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Surrealism & Branding
Building Brand Equity Through Surrealist Methodologies

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To my parents and professors, I am forever grateful for all your support and guidance.

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Abstract

There are aspects of Surrealism that are compelling in creating a memorable narrative environment with the capabilities of espousing a positive impression. At the forefront, I set out to create a branding campaign for Levi's Jeans Company that promotes character investment and builds a brand's identity through traditional and relatable forms of storytelling. Levi's Jeans branding has archetypically stood for the pioneer, the rebel, the outcast, and the free spirit. The campaign that developed out of these archetypes is entitled *Empire*. In this campaign rebellion is revealed through individuality. The viewer identifies with the outcast. Ruggedness is expressed through the tarnished environment and weathered clothing of the hero character.

Empire is built around a fantastical fable of forbidden love. An outcast hero and a discontent Queen rebel against the rigid conventions of their land in order to be together. The oppressive vanity of convention is represented through delicate paper couture dresses that hamper movement. Conversely, our hero's individualism is represented through loose fitting casual clothing. Exhausted from the weight of both her enveloping costume and the expectations of the Empire, the Queen grows an attraction for our free-spirited hero that will lead them on a journey in opposition to the status quo.

The Levi's campaign was developed as a unique episodic narrative that engages the viewer in a timeless vision of love's ability to transcend entrenched values. The environment is a reflection of the characters and the tenants of Surrealism by being constructed on unstable foundations and utilizing skewed dimensionality. The alternate reality defined in *Empire* defies causal expectation but remains consistent throughout the entire campaign.

Survey of Historical Research

Research on Surrealism was done using author Maurice Nadeau's *The History of Surrealism*. Most of the historical basis for Surrealism comes from Nadeau's book:

“As an account of the public record of surrealism, its performances and its declared positions, the History frees us from the illusion that it was a monolithic and unchanging group of artists who held the same ideas for twenty years. [...] But let us be even clearer about what Nadeau does not set out to do. He directs his attention exclusively to history and theory—as expressed in statements, manifestos, expository texts, programs, and anecdotes—and thus does not convey any sense of the works produced.”¹

Since Nadeau does not give a clear sense of the artist's compositions, I examined supplemental books on artists such as Hans Arp, Yves Tanguy, Hans Bellmer and Man Ray. To provide a theoretical and historical backing, I also used author Kim Grant's *Surrealism and the Visual Arts Theory and Reception*. Grant's book delves much deeper into the specifics of Breton's *Manifesto du Surréalisme*, the Surrealist love of the imagination, and relating Surrealism to semioticians like Ferdinand Saussure. The major difference between the theoretical books is that Nadeau examines Surrealism as a contemporary of Surrealism, giving a full-bodied discourse on why and how decisions were made. Grant's *Surrealism and the Visual Arts Theory and Reception* reads like an outsider's perspective, while still just as valuable, it does not focus on the dynamics

within the group, but instead focuses on the visual and literary influences for Surrealism to take shape.

Introduction

Surrealism's first tremors began as a series of meetings between individual writers and painters during the First World War, the most influential of whom was the organizer and creator of the surrealism manifesto, Andre Breton.² However, to fully understand the Surrealist mindset one has to observe and understand the period of time that the movement was conceived. Artists, painters and poets such as Andre Breton, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Benjamin Peret and Philippe Soupault were conscripted to fight in the First World War, the notorious war of attrition fought hand to hand.³ This war, as in any war, left an indelible mark on its participants. Instead of withdrawing inward and battling personal demons through self-loathing, these men questioned their desire to be a part of a decadent civilization.⁴ They channeled their grief through creativity and psychology, trying to understand the purpose of life.⁵ These poets, authors and painters felt that there must be a new way to express the imagination, there must be a revolution and the revolution must start from within.⁶ Andre Breton defined Surrealism in the *Manifesto du Surréalisme*:

“SURREALISM, n. m. Pure Psychic automatism by which one proposes to express, verbally, by writing, or by any other means, the real functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any

control exercised by reason, beyond all aesthetic or moral preoccupation.”⁷

To understand Andre Breton’s 1924 definition, it is important to first understand automatism and how automatism would lead to a revolution of the mind. Automatism is most easily understood as an outgrowth of the Dada movement.⁸ Young Rumanian poet, Tristan Tzara produced three manifestos cleverly named *Dada I*, *Dada II*, and *Dada III* and formulated the proposition, “Thought is made with the mouth.”⁹ Dada reinvigorated language with some panache, after years of being torn down by vulgar repetition. Dada made language the focal point of attention by using puns, combining the sounds of two words, and changing the order of words in a coherent sentence.¹⁰ Concurrently, the leaders of Surrealism—Aragon, Breton, Eluard, Peret—constituted the French Dada group until 1922 when disputes over the future of the Dada movement lead these men to found the Surrealist Movement. From their participation in the French Dada group, Breton writes of a process wherein unconscious thoughts find clarity in the *Manifesto du Surréalisme*:

“[...] a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible, on which the subject’s critical spirit brings no judgment to bear, which is subsequently unhampered by reticence, and which is, as exactly as possible, spoken thought.”¹¹

The stream of spoken words leads to an unconscious truth of the participant. The unencumbered power of language leads to liberation. Minds became unfettered and writings took on a supernatural tone. Automatism was essentially free writing without moral, logical, or rational consideration. Experience is the basis for logic and because of

this, experience is flawed and limited since it has a strong reliance on rational thought.¹² The complete lack of infused logic, planning and foresight was the favorable approach. Automatic writing (automatism) offered the Surrealists the ability to transfer one word, idea or image from unconscious thought to the medium of choice.¹³ Automatism is a fundamental technique in the toolkit for understanding and defining Surrealism, an art movement that grew out of wanting to change thought and social experience, rather than the art world. Surrealism was not aiming for a new artistic direction but for a new mode of thinking entirely.¹⁴ This desire to change minds became the aftertaste and the emotional identity that aspiring poets, writers, and artists grasped during the early 1920's.

As Surrealism established its founding principals, writer Andre Breton became weary of logical, moral and rational deduction:

“First of all, no more logic. [...] Knowledge dispenses with reason, action transcends it. Beauty, art have been the conquests of logic, they must be destroyed. Poetry must be ‘soul speaking to soul,’ dream must be substituted for ‘directed thought,’ images must no longer be the foxfire running on the surface of thoughts or feelings, but lightning flashes, continually illuminating ‘the caverns of being.’”¹⁵

Action transcends reason because it exists in an area of temporal vulnerability; reason is safe and calculating, there is no margin for error. Logical systems of thought hamper the mind and “reduce the imagination to slavery,” since there is always a cognizant effort to abide by the natural laws and order of the known universe.¹⁶ The surrealists were akin to conquistadors on the desert of the mind, probing the unconscious, the marvelous, the dream and hallucinatory states.¹⁷ In Surrealism, thought is king, it is omnipotent and the

artist must bend to its whim for nothing should stand in the way of the internal thoughts being externalized.¹⁸

As time progressed Surrealism took many forms, it lost and gained collaborators, and in its final days it met a rational end in a weak attempt to change the way humans observe the world.¹⁹ Ultimately, Surrealism failed to achieve the prescribed goals that it aspired to accomplish, but nevertheless it has left a lasting impression.²⁰ By the 1940's the movement's activity began to wane, Surrealists sought out demoralization and anti-culture as the footing to protest against. The Surrealists believed that hope was false and had been propagated as crutches for the ineffectual to cower behind.²¹ Breton's efforts to mingle dream states with reality came to no avail, the unconscious would remain out-of-reach and the accidental would remain apt to its definition.²²

Experience & Branding

Upon reading Breton's definition of Surrealism it is challenging to glean an understanding of how Surrealist artworks can be applied to an artificial world to create a plausible reality. Breton believed that experience could be understood within the realm of either determinism or chance.²³ Determinism allows man to believe that the world is filled with meaning and wonder, there is a reason for actions to occur and no matter what that reason is, wherever the road leads, that is what is meant to occur. Chance is a bleaker affair. Chance consists of the perception that life is filled with misery and man is constantly trying to rationalize injustice.²⁴

Art is found somewhere in the extraction of chance from destiny (or vice-versa), by

utilizing both viewpoints in juxtaposition of context.²⁵ For instance, how can one claim the ephemeral experience of love without knowing sadness? It is not possible. Author Maurice Nadeau eloquently provides an example in his book *The History of Surrealism*:

“Baudelaire [distills] flowers from evil, Dostoevsky [finds] despair in the deepest impulses of charity and love.”²⁶

There is a duality that exists in these statements of love and despair, a poetic truth that resonates, a commonality that reflects the ebb and flow of daily existence: a moment of hope, a moment of longing, and moments of ambiguity.²⁷ In both statements it is perception that is being viewed askew, but their sentiment is understandable as holding two opposing viewpoints in the mind at once. Such relatable experience is akin to crying from the joy of achievement or laughing amid tears at funeral. This is the sum of experience; moments realized, lived in, felt and understood to a degree of personal belief in chance or determinism, wonder or ambiguity.

In order to see the parallels between Surrealism and branding, branding must be defined. In the ProMax BDA presentation, *Best Practices of 2009*, Lee Hunt defines brand as a “set of expectations [...] created with personality and perspective.”²⁸ In the August 29th episode of *The Show with ZeFrank*, brand is defined as an “emotional aftertaste that is conjured up by, but not necessarily dependant on, a series of experiences.”²⁹ ZeFrank’s definition is a broad definition of how branding can be experienced over many mediums.

In terms of advertising, Klaus Fog, co-founder of the Danish division of Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency, defines “brand story” in his book *Storytelling: Branding in Practice* as a “story [that] charts the course for the entire corporate brand, [acting] as a

compass [to direct] all company communication both internally and externally.”³⁰ This brand story is a guiding force that keeps a company consistent in its long-term brand strategy and marketplace identity. The importance of a strong brand story becomes magnified when companies try to appeal to a general audience while maintaining individuality and distinction. Lee Hunt expresses that the secret to a successful brand story is finding a “perspective that can harness [diversity] and give you a unique, differentiated way to sell while remaining true to your brand.”³¹

One way to stay true to the brand but create a memorable campaign is to inject some of the Surrealist notions of imagination into the brand strategy. While the primary focus of the Manifesto is on the functioning of thought, Breton writes that the ultimate goal in the *Manifesto du Surréalisme* is to remake the world in accordance with the human imagination.³² In relation to ZeFrank, Surrealism has an emotional aftertaste that is founded in the importance of distilling the unconscious to artistic representation. The branding for Surrealism lies in the cultivation of the pure thought before the agents of logic, rationality, and formal aesthetics are applied to the artist’s composition. Ultimately, Surrealism built a following and an aesthetic based on this foundation. Surrealism utilizes notions of the unconscious, dream states, automatic writing, and accidents as the basis for the creation of this pure art. Breton goes on to describe the advantages of pure, unconscious, Surrealist art:

“Entire worlds will be created from the imagination once human beings recognize their mental freedom and submit to its empire [...]”³³

The “mental freedom” Breton is referring to is that of logical and rational constraints, however, one could apply these freedoms to causal actions. For instance, if one were to

expect a house to be made of a solid material and the housing material is a buoyant liquid or a highly flexible amorphous formation, much like the biomorphic forms of Yves Tanguy, this would go against the consumers causal expectation and create a memorable visual. It is these shifts in conventions, these changes in causality, which interest me. Therefore to create a more cohesive brand experience there must be a reimagining of the causal expectations that allow an artist to realize an alternate world and challenge surrealist conventions of perception, rationality and superficial spaces in the 1920's to 1940's.

Original Research

In order to understand Surrealism, one must compare and contrast common visual features of Surrealist artwork. Through researching the commonalities in Surrealist art one could utilize Surrealist conventions to aid in the creation of a memorable branding identity. Therefore, I examined the photography of Man Ray, the reliefs and sculptures of Hans Arp, and the paintings of Yves Tanguy. A vertical hierarchy was established by laying out a grid of the Surrealist's artworks. This was incredibly clear, but extremely laborious, especially when comparing a large quantity of artworks.

The first artist studied was Man Ray and his Surrealist photographs. The Man Ray brand of photography is most aptly characterized by simplified geometry and by a reduction of the formal subject down to its purest state. The hard-edge lighting Man Ray uses for his photographs cast the subject into an abyss of abstraction, leaving no sense of scale or purpose. The subjects captured by Man Ray also magnify the three dimensional

structure and highlights of the figure through the subject's transmission of light. Therefore, Man Ray teases the viewer into recognizing forms on a level of familiarity but purposefully leaves out context, time and scale. Removing these agents of specificity reduces the image to that of figurative abstraction.

Man Ray's 1934 to 1936 photograph, *Perspective d'un cube, d'un sphere, d'un cone, d'un cone, et d'un cylindre* is a geometric formation.³⁴

There is a cube with a sphere on top, while a cylinder stands beside the cube, paradoxically unable to roll. The skewed perspective of the geometry and its rigid placement on the tipping wood serve to amplify its inconsistency by defying conventional physics.



Fig 1. Man Ray – *Perspective d'un cube, d'un sphere, d'un cone, d'un cone, et d'un cylindre* (1934)

Perspective d'un cube[...] is also placed in an entirely black background with no relatable objects that denote or give reference to scale. In the same year, Man Ray created *Surfaces algébriques de IVe degré*, a photograph that is comprised of two objects that resemble fractal patterns.³⁵ Their ambiguity in relation to one another seems to be

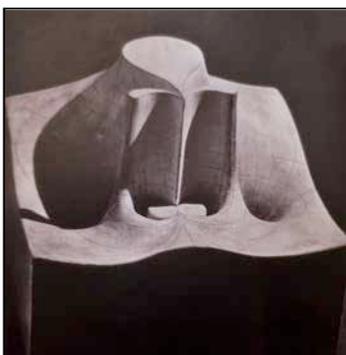


Fig 2. Man Ray - *Mathematical Object, Modular expression of an elliptical function* (1934-1936)

only based in their metallic material properties, their pointed appearance, and their ability to pierce the sky. If it were a drawing, the foreground object in *Surfaces algébriques de IVe degré* would be the inverse of the background object. The background object stands on the ground plane. The foreground object is elevated and, depending on the perspective of the viewer, it could

interlock and create the appearance of a solid whole object.

Following these works, two more geometric works by Man Ray dated 1934-1936, were examined. *Mathematical Object, Modular expression of an elliptical function* appears to be akin to a bouquet of geometric forms exploding out of amorphous cones.³⁶ The amorphous cones are held up by black cylindrical supports and the entire sculpture is resting on a solid plate. The ground plane is barely visible. The background is completely black. The sculpture looks like a three dimensional fractal that has been solidified.

Finally, Man Ray's *Polyédres* photograph is a geometric form made out of wire. The wires in *Polyédres* form a polyhedron. The photo was filmed on a black background with a white floor. There is no sense of scale. The picture has a sense of ambiguity. Strong contrast exists between the black and white lines of the photograph.

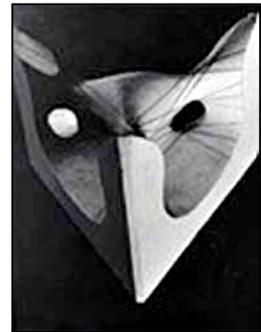


Fig 3. Man Ray – *Polyédres* (1934-36)

These four photographs by Man Ray exhibit interest in geometric forms, the three dimensionality of the sculpture is of interest as is the sculpture's ability to catch and cast light. There is no sense of scale in any of the photographs because there is no reference for scale. The photographs are pure geometry—it transmits light, therefore it is. The biggest contrast can be found between *Mathematical Object, Modular expression of an elliptical function* and *Polyédres*, the amorphous smooth cones of *Mathematical Object*[...] are in rigid opposition to the angular, extremely geometric lines of *Polyédres*.

Man Ray has a certain soft-focus aesthetic when using the female as the subject of the photograph, *Anatomia* from 1929.³⁷ The photograph consists of a woman's head bent



Fig 4. Man Ray - *Anatomia* (1929)

backwards, while the shot composition is from her neck up. The image is ambiguous: her expression is unknown, the forces acting upon her are unknown, and her placement in the world is unknown because of the dark background. Composed very much in the same manner, *Cuello* shows woman whose head is bent backward.³⁸ *Cuello* is also shot in soft focus, the subject's face is non-descript and hard to observe, and only a quarter of the face is seen. Again, the background is completely black, creating a harsh contrast between the porcelain skin of the subject and the ominous black background. In *Mujer desnuda y tela de araña* (1936), we see a full frontal shot of a nude woman with her arms folded behind her head.³⁹ A spider web covers her vagina and wisps out towards the bounds of the photograph. As before, the background is completely dark, and the model looks away from the camera. The women in this collective group of photographs never look at the camera or acknowledge the presence of a viewer looking upon them. Their context is completely arbitrary, there is nothing seductive or alluring

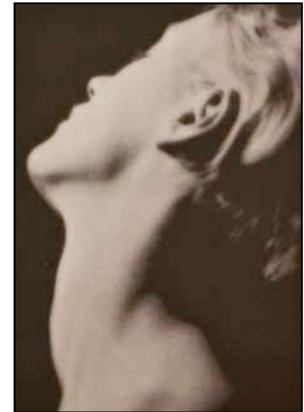


Fig 5. Man Ray – *Cuello* (1929)



Fig 6. Man Ray - *Mujer desnuda y tela de araña* (1936)

about their gaze, in fact many of them seem as if they are in the throws of pain or embarrassment, as in the case of *Anatomia* and *Mujer desnuda y tela de araña*, respectively. *Mujer desnuda y tela de araña* is the photo with the biggest contrast against *Anatomia* and *Cuello*, *Mujer*[...] has a spider web overlay and Man Ray is clearly making a statement with this photograph. *Anatomia* and

Cuello could be seen as formal experiments in the interplay of darkness and light on the body's surface. In *Mujer*[...] Man Ray appears to be magnifying his intended message through careful selection of his subject, she is unshaven, a bit overweight and her demeanor is by no means prudish.

In contrast to Man Ray's photographs, Yves Tanguy's oil paintings emphasize abstract z-space and light sources. Tanguy utilizes ambiguous scale and abstract perspective along with arbitrary placement of biomorphic forms to create surrealist landscapes. In *Surrealist Composition* (1927), spatial depth is acquired through the scaling of objects in z-space. The sky and the ground plane appear to blend together. Biomorphous mountainous forms recall notions of underwater landscapes. The painting is particularly monochromatic, with hints of blues, greens and oranges purposefully placed. An



Fig 7. Yves Tanguy – *Surrealist Composition* (1927)



Fig 8. Yves Tanguy - *Old Horizon* (1928)

amorphous shape reaches vertically toward the sky. The shadows on the ground plane are inconsistent, some of the amorphous shapes cast shadows that strike directly behind the object itself, and some of the shadows are cast into the sky and project oddly against the mountainous surface destroying perspective and space. In the same year, Tanguy created *Old Horizon*, a painting entirely created with brown and green earth tones.⁴⁰ Here, the shadows imply the ability for the amorphous shapes to float in the background of the painting. “Floating” is possible because the shape's shadows are

not connected to the form itself. Clouds wisp gently across the ground.

Anthropomorphic white lines punctuate the z-space. Lines in the foreground appear as divots in the sand, while oil slicks and scuffmarks fill the negative space. There is also a faint symmetrical design in the foreground, spouting white and black markings from a central point.

Tanguy's 1927 painting *Belomancy I* strongly recalls an underwater landscape or moonlit desert.⁴¹ Biomorphous forms in the background hark to objects that resemble seaweed, or the tenuous organic weeds of an imaginative mind. Soft lateral brush strokes recall mental images of floating bubbles, or images that could be considered visualizations of wind turbulence. Piercing the entire composition is an overlay of

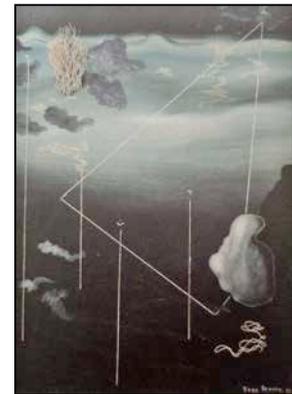


Fig 9. Yves Tanguy – *Belomancy I* (1927)

geometric forms and vertical lines. Besides these geometric lines, other amorphous lines punctuate the foreground and light up the darkness. A horizon is clearly defined at the upper third of the painting. The ground plane is bumpy and consists mostly of a



Fig 10. Yves Tanguy - *The Passage of a Smile* (1935)

monochromatic color scheme. The limited use of color makes the reds in the biomorphous form toward the background pop and invites the viewer to focus on its tenuous formation. In 1935, Tanguy created *The Passage of a Smile* where he employed deep z-space, and a low horizon in the bottom third of the composition.⁴² The formations in the painting resemble rock-like objects that cut through the sky. There is limited use of color, the sky has reds and dark blues, but for the most part brown is the dominant color. The formations seem

to be systematically placed to guide the eye into staring deep into the horizon. There is plasticity to the objects, even though they resemble an amorphous rock structure. Their shadows are consistent and help the viewer understand their placement on the ground plane by being attached to the object.

The central features that create the brand of Tanguy's work are his interest in manipulation of z-space and the unusual perspectives created based on shadow placement. All of Tanguy's work has a basis in nature and seems to recall images of the ocean's floor. These paintings are also layered and cause the eye to move around the landscape, feeling the vastness of its arbitrary design. All of Tanguy's work has amorphous forms, which are unidentifiable as naturally occurring objects. Some of the contrasts between works occur when the amorphous (or biomorphic forms) are connected with harsh geometric overlays, one such example can be seen in *Belomancy I*. Other contrasts occur when looking at the amorphous forms, the later Tanguy work from 1935, such as *The Passage of a Smile*, has a plastic sheen that is not evident in the 1927 works.

Like Tanguy, the artistic branding of Hans Arp is engaged with the formal concerns of biomorphic abstraction, and with the interplay between natural light and shadows, the bounds of the artistic composition, the utilization of amorphous forms, and transmission of light through three-dimensional sculpture throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. Arp created

amorphous reliefs that are a precursor to Tanguy's painterly biomorphic formations.⁴³ There is a layered aspect to Arp's work that involves the physical bounds of the

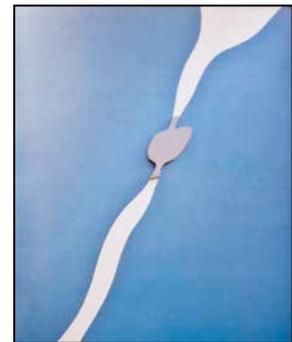


Fig 11. Hans Arp – *Head* (1927)

composition, the frame, and the interplay of available light that occurs with the artwork itself.

For example, in the 1927 composition *Head*, the background is a blue painted wood.⁴⁴ The middle is a grey raised wood relief, amorphous in shape, and placed in the center. Outlying the grey center section, white

amorphous streams extend diagonally. *Human*

Concretion (1934) has a completely black background to emphasis the amorphous freestanding form.⁴⁵

When comparing *Human Concretion* to Man Ray's

Perspective d'un cube[...], one can immediately draw

relation between the sculptural forms Arp created and the ambiguous black and white

photography of Man Ray. In 1932, Arp created *Star Seed*, an amorphous frame with an amorphous relief of white shapes that reach the bounds of the frame.⁴⁶ The composition resembles cow patterns, but is also affected by available interior lighting creating new dark areas based upon the direction of light hitting the composition's surface.

Arp's work influenced the amorphous shapes seen in the work of Tanguy.⁴⁷ In Arp's reliefs there exists a strong interest in the dynamics of light that is akin to the ambiguous shadowing elements of Tanguy and Man Ray. Arp also occasionally plays



Fig 13. Hans Arp - *Human Concretion* (1934)

with the concept of where artwork begins and the frame ends, sometimes overlapping or including the frame as a part of the overall composition. Conversely, some of the elements in Arp's work are less free flowing, *Head* is diagonally amorphous but still resides in a square frame.



Fig 12. Hans Arp – *Star Seed* (1932)

New Contributions in Regard to Historical Research

In author Grant Kim's *Surrealism and the Visual Arts Theory and Reception*, he writes about the power and importance of Surrealism to abandon rationality in favor of the imagination.

“Created by the mind released from rational control, the poetic image satisfies human desire and has the potential to become real, not merely as an entity separate from the individual, but as a world in which it is possible to live.”⁴⁸

This is the power of motion graphics: to create a new perspective through which one can view the world. Kim highlights endless possibilities unhindered by experiential knowledge. This shift in rationality creates imaginative mental images that propose new areas of experience beyond established human understanding. Shifts in causal action are fundamental to brand identity because it creates a highly memorable visual that entices the viewer to interact and recall the brand. Author Grant Kim's quote further reiterates this by stating that poetic images entice the viewer into a world of imaginative landscape where the participant can escape.

My contribution differs from the principals of surrealism in that I do not reject logic. I challenge Breton when he states:

“[...] no more logic [...] it must be hunted down, beaten to a pulp, reduced to nothing. [...] Only one prescription: let the ‘unknown guest’ express himself in his depth, his totality, automatically.”⁴⁹

Breton states that logic must be removed to gain access to areas of true poetic artistry and that this artistry can only be seen through the unconscious. *Empire* proposes that logic can be disregarded in artwork systematically, as long as consistency is maintained throughout the composition. Therefore, I am deploying illogical forms in a logically consistent linear narrative. Logic can be stifled and such notions are present in my thesis contribution, the houses parody logical structures through their illogical foundations. This logical distortion suggests that elements in the world of *Empire* are based on alternate properties. However, this is the only illogical manifestation presented in the campaign and it does not pull the viewer out of the composition because it is a consistent element in the visual narrative.

In adapting elements of Surrealism to a brand's identity I am venturing into an area of experiential design based upon creating an alternate world. In order for the alternate world to have a cohesive brand experience there must be consistency, and this need for consistency is a selective interplay between the principles of Surrealism and that of science and rationality. In order for the observer to understand the function and application of elements within this alternate world, their mechanics should be familiar but causally inconsistent with the known properties of solids and physics in the understood world. This shift in convention will create a memorable brand experience that drives the narrative into new areas of episodic storytelling and advertising. Since I am utilizing consumer familiarity I am partially violating some of the principles of Surrealism, rejections such as logic, rationality, and unconscious thought.

Starting in early January 2010 work began on the visual campaign. Before storyboarding, one of the first steps was to map out and formulate how characters could move and interact within the environment. A large tree would act as the epicenter for the Empire and also as a point of reference for each



Fig 14. Giorgio De Chirico - *Tomatoes* (1936)

shot. Anywhere the viewer stands inside the Empire, the tree orientates viewer as to their location. The tree is an important element because it provides visual cues as to how the inhabitants of this Empire divide social classes and how they respect the environment in which they reside. The tree itself is broken and the limbs shorn off, implying a decadent society. The overgrowth and supremely large nature of the tree hark to the oversized fruits and vegetables of surrealist artist Giorgio De Chirico. The tree itself is built upon a harsh landscape of stone. The weathered landscape and the restrictive nature of the clothing required an automated system of transportation. The vain characters in the Empire must ride on rail systems to gain access to the schoolhouse atop the tree.

The scale of the surrounding landscape that bordered the epicenter tree was

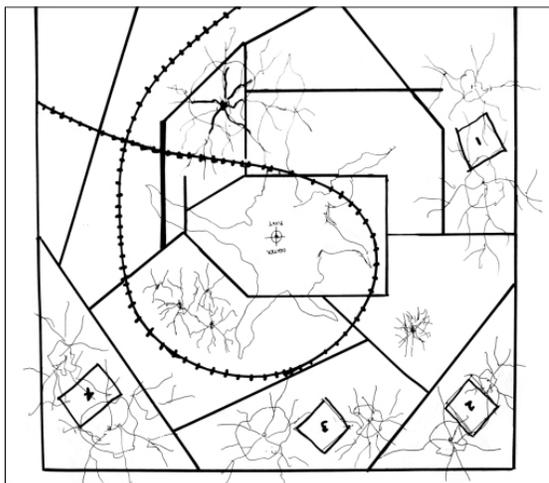


Fig 15. *Empire - Tree Landscape Top View / Profile View* (2010)

determined by placing boxes of different sizes on edge to mimic a varied terrain. A measurement was made and the general width and length of the floor arrangement was established. A scale drawing was created that showed the placement of the tree houses on the perimeter of the model and their location to the rail system and the epicenter tree.

The first thing constructed was the tree itself. It had a 4X4 inch wood armature that was cut at a 20-degree angle to cast the trunk of the tree in a position simulating movement. Two-inch high-density polystyrene foam was glued to the armature with expanding polyurethane foam. The basic shape was made using a serrated knife and a



Fig 16. *Empire* – “Rotating Empire Tree” (2010)

long bladed reciprocating saw. Using a grinder and a 5-inch cutting disk made the bark detail. Once the tree was shaped it was coated in an acrylic base coat to protect the foam from damage from any spray paint used from aerosol cans. The spray paint would etch the foam if it were not first coated in an acrylic paint.

In order to film the model in the round it was determined to have the model table pivot around a central axis. This was accomplished by using wheel bearings and roller-ball castors that provided near effortless smooth movement for filming all elements of the

model. A system of electrical brushes on copper-ringed commutators provided the model with electrical current without wire entanglement when the need arose for lighting and train movement while filming.

Experimentation for rock formations was complicated. After using real rock impressions in modeling clay and casting plaster in the impressions it was determined that the process not only was time consuming and costly but it lacked the desired effect. An accidental spill of lacquer thinner on a piece of polystyrene provided a result that produced the most dramatic effect of rock structure for the model. When the etching of the polystyrene subsided, an acrylic paint was applied to provide the landscape presently on the model.

Real mosses, miniature ferns and lichens were glued to various areas to provide a juxtaposition of hard and soft surfaces that would lend visual interest to the environment. Other surfaces were covered with adhesive glue and either sprinkled with colored flocking or sawdust that was later spray-painted to achieve a rugged appearance. A clear epoxy resin was spread over a black acrylic painted surface to provide the simulation of water. The model was made in four segments that could be removed from the main frame of the unit for transport. A rolling base was made to provide mobility to the model, as the model would need to be moved to natural light or a location where a blue screen could be erected for filming. The tree houses were made from split popsicle sticks, 1/16-inch luan mahogany, and cereal box cardboard covered with acrylic paint.

The entire model's surface was built from polystyrene foam. The cost, ease of adhesion, forgiveness of the medium, etching capability and lightweight, made this the best medium for the project. The train track was made of HO gauge flex track, fashioned

in a double loop. The trestles were made from 1/4 inch strips of pine that were glued together with a high strength cyanoacrylate glue. The entire track was functional and can be regulated from a point located on the side housing of the model. The interior of the tree houses have LED lights that can be lit from the same location as the track regulator. The overall presentation of the Empire model was made to mimic an excision of a plot of land from earth and placed on display for observation in a surreal setting.

The handmade model houses and large rotating tree assemblage took about two months to complete. After this time, work was done on refining visual briefs, creating animatics of the story and putting all of this information online to garner interest from prospective buyers.

Starting in June 2010, work began on the 3D side of model creation. The 3D models had parameters; all the models needed to have some kind of natural energy such as counterweights or wind power, and they needed to be made of wooden textures or natural elements, including an assortment of metals. Further, the environment needed to convey the idea that this was once an intelligent society that was in a state of deterioration.

At the start of June a majority of the live action had been shot, the next step was to populate the footage with surrealistic houses and devices. After creating a rough cut, all the footage was imported into Adobe After Effects and rough sketches were painted directly over each shot to attain the placement and arrangement of the 3D models. This process also helped to create a blueprint to give to a compositor. The blueprint consisted of every individual shot name with timecode and frame numbers, thus giving the compositor instant reference in 3D tracking programs for matchmoving. The rough cut

also became the reference document for future work, eliminating time spent creating extraneous models.

The initial concept for the “Hanging Tree House” was to create a reciprocal structure where the house and the tree formed around each other. The elements of foliage and a profusion of limbs are incongruously absent. The stump is a gnarled remnant of a tree that appears more as an inverted root. The shingled roof with its substantial truss system dominates the structure and provides shelter for not only the walls below, but also the entire tree stump that supports it. The mechanical mass of gears topped with wing-like vanes moves from a vertical to a horizontal position when wind strikes the blades. The arched windows and door are part of the overall strength of the structure. The most obvious omission is a system of entry into the house. The inhabitants of the Empire have become so self absorbed that the very elements to access shelter have been neglected in order to maintain their vane narcissistic lives. These houses without entrances become useless icons. They are a testament to what once was and to a generation that has ceased to be productive.

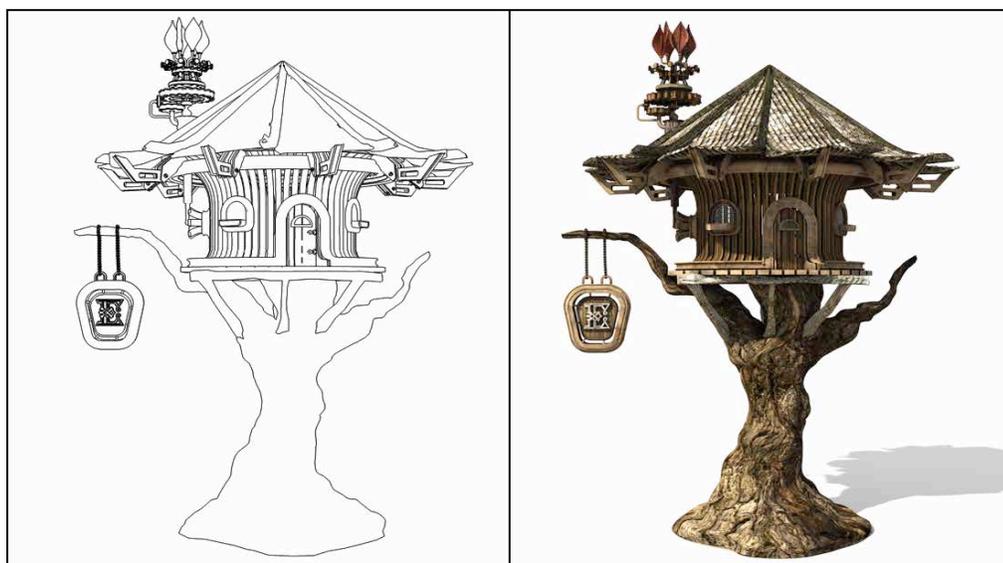


Fig 17. *Empire* – Hanging Tree House (2010)

The next model, “Tower House” is a lookout tower that is built upon a stone foundation. The house exists as a point of observation for xenophobic inhabitants to make sure the bounds of the Empire have not been infiltrated or crossed. This house was greatly inspired by the paintings of surrealist artist Jim Shaw, who built structures onto absurd foundations that served simply as testaments to form over function. The



Fig 18. Jim Shaw - *Landscape with Padlock* (n.d.)

copula that protrudes out of the center of the roof represents the dominant form in this house. By having windows in the copula, light and ventilation is allowed to enter into the main room of the house. The entrance is carved out of rock that implies substantial strength and longevity. The braces supporting the roof only add to the idea that the house is overbuilt and solid. The detail in the glass grates reflects the overall isolationist attitude of the Empire's inhabitants.



Fig 19. *Empire – Tower House* (2010)

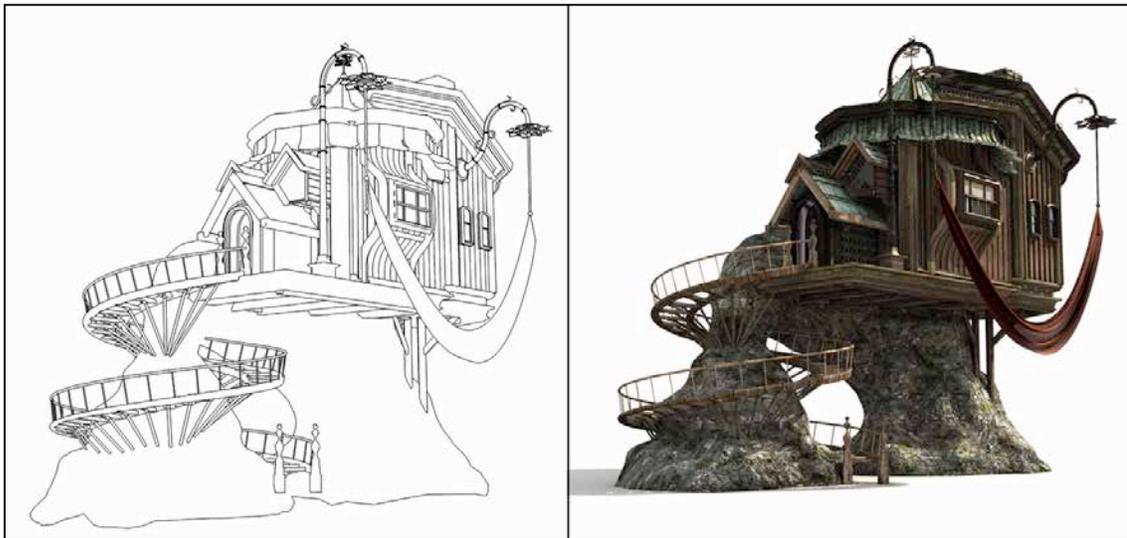


Fig 20. *Empire* – Rock Arch House (2010)

As work progressed some of these houses took on a much larger scale and became full set pieces that action could be composited against. “Rock Arch House” began conceptually as a desire to build an oversized house onto a foundation that would be entirely too fragile to hold its weight. This house is a combination of many complex roof elements. There are aspects of this house that are similar to mechanical elements created by Marcel Duchamp. Similar to Duchamp, elements of familiar objects were mixed to create an entirely new object. In “Rock Arch House” a cloth carrier adorns the front of the house and is held up by two rotary blades that spin on ornate poles. This amalgamation of known formal elements and familiar motion constructed in an abstract hierarchy creates an entirely new object. This new object is intriguingly familiar yet new in the mind of the viewer. The base of the house is anchored to a stone arch. The surreal aspect of a stone arch acting as a foundation draws inspiration once again from Jim Shaw. The decision to build on form



Fig 21. Marcel Duchamp – *Bicycle Wheel* (1951)

over stability is indicative of the short-term wasteful culture that inhabits the Empire. Flower petals largely inspired the costuming in *Empire* and it seemed fitting that architecture in this land would be inspired by natural plant life. Thus, even roofing is modeled after shapes and patterns similar to that of flower petals.

Early on in the storyboarding process one of the ideas that developed was to create houses that could open and close with the pull of a cord. These houses would work like an umbrella or a venetian blind. The operator would pull a cord and the house would collapse upon itself. This idea was incredibly time-consuming to engineer. One of the issues facing the creation of every model was how to automate the house for ease of use by a compositor. A script animates all of these models. These 3D scripts are akin to dominos. The way to tip the first domino is to create a script that says at frame one start this ‘H’ rotation that causes this ‘Z’ rotation. This starts the chain reaction. The script drives the movement of one rotation and that one rotation translates to the movement of many objects designated by operator. Engineering rotations to translate to expanding and contracting positioning coordinates proved to be a tall order and extremely time consuming. Ultimately, this is something the viewer would never see or be aware of its occurrence. The motion in the houses run independently. No animation has to be considered by anyone taking the project files. This scripting animation process speeds up the compositor’s job and makes for much more manageable file sizes.

“Unfolding House” is an example of one of these complex animating houses, everything in the house is run by a large windmill on the left of the house, the windmill spins and turns screws on the inside of the house. When a screw starts to wind, the roofing begins to unfold and cover the house. The animation of the roof expanding is



Fig 22. *Empire* – Unfolding House (2010)

staggered giving a wave-like appearance to the roof unfolding. To seamlessly allow the roofing to raise the front siding begins at a 90-degree angle and folds down to cover the face of the house. The house is built upon a barren tree whose branches have protruded through the siding of the structure. This house is a shelter with the designed purpose of bringing the outside in. “Unfolding House” is a unique blend of industrial, residential and commercial architectural elements.

“Fallen Tree House” was first conceptualized as a house that was built upon a large fallen tree. The house grew in scope and it became a large set piece. At the start,

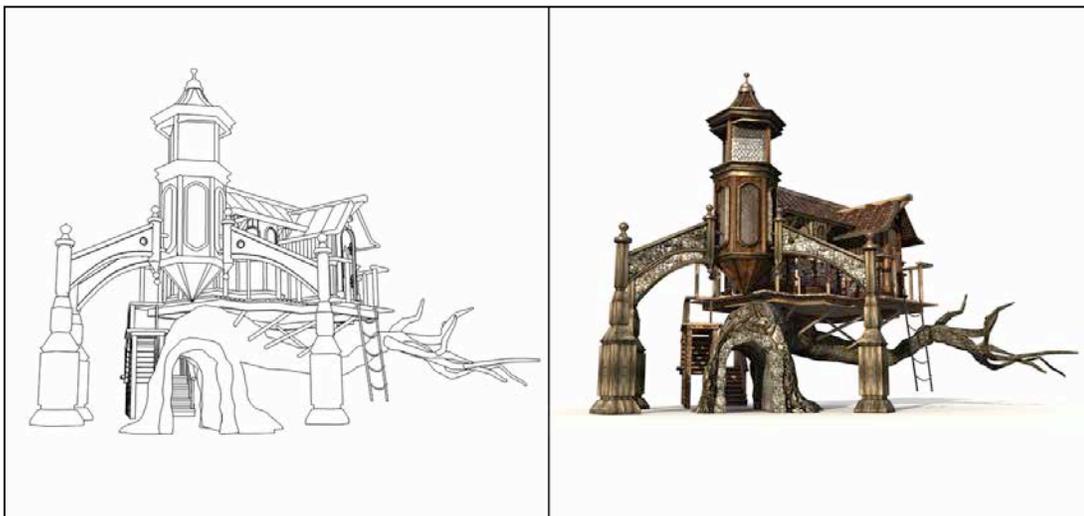


Fig 23. *Empire* – Fallen Tree House (2010)

the main visual appeal of the house was the amount of z-depth the house would possess. The z-depth came from the branches that would extend from the background into the foreground. As the house was being built the main issue became how to properly position a house upon a fallen tree. A tunnel was build into the tree trunk that led to a pair of stairs and provided an entry point into the house. The house's width suggested that it should be set as an element resting on the tree, rather than being a part of the tree. As with almost all of these models, the house's mass appears greater than the tree could withstand. To provide a sense of movement and lack of symmetry, the house was set askew atop the fallen tree. Visual interest was added by including a light tower beside the house. The light tower has a surrealistic element of being held up by flying buttresses, which are completely superfluous because such a structure does not run the risk of its sides bowing outward.

“Stilted House” was created first as a structure that could rise from ground level to an elevated state. The gears underneath served as a rotating piston that was driven by a windmill at the back of the structure. Utilizing the aforementioned scripting animation, the movement of the windmill caused each gear to spin in sync and raise the house to its

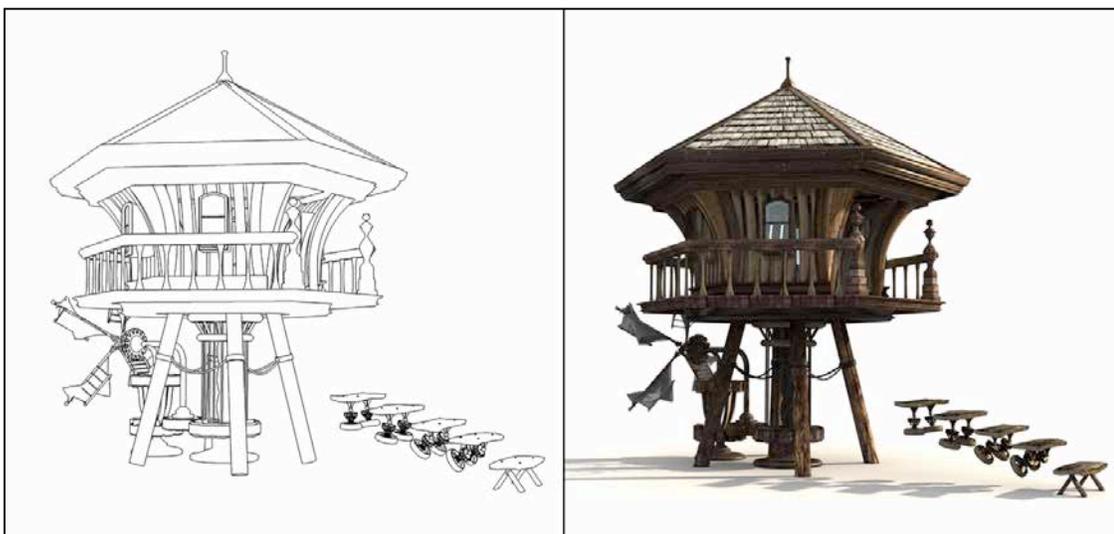


Fig 24. *Empire* – Stilted House (2010)

resting location in the sky. The idea was solid, especially for such surrealistic structures, but it caused a problem that was unforeseen. When there was too much movement occurring from these modeled elements, whose main purpose was to sell the alternate realism of this world, they began to become the center of attention instead of the characters on screen. Therefore, it became a balancing act between adding motion elements and keeping elements static. Instead of the house raising and lowering, stairs were created that run on turbines and gears. These “Flying Stairs” rise, lower, and bob, based upon the users interaction with them. They are far less distracting than an entire structure raising and lowering behind the protagonists of this story.

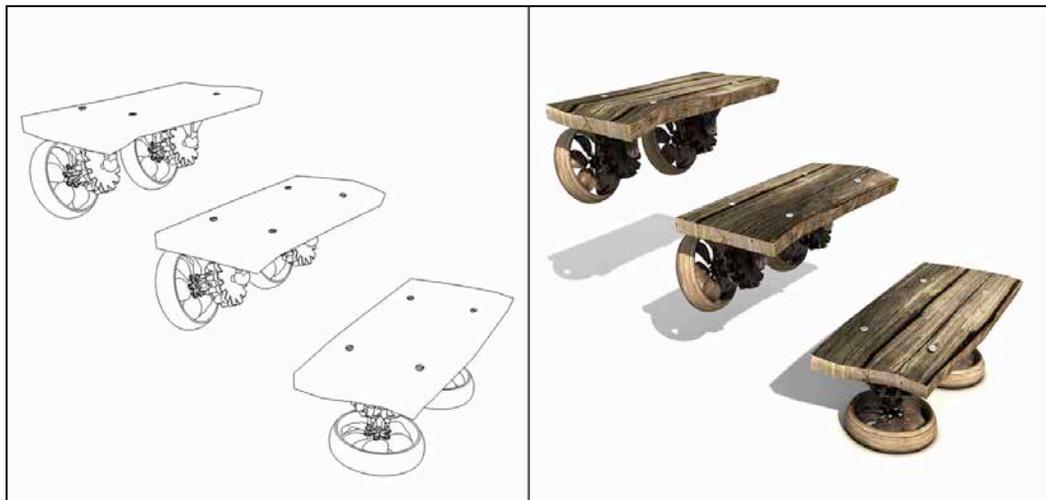


Fig 25. *Empire* – Flying Stairs (2010)

During the creation of the large “Rotating Empire Tree” model, it was decided that houses and the “Tree Elevator” that carried inhabitants to the structure at the crest of the tree would be created in 3D. This was done because early tests proved that the ability to track 3D objects onto the tree was possible and would provide greater realism and movement than a static handmade model. One of the interesting factors about the “Tree Elevator” was its ability to scale to any scene. For a compositor, the model was scripted so when the elevator moved along the vertical Y-axis all the gears spin and animate

appropriately. Correspondingly, adjusting one parameter adds procedural track and supports for the elevator to ride on. The track itself was unique in that it is a ratcheted rail with a ladder structure behind it. In case of a free fall, there are safety stops along the track's surface in the form of protrusions should a mechanical failure occur. The "Tree Elevator" was part of a signature design of exposed geared devices fabricated from wooden elements. Aged wood is the dominant component of all the mechanical devices.

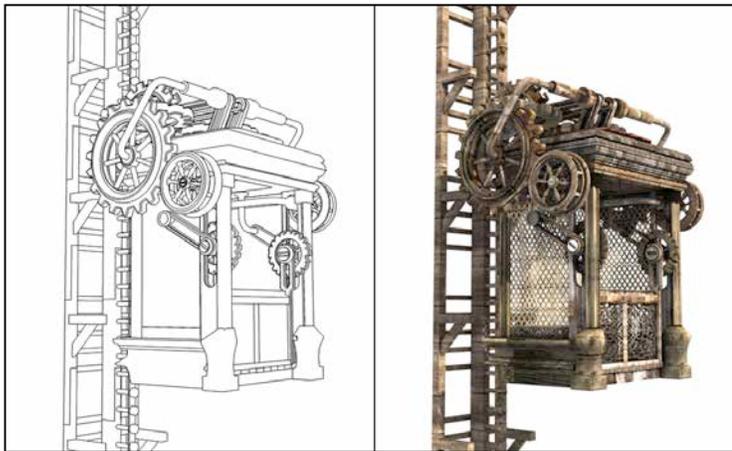


Fig 26. *Empire – Tree Elevator* (2010)

The physics of the structures can be visually followed as they move in a manner that legitimizes the overall function of the object. Embellishments such as deep cut moldings

give the "Tree Elevator" an artisan's influence. The Da Vinci-like design evokes a master's thoughtfulness. The execution in basic materials provides an aged appearance that might be reflective of the Renaissance.

The "Water Wheel" is an energy source inside the Empire's landscape, harkening to a simpler and efficient source of energy consumption. Motion is caused by a barrel of water spilling its contents onto a

section of the wheels edged slots. Unlike a flowing source of water, such as a stream or river, the barrel provides a short-term mechanical energy source.

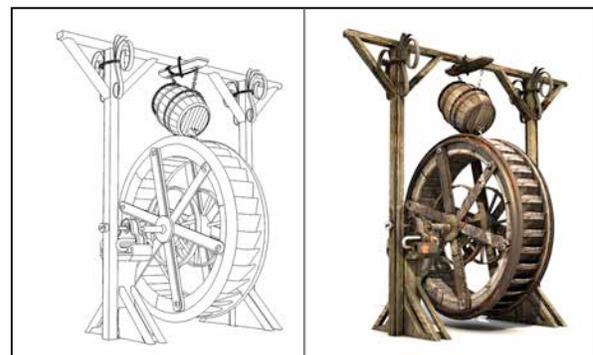


Fig 27. *Empire – Water Wheel* (2010)

The “Water Wheel” was created as a modular structure to place beside more surrealistic houses, implying their energy source. The “Water Wheel” was useful because it provided a sense of consistency over many of the houses, transmitting both a pleasing motion and varied light reflection.

“Courtesy Mirrors” are found throughout the Empire and are directly related to the Empire character’s vanity. Created much out of necessity for Empire inhabitants,



Fig 28. Tadashi Sugimata – *Rampancy* (1938)

they are fashioned out of the stand-a-lone structures of surrealist artist Tadashi Sugimata who created similar doorframes in the middle of open expanses. The “Courtesy Mirror” expands with the pull of a lever at the base of the structure.

Once the lever is pulled, mirrored covered doors open to provide a full-side view and frontal view for the Empire's inhabitants. The light that is arched above the mirror provides illumination to the immediate surrounding area at night. This fitting room style mirror is the most used piece of equipment in the land. The narcissistic society spends most of their cherished time primping themselves in front of the mirror. Once a person releases the lever, the mirrors fold back through the use of a

very complex weight, pulley, and spring system. The inhabitants are not impressed with the mechanics of the mirrors, they just know that when the doors close they

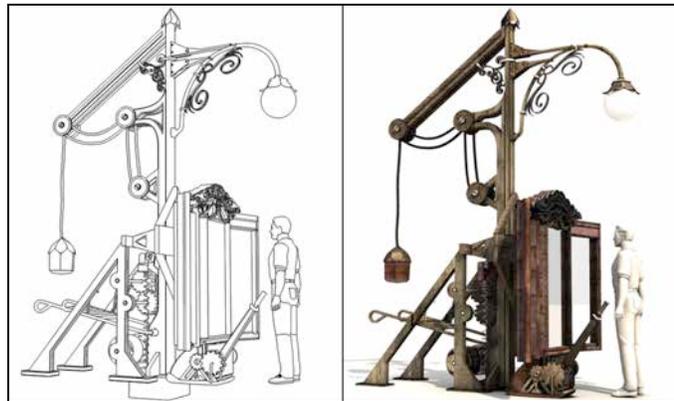


Fig 29. *Empire* – Courtesy Mirror (2010)

cannot see themselves and this fills them with sadness. They must make the effort to pull the lever again to see themselves and calm their anxiety. This behavior is like that of a caged bird viewing itself in a mirror for companionship.

Flying structures in *Empire* are directly related to surrealist dream states, they are self-propelled and autonomously intelligent. These flying objects seem mechanically plausible. They are created very much in the same way Duchamp created his amalgamated objects. They are the blending of known objects to create an entirely new object in the mind of the viewer. These flying objects add visual interest to *Empire*'s vistas and populate z-space adding to the fantastical nature of the story.



Fig 30. Marcel Duchamp – *Rotary Demisphere* (1925)

The “Flying Lanterns” provide a unique source of light in the darkened world of the *Empire* at night. The “Flying Lanterns” are covered in a woven paper fabric that emits a streaming quality of light out of the lanterns. The internal structure of the lantern has a rotary gyroscope that provides balance and stabilization. The inner mechanics are greatly influenced by the *Rotary Demisphere* created by Marcel Duchamp in 1925.

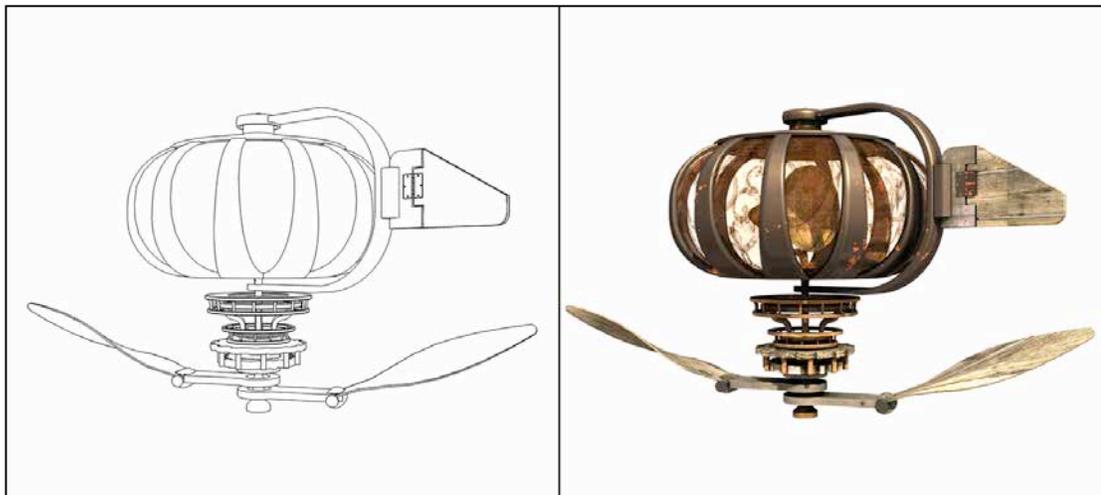


Fig 31. *Empire* – Flying Lanterns (2010)

Propulsion is created through a middle piston that drives the propellers to flap, while the top gears spin the propellers in radial motion.

The “Tree Carriers” are the most advanced technological devices in the Empire. They fly, they maneuver, and they carry huge payloads of timber and tree stumps. The carriers start with the back propellers at a vertical angle that causes the carriers to rise upward. Once far enough in the air, the top propeller bends 90-degrees causing the “Tree Carriers” to move forward. Mechanically the propellers of the “Tree Carriers” run on a system of belts, gears and screws that spin in synchronicity. The stump holder, underneath the flying mechanism rises and lowers on a winch. These “Tree Carriers” are the very things that facilitated the demise of the Empire’s natural resources.

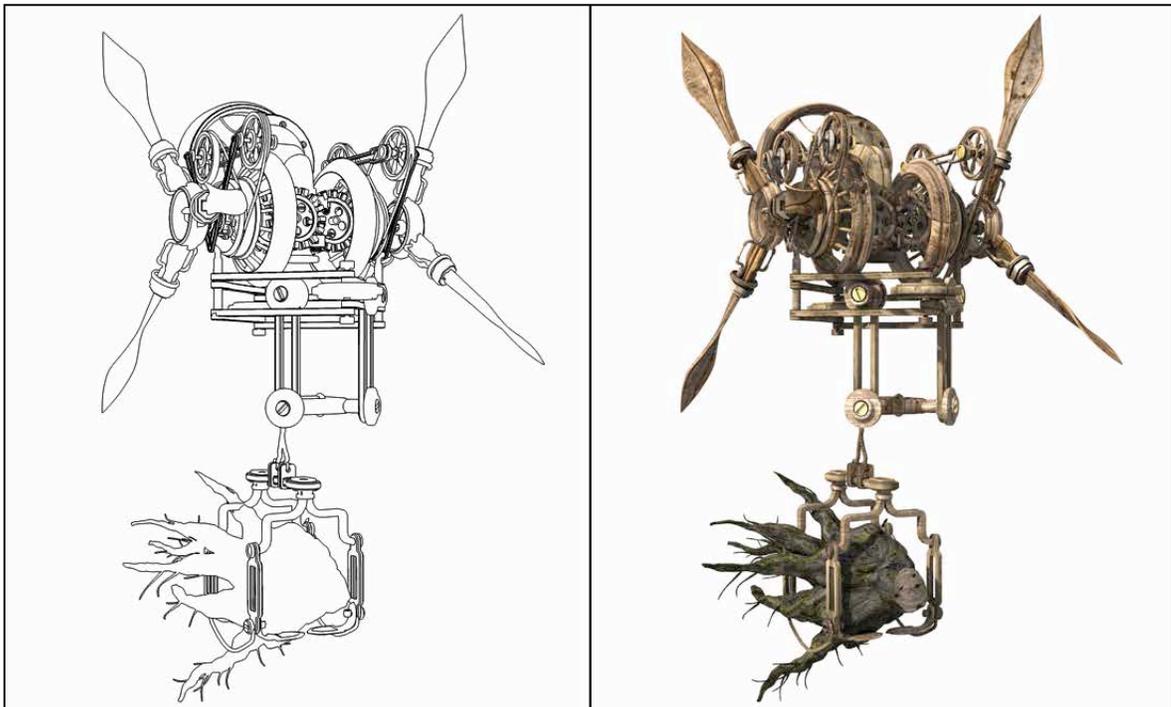


Fig 32. *Empire* – Tree Carriers (2010)

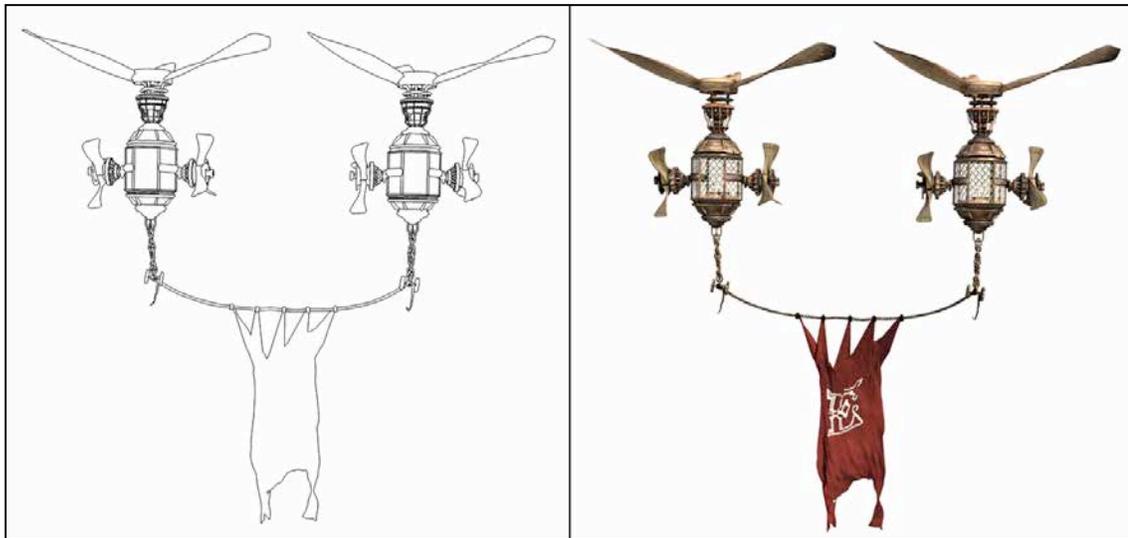


Fig 33. *Empire* – Flag Carrier (2010)

The “Flag Carrier” was created as an element that would fly over the Empire and mark the surrounding land. The “Flag Carrier” was created for use during a big reveal shot of the decadent Empire. Two lanterns that are affixed with gear-driven propellers hold up the “Flag Carrier.” Between the two lanterns a dynamic rope holds the flag in place. The flag is torn and ragged which is a direct reflection on the state of society in the Empire. Each lantern is made of dynamic glass that can break upon impact with hard surfaces. The “Flag Carrier,” much like all the flying elements in *Empire*, works without an operator suggesting there is an ambiguity of purpose that is reflected within the characters of the story.

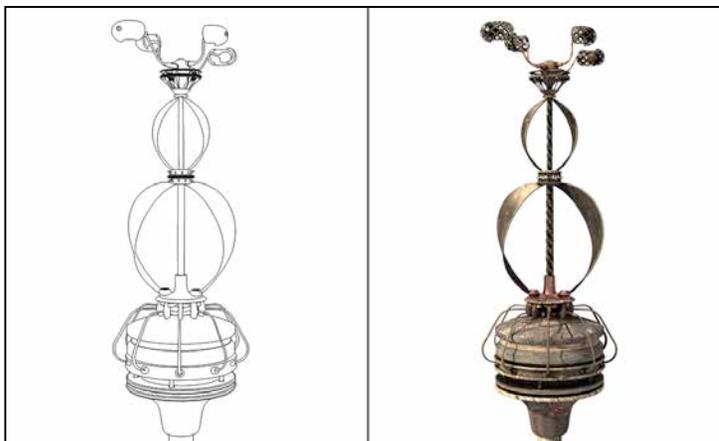


Fig 34. *Empire* – Wind Generator (2010)

“Wind Generator” was initially conceived as an energy creation device to be composited onto the “Rotating Empire Tree.” The “Wind Generator”

would be tracked onto the trestle of a moving cart that is used to transport vain citizens throughout the environment. During early pitch videos, the model was used as element to be placed in fields. The hypnotic rotation of the device placed next to the characters of *Empire* proved to be a compelling fit. The “Wind Generator” appears fantastical but is based upon real-world savonius wind turbines. Under normal conditions, these types of turbines are used for cooling but inside the world of *Empire* they are exponentially multiplied in fields and act as energy creation devices. To match the fantastical quality of the elements in the Empire, the textural surface of the generators is comprised of old copper and wooden materials.

Conclusion

This thesis attempts to create a new world unbound by the rules and experiences of everyday reality. The primary goal is to engage people in the story and these elements of Surrealism help to make that story more memorable. *Empire* is a campaign that was created to sell products, but to a greater degree it was created with the focus of making beautiful art and powerful storytelling. The goal is to make this fantastical story of forbidden love feel imaginary yet beautiful, poignant and relatable. The theory behind *Empire* is to connect the characters and their world to the viewer. If the viewer is moved, recalls the information, and has an emotional connection to the story, then that emotional connection will directly transmit to the Levi’s brand.

Empire is unique but familiar on many levels. *Empire* is essentially a satire on how man lives in a disposable, restrictive, society. Similar to the protagonists in the story and

as a collective whole, we are the characters in our own stories searching for something that is lasting and meaningful. *Empire* can even be seen as a cautionary tale of the destructive environmental and interpersonal effects of conformism.

With the creation of *Empire's* environment I visually attempted to show how causal expectations could be shifted to create a more memorable experience for the viewer. Elements such as floating stairs and flying lanterns, defy natural laws and immediately transform thoughts from ordinary to intriguing. Placing houses on unusual foundations serves to foreshadow the societal consequences of living for the moment instead of the future. The repurposing of known objects into a new representation provides a point of reference for the viewer to accept what they are viewing while still being intrigued as to its function inside the Empire.

Surrealists transformed the banal and the mundane into the extraordinary. The environments and models created for *Empire* have emerged from the surrealist's ability to render the imagination visible.

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