

DRAWING THE LINE

Jamie Rae is a professional storyboarder who explains why using the services of one, or at least understanding the role, could transform your next filmmaking project



my interest in film, particularly horror. Seeing *A Nightmare On Elm Street* at a friends house years before my mum would have ever allowed it - terrified me, and I knew I wanted to be involved in the arts somehow. It was through the latter years of Secondary School that I really found where my passion lay, and that was in filmmaking. With no Video Production course in place at my Sixth Form, I was the first person in eight years to tailor the Art A-Level, to a photography and moving image unit.

Most of us aren't in the position of being able to hire the services of a storyboard professional, but what they do can often be central to a filmmaking project. In layman's terms, a storyboard can help visualise what a production needs and put it all down in black and white on paper. These drawings can then be developed as the team collaborates on the film, TV show or whatever it might be, which helps productivity and might actually save some money thanks to the way it

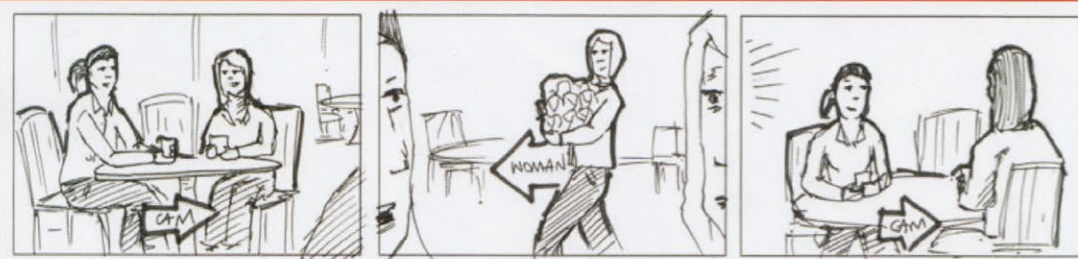
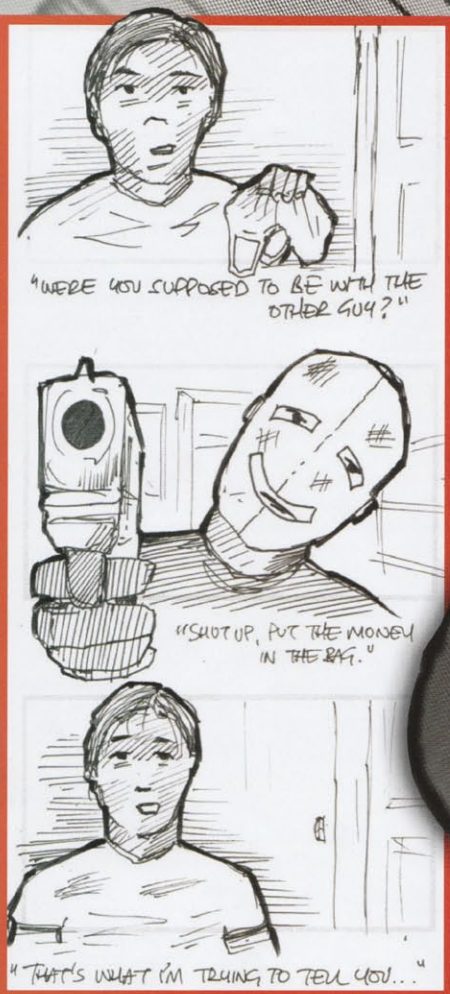
helps everyone involved to see the wood from the trees. But hey, we've got a professional on hand to take you through the in's and out's of storyboarding, so it's over to Jamie Rae who will take you on a whistle-stop tour of what he does and why he does it...

Who am I?

Born in Kettering, I grew up with a keen eye on the visual arts. From the minute I could hold a pencil I was keen to draw everything around me. As my skills developed, so did

Having grounded a basic skill base in moving image, I was ready to make the step to Lincoln University, where I studied Contemporary Lens Media. It was here that I found my passion for directing and in particular, storyboarding. My horror short, *Flesh Forum*, was chosen by Orange to appear on the mobile download section of their website in 2007. In 2008, after having written and directed several short films, I co-wrote, produced and directed horror short *Eight Limbs*, along with fellow graduate and friend, Daniel Anscombe. A trailer-cum-internet viral was made for the film and it won the Total Film Award for Best Trailer, at the inaugural IceWhole Awards, an event held in London, October 2008. Following on from the success of *Eight Limbs*, I went on to work with various production companies on shoots in various capacities, before carving my own style of storyboarding and filmmaking over the coming years.

Currently, I storyboard freelance for film and TV production companies in the UK and US, and I'm looking to expand my portfolio into longer and more commercial projects such as TV adverts and feature film. I also operate production company RedScar specialising in promotional video content for small to medium sized enterprises, winning the 2014 Local Business Accelerators



award for Northamptonshire, an award that promotes the success of young businesses and entrepreneurs.

What do I do?

As a storyboard artist it's my job to help the director to visualise their vision for cast, crew, and often first and foremost, investors. To be a storyboard artist is not to necessarily be the best technical drawer in the world - in fact, often far from it. It's having the ability to understand what the director wants on screen; the ability to understand perspective, shot types, framing - but, most importantly, the ability to represent the script, bearing in mind its budget. Of course, having some level of ability to



draw is essential! I draw every day and have a sketchbook that I carry around with me and often draw what I see while sat in a café! Understanding what you see as simply an arrangement of shapes is a great way to improve drawing ability - the human form, animals, vehicles and so on. They're all made of basic shapes and learning this early on was a big turning point in my drawing ability.

As you can see from what I've outlined above, my background is in narrative film and having directed various short films and directing crews regularly for corporate work, this really does lend itself to my ability to draw 'what the director sees' and in understanding his vision. Of course, as a storyboard artist, we don't always draw for the director. Sometimes I storyboard for writers who are looking for



some visualisation of a few key shots to help sell the script, or for a producer that's looking to package together a film.

I like working with people who know what they're good at and stick to it. I'm not saying it's not important to expand and gain new skills in the ever-changing industry, but we all know that it takes a team to make a film

- not just one person. Good director? Then direct. Love to edit? Work on those skills. I'm a storyboard artist at heart, and although I have directed, and can - I generally don't. I work on expanding my drawing skills and my understanding of film language, so I can be exceptional in the field of storyboarding, and not just 'okay' in many. I often

use the analogy that you wouldn't represent yourself in court, would you? You'd hire a lawyer, so that applies to the filmmaking scene too. Hire those that can, to help you do what you can!

My client base is global and I have strong ongoing relationships with filmmakers here in the UK and the US. I worked out in LA for a month in 2008, working



closely with a director for an independent feature. Since then I've built up a client base of indie filmmakers, TV ad producers and corporate video directors.

How did I get into it?

It was at university where I found my passion for storyboarding. There's nothing quite like having the director in awe of your ability

to really understand how he sees the film and it's exhilarating to see them get so excited by having their vision realised on paper! As mentioned before, I'd always maintained a certain level of drawing skill, but really having that deep understanding of perspective, shot types,

"TO BE A STORYBOARD ARTIST IS NOT TO NECESSARILY BE THE BEST TECHNICAL DRAWER IN THE WORLD"

framing, pacing and lots of other film language is what makes a good storyboard artist.

My rise as a storyboard artist was partly by accident. I had my eyes on directing to begin with, as I love working with lots of people on set and pulling everything together to create a combined unique vision. It was when a filmmaking lecturer at uni commented on some storyboards for a project and

noted that, if I developed my own style a bit more, I could make a living from this. So I took those words and continued progressing my style - boards I drew four years ago look vastly different to what they do now!

Why do I do it?

Working in the film industry has to be one of the most fun, challenging, exciting and rewarding jobs in the world.

TELEGRAPH COMPETITION

Enterprise County entrepreneur shows promise for the future

Film-maker is ready to roll in bid to win best business award

STILL TO BE SEEN: The film-maker who has won the best business award

A film-maker has won the local heat of a national competition to find the country's most promising young business.

Janie Rae, 24, launched his company Redcar media and creative services in August 2011 and it was picked as the winner from video finalists in the Northants Telegraph Local Business Accelerators Competition.

He has already received mentoring from Rachel Mallows, of The Mallows Company, and is now in the running to win the national final.

Janie, who runs his business from his home in Carrington Crescent, Kettering, said: "I was absolutely over the moon when I heard I was one of the county finalists."

The competition is run by the Newspaper Society and has the backing of the Government and private sector's Business in Your Community.

"Working with Rachel, I've already received really invaluable advice. She recognised my passion and drive and has helped me win bigger clients."

After leaving his Community College, Kettering, Janie went on to study film and photography at the University of Lincoln. After gaining his degree he worked as a freelance film-maker and decided to set up his own company.

Redcar produces promotional videos for companies and individuals, as well as covering events.

Among recent commissions were a film to promote an NHS anti-smoking campaign and promotional work for the Open University and martial arts instructor and motivational speaker Andy Gibney.

Janie said: "The first four months were quite hard but now the business is going really well. Film-making is my passion and I've been able to turn it into a business. I've also been able to have a big impact."

The national winner of the competition will receive free membership of the CBI for a year, free business advice from the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales worth £2,000 and an iPad from Freesight, with a year's free access to its accountancy software.

The winner will also receive mentoring from the campaign national ambassador Deborah Madden, of Dragon's Den, a free ad campaign in their local newspaper and £10,000 from the Business Growth Fund.

The other finalists were The Bath House, of Cotby Old Village, and Bright Sparks, of Kettering.

All three businesses have won free advertising in the Northants Telegraph and mentoring from local business people Greg Hill, of SRE Technologies, Paul Adams from The Linden Group and Rachel Mallows.

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Janie Rae, winner of the Local Business Accelerators competition

Judges select the winning entry

The judges were, from left, marketing director of London Paul Adams, Greg Hill of SRE Technologies, Rachel Mallows of Mallows, Northants Telegraph and Harborough Mail editor Neil Pickford, Peter Anson of the University of Northampton and Telegraph deputy editor Yvonne Martin, not pictured.



The panel of judges who selected the winning entry



Imagine - a team of anywhere from 3 to 3,000 pull together to create something unique. Being a part of that team and bridging the gap between the director and the cast and crew/investors to highlight his or her vision through drawing is, in my opinion, incredible.

I often get looked at by friends who ask about what I do and when I explain they simply say, 'What, you get paid to just do some drawings?!'. Although it's not as simple as that, I guess I do! I also think a big part of being a success in the film industry is working on self-development. I don't mean you have to go and see Tony Robbins every weekend, but the film industry is very much a relationship industry and you have to be willing to talk to new people, build up a rapport and sell yourself. It's not enough to hide behind a screen and tout for work, you have to pick up the phone, talk about what you do with passion and confidence and this, inevitably, brings new leads and contacts.

What am I working on?

Having taken on a junior artist to assist me with larger scale and/

"MY RISE AS A STORYBOARD ARTIST WAS PARTLY BY ACCIDENT. I HAD MY EYES ON DIRECTING TO BEGIN WITH"



or lower budgeted productions has increased my workflow no end. I'm always introducing myself to potential new clients via mailshots, which I have a great level of success with. A quick side note - cold calling or emailing is not a bad thing if you're offering something to the prospect that they need. Cold contact with new prospectives have worked great for me, and I

also run a monthly e-newsletter to current clients and filmmakers who have enquired but never booked.

Currently I'm working on expanding my portfolio with the help of Craig my assistant artist, building new relationships with clients in the UK and US. Europe is my next spot! I'm working on a feature film due to be shot in

Notting Hill in October 2015, a few short films, another indie feature from a UK production company and the consistent stream of ad pitches and investor boards.



Why use me?

Storyboarding is the single key visualisation tool during the pre-production process that you have to highlight tone, style and pacing of your film. Sure, talking about it is fine with investors, but do they know what a tilt or pan is? Do they care? Probably not. Storyboards show your film in a unique and dynamic way that saves hundreds of words trying to explain the same thing. Communication is the number one quality that everyone in a film production must possess. As a director you need to

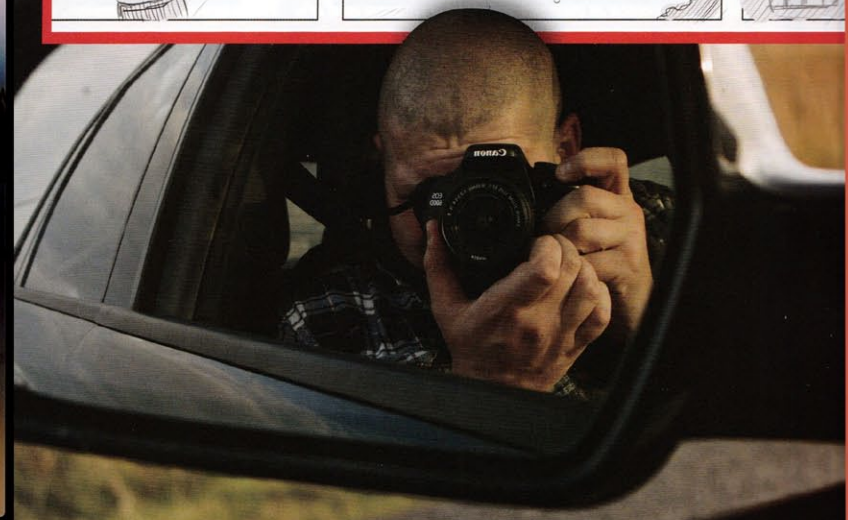
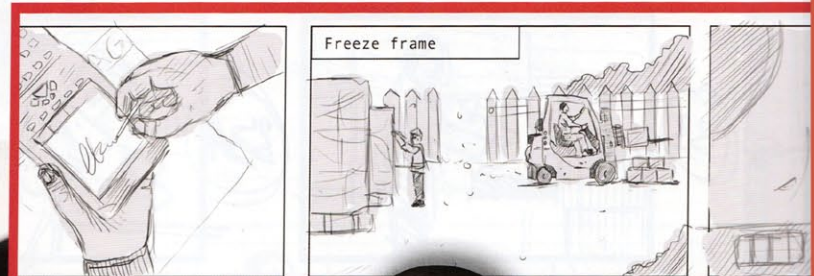
"STORYBOARDS SHOW YOUR FILM IN A UNIQUE AND DYNAMIC WAY THAT SAVES HUNDREDS OF WORDS"

communicate your vision to the cast and crew. As a producer you need to aim that vision as distributors and investors. The cast must fully understand their

role among the other performers, and every member of the crew, from runner to writer must also understand the same vision. Storyboards, and also concept

art, bridge that gap between the idea, and the visualisation.

Are you totally comfortable that you could sit in front of your DOP, investor, or TV client and verbally explain your pitch to them, and that they would then go ahead based solely on that? It's highly unlikely. People like to see, and feel, what their project will be. Often I sit in on





meetings with my client and theirs and draw as they speak to really showcase their ideas. This is a dynamic way to work and has led to many successful ongoing ventures within the corporate and ad pitch world. The clients that I've worked with that come back to me time and time again really have an understanding of this, and know that their financial output for a well-crafted storyboard can save them hundreds, if not thousands, down the line when trying to get across the directors vision.

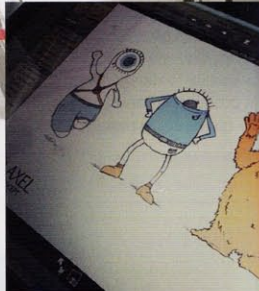
Storyboard artists - and much is the same of the majority of talent within a film production - get hired for their style, understanding of what

"AS A BOARD ARTIST, I NEED TO KNOW HOW MANY PAGES DOES YOUR SCRIPT HAVE? WHAT'S YOUR DEADLINE?"

the director wants, experience, and efficiency. Me? I don't have a 'graphic novel everything in proportion lifelike drawing' style. I draw loose, quick and dynamically. My clients love this style - but, of course, for some it's not refined enough, or there may be another reason they prefer another board artist. And that's fine! This comes back to sticking to what you're good at and becoming an expert at that. It is important to be able to 'adapt' though if you want

regular work, but you must stay true to your style - this is of course why you're hired in the first place!

The key question I always get asked is, how much does a storyboard cost? If I respond with 'How much could you make my film for?', they would proceed to ask a number of questions to gauge my timescale, genre, SFX, talent and so on. Much is the same for storyboarding. Now I only charge by the half-day and full day, which clients tend



to prefer than 'by the board' drawing where you charge per frame. As a board artist, I need to know how many pages does your script have? What's your deadline? Are these investor boards or shooting boards? Black and white or colour? Do you want layered digital files? All of these and more determine overall cost - the positive thing about the way I structure price is we work out the answers to these questions then I say 'it will take two and a half days', and bingo, your price is right there. I also discount for major block bookings, such as low-budget feature films, if I love the story and what the team is doing with the production.

In summary, if you want to ensure 100 per cent success in communicating your vision as a writer, director, producer, whatever, then a storyboard artist is absolutely key in bridging that gap. Concept artists are more commonly used to show detailed set pieces, locations, character costumes, vehicle designs (to name but a few), but the storyboard artist puts those things into a frame and shows how they move and react in their environment. I do often work with the concept artist and use their work as reference material for the storyboards.

Storyboard as art

As a professional storyboard artist, it's important to keep up with learning of other artists

"I GAVE THE BOARDS A 3D LOOK BY CUTTING OUT THE FOREGROUND PEOPLE AND RAISING THEM SLIGHTLY"

and taking part in drawing classes. I'm always learning new ways to draw everyday objects. I hadn't really thought of storyboard as an actual art form until I submitted a series of three boards I did for an investor pitch for a US-based short film. Of course, I am an artist, but storyboards generally aren't something you look at or admire unless you're active in the film industry.

I got crafty, and gave the boards a slight 3D look by cutting out the foreground people and raising them off the storyboard slightly. Framed, I

then submitted it to the Open '14 at the Alfred East Gallery in Northamptonshire and my piece was successfully chosen to be shown in the final sixty or so pieces! It highlighted storyboards to a whole new audience who don't even know what they are, but could appreciate them on an aesthetic level. Another important element of storyboarding - I've known clients to books film jobs with my clients heavily based on the storyboarding style - it echoed what they saw in their head. ■



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www.twitter.com/jrstoryboards
Jamie@jamierae.co.uk

