

Academy of Digital Arts does it again

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...With their launch of the first, accredited Concept Art course in Africa!



This year, the Academy of Digital Arts in Cape Town has more to celebrate than just the close of another phenomenal academic year, and the festive season. Break out the bubbles, because they are proud to announce the accreditation of their full time, one-year, Concept Art programme.

And, with the official stamp of approval from CHE (Council for Higher Education), and its listing on SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority), the Academy of Digital Arts Higher Certificate in Concept Art also becomes the first of its kind in Africa. (If that isn't something worth making a hoo-ha about, we don't know what is!)

Always encouraging the digital arts fields, this additionally isn't the first time the Academy has led the way in the education of future technologies. Consistently pushing for relevant, cutting-edge tertiary education, the Academy of Digital Arts was also the first college to offer an accredited Game & Interactive Media Development course in 2014, and, while other courses are now available, it remains the most well-received by the industry.

Much like "Game" was back then, Concept Art as an academic discipline is, today, still very new in South Africa, and has only recently begun to separate from graphic design and illustration as a separate field of study. While graphic design traditionally deals with the creation of images and text-based content like logos, publications, advertising and other marketing materials, concept art is primarily focused on the creation of content for the entertainment design industry, which typically includes the film, game and animation genres. Locally, audiences are still working towards wrapping their heads around this, while internationally, this distinction has already been made clearly, with formal studies in Concept Art being offered up to even a Masters level, and the high value placed on the skills of concept artists in the industry.

The skills that are needed in the creation of world-class concept art are very art intensive and, although they find some overlap with graphic design, they are, in general, far more artistically focused than any graphic design training program can provide. Typically, these skills involve meticulous drawing and anatomy skills, an ability to work in perspective, superior rendering skills which allow for the accurate visualisation of forms, and the ability to use these fundamentals skills in new contexts, where direct reference is not always available.

Out in the real world, concept art usually falls into the preproduction phase in the development of projects for the movie, game and animation industries. Usually a narrative, or components, of a story need to undergo their first visualisations, before they are developed further, and put into production. This saves the project a significant amount of time and money, as it reduces the margin of error, and helps keep the project and team focused.

Aspects of the enterprise, in any of the multimedia fields, that might need conceptualising and refining, include the design of characters and creatures, props, such as vehicles, weapons or tools, attire, and even environments and key shots. These could take the form of drawings or illustrations done in traditional media like pencil, but in today's world, these are generally rendered digitally making use of software such as Photoshop or Procreate, drawing tablets and smart devices. More recently, concept artists worldwide include 3D modelling into their workflow to aid in creating initial blueprints, and combine renders with 2D content to more clearly convey ideas.

Having identified this need in the South African industry, and the gap in education, in 2015, the Academy of Digital Arts launched a four-week, pilot program in concept art which centered around the development of these skills. During the first year of this short course, development also began on a larger, one-year programme, which was designed to allow participants more time to internalise these new skills, and to develop concept art as an academic field.

Pioneered by Andrew Awakoumides, while successfully working in the industry himself, and also in the process of obtaining his own Masters focused on concept art in education, the one-year programme was submitted to HEQC (the Higher Education Quality Committee) in 2017, and began the journey to accreditation, and becoming a formal qualification recognised by SAQA.

Two years later, on the back of numerous hours of research, course development, grafting, admin and committed dedication to the field, the program has grown and developed into an educational offering reaching towards international standards in concept art education.

While the Concept Art course was initially run unaccredited, offering students from around the country the opportunity to focus their skills in this digital art field, and make their way in the industry with incredibly polished portfolios, in late 2019 the programme officially obtained its accreditation to the delight of students, parents, lecturers and industry alike.

Congratulations to the Academy of Digital Arts for continuing to develop content and courses that educate, train, and encourage creatives to shape and innovate in the modern world.

<https://www.ada.ac.za>

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Academy of Digital Arts offers industry-orientated courses taught by dynamic lecturers who work in the industry, ensuring hands-on, quality tertiary education in Graphic Design, Web Design, Game Development and Concept Art, short part-time courses and customised corporate training.

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