Undressing The Mythic Hero: Deconstructing the Superhero Genre

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Research Information:
Aims and Objectives:
- Demonstrate the importance of colour in the design and storytelling of superhero comics
- Present the ways in which the superhero genre has evolved through history
- De-mystify the superhero genre from conceptual, cultural and anthropological standpoints
- Create an interactive teaching tool for students interested in superhero comics
- Expand the understanding of professionals working within the superhero genre

The superhero genre of comics is a seemingly-simple form of visual narrative that is, upon closer inspection, very complex, with a rich and varied history. Artists and writers in the field are both consciously and unconsciously influenced by this history which has its beginnings at the dawn of human society when the hero archetype was created. In addition to this hero archetype, the genre is influenced by the changing faces of society, politics, symbolism, culture and psychology. As a sequential artist, I often wondered about the reasons why. This thesis aims to answer these questions and provide a thorough, interactive deconstruction of the superhero.

The thesis will be presented as a series of interactive comic panels depicting archetypal superhero behaviour, and characters and events within them will be the triggers for the information the thesis will provide.

Anthropology, philosophy, psychology, sociology, politics, colour theory and psychology are a few of the fields that have fed into my research. As the research is practice-based, my challenge was to find a method of practice that would not only compliment my research questions, but present them visually in a manner that communicated well. Becoming familiar with the genre resulted in finding many overlaps, parallels and layers of information, visual and conceptual. Using Adobe Flash as a vehicle has allowed me to represent these layers and overlaps of information clearly.

About:
Sarah began her formal training in 1999, when she attended the Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah Georgia. She graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts in Sequential Art in 2003.

After a year teaching young Saudi women art history and foundations of drawing at Dar Al-Hekma College in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Sarah decided to undertake postgraduate study. She completed a Master's of Arts in Illustration with Commendation from Kingston University in 2006 and displayed the work she produced over the course of the degree at the Menier Gallery in London later that year.

At the moment, Sarah is deeply engrossed in a practice-led PhD that allows her to combine her two great loves of visual narrative and myths by creating an interactive visual collage that analyses and deconstructs the superhero genre of comics and will be completed in early 2011.