

60 seconds in the 9to5 of a VISUAL INFORMATION DESIGNER

Visual information designer Andrea Lau is building a career based on melding emerging computer technology with aesthetics to present information in interesting ways. Completing her Honours year in design computing at the University of Sydney, she is part of Junk Theory, a community-based project helping to repair damage from last year's Cronulla riots. She feels her job is reshaping our perceptions.

What exactly does your work entail?

I'm involved in web design, multimedia, graphic design and animation but we take the newest technologies and place them in different contexts. The degree is called Design Computing but there is no set job description as yet. The powers that be have settled on visual information designer.

Does it have scope to encompass a greater creative element within computer design?

Because we have such a breadth of understanding of skills we can move from the art side into design, which has a functional element to it, and even further into more technical areas like the installation of hardware. A lot of design computing graduates are looking for work in animation or 3-D modelling. But our degree isn't specifically geared towards that because it's a unique degree.

How did you come to work on Junk Theory?

The crux of the project is the old Chinese junk boat which is being rebuilt and travelling from Bundeena to Botany Bay (Dec 5-21) and Sydney Harbour to Pittwater (Jan 6-26). Each night it will sail at twilight, slowly moving along its route, showing projected film and photos to its sails. A soundscape will be played, so people having picnics on the shore will ask what this mystical visage may be.

I did the website and developed an application where people could send messages to the website. To have them displayed in a way that they're overlaid with



Challenge . . . Andrea Lau is working on an awareness-raising project.

Picture: KRISTI MILLER

Master peace in the design

something we call news waves. There's five terms to the project, which are Cronulla, peace, understanding, fire and isolation. We searched for these terms on the internet and built a database of how many news items there were occurring for each per day. Then we drew waves to represent that. The height of the wave on each particular day is representative of how many items there were for that term. So it's a recognisable gauge of public reaction to those terms.

It sounds as though upon graduation you will have a lot of scope to move into any emerging technology. Or to work in a design collective in conjunction with other graduates.

Definitely, some of the graduates have actually formed their own design studios together. But I'll likely work in the wider

industry for a while then do a PhD to work in academia, theorising emerging technologies and doing project work, which is very exciting. Teaching is a really important aspect to this field because the knowledge has yet to be spread very well.

How about with emerging online media, is there potential for graduates such yourself to work there or shape its development?

One of our peers got a job straight after graduation and he has been working flat out for a year. He does things like web, multimedia, flash and interactive interfaces. He is aesthetically minded but also a very gifted programmer. A lot of the time there is a dichotomy between designers and programmers but we are sort of both. There's a lot of jobs or potential when working in a group where you need those skills.

JEREMY STEVENS