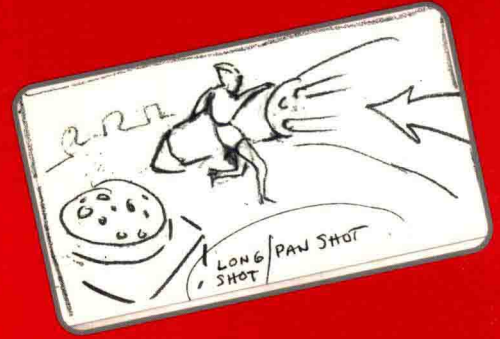
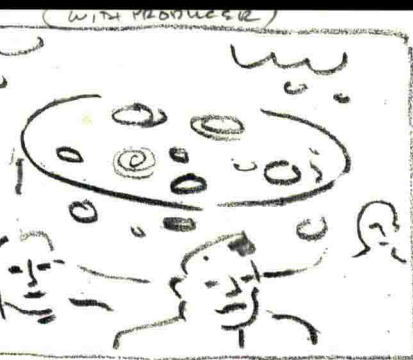


# The Art of the Storyboard

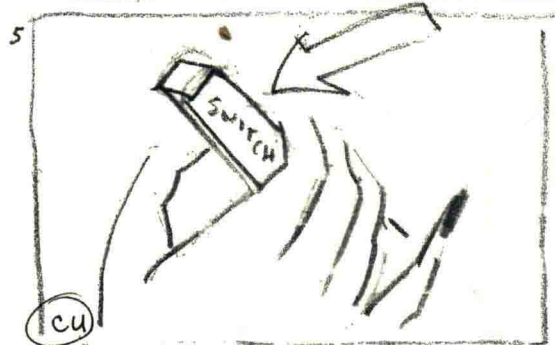
Storyboarding for  
Film, TV, and Animation



John Hart



AMANDA: THANKS! HERE'S THE MOON CAKE.



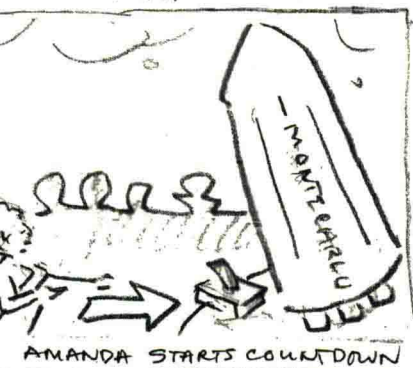
(C.U.)

V.O. AMANDA GOES TO SWITCH



(M.S.)

ROCKET STALLS - PAN ROCKET BACK



AMANDA STARTS COUNTDOWN



(M.S.)

WAITERS PLACE CAKE IN CENTER P

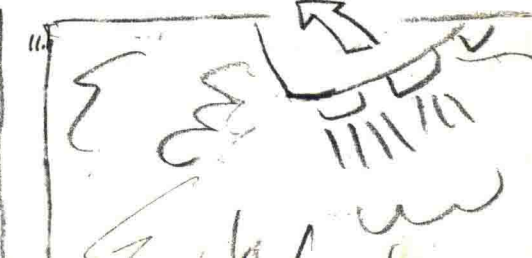


(M.C.U.)

AMANDA LEANS OVER ROCKET TO FIX



MONTICARLO



MONTICARLO

MONTICARLO

# The Art of the Storyboard

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Storyboarding for  
Film, TV, and Animation

John Hart



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# The Art of the Storyboard

**To John Hoar, Ph.D., whose indispensable editorial skills in dealing with this multifaceted text, ongoing criticism, and never-failing support made this book possible.**

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# Introduction

In saying that you want to be a storyboard artist, you're saying that you want to be the person who illustrates all the individual frames that make up the shots in a shooting script either for commercials, industrial films/multimedia, animated feature films, or animation used in commercials, industrials, or educational films. All these genres use storyboards in one form or another.

To be a storyboard artist you must have a good grasp of interpreting other people's thoughts. Your drawing talents must be developed thoroughly in both rendering live-action images realistically and in interpreting images as called for in animated films or videos. You must be comfortable expressing yourself clearly and creatively to your audience.

You will be part of what is referred to as the preproduction team. You will work with producers, production designers, directors of photography, and special effects teams. Most of your storyboard work, however, will be with the director, whose vision of the project will inform the entire production team.

*The Art of the Storyboard* seeks to help you in the following ways:

- To summarize the history and development of the storyboard and clarify its adaptation and function as a viable visual tool for the creative team that produces live action feature-length films, animation films and cartoons, commercials, multimedia/industrial films and videos, and documentaries.
- To provide basic exercises and illustrations in order to develop the drawing/drafting/design skills essential to realizing an artist's style, a style that will satisfy the needs of directors working in any of the aforementioned fields of creative endeavor.
- To serve as a standard text or a supplementary text for established art or film studies at the secondary or college level or in film schools.
- To help the student of storyboarding or film techniques whose time or funds restrict participation in organized classes to be better prepared for future art challenges.
- To increase the appreciation of the storyboard as a preproduction tool for producers, directors, cinematographers, art directors, and the like in any media, who perhaps aren't as familiar with its processes and purposes.

Stills from historically important films—from silent to sound—will be used throughout the text to illustrate their inherent design qualities and “stopped action” (actually parts of a storyboard, called *shots* or

*stills* from “key frames”). Each of the chosen renderings of movie or animated stills from close to 200 entertainment projects will serve three basic functions:

1. To place the film in its historical context in the evolution of twentieth century film styles, particularly those nominated for or winning Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Cinematography, Best Production Design/Art Direction, or Best Special Effects.
2. To illuminate for the student of film each film’s unique compositional qualities; that is, its use of framing in the context of its realization in reproducing a three-dimensional reality on the screen.
3. To delineate the dynamic placement of figures, use of camera angles (the point of view of a character often dictates camera angles used), and in particular, the director of photography’s (or cinematographer’s) “painting with light,” thus creating striking visuals composed of light and shade (*chiaroscuro*).

The stills or shots that have been analyzed and interpreted here serve as singular illustrated frames that makeup the visual narrative that becomes the sequential action of the storyboard. These “key frames,” when filmed as individual shots (projected on a screen at 24 frames per second), induce a “persistence of vision” on the human retina, thus creating a “cinematic motion” in the viewer’s perception.

The basic drawing techniques illustrated in this book are applicable to any work the storyboard artist will do either in feature films, animation, commercials, or in computer-generated applications. But something this book will emphasize over and over is that, while it helps to draw well, it’s the story concept that counts, and even rudimentary drawing techniques can convey the narrative flow of a given production.



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## The Storyboard's Beginnings: A Short History of Animation

When I was studying art in high school, I thought that the greatest place to get a job as an artist would be at Walt Disney Studios in Burbank, California. Having seen *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, *Bambi*, *Song of the South*, and so forth, I imagined myself sitting at an artist's drawing board, helping to design and execute even more of the magically visual imagery for which Disney, along with his conceptual artists and animators, had become justly famous.

Although my career went off in quite a different direction (an eventual master's degree in Portrait Painting and a long teaching career in commercial art and photography), I wonder what would have happened if I had applied and actually been accepted.

What I didn't realize at the time was that I might have been put to work simply coloring the thousands of cels (acetate sheets) that make up a finished cartoon or full-length animated feature. I didn't think about the multitude of other jobs a trained artist could do at an animation studio—jobs like story and storyboard development, character design, animation drawing, action analysis and timing, camera and editing, special effects, puppet animation, and computer graphics (CGI). An artist might even learn to work on an Oxberry camera stand, used to photograph animation drawn on field charts. Or, at some animation studios like Hanna Barbara (*The Flintstones* and hundreds of commercials), an artist might be involved in painting production backgrounds, animation drawings, inspirational sketches (concept artwork), or making character model statues.

In high school, I also wasn't aware of the rich contributions of others who paved the way for Walt, like Winsor McKay, whose *Gertie the Dinosaur* (see Figure 1-1) and animation of the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915 established him as a great ancestor of the art form.

The concept of telling a story through a series of drawings, which is the root of the storyboard, can be traced all the way back to the ancient Egyptians and further. Charles Solomon's *History of Animation* begins later, with the traveling magic lantern shows of the 1600s and takes readers from the Optical Illusions of Phantasmagoria in the 1800s to the animated cartoon—from *Felix the Cat* and *Mickey Mouse* in the 1920s to *Jurassic Park* and *The Lion King* in the 1990s.

A late-nineteenth-, early-twentieth-century contributor to the history of storyboards and animation was George Méliès, the French conjurer,

Figure 1-1 Winsor McKay with  
Gertie the Dinosaur.



illusionist, theatrical set designer, and magician whose films projected optical tricks and fantasies. Examples of his films include *Cinderella* (1899) and *Joan of Arc* (1902), topped by his *Trip to the Moon* (1902), which still amuses and fascinates film audiences with its humor and inventiveness wherever it is shown. It is memorable for the rocket landing in the eye of the man in the moon.

Others who paved the way include Felix Messmer, whose expressive *Felix the Cat* (1914) was the world's most popular cartoon character, and Max Fleischer, creator of the Betty Boop cartoon series of the 1930s and whose *Cinderella*, for me, is even more inventive visually than the later Disney version.

Between these two came the inventive Ub Iwerks's artists in 1929, known to be among the "greatest animators of the silent era and who designed the physical appearance of Oswald Rabbit [bearing a first cousin resemblance to Mickey Mouse]" (Solomon, 1994). This was the beginning of the so-called Disney Era, which reigned through the early forties; and the world was to fall in love with Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Pluto, and Snow White.

In 1940, the ever-popular Bugs Bunny made his debut in "A Wild Hare" and became a living legend right through the 1950s and 1960s, under the inspired direction of Tex Avery, Bob Clampett, Fritz Freleng, and Chuck Jones. Recent storyboard drawings by Darrell Van Clitter for a possible upcoming feature, *Ballet Box Bunny*, capture the wabbit's feisty, debonair, suave personality. (For more visuals on Bugs Bunny, see Joe Adamson's *Bugs Bunny: Fifty Years and Only One Gray Hare*, with Forewords by Fritz Freleng and Chuck Jones (1990).

Tex Avery was especially notable among the giants of animation art. His inventive, original cartoon creations, particularly at MGM from 1942 to 1955, are still being imitated. Tex is considered by the cognoscenti of cartoons to be second only to Walt Disney. He worked first with Walt Lanz (Daffy Duck), next at Warner Brothers where he fine-tuned Bugs Bunny and redesigned Porky Pig in the 1940s (with the talented assistance of Chuck Jones), then at MGM (where he created his own "golden age" with memorable cartoon characters as Red Hot Riding Hood, the deadpan pooch Droopy, and many others such as the Slap Happy Lion and the King Size Canary).

Avery's fast-paced, irreverent, even surrealist gag style continues to influence contemporary cartoons (like *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* 1988), the zany MTV "look," and even in recent films and commercials—after all, his witty "surprise the audience" techniques dictated much of the 1960s French New Wave.

In 1995, Disney's *Toy Story* was created by John Lasseter's studio, Pixar, pioneers of the computer-animated format. Pixar's use of fine rendering, especially in the subtleties of three-dimensional light and shade, kept *Toy Story* from appearing simply like a series of mathematical formulas.

Each of these animated cartoons, from *Felix the Cat* in 1914 to *Toy Story* in 1995, began as a drawing or series of drawings, just as so many popular cartoon characters like Popeye and Krazy Kat started as that prime example of a storyboard, the comic strip. In comics, you will notice a very clever manipulation of the figures in action within each of the frames. Cartoon artists must make dynamic use of space, compositional devices, and color. They must effectively utilize the foreground, middle ground, and background areas, which, in turn, frame the close-ups, medium shots, and long shots of the characters.

Cartoonists must keep children and sometimes even adults visually stimulated, so that they won't be bored by the characters and situations. The artists have to come up with an interesting story line and even stronger images, which are exaggerations of human or animal features, expressions, and body movements, to illustrate their stories. As always with cartoons, the main action revolves around conflict. This

type of approach can help one develop good storyboards. Conflict can be created merely by playing a large object or person against a small one, strong verticals against horizontals, red against green, large expanses of sky against a lone tree, or a ferocious thunderstorm against a defenseless person.

Ultimately, a cartoonist must place the story into a logical narrative sequence; and this, essentially, is the task of the storyboard artist. The use of the storyboard is a premiere aid in preplanning a filmed live action or animated feature. Eric Sherman states in *Directing the Film*, "The storyboard consists of making a series of sketches where every basic scene and every camera setup within the scene is illustrated—it is a visual record of the film's appearance before shooting begins." In *Lighting for Action* (Hart, 1992), written for the still photographer who wants to move up to video and film, I describe the storyboard as a tool designed to "give you a frame by frame, shot by shot, organized program for your shooting sequence."

Ron Huss and Norman Silverstein (1968) elaborate on the storyboard artist as one who, "guided by the Director, captures the actions and passions that will be translatable into film," that they involve "a continuity reminiscent of comic strips," remaining then "primarily pictorial."

Working from the original idea, storyboards enable one to organize all the complicated action depicted in the script, whether being done for live action films, animation, commercials, or a combination, they will illustrate what each selected frame of action contains. By doing one's own storyboards carefully and thoroughly, one knows exactly what is going to be done before the actual filming begins—every shot, every camera angle, what lights, reflectors, sets, and props will be used.

Of course, memorable scenes and sets don't just happen. One needs talented people to create them. And, on a commercial project, every piece of board and pound of plaster used in the building of sets, every performer, every costume, and every crew member has to be answered for and paid for. Germs of ideas and lengthy conferences involving the director, director of photography, set designer, and costume designer are part of this process.

Dozens of other creative people are involved in the extremely complicated preproduction process. The producer acquires the story property in the first place and raises the money to produce it. Producing it requires actors, costumers, grips, and other technicians like the carpenters, painters, composers of the soundtrack, even traffic managers and drivers. The entire production enterprise can be quite mind-boggling long before it is shot, edited, promoted, and distributed to local movie theaters. The whole operation is doubly impressive when one considers the logistics of getting together this group of people to decide what will be the "look" of the film to be produced, what will be its tone, and how will it be visualized—in other words, how the film will appear in its final form when shown to those who have become its targeted audience. Exactly to what created images will we all relate and respond?

The storyboard artist is the one who will make sense of the initial creative mayhem involved in getting a film produced. The storyboard artist's contribution to the creative team's efforts is to help in visually evaluating and synthesizing the narrative flow of the screenplay. The storyboard artist's job is to give cohesion, interpretation, and illustration to the visual spine, the "flux of imagery" that will constitute the screenplay. He or she will render or sketch, when requested by a particular director, all the necessary action in each key sequence or shot. Working

with the producer, director, director of photography, and often the production designer, the artist will create a vital blueprint that will be referred to by all of them during the entire shooting schedule of the production and frequently right into the postproduction editing process.

In a recent interview in *VISFX* by the editor, Bruce Stockler, (1998), Ray Harryhausen responded to a question on how he learned about storyboarding:

I learned storyboarding from Willis O'Brien. He storyboarded everything. He started a film before *King Kong* called *Creation* [1931] at RKO. When Merian Cooper took over, he put the gorilla in it, and they added parts of *Lost World*, and they built that up to be *King Kong*. It was a great experience to work with him. He would make 20 or 30 drawings a day, little ones, about the size of this (indicating a napkin) . . . then he would paste them up and write captions underneath and we would do each scene that way. They were all numbered, so you knew when the close-up was coming, the camera angle and the framing, and whether you needed a rear-projector or a split screen or whatever.

---

## The Storyboard Artist: A Team Player

The evolution of the storyboard is intertwined with the history of twentieth century cinema itself. It's my guess that, if the very early master directors didn't use a storyboard per se, creative visionaries like D. W. Griffith, Eric von Stroheim, Charles Chaplin, and Buster Keaton were involved in some sort of preproduction planning, even if it entailed simply basics like the day and time of the shoot, what actors were involved, where the location would be, would sets have to be built and painted, what style costumes would be worn, who would run the camera, and what scenes were the director and the cameraman going to shoot at the designated time and location? Some directors like Eisenstein made simple sketches in the margin of the script (see Figure 2-1), while others probably kept them in their heads like John Ford or DeMille in the silent film period.

In any case, some form of preproduction concept sketching evolved, if only to give the construction and technical crews, and in particular the actors, some idea of what the next shot was going to consist. It's unlikely someone like Griffith, who was shooting 72 one- or two-reelers a year, circa 1910, would have had time to make detailed sketches of every scene scheduled (see Figure 2-2).

Although the storyboard per se was developed in its more sophisticated form by Disney in the thirties, Griffith certainly preplanned the setups, set construction, camera movements, crane shots, and so on and, indeed, rehearsed the actors to block each shot. Later, in *Gone with the Wind* (1939), David O. Selznick would apply many of Disney's preplanning animation techniques to his Civil War epic.

Frederico Fellini (*La Strada*, 1954; *La Dolce Vita*, 1960; *8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>*, 1963) was known occasionally to arrive on the set early in the morning and, like Griffith before him, keep scores of carpenters, actors, and technicians waiting around while he worked out in his head where and how the next shot was going to be accomplished. (Who could get away with that now, with budgets of \$50–75 million being poured into some productions?) No doubt, he spent many hours with his technical people preplanning the use of the expensive sets, the lighting, and the camera positions that obviously were needed, for example, for a brilliantly imaged film like *La Dolce Vita* (1960) or *8<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>* (1963; see Figure 2-3).

Preplanning for these films? Most certainly, because gigantic budgets demanded it. Storyboarding for action sequences? Probably, at least in drawings of concept sketches aligned with the script.

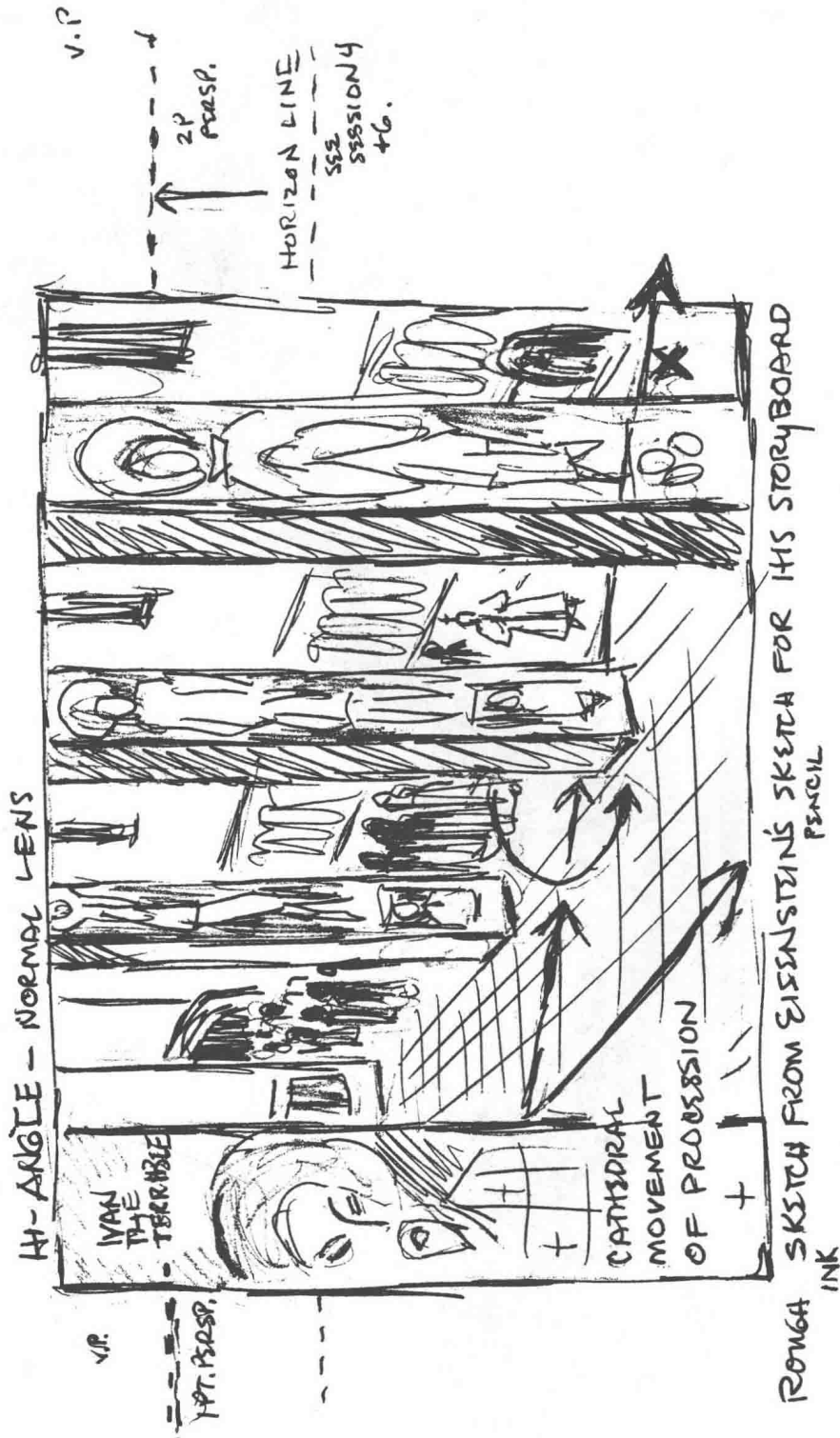


Figure 2-1 Hart's schematic interpretation of original Eisenstein's sketches for Ivan the Terrible, Part II (1958).



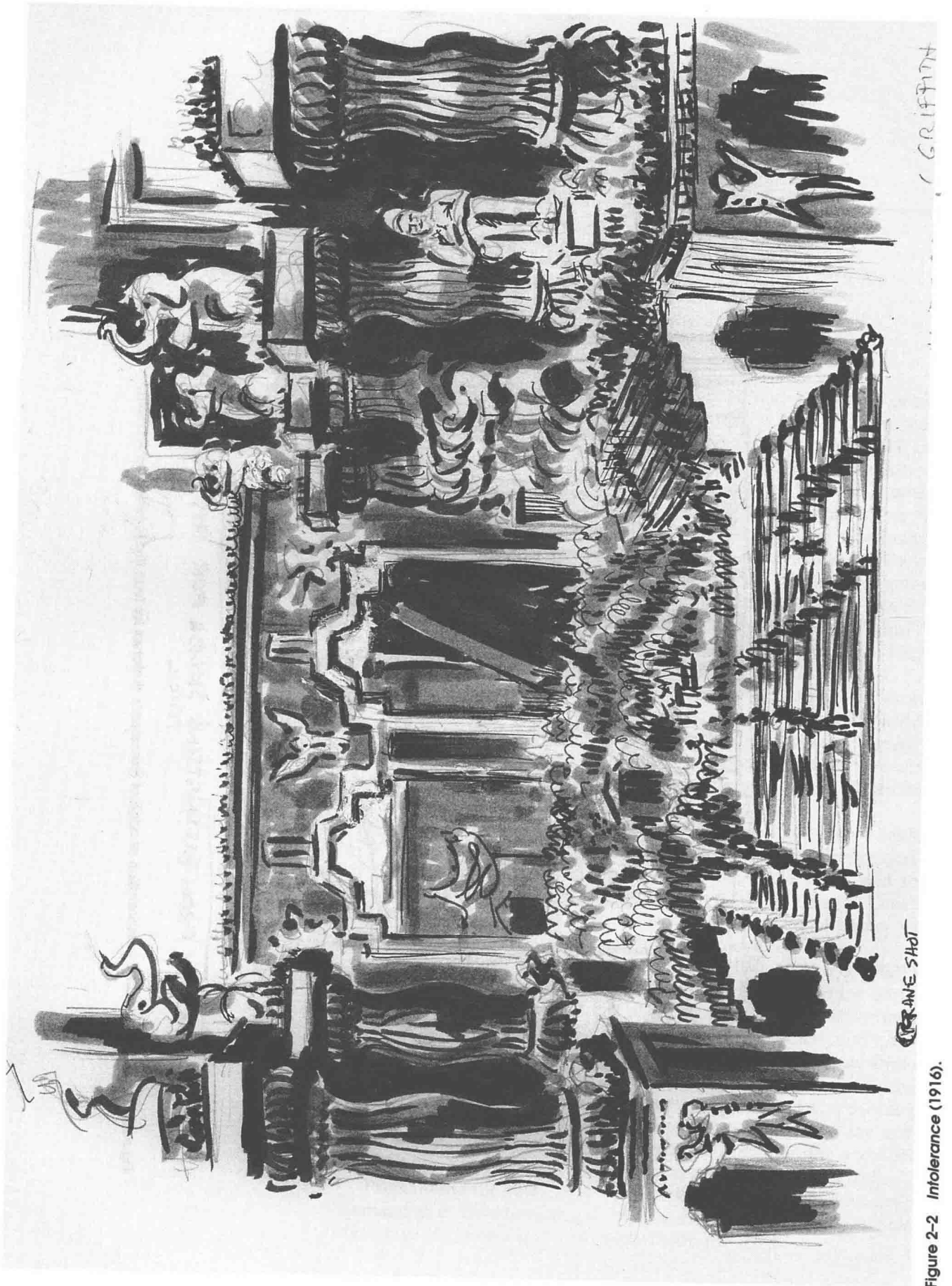


Figure 2-2 Intolerance (1916).