Los Angeles in Motion: A Beginner's Guide from Yesterday to Tomorrow
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What ARE Motion Graphics?
Google "Motion Graphics" and you'll get 18,900,000 hits. In a nutshell, Motion Graphics is the contemporary term used to describe a broad field of design and production that embraces type and imagery for film, video, and digital media including animation, visual effects, films titles, television graphics, commercials, multi-media presentations, more recently architecture, and increasingly digital/video games.

A Thumbnail History of Motion Graphics
The year 1936 in Los Angeles witnessed the arrival of German émigré Oskar Fischinger, who like many artists condemned by Hitler's Reich as "degenerate," relocated to the West Coast in hopes of pursuing a career in the film industry. Armed with visionary projects Fischinger's graphic approach was far-reaching, propelling both experimental filmmaking and commercial time-based design.

However, it was Saul Bass whose name became synonymous with Motion Graphics, beginning with his sensational titles for Otto Preminger's 1955 film, *The Man with the Golden Arm*. Bass distinguished himself not only by deploying modern graphic design in place of conventional film titling cards, but also through his momentous experimentation using narrative "back-story" to emblematically introduce feature film plots.

[Image: Saul Bass' title design for *The Man with the Golden Arm,* 1955, one of many films directed by Otto Preminger, who championed inventive title designs for his films.]

Ray and Charles Eames broadened the reach of Motion Graphics in the late 1950s, applying their ideas to documentary and educational films. Through their film and multi-media presentations, the Eames were responsible for disseminating a new way to see the world through their approach to visual education.

Slightly less known, but equally important was Pablo Ferro, whose titles for Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* in 1964 were a milestone in the history of Motion Graphics. Idiosyncratic and offbeat as the film, the work distinguished an approach that was high concept yet formally lowbrow. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, other Los Angeles based designers including John Whitney, Haboush Company, Spungbuggy, UPA, Jack Cole, Robert Abel,[1] and Douglas Trumbull, were moving the field in important new directions.

[Image: Stills from titles from *Dr. Strangelove*, designed by Pablo Ferro, 1964]

Motion Graphics in Los Angeles Now
Imaginary Forces launched the present era of Motion Graphics when Kyle Cooper, Peter Frankfurt, and Chip Houghton took over the West Coast office of R/Greenberg Associates in

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[1] Thanks to Frank Terry, Animator and Director of the Animation Program at California Institute of the Arts for his generous time in discussing the development of Motion Graphic in Los Angeles.

1996. However, it was Cooper's titles for the 1995 film, *Seven* that set things in motion. Karin Fong, who joined the LA office of R/Greenberg in 1994 and later became a partner in Imaginary Forces, recalls, "*Seven* became a phenomenon to an MTV generation already used to short formats. This group was the first of what was to become the blossoming motion graphics industry made possible by the accessibility and affordability of time-based graphics software."

[Images: Stills from Kyle Cooper's title design for *Seven,* 1995, launched the next generation of interest and invention in Motion Graphics.]

Recently described in the *LA Weekly* as "a handful of Los Angeles companies … with a super-relaxed style, founders in their 20s, and a cheerful disregard for age-old advertising wisdom," who are "not only inspiring an emerging generation of artists, but reinventing moving-image design as we know it,"[2] three stand-out studios (among an almost countless number of contemporary practitioners) are Brand New School, Logan, and Motion Theory — in whose work filmmaking, design, animation, and visual effects converge. Motion Graphics has indeed ripened into a substantial industry incorporating a vast territory of creative and technical enterprises and media.

[Image: Brand New School's broadcast graphics promo package for Fox Fuel offered the concept of constant reinvention of the brand. One of six strategies, "Go Pinto Go" includes a homemade character playing to cynical audiences oversaturated by slick graphics.]

[Image: A few examples of Logan's many designs for Current's many short programs reflect in this unconventional TV station's new approach to television programming.]

[Image: Motion Theory's design for the Hewlett Packard commercial "It Consolidates" imaginatively combines live action, illustration, and animation.]

On the Horizon
So, what's next? Jonathan Notaro and Jens Gehlhaar of Brand New School emphatically describe the next generation of Motion Graphic Designers as claiming more creative control by becoming tomorrow's directors — both for commercials and independent films. Graphic Designer Mike Mills is already acknowledged among "hot" young filmmakers such as Roman Coppola, Sofia Coppola, and Spike Jonze, most recently for his film *Thumbsucker*. Although he's since left, Mills was part of Director's Bureau, a Los Angeles-based agency representing among others, Geoff McFetdrige, AV Club, and Shynola, whose directorial origins can be traced to their Graphic Design education.

[Image: Stills from Mike Mill's *Thumbsucker*, 2005, and *Thumbsucker* promotion]

The field of architecture also seems to be ripe for Motion Graphics thanks to projection technology that allows screen-based media in the built environment. Imaginary Forces's recent collaborative project for 745 7th Avenue in Times Square for Kohn Pedersen Fox and

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[2] Holly Willis, "*The City in Motion: L.A.'s hyperactive graphics scene"* LA Weekly, Feb. 25 - Mar. 3, 2005

Morgan Stanley "fuses storytelling and architecture" on a block-long building. Live data streams offer multitudes of images including market data and images of both local and foreign communities.

[Images: Examples of the Imaginary Forces' design for changing media that is incorporated into 745 7th Avenue building in Times Square in collaboration with building architects, Kohn, Petersen, Fox.]

Los Angeles-based office, Michael Maltzen Architecture, has also gotten into the Motion Graphics game with their clever signage design for MoMA Queens. Viewed from the train as it moves towards the museum, white lettering on the black roof boxes of the museum building optically align to spell out "MoMA." Rather than movement on a screen, the motion of the approaching visitor creates the animation.

[Images: Two views of signage for MoMA Queens designed by Michael Maltzen Architecture, 2002, showing lettering on structure before and during optical alignment that takes place to spell "MOMA"] [Credit: Photos by Christian Richters]

Game design, design for the small screen, computer-programming, virtual film and film set design, among other possibilities, open up myriad new venues for Motion Graphics. The only certainty is that Motion Graphics in Los Angeles has experienced a rapid-fire evolution echoing the creative visions of Fischinger, Bass, the Eames, and many others against a backdrop of technological change, market flux, and most significantly, the imagination. Where Motion Graphics will take us now is anyone's guess and everyone's possibility.