Michael Doret
The Art of Letterform & Image Design

Case Study #2

"Cry-Baby" Title Treatment

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My "Case Study" Series is an attempt to answer the many questions I receive about my work. It's difficult and time-consuming to answer each and every question from students and professionals, so I felt that creating this series might be helpful to others in understanding my creative process by using specific examples. Where do my ideas come from? How do I develop them, transforming them from crude ideas to finished art? By retracing the steps I followed on several projects I hope to be able to provide some insight into this process.

I'd like to mention this about this process: although many of my projects have similarities, each and every project has it's own peculiarities, and therefore may have to follow a very different path from what is described in the following Case Study.

This #2 in the series follows the steps I took to create the title treatment for a Broadway musical.

PROJECT:

To design a title treatment for the upcoming musical adaptaion to the Broadway stage of the 1990 John Waters cult classic film "**Cry-Baby**" which had originally featured Johnny Depp, Iggy Pop, Polly Bergen, Traci Lords, Ricki Lake, and Troy Donohue. "**Cry-Baby–The Musical**" is scheduled to open on Broadway in the Spring of 2008.

CLIENT:

Serino Coyne, an ad agency which "services the world's leading theatrical producers and the most prestigious theatres and performing arts centers in the nation". I worked with **Moira Deakin,** Creative Projects Manager for Serino Coyne.

TURNAROUND TIME:

Because of extenuating circumstances at Serino Coyne, the deadline on this job was unusually tight. I began work on November 15th. I had to deliver finishes by November 26th.

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The first stage of any project is usually information gathering. In addition to a synopsis of the play, the info I received from the agency consisted of the following:

- *Time Period: Early 1950's (1950-1954/55)*
- *Style: Like all of your work, we need to respect the time-period but have a contemporary flair…in other words we took a 50's logo and updated it for the 21st Century.*
- *We have 3 categories/styles that our Art Directors are focusing on: Pulp Fiction Book Jackets, Mad Magazine style, Early 1950s movie posters. I have attached some examples that I found on the internet when doing research for the project.*

Here are two of the examples I was sent. To save space I have cropped in from the full movie poster images.

These examples were fine as far as type treatments on posters go, but a solution for "Cry-Baby" would probably have to go a bit farther in order to be able to stand on it's own. I started doing my own research into the various genres that would be appropriate for this title treatment. In addition to the "Pulp", "Mad Magazine" and "'50s Movie Poster" genres I felt that "Hot Rods" would also fit in nicely. I did my own research, coming up with many images such as the ones below:

I don't use reference to "copy" from, but more to help me understand a mood, or set a theme, or push me toward a certain style. I might pull out 10 or more of my reference books—or sometimes none at all. It really depends on the project, and if my "creative juices" need a little jump-start.

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SKETCHING

Next I pick up a pencil and sketch pad and just start noodling and doodling. I might do many pages of these before I'm satisfied that I've got the germs of a few good ideas.

I'll go through all the pages of sketches, noting those that show some promise. In the case of this project, I picked out seven that I thought had potential and expanded them into rough pencil sketches that would be tight enough to present to the agency...

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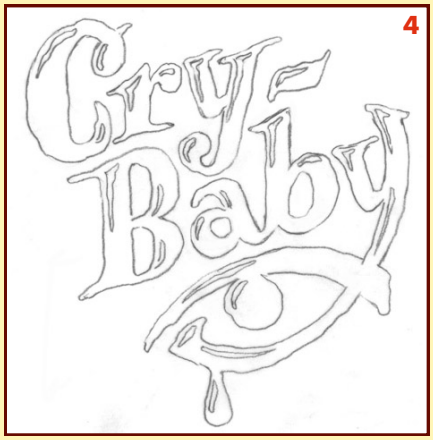

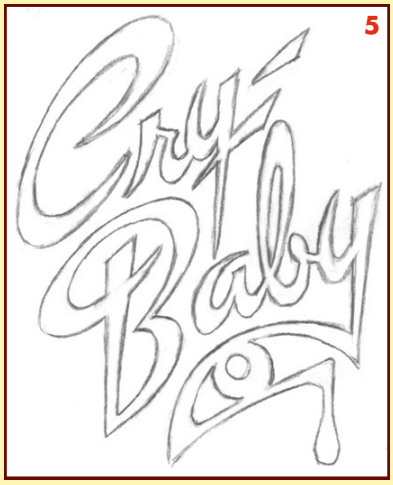

I try to provide graphic ideas that appear as different from one another as I can make them. Yet all of them should in some way fit within the parameters that were set out by the agency (see page 3) at the beginning of the project. Here is a little bit of the thinking behind the sketches:

The crowns in sketches **1** and **2** were suggested by one of the songs ("King Cry-Baby") that appeared in the movie.

The letterforms in sketches **1** and **5** are references to "bright-works"– classic chrome car logos and ornaments of the '50s.

The letterforms in sketches **3** and **4** were an allusion to pulp novel covers and film noir and horror movie titles of the period.

Sketch **6** is a direct reference to hot rod decals. Sketch **7** is also a reference to hot rod decals and also to Matchbook covers.

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Serino Coyne asked me to bring three of the sketches to a level of finish where the producers would be able to easily visualize the treatments, and where the agency could insert them into their layouts. These were sketches **2**, **3**, and **7**.

On sketch **2**, the agency asked me to remove the racing flags/musical note motif. They also asked me to remove the crown motif, as the song "King Cry-Baby" would no longer be in the show. We discussed that it might be a good idea to change the triangular background to a V-8 "V" shape to reinforce the car connection.

The agency felt that sketches **3**, and **7** were fine as is. So I was to move ahead and develop these three sketches.

Additionally they asked that if I had the time before the deadline, if I could develop sketch **1** that would be great. As it turned out I was able to squeeze in a finish on this one as well before the deadline. I also needed to edit out the crown on this design for the same reason as in sketch **2**.

REFINING THE DESIGNS

The next step was to refine and develop these designs. Typically the way I do this is to take a rough sketch and redraw it, making refinements and changes as required. Because of the impending deadline, there was no time to do redraws on the designs, so I had to make-do with the rough sketches as they were.

I'll place one of my semi-tight sketches in a layer in Adobe Illustrator and create a template. I then start drawing and refining using the template as a base. I don't feel it's important to go into detail describing how I create a piece of art in Illustrator. What's more important is the the whole process leading up to this stage—the research, the thinking, the ideas and how they are implemented. See the next page for the four finishes I delivered.

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One other thing I needed to add to the designs were the words "THE MUSICAL". Of course I felt I should add those words in a way that would feel organic to the designs.

Serino Coyne had their meeting with the client and they ended up selecting the "pulp-novel" style title treatment (the second from the top, above). In a last minute adjustment it was decided to change the colors from what you see here. But all in all I felt this was a successfully completed assignment.

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