instagram, but when I freelanced it was a great way to share bits of my process and things I was very proud of that didn't necessarily fit into a "portfolio quality" photo. I know some scenics that incorporate their Instagram accounts into their websites, but I post too many photos of my dog to do that.

I've found that sharing photos on social media falls in a grey area with some of the theatres that I've worked for though. At my last theatre, we were told not to post any photos of our work online, unless it was on our portfolio websites. The reason we were told had something to do with the contracts that the theatre had with the union regarding the sharing of photos. Has anyone else ever run in to that? It was strange and never fully explained to the staff. At my current job, the theatre has created a hashtag for the staff to use when sharing images on social media. Since sharing work before a production opens is sometime such a grey area, I tend to share "snippets" instead of full pieces. Ex: I'll upload photos of cool textures I've done, or funny things that have happened in the shop, but never full pieces or full stage shots until after the show has opened and/or my employer posts photos of the piece first.”