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Culture in Disney Films: A Comparative Analysis of Color, Composition and Rhythm

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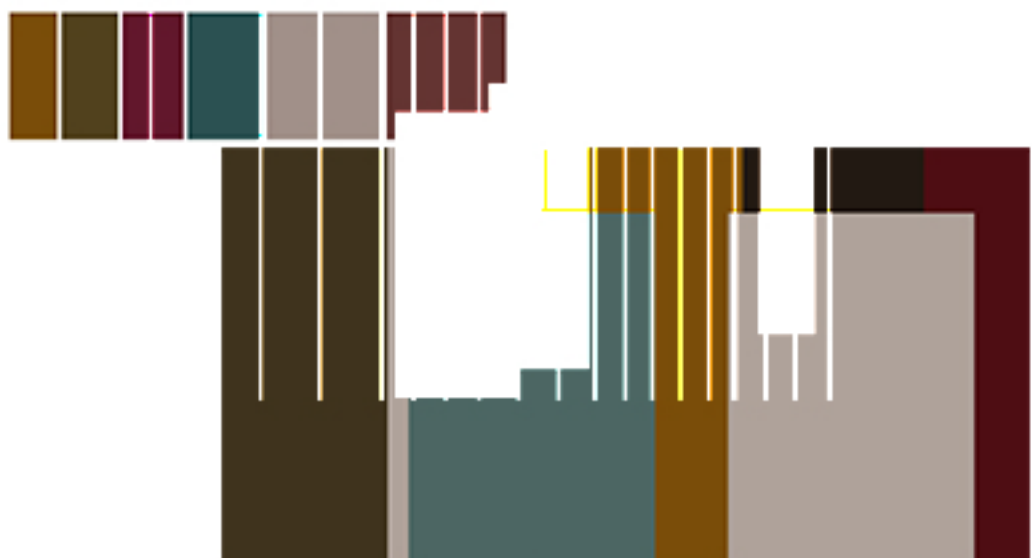
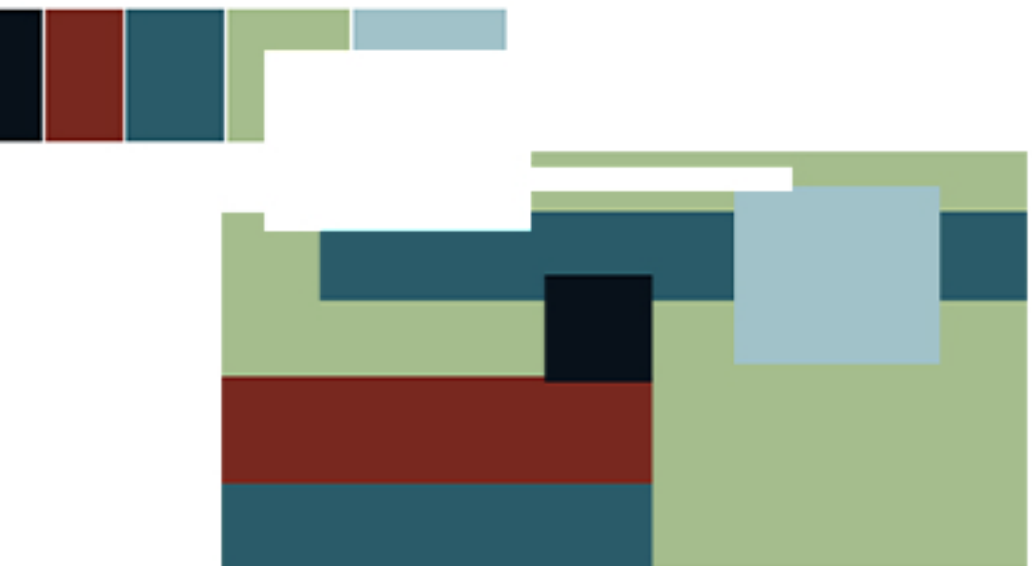
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Culture in Disney Films

A Comparative Analysis of Color, Composition and Rhythm

By: Megan Paul



Culture in Disney Films
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By: Megan Paul

Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design
Bachelor of Interior Design (B.I.D)

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PROJECT SUMMARY

As a student of design, I take inspiration from everything around me. The media I consume, the places I visit, and the people I meet. By choice or not, I and my generation are subject to the various forms of pop culture, film is one of them. Film is one of few art forms which combines several methods and elements of design to produce a cohesive result, as opposed to a singular medium. This forms the connection to design thinking and is the foundation for the study.

Another critical component to pop culture is the ability to reach the masses. Due to their wide reach in America, I have chosen to study popular live-action Disney films which are representative of different cultures. First by studying Marvel’s Black Panther, directed by Ryan Coogler, and continued by screening Disney’s recent live-action adaptations of Aladdin, directed by Guy Ritchie, and Mulan, directed by Niki Caro. By taking a closer look at these movies to gather a deeper understanding of their use of color, composition, and rhythm, I will be identifying a methodology used in designing for different demographics.

Isolating elements within key stills will generate a comparative analysis of the selected films. However, this comparison highlights within each film how the different cultures are coming to light through these tools of representation. These films were selected not as prime examples of the cultures featured, but as a study of how the mainstream media is portraying those cultures and the tools they are using to create them. This is a study of the intersection between pop culture and the representation of various demographics using design tools.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- Week 1:**
Research popular films, committee forming
- Week 2-3:**
Initial Discussions, developing film selection, outline project goals, initial viewings of films
- Week 4-6:**
Capstone goals stated, committee fully formed, first written draft
- Week 7-8:**
Addressing feedback, secondary viewings of films, selection of still frames, refining literature review
- Week 9-10:**
First pass at visual deliverable, studies on color, proportion, and rhythm for each of the selected films
- Week 11-13:**
Final adjustments on draft, amendments to deliverables based on feedback from committee, presentation materials for Defense
- April 28th:** Committee Oral Defense
- May 5th:** Public Presentation
- May 13th:** Final Submission to Scholarworks

INTRODUCTION

The ability to experience another culture enhance life and allow for a broader understanding of different people. The modern age has allowed for more connections and by extension, stronger knowledge about one another. Through mass media a new form of culture has developed, popular culture. Within this new stream of media comes film, which carries design methodology and layers that are beyond that of art forms of a single medium. As individuals we may often have very limited understanding of what embodies a culture, and it can be difficult to pinpoint the intricate details of the customs of a given society into film.

Culture can be understood through different use and meaning of color, architectural styles, and varying use of scale and rhythm. Disney films in particular have begun to represent an increasing range of cultures and stories, which exposes a wide range of individuals to a society they might never experience. While this is not all encompassing, understanding the representation of these facets of society in film assists in creating a limited understanding of the represented demographic.

Many of these films undergo extensive research into representing a space, its society, and their stories. Niki Caro gives examples of this in her interview with Ciara Wardlow, "Every aspect of the filmmaking here was meticulously researched, and not just by me but across every department. We studied Chinese cinema, ancient Chinese art, historical accounts of war. In fact, we have a Tang dynasty military expert we flew into Los Angeles to consult with me and my team as we were designing sequences so that we got them right."¹ While there are always shortcomings, these films are an important tool for individuals to begin to experience something outside of their familiarities, especially due to the large range of viewers. With that being said:

How do these popular American films utilize the elements of color, composition, and rhythm in interior space to impact our understanding of that culture and story?

1. Wardlow, 'Mulan' Director Niki Caro Talks Authenticity, Research, And Responsible Filmmaking, 2020.

This study will isolate scenes from three Disney and Marvel films which have received a large American audience and have each depicted a different culture. By critically analyzing these films and isolating various elements of design within, the side-by-side comparisons will demonstrate clarity in the ways these films were created. With this analysis comes a basis for understanding the key differences of these cultures as well as the methods of film production in use, as well as the ways in which architectural space is used as a tool of cultural representation. Designers can utilize various films to understand larger themes in a societies culture, their methods, and use of design principles.

As a basis for this study, a more concrete understanding of culture and design principles is necessary, as well as a contextualization of the films in question. In his study *Image and Influence*, Andrew Routledge defines culture as patterns of belief, values, and ideas, as well as the objects which they are associated with. This can translate directly to architectural space and color use, which in turn is articulated to a degree in cinematic set design. These feature films receive the budget for extensive research and the exposure to an extremely wide range of individuals. In the first film screened for this study, *Mulan*, there was a budget over one-hundred million dollars.² In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, director Niki Caro stated that "As the projects get bigger, the more certain I am that cultural authenticity and specificity is the only way to approach my work".² This method comes through in the production design as well and will be analyzed both in form and color of interior space. While there has been many criticisms of the film and it's cultural representation, this study seeks to isolate design elements to understand how they specifically are aiding in the process of representation.

A viewing of two other films, *Aladdin* and *Black Panther*, will take place as part of the study, in an attempt to create a methodology which can be applied across various representations and films. The reproduction of Disney's *Aladdin* was released in 2019, twenty-six years after the original 2-D animation. This film draws from a few cultures to represent the fictional setting of Agrabah.³ This

2. Reinstein, *Inside the Rich and Timeless Sets of Mulan* 2020.

3. Wardlow, 2020.

contrasts to the representation in Black Panther, released in 2018, which utilizes hyper-realism and futurism to represent the culture of African Americans. The director stated he felt it was important that “with all the technological advancements, you don’t leave the culture out. Africa is a culture that has been colonized and oftentimes demonized, so it was about reclaiming certain things as beautiful and powerful”.⁴ It is important to note that while this film is set in Africa, it has major implications for African Americans and therefore represents more a cultural-utopia.

These three distinctly different frames on culture will provide for a rich side by side comparison in which each are able to demonstrate the use of elements of design in different ways that play to the advantage of that culture. As opposed to studying films from various production companies of the same culture, the method was found to be stronger with the use of similar production companies and the representation of three distinct demographics. This was done not only for visual distinction, but also to refrain from trying to simplify a single culture into the representation made of it by films. While they are important tools being used in this study to understand more from a design context, they are not full embodiments of these people and will not be reduced to such. This method of written scholarship, observation, and comparative analysis through still frame color and spatial studies, will be the basis for my research in attempt to answer the question of how Disney films utilize different design principles to articulate different cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Upon initial selection of this subject matter, reflection on the relationships between film and culture historically was needed. In the work of Dudley Andrew, Cinema and Culture, which was published in the Humanities Journal in August 1985, the works of historic filmmakers are discussed.⁵ Andrew provides several examples of films throughout the twenties and thirties, in order to draw conclusions about the presence of culture in those films. This strongly relates to my research topic because of the use of specific examples to address the impacts on and from, the culture of our time. While I am looking towards a more current, popular culture study, this study will be utilized to understand the structure used to analyze culture in film.

Within the textbook “Understanding Media and Culture” Section 8.3 discusses movies and culture quite broadly. This section discusses American culture and how that was portrayed during specific periods of time. Next, this text discusses the rise of mass culture as well as the growing representation and popularity of social issues in film.⁶ This will assist in my study because it provides a range of information on American pop culture while providing a clearer understanding of its impacts, and how they are changing over time.

In the text Image and Influence, the chapter “Patterns of Culture” addresses directly the relationship between film and culture, as well as the dialogue surrounding popular (or mass) culture.⁷ This particular selection from this text attempts to establish a structure for elements that comprise culture, as well as a method that describes the relationship between Culture, Social Structure, Cinema, and Society. This will provide a great frame of reference for my study which I can build off of and utilize to analyze different films on their ability to incorporate all aspects of culture.

For the synopsis of each film, a range of source materials was needed. Interviews with Niki Caro⁸, Guy Ritchie⁹, and Ryan Coogler¹⁰ were needed. In addition to this, information about each film was

4. Eells, Ryan Coogler: Why I needed to make 'Black Panther' 2018.

5. Andrew, D., Cinema and Culture, August 1985.

6. [Author Removed], Movies and Culture.

7. Tudor, A., Image and Influence: Studies in the Sociology of film. In Image and Influence: Studies in the Sociology of Film, 2015.

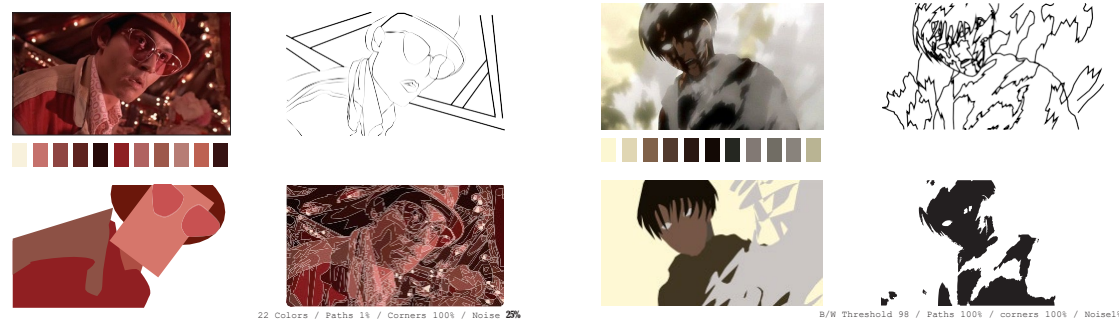
8. Wardlow, 'Mulan' Director Niki Caro Talks Authenticity, Research, And Responsible Filmmaking, 2020.

9. Dodds, How Aladdin's Production Designer Created a Dazzling Live-Action Version of Agrabah 2019.

10. Eells, Ryan Coogler: Why I needed to make 'Black Panther' 2018.

found through the International Movie Database¹¹, and film reviews of each were collected.^{12 13 14} These reviews provide an insight into how scholars in this field reacted to these films. Though often addressing issues outside of the production design, these are helpful tools for understanding how these are being viewed by the public.

As a basis for understanding color theory, symbolism, and the design elements a range of texts will be utilized. *Color Theory: A Critical Introduction*¹⁵, by Aaron Fine, as well as works done by Josef Albers.¹⁶ These sources will support the decision-making process in each of the design studies at hand. In addition, this project was heavily informed by the project based in movie stills done by Professor Torrey Tracy in IDES 1045. Jason Cote, a student at Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design, describes his methods to utilize everything “from linework to color blocking in illustrator, creating color palettes, and creating edited variations of color and hue in photoshop, and then compiling these works together in InDesign, this project touched on many useful aspects of digital design and continued my progression in the workflow of these programs”.¹⁷ This project allows for better understanding of these still frames as well as the tools needed to make the studies, and was and helped to inform this research methodology.



Student work by Jason Cote, IDES 1045. ¹⁷

COLOR THEORY AND RHYTHM

While color is universal, our understanding of it is not. There are many facets of color theory that are derived from Western culture and do not necessarily reign true for all cultures. This idea is explored in the text “Color Theory: A Critical Introduction”, written by Aaron Fine. Throughout, he reminds us that color is a way we can encode our environment and are a system of symbolism across all levels of society.¹⁸ He then goes further into describing the use of specific colors, the color used in Indian Mandalas, and the use of color in Islamic art and architecture.

“Certainly, the translation of color terms is fraught, and many cultures seem to frame color first in terms of brightness, muddiness, or even flashing or sparkling qualities- before they consider the various hues of the rainbow. But the case for red as a separate color term alongside or just after black and white has other supports besides ancient text.”¹⁸

Although vibrancy and brightness are often considered, red is still seen as the most prominent color in many cultures, not just Western cultures. Because of its presence in fire, blood, in animals signaling to a mate, and in fruit to show its ripeness, there are many indicators of red being used in nature to stand out. This creates its importance in color theory all over the world. This highlights the unique associations to color that we have, and the emotions that might create.

In these films color is used to create emphasis and dynamic compositions, while rhythm highlights the subject and creates framing. This technique has been researched by Josef Albers in his “Homage to the Square” study as well as the “Study for Sanctuary”.¹⁹ These studies seek to articulate how the use of color, line and fill work together to force an understanding of depth and composition on the page. These studies create dimensionality from simple forms, and reinforce the method used in the still frame studies of this research.

12. IMDb, 2020.

13. Gates & Warner, *Wakanda Forever: The Pleasures, The Politics, and The Problems*, 2018.

14. Romano, *Disney’s Live-Action Aladdin Is Almost a Charming Rom-Com - When It’s Not a Sluggish Musical*, 2019.

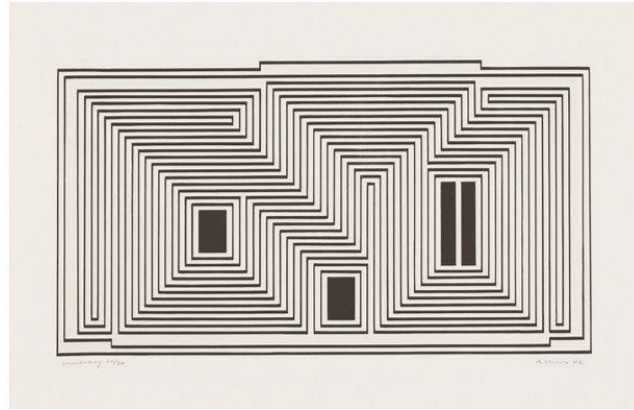
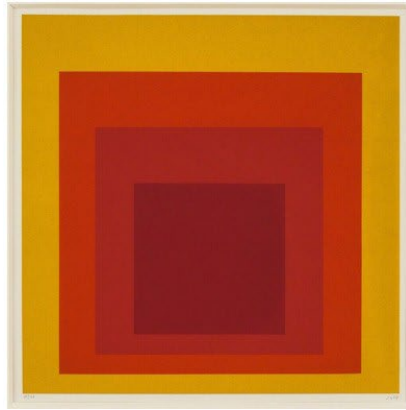
15. Reinstein, *Inside the Rich and Timeless Sets of Mulan 2020*.

16. Fine, *Color Theory: A Critical Introduction*, 2022.

17. Cote, IDES 1045, 2021.

18. Fine, 2022.

19. Smith, *Homage to Mexico: Josef Albers and His Reality-Based Abstraction*, 2017.



Josef Albers, "Homage to the Square"²¹ and "Study for Sanctuary"¹⁹

PROCESS DESCRIPTION

In an attempt to have a fully informed view of these films, three separate screenings will take place, followed by supplementary viewings of select scenes. The first screening will involve only mental notetaking, and a short reflection following the film. This process will allow for less momentary interruption, gathering a more informed view of all three. Following the first viewing, the secondary screening will take place. Now, annotating throughout the film, drawing connections between the use of color and the emotions or actions taking place. This will also consist of recording the screen time of interior space, noting which architectural styles are visible, spatial proportions, how those change dependent on the plot, and drastic changes in color across the film. Results of these screenings will be seen in the individual film synopsis.

Following the close reading of all three individual films, comparisons will be made regarding the ways in which these films are utilizing color, scale, and architectural forms differently. Utilizing sources found in color theory and symbolism across the represented cultures, as well as the use of interior space, proportion, and architectural forms, A third viewing will be made in order to select four scenes across each film that can be comparatively analyzed in these categories. These scenes should be compared across films from

similar points in the plotline, to create more consistency in the study. Supplementary viewings will be had to select these scenes and collect still frames for the following isolation studies.

In an attempt to learn more about each culture represented and the tools which were used to articulate their differences, an abstraction will be made of each frame to demonstrate the use of architectural space, proportion, and color in the scene. This will be done across five frames for each of the four scenes from *Mulan*, *Black Panther*, and *Aladdin*, a total of forty-five still frames, that are then abstracted for each of the three categories of study. These studies will be collected and compared side by side for the scenes which were selected across similar moments in the film to understand how each one utilized that element of design in a different way across that point in the plot.

Upon final collection of these studies, there will be a comparative analysis of each of these categories across the film. Utilizing the studies made as well as information found in the literature review, the research will demonstrate where the design intentionally used these design elements to represent the demographics in the film in a more specific way, while also appealing to the growth of the plot and the character. This will lead to a discussion regarding the elements of design and how these are used across all disciplines of design and are dependent on the demographic of the user. Translating this to design education leads to a better understanding of the importance of understanding the occupant, and a focus on user-centered design.

FILM SYNOPSIS - MULAN

Release Date: March 9th, 2020
Director: Niki Caro
Budget: 200 Million
IMDb Rating: 5.7/10
Setting: Imperial China
Screen Time: 1h 55m
Time in Interior Space: ~ 45m
Plot Description: A young Chinese maiden disguises herself as a male warrior in order to save her father.²⁰

Initial Screening:

Themes shown through use of color. Red, tan, and black are dominant, villains often shown in black, blue, and neutral colors, while Mulan is in Red. More vibrant colors used in community scenes. Dramatic change in proportion in the Imperial City against the rural town and army camps. Important moments seemed to be marked with a distinct color such as green and yellow. Rhythm in lines of people used throughout many scenes.

Secondary Screening:

The initial scenes where we are learning about the place and the storyline allows for different visuals than the moments towards the end of the plot. Color is heavily controlled and utilized even in outdoor settings to indicate the protagonist and antagonist. The sword is an important symbol throughout the film and is representative of her journey of self-discovery.

20. IMDb, 2020.



Interview with Director and Production Designer:

"We went all the way back to the Ballad of Mulan and were inspired by that. It was certainly very important to me to bring iconic elements from the beloved animation to the live action, but what we're trying to do here is make something very new not just new in terms of the Mulan story but new in terms of the Disney story."

- Niki Caro in interview with Ciara Wardlow, August 2020. ²¹

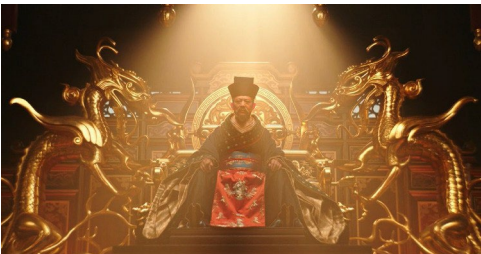
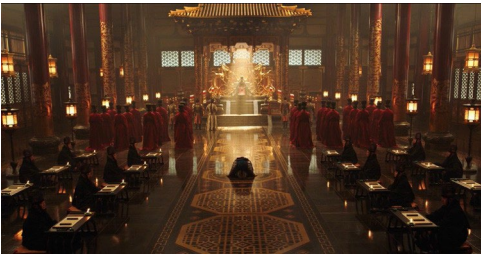
"From a production design standpoint, Grant Major, who previously worked on The Meg and Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon 2 in China, along with set decorator Anne Kuljian and the rest of the production team, spent months in and around Xinjiang to do legwork research before the cameras rolled. (Chinese academics were consulted as well.) Thanks to the meticulous detailing, layouts, and structures of the local buildings, 'we could extrapolate what we found and just use our creativity to make it feel right.'"

- Grant Major Interview with Architectural Digest, September 2020. ²²

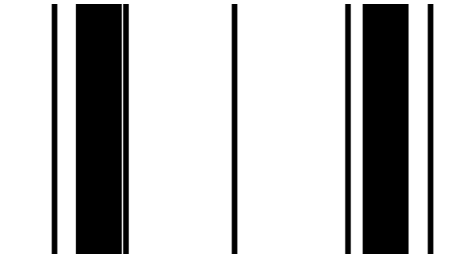
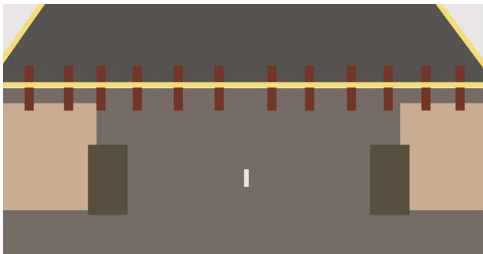
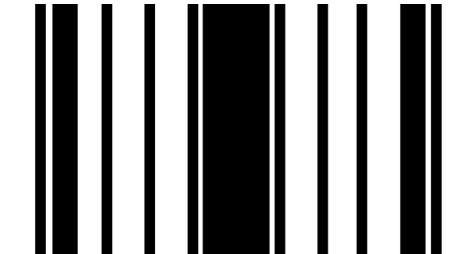
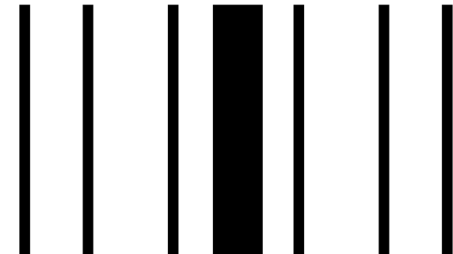
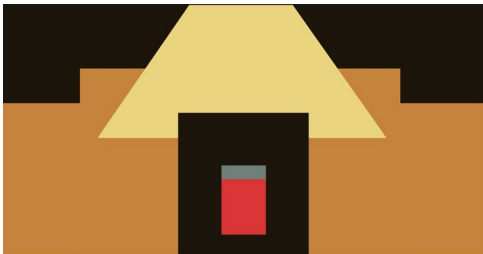
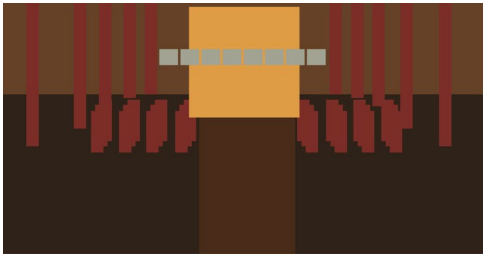
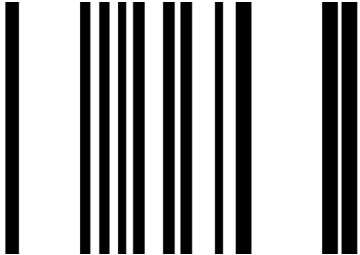
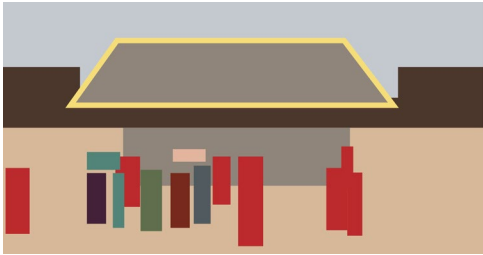
21. Wardlow, 'Mulan' Director Niki Caro Talks Authenticity, Research, And Responsible Filmmaking, 2020.
22. Reinstein, Inside the Rich and Timeless Sets of Mulan 2020.

MULAN, SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT OF SETTING

Time: 09:30
Context: First look at the Imperial City. The antagonist uses their chi to take the form of a soldier and goes to the emperor to notify them of the attacks and begin the war.

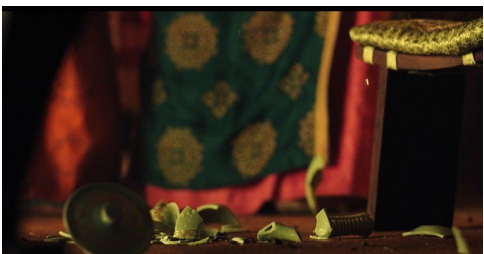
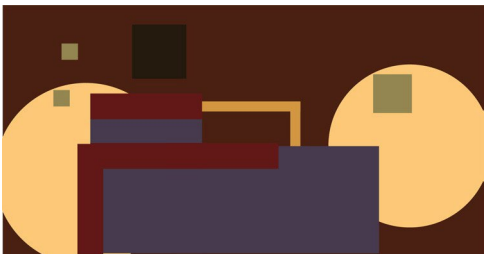
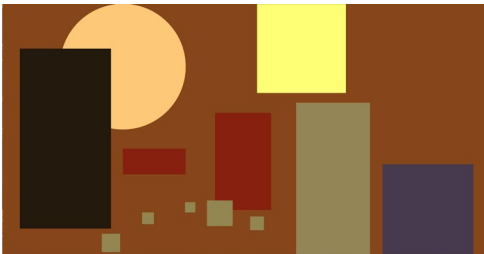
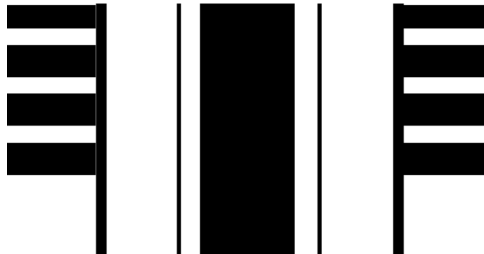
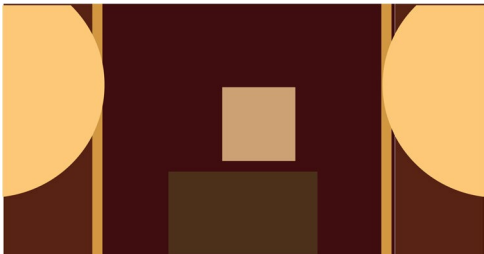
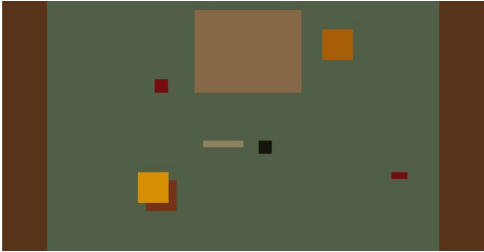


This scene was selected because of the juxtaposition between the opening shot with several subjects compared to the final shot of the antagonist, and the emphasis created through scale of the city and throne. Red is used to emphasize figures and frame the aisle. The emperor has a red accent on, while the antagonist is distinguished with blue.



MULAN, SCENE 2: CHARACTER AND PLOT DEVELOPMENT

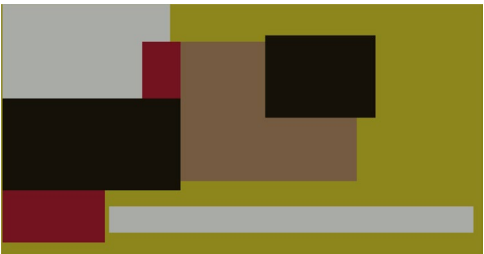
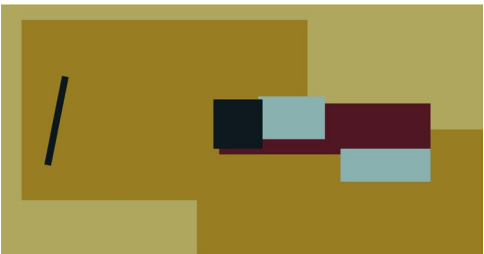
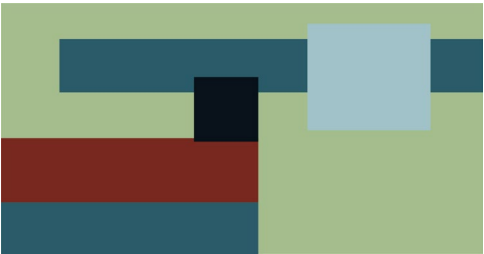
Time: 14:55
Context: Mulan is trying to fit in to the role she serves in her family and bring honor to them. She meets with the matchmaker to prove that she is worthy, and it ends in disaster because of a spider.



In this scene, the use of the sage green is shown throughout with the placemat and teacups. In the final shot, the teacup shatters and takes up most of the frame. This scene demonstrates Mulan's struggle to fit in and hide her chi, while showing some of the traditional customs of the culture.

MULAN, SCENE 3: BEGINNING CONFLICT ARC

Time: 1:01:20
Context: Mulan has trained in the Imperial Army while being disguised as a man. In this scene she is confronted with the antagonist, who is much like herself. She is confronted with the fact that she needs to be true to herself.



Nearing the height of the conflict in the film, the scene show Mulan's initial confrontation with the thought to be villain. While they do fight, this scene demonstrates more of Mulan's internal battle with her lying about her identity. The use of a static background and close up shots of Mulan and her sword help to emphasize this relationship and struggle.

FILM SYNOPSIS - ALADDIN

Release Date: May 24, 2019
Director: Guy Ritchie
Budget: 200 Million
IMDb Rating: 6.9/10
Setting: Agrabah
Screen Time: 2h 8m

Time in Interior Space: ~ 45m

Plot Description: A kind-hearted street urchin and a power-hungry Grand Vizier vie for a magic lamp that has the power to make their deepest wishes come true. ²³

Initial Screening:

The interiors shown throughout consisted of the dungeons, an ornate royal castle, Aladdin’s drab apartment, and the interior of the cave where Aladdin finds the lamp. The use of color throughout consists of strong use of vibrant hues like gold, pink, purple, and blue. There is a strong contrast between use of color, proportion and rhythm used in spaces of luxury as opposed to poverty. However, the city streets are still vibrant and dense with life.

Secondary Screening:

Strong monochromatic warm tones, much of the vibrant colors are coming from the background and extras, which allows Aladdin to stand out from the scenery. Jasmine is consistently shown in blue and pink which complement with the gold setting. The rhythm of the background and the subjects is more very detailed and busy.



Film Reviews:

“But Disney, long committed to doing well by meaning well, has synergized evolving social attitudes with advancing digital technology to concoct a series of updates. None of these have surpassed the original, but that might be too much to ask.”

- The New York Times, 2019.

“Jackson envisioned Agrabah as a bustling, vibrant port city, “heaving with details and stuff.” Early on, she made a trip to Morocco and did a “big haul with lots of architectural details—doors, windows, a lot of timber.” She did research on Iranian architecture and mosaics.”

- Inside the Set Design, Frances Dodds for Architectural Digest, 2019.

23. IMDb, 2019.

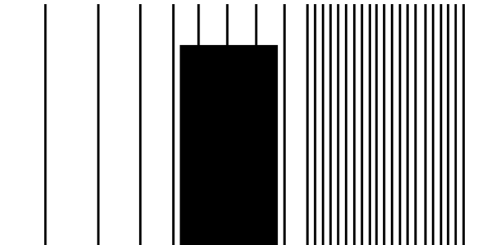
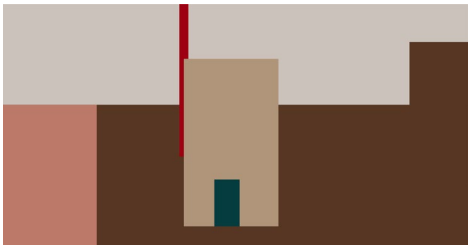
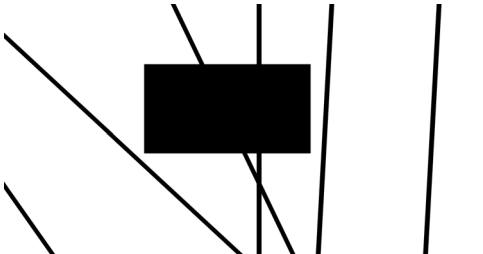
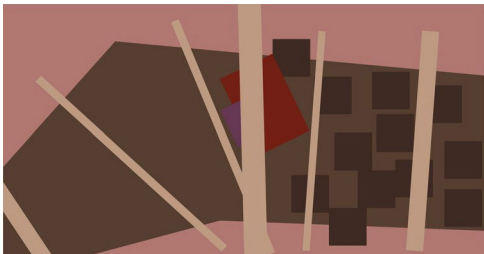
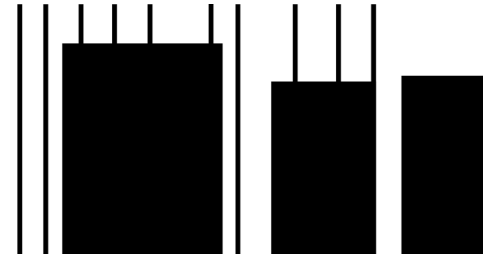
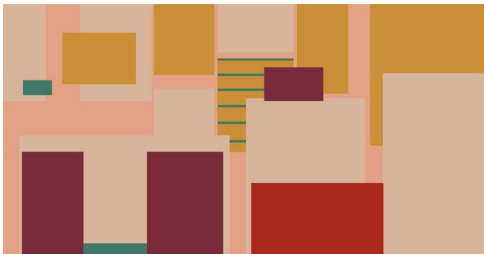
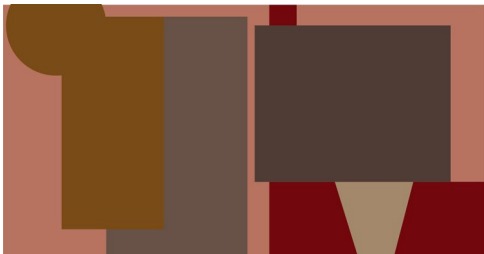
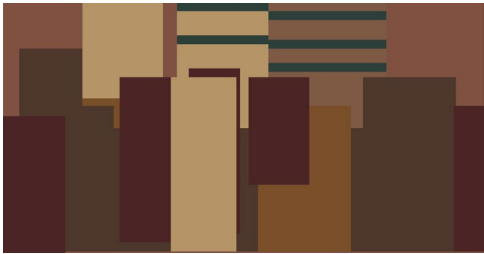
24. Romano, Disney’s Live-Action Aladdin Is Almost a Charming Rom-Com - When It’s Not a Sluggish Musical, 2019.

25. Dodds, How Aladdin’s Production Designer Created a Dazzling Live-Action Version of Agrabah 2019.

ALADDIN, SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT OF SETTING

Time: 00:06:26

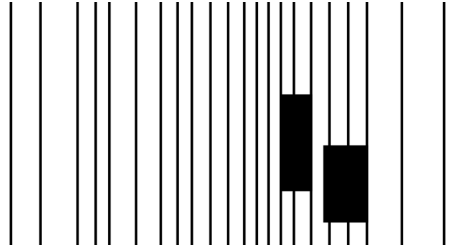
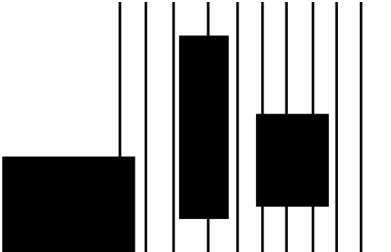
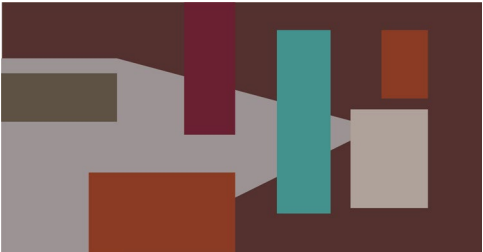
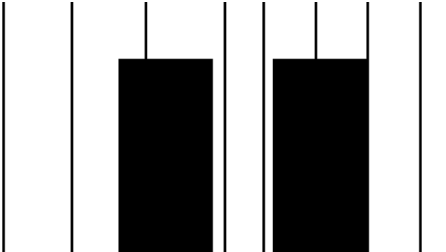
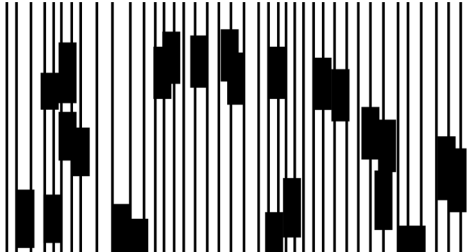
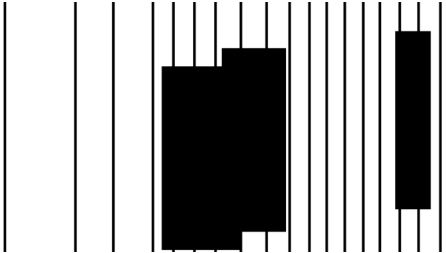
Context: Princess Jasmine is disguised as a commoner and gets caught in an argument with a street vendor. Aladdin steps in to help and ends with them on the run.



In this scene Jasmine and Aladdin meet for the first time in a sea of people, making them appear as part of the city. The use of color and rhythm help to create the sense of business and activity of the city, and does little to make them stand out, until the end of the scene where they are on the run from the guards.

ALADDIN, SCENE 2: CHARACTER AND PLOT DEVELOPMENT

Time: 01:06:52
Context: Aladdin is in the castle under the disguise of Prince Ali and got off on the wrong foot with Jasmine. Genie helps him dance with her at the evenings harvest celebration.

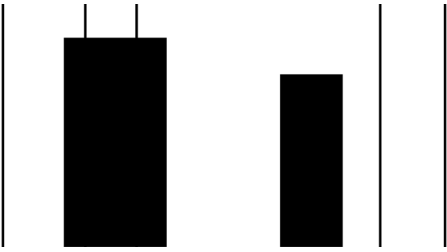
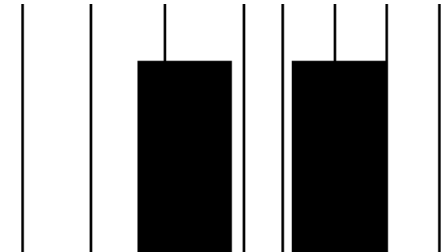
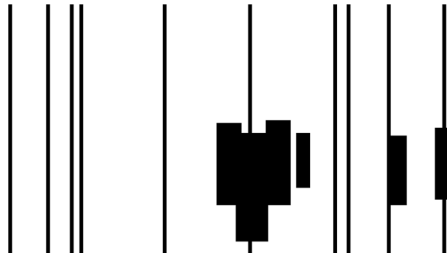
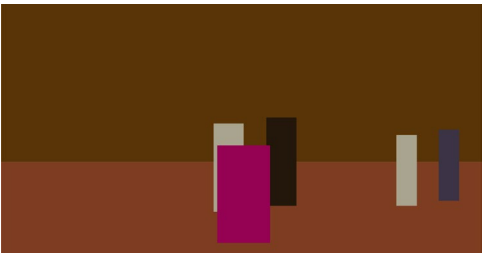
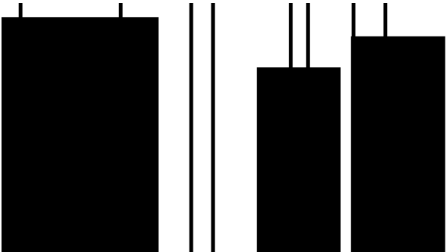


After Aladdin has reached the genie and become a prince, he is working to impress Jasmine and fool her into believing he is a prince. They are dancing for the harvest festival, which shows the vibrant colors of the culture as well as the rhythm shown in the group dance.

ALADDIN, SCENE 3: BEGINNING CONFLICT ARC

Time: 01:26:50

Context: Jafar has just attempted to kill Aladdin. When Aladdin and Jasmine confront him he attempts to manipulate the Sultan with his magic but is exposed.



The scene takes place in the throne room, which has a very ornate but monochromatic scheme. This allows the color of their garments to stand out in the shot, and frames the characters. The warmth of the space and the proportion creates a grand feeling.

FILM SYNOPSIS - BLACK PANTHER

Release Date: February 16, 2018
Director: Ryan Coogler
Budget: 200 Million
IMDB Rating: 7.3/10
Setting: Wakanda
Screen Time: 2h 14m

Time in Interior Space:

Plot Description: T'Challa, heir to the hidden but advanced kingdom of Wakanda, must step forward to lead his people into a new future and must confront a challenger from his country's past.²⁶

Initial Screening:

High contrast between modern and historic. Vibrant color is used against natural colors. Black and white used together with blue highlighting the vibranium, the source of their power and technology. Spaces for ceremonies and the throne room are much larger in scale, while the spaces throughout the introduction of the villain are smaller, and less elaborate. Orthogonal geometries and repetition are seen in interior spaces, repetition of people, and in the natural environment.

Secondary Screening:

The majority of this film is utilizing neutral tones and black and white with bold pops of color. This helps to emphasize the important themes and ideas the director is trying to portray. The film utilizes composition and framing throughout, and even uses parallel scenes to contrast the protagonist and the antagonist. These methods of design creates an even stronger foundation for the plot, characters, and culture being shown. People are often shown in larger groups rather than intimate parties of people.

26. IMDb, 2019.



Film Review:

"Black Panther has to maintain a balancing act in the most extreme way though. Unlike any other Marvel film, it is expected to "feel" Black at the same time as it has to be accessible to a plethora of audiences."

- Kristen J. Warner, Film Quarterly Review, 2018

Interview with Director:

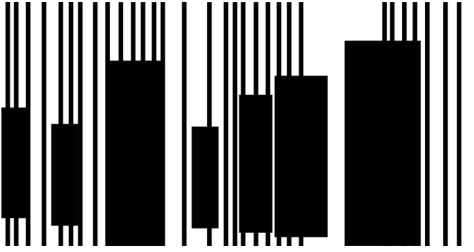
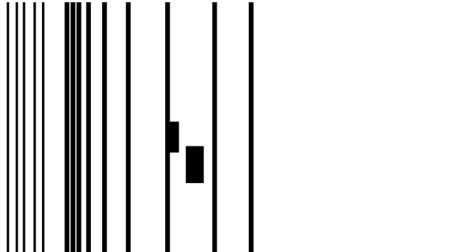
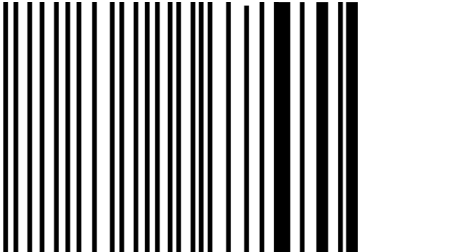
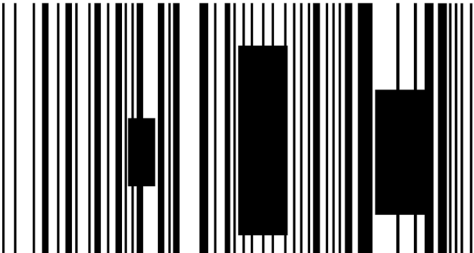
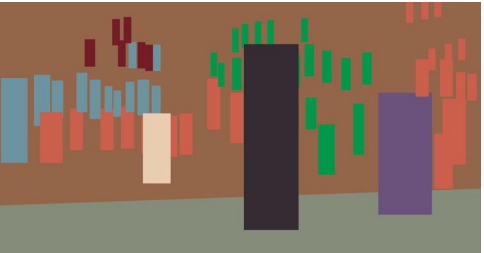
"Coogler tried to ensure that 'with all the technological advancements, you don't leave the culture out. Africa is a culture that has been colonized and oftentimes demonized, so it was about reclaiming certain things as beautiful and powerful.'"

- Ryan Coogler interview with Josh Eells, Rolling Stones, 2018

27. Gates & Warner, Wakanda Forever: The Pleasures, The Politics, and The Problems, 2018.
28. Eells, Ryan Coogler: Why I needed to make 'Black Panther' 2018.

BLACK PANTHER, SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT OF SETTING

Time: 00:20:30
Context: T'Challa is going through a ceremony to take the throne as king, though many tribes do not challenge he is challenged by one tribe's warrior. The ritual combat is conducted and T'Challa is victorious

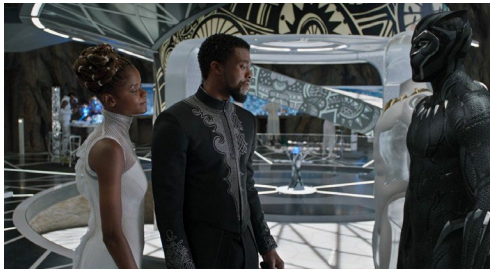
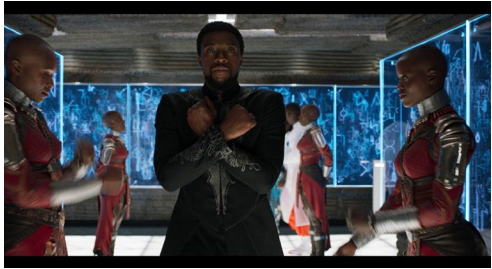


As one of the first scenes which we are able to see the tradition of the culture and how their rituals take place. Each tribe is shown in different garments and colors, while the significant characters are shown in other colors. This scene was selected for its cultural significance, use of color and setting.

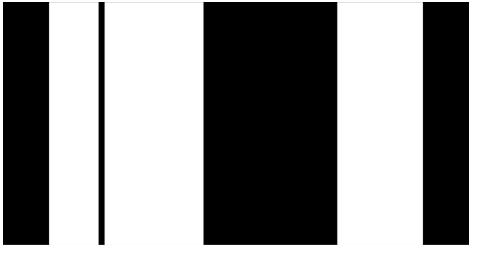
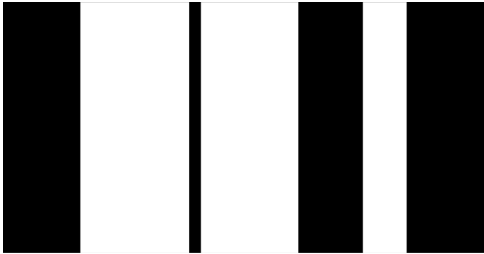
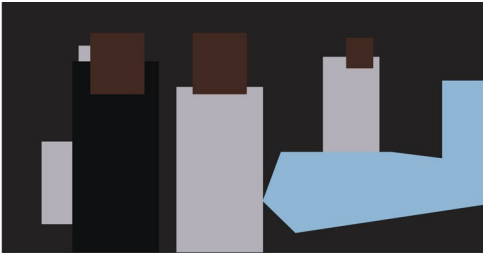
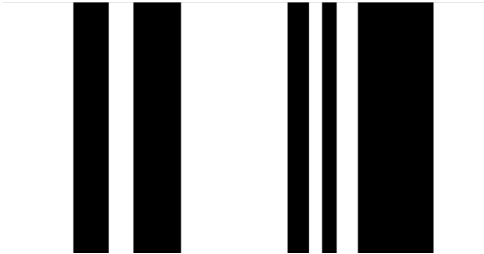
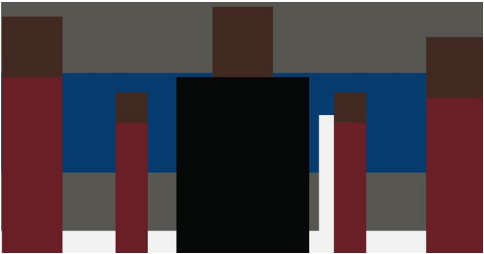
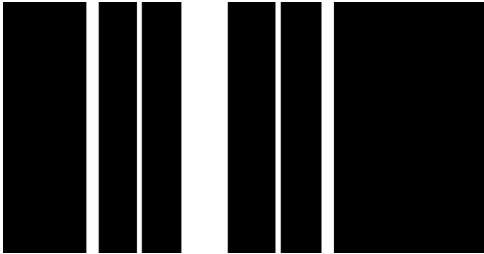
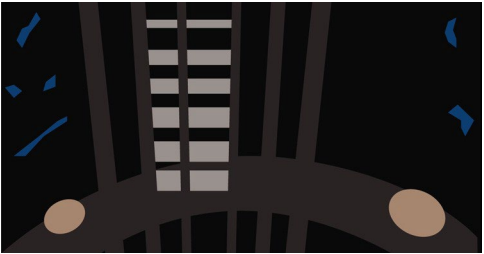
BLACK PANTHER, SCENE 2: CHARACTER AND PLOT DEVELOPMENT

Time: 00:37:35

Context: T'Challa is now king and is visiting his sister's lab before going on a mission. In this scene, we are able to see the extent of their technology advancements made with vibranium and prepares us for the mission.



This scene is the first glimpse at the modern technology in this futuristic culture. While the color is very monochromatic, it still creates contrast to the rest of the film. T'Challa and his sister fit in with the space, which furthers the idea of him as a modern ruler. Instead of showing subjects with black lines I chose to show these with white fill on a black background to emphasize the darkness of the shots.

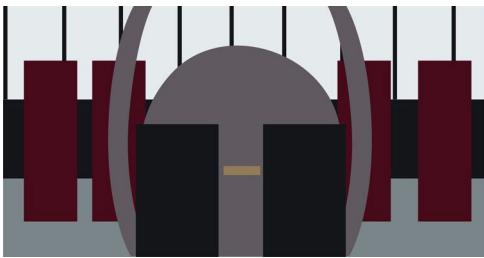
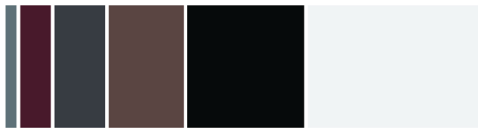
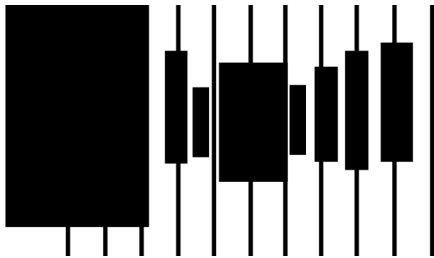
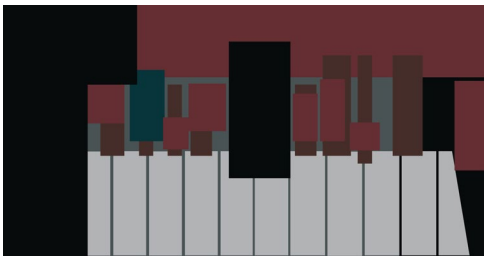
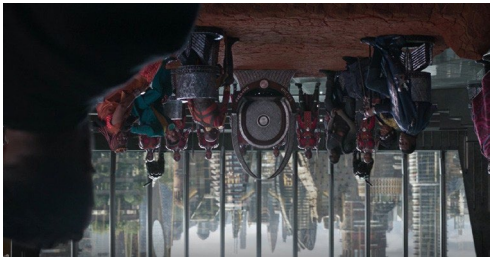


BLACK PANTHER, SCENE 3: BEGINNING CONFLICT ARC

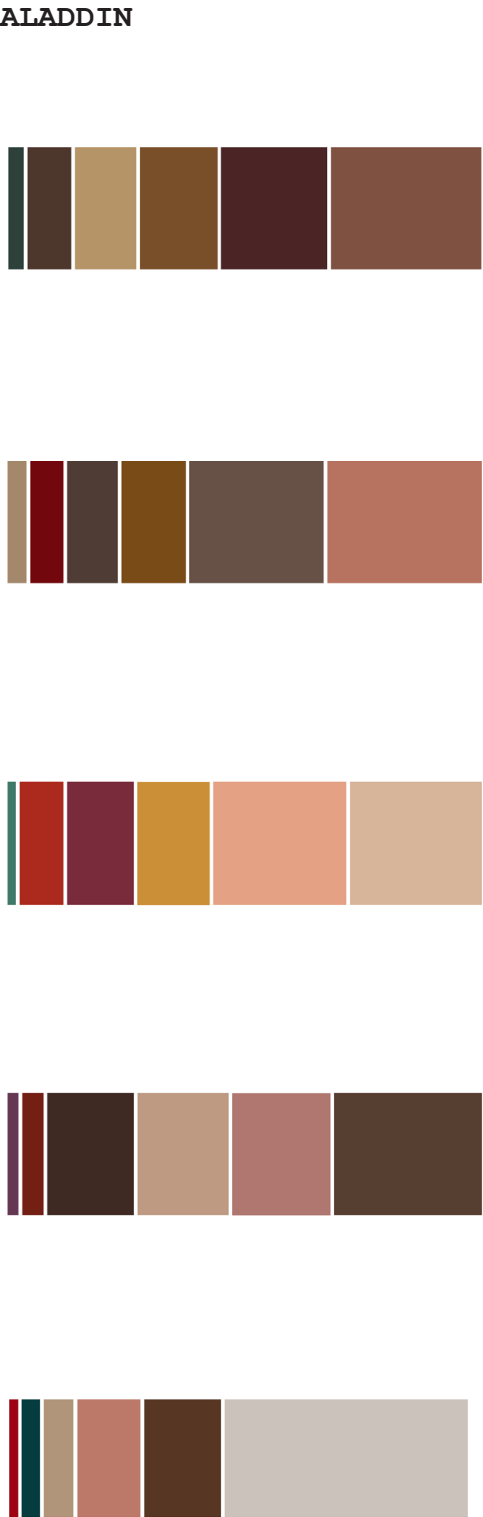
Time: 01:29:30

Context: After exercising his blood right and beating T'Challa in ritual combat, Kilmonger takes the throne and describes his plan to weaponize black people across the world and take control. The elders and generals struggle with the orders.

In one of the first scenes where Kilmonger has defeated T'Challa in ritual combat, he is shown taking the throne and the first shot is upside down. This composition stood out because of how they are using the perspective to reiterate the idea that their world has been turned upside down. The background creates a dynamic rhythm to complement this idea.



SIDE BY SIDE, COLOR SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT OF SETTING



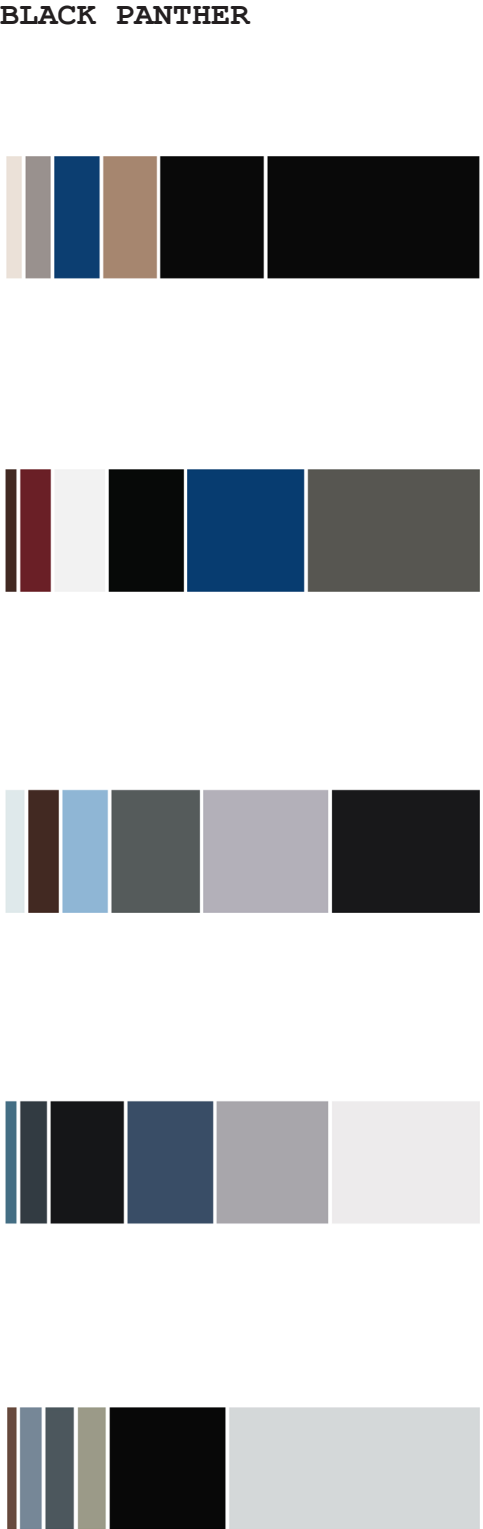
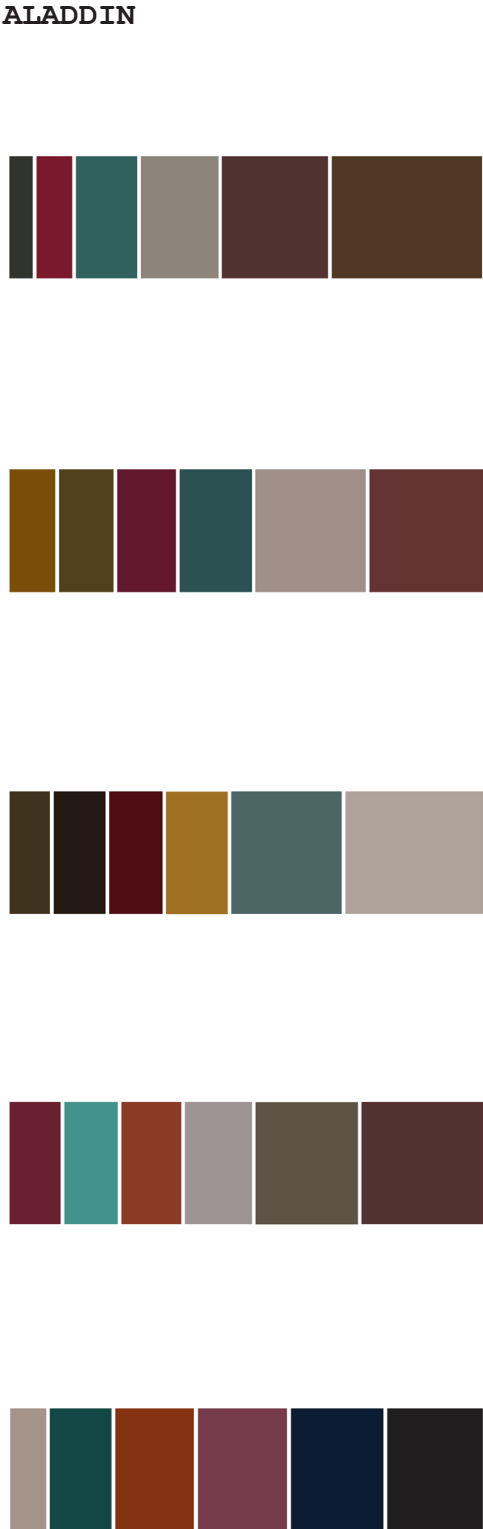
Through the comparison of these studies across different films, we are able to see the distinct differences in technique that each film uses to portray the characters, plot, and culture in question. In this first scene, each of the films is introducing more of the larger context and setting. This led to a broader range of hues shown throughout the scene as well as a more even distribution of color,

In Mulan, the colors are warmer, and more saturated, and introduce pops of red and green to create more emphasis. In Aladdin, the colors used are very monochromatic and lean towards warm tones as well. This allows for the characters to recede into the setting and make them feel as if they are part of the city.

In the last film, Black Panther, we are in an outdoor setting, with the various tribes surrounding the scene. This creates a high contrast between the desaturated natural hues of the surroundings and the vibrant array of hues for each of the tribes.

Throughout each scene, the still frames maintain similar levels and balance to the saturation, warmth, and tones. This creates a sense of cohesion across the scene and allows for certain moments to stand out when they include a broader range of hues or levels of saturation.

SIDE BY SIDE, COLOR SCENE 2: CHARACTER AND PLOT DEVELOPMENT



In the second scene selected, each of the characters was experiencing development in the struggles that they are facing and how they are developing through that. This is accompanied by stronger levels of contrast and saturation in each of the films. These studies continue to isolate the hues based on what is being perceived as the most prominent, as well as the quantity of which it is being shown. This allows for an understanding of color balance as well as emphasis.

In Mulan, The colors are very similar to that of the first scene, however, they are shown in much stronger saturation and even balance. The sage green hue is used from the beginning to the end of this scene to highlight the symbolic nature of this scene through the teacup.

In Aladdin, the colors are even richer chroma, covering a wide range of hues. While more even in distribution, the colors vary from each other strongly due to the large number of characters shown in this scene and the rhythm they are trying to create with such changes in hue.

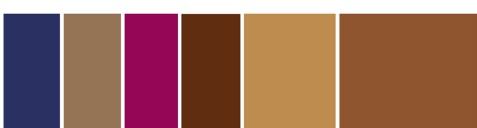
Finally, in Black Panther, the scene shows high contrast between the natural setting of the first scene with the high-tech workspace in the second scene. The cool hues, low saturation, and little variety of tones create a unique feeling in comparison to the rest of the film. There is little emphasis on the characters through color.

SIDE BY SIDE, COLOR SCENE 3: BEGINNING CONFLICT ARC

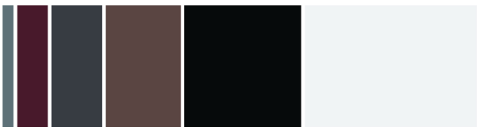
MULAN



ALADDIN



BLACK PANTHER



In the final scene selected for these studies, the characters are reaching the height of conflict for the film. This creates a stronger emphasis on the mood and feelings of the characters through the use of color.

In *Mulan*, she is battling the antagonist for the first time, however, it is clear the battle of this scene is internal. The scene utilizes high value chroma as a backdrop for the relatively neutral characters. This allows her to stand out in the natural setting.

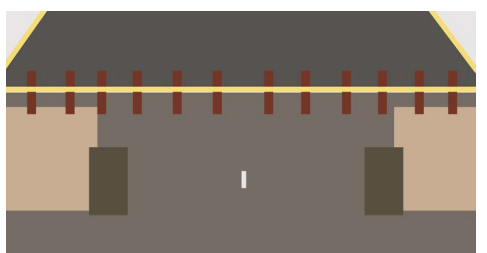
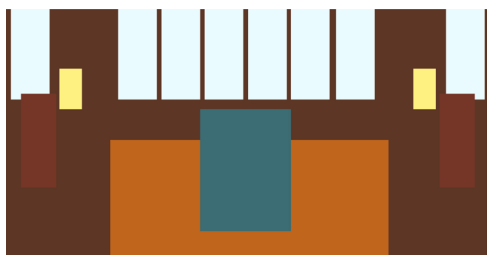
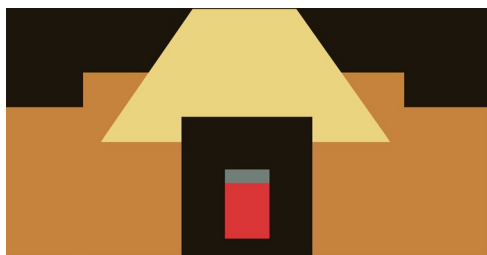
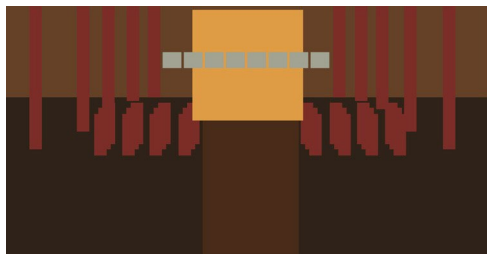
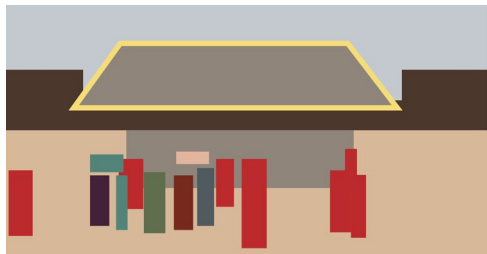
In *Aladdin*, the background is monochromatic and has warm neutral tones. The characters are emphasized through their vibrant garments and draw more attention. The distribution of hues in this scene is relatively balanced.

In the final scene selected for *Black Panther*, the antagonist is shown taking his place on the throne before divulging his plans for Wakanda. This change of power is shown through shades of hues that are less vibrant, allowing the somber mood of the scene to be articulated through color. The elders and generals are still articulated through traditional vibrant colors, to show they remain true to the tradition of Wakanda.

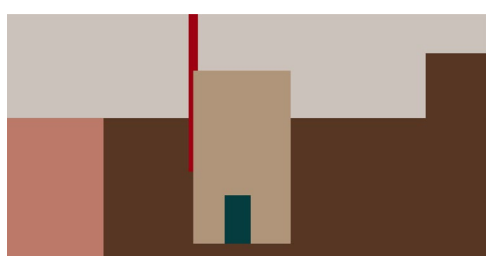
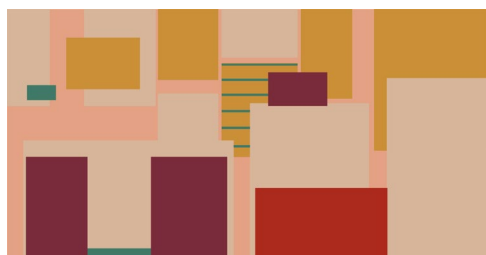
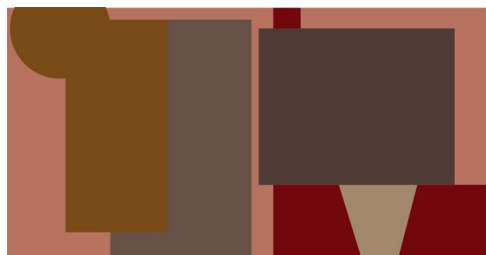
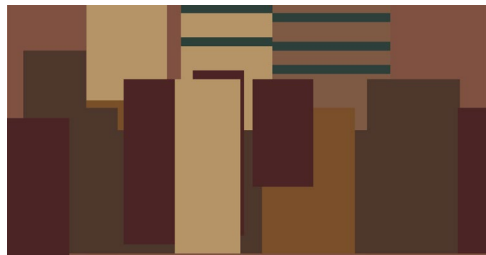
Each of these films are using different techniques of color theory to articulate similar levels of conflict at this point in the film. This supports the idea that this methodology allows for a deeper understanding of techniques that can be used to represent plot, conflict, character development, and culture.

SIDE BY SIDE, COMPOSITION SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT OF SETTING

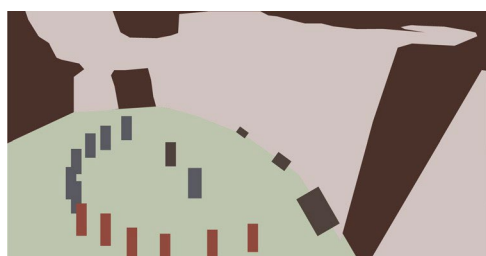
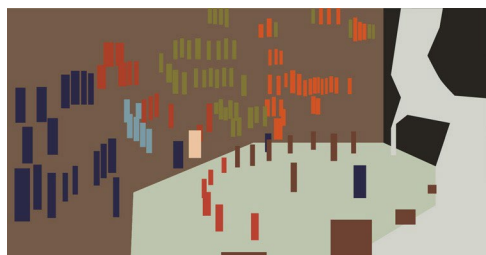
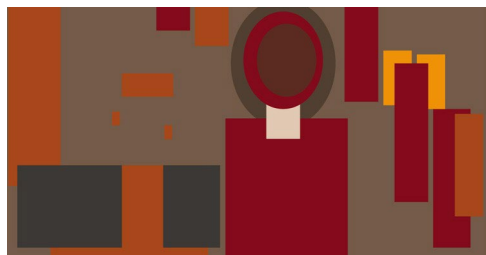
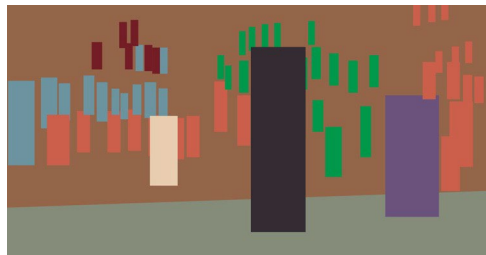
MULAN



ALADDIN



BLACK PANTHER



In the composition studies for each of the films, the previously selected colors were utilized and interpreted into abstracted forms which articulate an understanding of the distribution of color, form, framing devices, and depth.

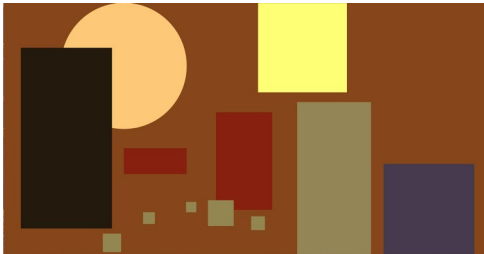
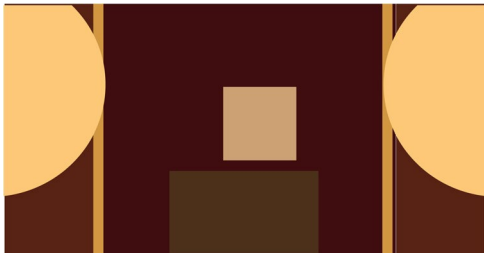
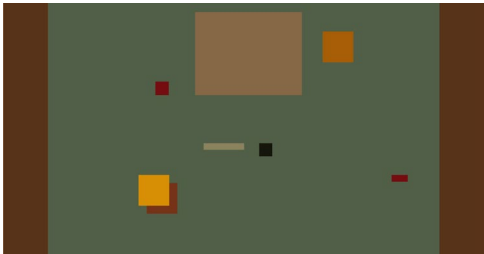
In the first scene from Mulan, we transition from the exterior to the interior, and the exterior again. This change, along with the scale of the Imperial City, creates compositions that are focused on the center of the frame. Each still creates a focus on the subject through their placement and framing through form, color, and rhythm.

Scene one of Aladdin is placed on the city streets, where Jasmine is disguised as a commoner. The hues of their garments and the forms of the surrounding subjects allow them to recede into the setting making it hard to place the focal point. This technique emphasizes the idea that they are part of the people and connected to the city.

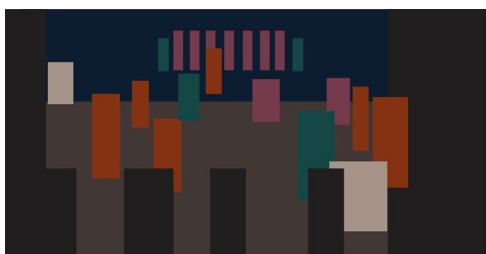
In the first selected scene of Black Panther, the natural context of the trial contrasts with the vibrancy of the various tribes present. Their sporadic placement and changes of hue create a busy composition that draws your eye more to the background than to the main character typically.

SIDE BY SIDE, COMPOSITION SCENE 2: CHARACTER AND PLOT DEVELOPMENT

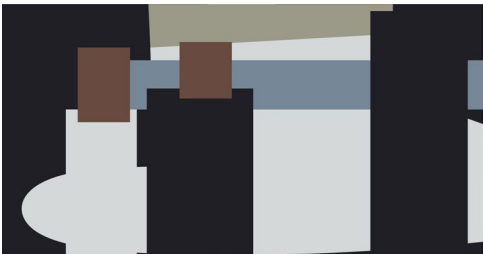
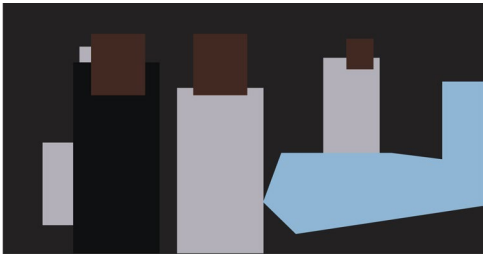
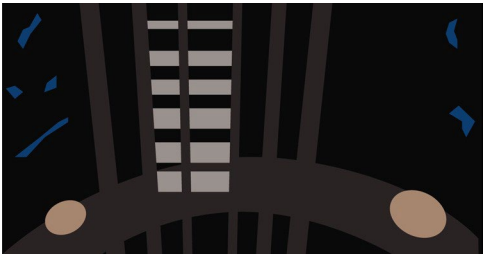
MULAN



ALADDIN



BLACK PANTHER



As mentioned in the color studies portion of this research, the second scene selected highlights more of the character development and generates a better understanding of the issues they will be facing. Using the previously isolate colors, these compositions demonstrate how the second scene utilizes color value and hue to create emphasis and variety.

As Josef Albers discovered in his study, "Homage to the Square"²⁹, the relationship between colors on a surface creates a sense of depth and impacts the way your mind perceives the colors. This is then explored through compositional studies.

In Mulan, the distribution of color is fairly even, however, there is higher contrast in tone and tint, saturation values, and hue. Brighter colors are jumping out in the still and have stronger emphasis.

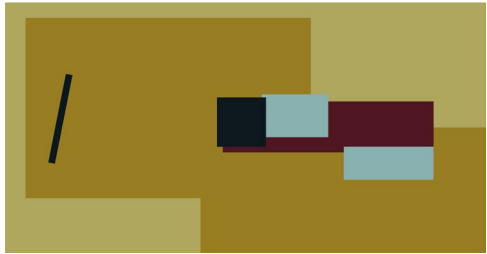
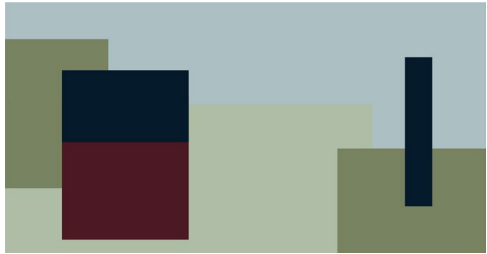
In Aladdin, most of the colors vary in hue but are similar in saturation and tone. This broad range of vibrant colors creates a composition that reads as a whole, as opposed to the main characters registering as the foreground.

In Black Panther, we are being introduced to their modern technology. The change in setting from the previous scene is stark, because of the monochromatic scheme and cool hues. These compositions appear relatively flat because of the lack of variation and the relationship between the colors.

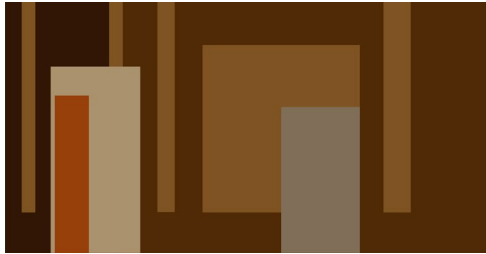
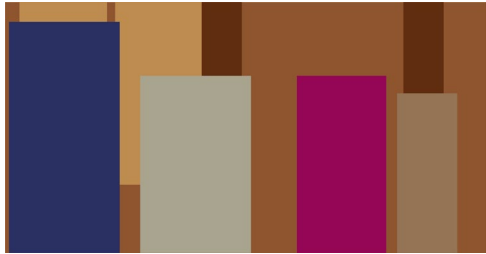
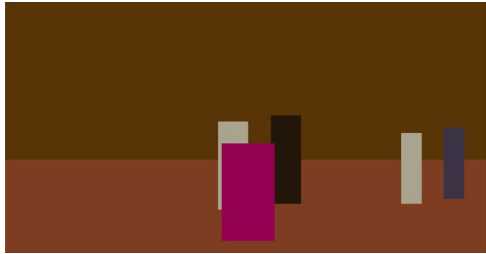
29. Fine, Color Theory: A Critical Introduction, 2022.

SIDE BY SIDE, COMPOSITION SCENE 3: BEGINNING CONFLICT ARC

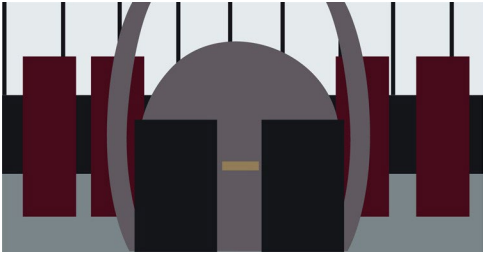
MULAN



ALADDIN



BLACK PANTHER



In the final scene selected, the conflict is starting to be portrayed in each film. These compositions begin to depict more of the main characters and their struggles or conflicts, as opposed to the whole setting or group of people.

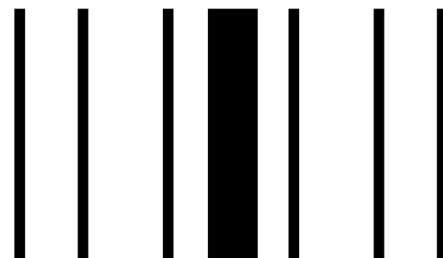
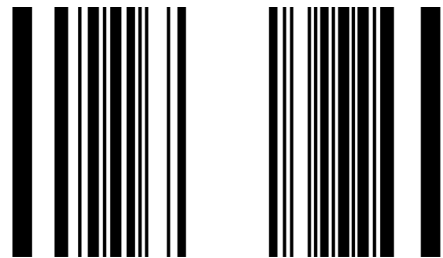
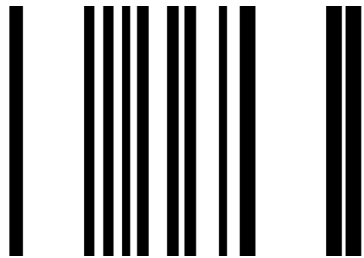
In Mulan, her internal battle is demonstrated through the composition with the way she is isolated and shown in a relatively plain background. The vibrancy of the background allows her to stand out because of her more neutral tones and central placement.

In Aladdin, the background is very warm and saturated but has little variation in form. This is similar to the technique used in Mulan; however, the characters are depicted in much more vibrant garments. This is in line with their depictions throughout the film, however, the previous scenes included settings where this did not allow them to stand out. These compositions allow the character to be emphasized.

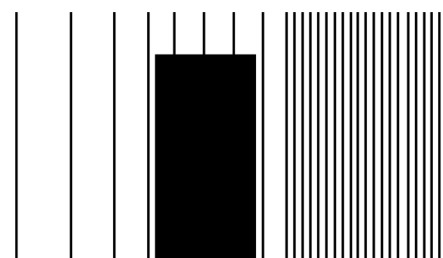
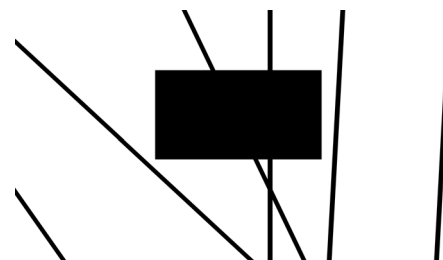
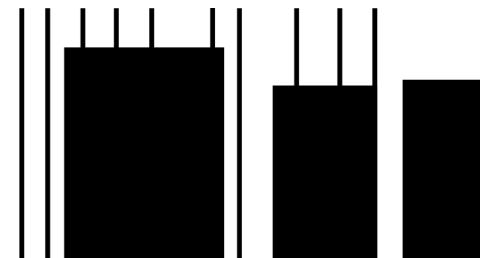
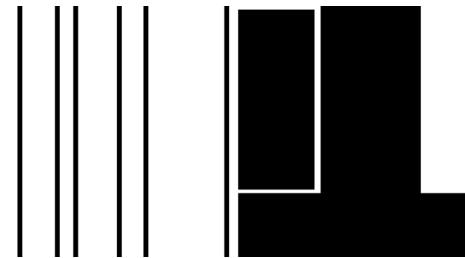
In the final scene selected for Black Panther, the composition is constructed in a very specific way to demonstrate the conflict. In the opening shot of the throne, the perspective is flipped upside down. This demonstrates the very idea that the change of leadership has completely turned the world upside down. In the colors, forms, and rhythm used, the composition is relatively rigid and melancholic.

SIDE BY SIDE, RHYTHM SCENE 1: INTRODUCTION, CONTEXT OF SETTING

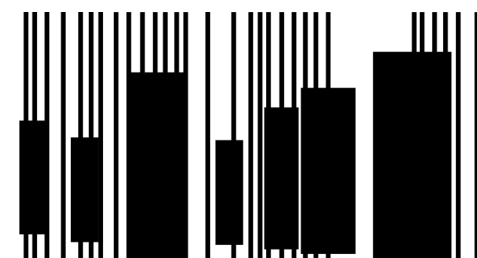
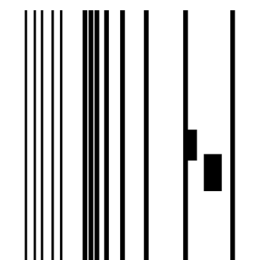
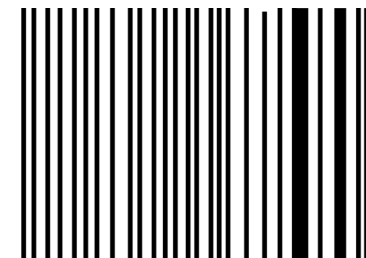
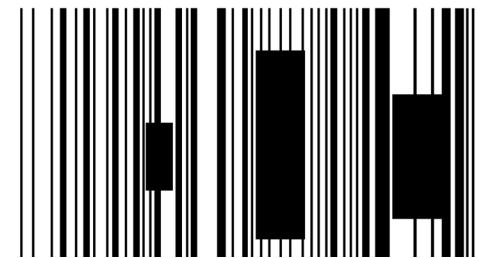
MULAN



ALADDIN



BLACK PANTHER



Abstracting even further from the composition studies, this series utilizes line and fill to indicate the subject and the tools used to frame and emphasize them in the shot. Informing these studies, Josef Albers's "Study for Sanctuary" was examined. His studies looked at the ways in which line and form can work together to create three-dimensional qualities.³⁰

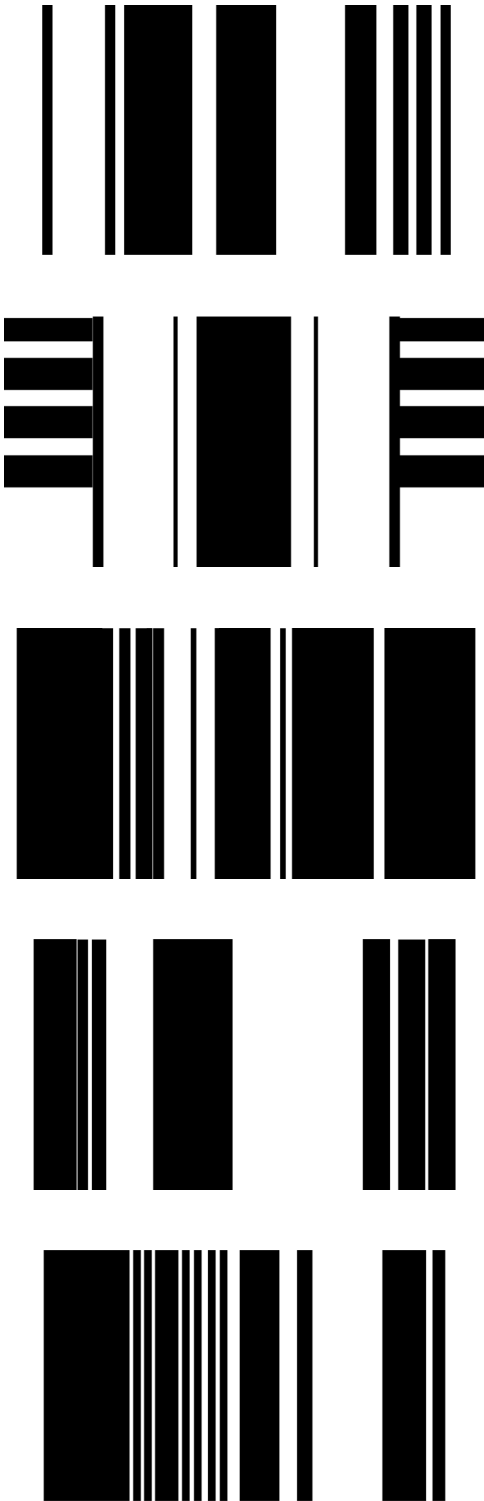
In scene one of *Mulan*, there was a variety of settings that created different scales of subjects and framing devices. This is clear from the last two shots, in which the central line is the subject, however in the fourth frame it is the most prominent fill, and in the final shot, the subject is so far away that it is abstracted into a thin line.

For the first set of rhythm studies in Aladdin, we are in a busy, fast-paced environment. This is again articulated through the rhythm studies, which are constantly changing in the number of subjects, framing elements, and even the direction of these elements which creates a complex and variable use of rhythm.

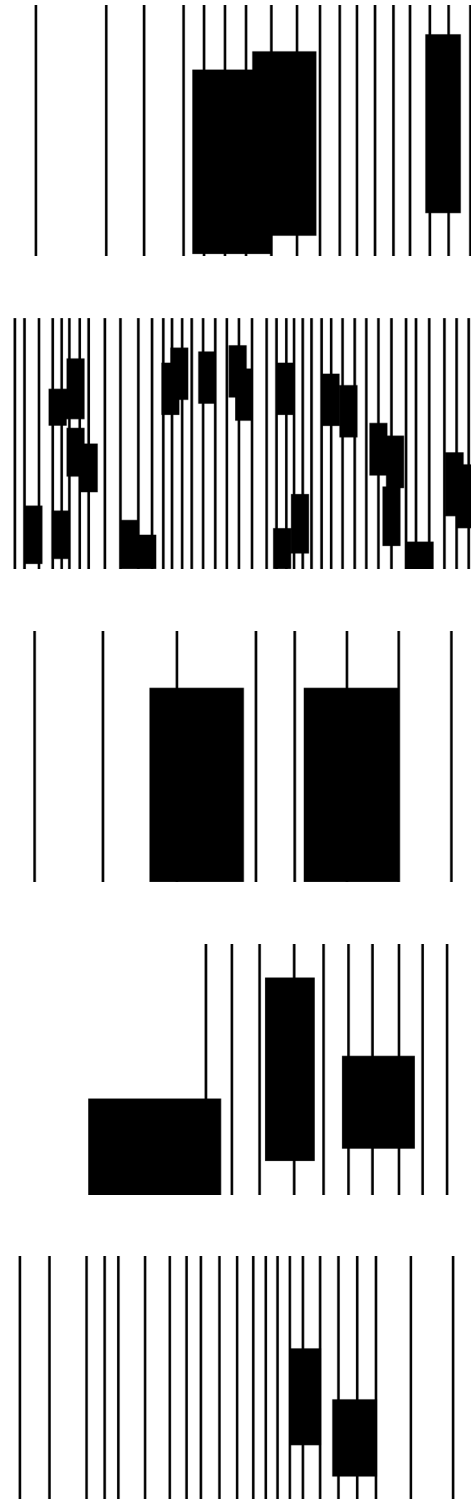
In Black Panther, the majority of the shots are focused on the tools of framing and background subjects. This creates a very repetitive and staccato frequency of lines and fills in each of these studies. Even the use of fill for the subjects appears to gradually grow or shrink from subject to subject.

30. Smith, Homage to Mexico: Josef Albers and His Reality-Based Abstraction, 2017.

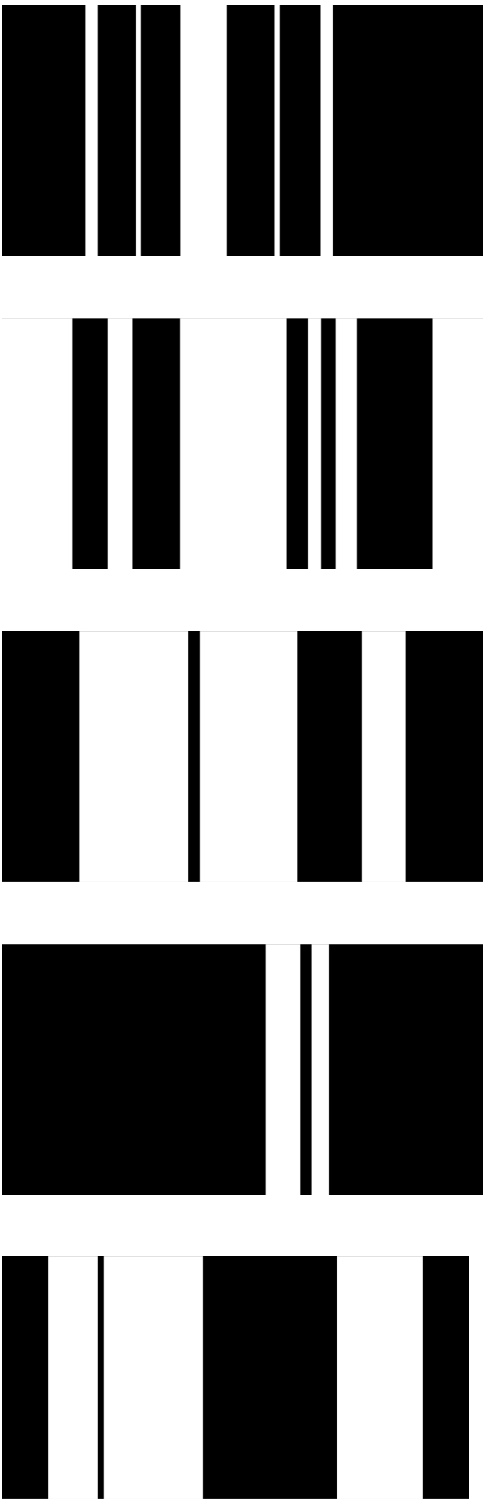
MULAN



ALADDIN



BLACK PANTHER



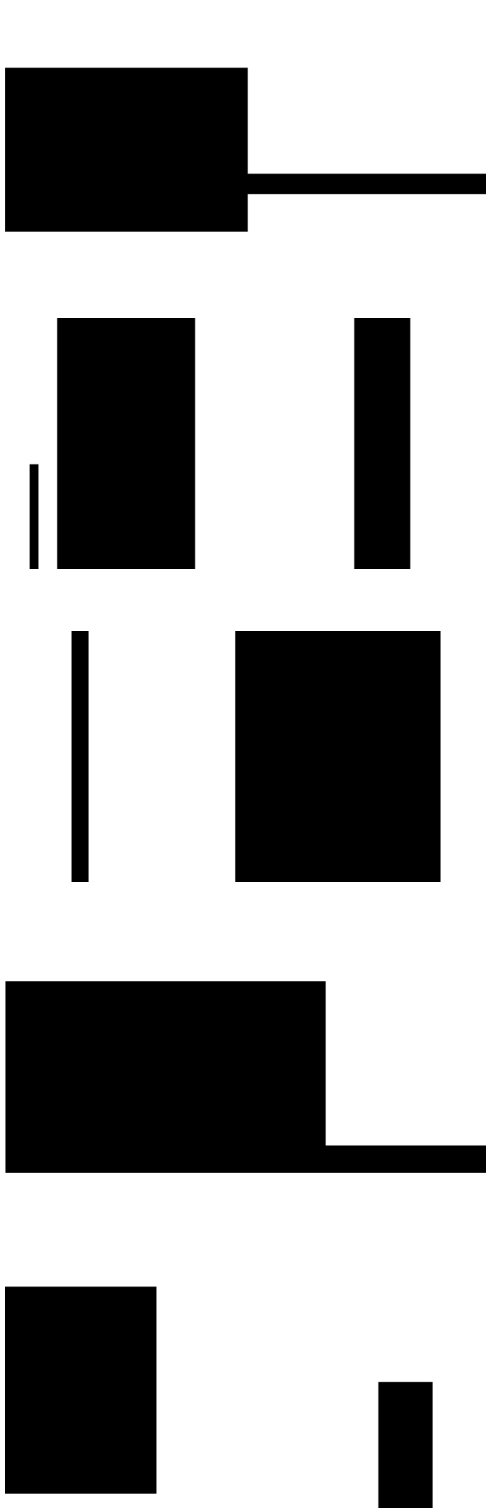
The second scenes selected are focused more on the main characters, but still have high connectivity to the setting in which they are in. This is portrayed in the color and composition studies above as well as the rhythm studies shown here.

In scene two of *Mulan*, we are seeing her struggle with her family and community. There are many characters shown in close proximity to both each other and the camera. This creates studies that make distinguishing between the subject and the background somewhat challenging. These rhythm studies are much denser and suggest a closer view of the subject, which raises the element of tension for the scene, as intended.

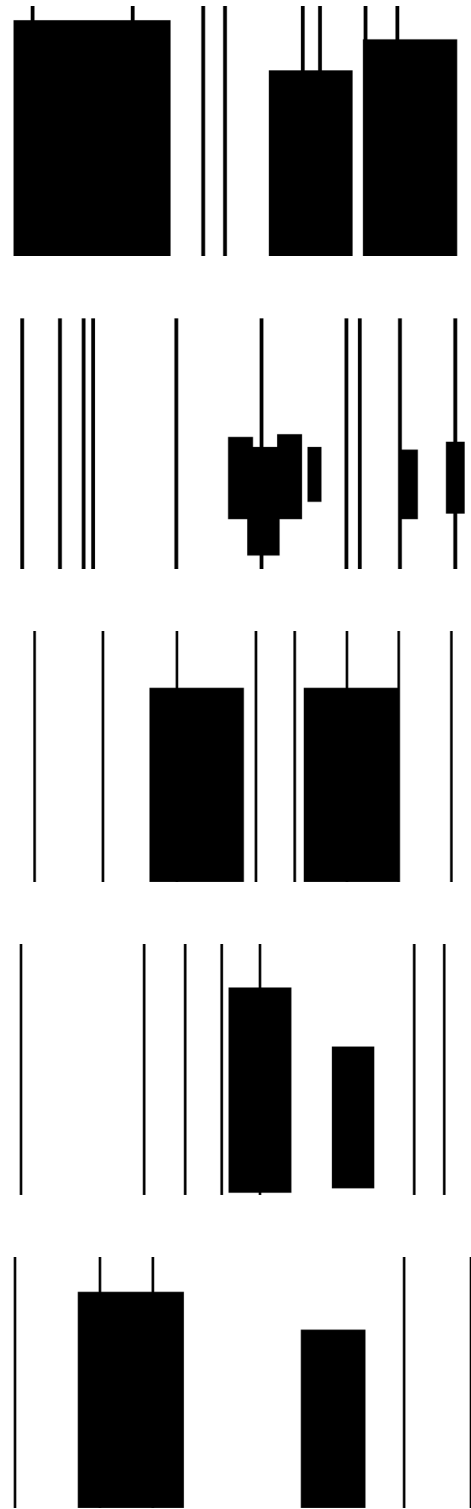
For *Aladdin*, the subjects are rarely shown up close and are even lost in the pattern of subjects which are in the dance. This continues the complexity seen in the first scene and joins it with the introduction of many subjects of similar prominence.

For this particular scene of *Black Panther*, the technique for the rhythm study was inverted. This allowed for the focus to go to the space, as is done in the composition. All of the subjects are shown with white fill on a black background. This change of technique coincides with the high contrast this scene has to the rest of the film.

MULAN



ALADDIN



BLACK PANTHER



The final rhythm studies of this research are depicting the final scenes selected, which are beginning the conflict in each film. This begins to have a much stronger focus on the main character in each of the films, which is made clear through these studies.

In Mulan, many of the shots in this scene are up close, showing only her or the antagonist, or her and her sword. The sword is treated as a subject in this study, because of its prominent role in her inward reflection. Beyond the subject matter, there is little to no rhythm or pattern being created in the background. This places all the focus on the subjects and their proximity to each other.

In the last scene from Aladdin, there is a small level of rhythm and framing created by the context, while the majority of these shots are focused on the subject matter. This allows for the fill to occupy the foreground, while the more sporadic framing pieces occupy the background.

Lastly, in Black Panther, the subject matter takes up the majority of these still frames, and there is consistent rhythm in the background as well. This makes for heavier use of rhythm in this scene, which is accompanied by a particularly muted use of color. Though these rhythm studies feel dense and active, they are complemented by color in the composition studies seen previously.

DISCUSSION

Throughout this research, culture was an overarching idea and driver for the film selection, method of research and study, as well as some of the original research. As the research process was refined and developed, the conversation developed more around the use of elements and principles of design as seen in these scenes, as opposed to the quality of representation in the films. Due to the reduction from a psychological approach to the effects of misrepresentation, to a study of process and design intent, this research developed more strongly into an understanding of the making process of these Disney films, the depiction of plot and emotions through the use of design, and a methodology for designing within these intentions.

Moreover, it was suggested in the public presentation discussions to define the study less as a study of culture and instead, as one of storytelling and production of a particular character. After all, these films are not made with the intention of depicting a whole culture as it exists today, but rather demonstrating a story of people within a fantasy culture. However strongly they draw on actual events and cultures, the element of fantasy is an indicative factor of Disney and impacts the production of "culture". A reframing of the previous study under the premise of studying storytelling and character development through design is aided by the description of each of the studies as they relate to the point in the film. These descriptions articulate the method of study and how specific ideas in the scene are coming to light using these design tools.

These design tools are used to further the plot and character development, which stands to reason that they would also be used to create similar effects when developing spatial strategies. Therefore, a methodology can be made using this study to break down a film with a particular mood or theme that a designer might feel inspired by and break that concept down into its constituent parts of color, composition, and rhythm to gather a better understanding. In doing so, the designer understands how these tools are being used to further emotions, relationships, connection to the setting, framing of conflict, and much more. These themes are not specific to film, but rather human experience, and are ones that we want to control within our own interiors.

CONCLUSION

What started as a study of various cultures in film developed more strongly into a study of how to design technique is being applied to each film in a specific way to further the themes, plot, and character development. Three Disney films were selected for the study, Mulan, Aladdin, and Black Panther, because of their large budgets and audiences. These three films vary in the cultures they were derived from, the use of color and rhythm, as well as the intentions behind their compositions in each of the selected scenes.

Three scenes were selected from each film that depicted important spatial moments as well as similar points in the story development. This allows for a closer comparison of techniques at each of these moments. The color studies were conducted by isolating six prominent colors and representing them based on the distribution that was perceived in the still. This creates a gained understanding of color balance, hue, chroma, tone, and saturation. The composition studies then use these colors to abstract the still into a composition based on color and form. These colors interact with each other in different ways to affect what is being understood as foreground and background, which often coincides with the subject matter.

Finally, black and white line studies of rhythm were conducted to gather an understanding of the subject, framing, and visual weight of the still. This study also demonstrated a connection with the themes which were occurring in the plot at the time, providing support for the idea that these design tools can further the ideas desired in storytelling both in film and interior space.

By using this methodology as a precedent for a particular project, you might better understand the ways the design elements and principles that a design utilizes create a sense of adventure, inclusion, melancholy, and other themes visible within the film in question. Utilizing and applying these ideas within interior space can create spatial sequences which have a desired experience for the user and can evoke more powerful emotional responses from the occupant.

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