DAY TO DAY
of a...

COLOR STYLIST

Day-to-Day Series Episode #9

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The Basics:

- A ***color stylist,*** also know as a ***color designer*** is the artist responsible for selecting and painting all of the colors for the characters on an animated TV show.

-Using their knowledge of **color theory**, their skills as a **painter**, and their **design sensibilities**, the color stylist creates palettes and lighting that allows the characters to fit within the backgrounds and match the overall style of the show.

As always, it's important to remember no two productions are alike, and the role of a color stylist can vary greatly from show to show.

Now let's talk color!

Style Guide

When a color stylist first begins on a new show they will **receive information from the Art Director about the style of the show** and the various painting approaches that are employed when coloring the characters. This is known as a **style guide.**

Whether an actual document or just a conversation with the Art Director, the style guide serves to give parameters to the color stylists to **help the character treatments look consistent.**

For example:
The style guide might say such things as the shadows of the characters are always hard edged and so when you are blocking out shadows, use the lasso tool.

Day 1: Handout

The color stylist's job begins once the clean black and white character designs have been approved and turned.

Similar to the other design positions, the color stylist receives their new assignments from the Art Director along with any caveats or specific instructions the Art Director would like for the color scheme.

The Art Director will also give them any context for the character/scene that may affect color.

Once the Art Director has delegated the designs, it's off to the races!

Paint With All the Colors

While the Art Director may have some specific thoughts about certain aspects of the character, the color stylist for the most part **makes all of the decisions about the color scheme of the character from hair color to skin color to outfit color/coordination.**

Occassionally there may be characters that **directly reference or parody a real person** and in these specific cases, the palette might be pulled from the reference in order to help it read as a reference to something already in existence.

Matching the Background

Another very important consideration the color designer has to make is whether the **character's color scheme/treatment will make sense against the background.**

Often, color stylists will bring in the finished backgrounds where available to make sure that the color scheme of the world and the color scheme of the character are **logical and aesthetically pleasing.**

Color Design Review

Once the color stylist has done a few color iterations [usually around 3 or 4] of the character in 3/4 forward, it is time for the Art Director and Show Runner to review.

The Show Runner will pick their preferred color scheme from the lineup... or possibly frankenstein pieces from different versions.

For example: The show runner may say, "Let's use the hair from #1, but the skintone and outfit from #4"

The color design usually goes through one or two reviews before it is approved for turns.

Paint Me Right Round

Once the front 3/4 color scheme is approved, the color stylist will then go in and **paint the rest of the black and white turn around**.

For primary characters, this turn typically includes **a front, a front 3/4, profile, back 3/4, and back.**

For incidental characters [bg characters that will not need as much robust animation], the turn might not be full but rather **a front 3/4 and a back 3/4.**

Local Colors and Lighting

Something that can vary from show to show is whether color stylists are responsible for doing the **light adjustments for characters under different lighting conditions.**

Local Colors [the base colors of a character under neutral lighting] Can be greatly impacted by the lighting of specific shots.

For example: A scene that takes place in a night club with neon lights could turn a brunette character's hair bright pink.

Sometimes color stylists do these lighting passes, and sometimes they are done by the Art Director.

Got Props?

Another aspect of this role of color design that can vary from show to show is whether the color stylist is responsible for exclusively character colors… or **whether they also color all other objects and fx in the world.**

On some productions, the color stylist is responsible for **any color design that is not a background.**

On other productions, there may be a whole other designer for props: *A PROP DESIGNER* who may both design and color all the objects featured in the series.

Right on Schedule

Similar to both BG and character design, there are usually about 2 weeks alotted in a production schedule for color design for each episode...
however the actual timeframe can vary depending on the complexity of the character and of the color scheme.

Color stylists usually finish around 3 to 4 fully-colored character turns a day.

Sometimes a very extensive character may take more iterations of exploration.

Fluid Pipeline

Because character design can sometimes shift right up until the episode ships to the vendor studio to be animated, sometimes color design can also be tweaked after the design was already approved.
It's not the usual... but it happens!

Most shows have a level of flexibility and fluidity in their pipeline to account for changes that may occur along the way.

Tools of the Trade

Like most of the design team, color stylists work primarily [if not exclusively] in **ADOBE PHOTOSHOP.**

Photoshop provides a tidy UI to both sketch and polish designs and is a software any aspiring color designer needs to be very fluent in!

Who Do I Work With?

Primarily, color stylists work closest with the **ART DIRECTOR.** The art director is the foremost person in charge of the over all look of the series.

The Art Director guides and supports the designers to make sure all the color treatments suit the style of the show.

Character designers will also receive some notes from **Show Runners.**

Color Stylists may communicate with **Character Designers** to discuss their black and white designs which are the basis the color stylists work off of.

Who Do I Affect?

Color Stylists most heavily affect the **vendor animation studio** where the actual character animation will be done.

Their color designs serve as guides and occassionally even rigged assets for the finished animation.

Advice for the Aspiring Color Designer

If you are interested in becoming a color stylist/designer, here are some helpful things to keep in mind for both your personal growth and
your portfolio!

#1 Characters and Colors

A strong color design portfolio shows you **know how to make clever and appealing color choices.**

Putting **illustrations** in your portfolio that really showcase your ability to assemble an **aesthetically appealing palette** is a very good idea if you are hoping to get into color!

#2 Embrace the BG

Because character color palettes must always exist within a world, having work in your portfolio that **includes a background and shows you know how to color key a character to their world** in an appealing way is another very good idea for the aspiring color stylist!

#3 Light and Variation

Another exercise that can both help you hone your color skills and showcase them in a portfolio is **doing several color variations of the same design... as well as doing lighting variations to show a design under varying lights** [ie, warm light, cold light, neon light, etc]

#4 Masks Abound!

Less of a thing for a portfolio and more of a skill to practice is **utilizing layer masks to cut and color different parts of your character designs and character linework.**

While each show will have it's own style guide, getting familiar with the use of layers and masks can make it easier to transition to designing within a production pipeline.

In a TV production, making changes fast and easily is everything so it is important to become acquainted with setting files up in a way that allows you to color shift quickly if needed.

Reference and Style

An important consideration color stylists make is how to choose color schemes that are **appropriate for the character in the sense of age, personality and fashion.** Looking up references of different outfits, palettes and clothing sets will help hone your eye for what sorts of colors pair nicely and what the affect of such colors have.

For example: More muted, earth tone colors tend to read as "mature" while brighter colors tend to read more youthful... and "black/gray" may read as edgy/dark.

The color of an outfit can radically change the way a character reads!

A Colorful Journey

Color styling/designing is an integral part of the television animation pipeline.
But for some designers, it is only the first stop of a much longer design journey.

Because the color stylist works off of the design of the character designer, it can be a good space to hone your design skills.

It's not unusual for color stylists to move into prop design or character design or background paint.
Everyone's journey is different.

**But, being observant of the way colors interact in the world around you,
and exploring different ways to build out a color palette...**

will hone the skills you need to excel as a color stylist!

And that's all I've got!

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