



Wally Wood

22 PANELS THAT ALWAYS WORK!!

3rd Edition



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2022

Tony Flowers



This is an introductory guide to Wally Wood's 22 panels that always work. The 22 panels are a valuable tool that offers composition references for all visual storytellers.

TONY FLOWERS, UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

Wally Wood



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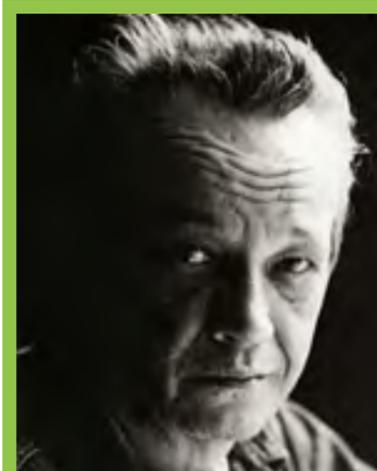
Acclaimed comic book artist Wally Wood started his 30-year career back in the '50s. Wood's work has made him one of the pop culture icons of the comic book world. During Woods' work on Mad Magazine and Marvel comics, he became one of the highest-paid artists of his era. When he left MAD to move to Marvel Comics, he was paid over twice the going per page rate due to his talent and reputation (Vandehey, 2020).

While his fame is built on his professional work as a comic book artist, his creation of the '22 panels that always work' will make him a must study artist for

all future comic book illustrators. When it came to his illustration, Woods was a master of efficiency and always looking to increase workflow. In the words of Wally Wood himself, "Never draw anything you can copy, never copy anything you can trace, never trace anything you can cut out and paste up" (Freeman, 2019, Sim, 2012)

The 22 panels follow this ethos of 'why reinvent the wheel'. The 22 panels form a reference system of know composition techniques for visual storytelling. The full title of which gives an insight into the thought processes and

applications for the panels.



"I worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week for years. Being a comic book artist is like sentencing yourself to life imprisonment at hard labor in solitary confinement. I don't think I'd do it again."

"Wally Wood's 22 panels that always work!!"

Or some interesting ways to get some variety into those boring panels where some dumb writer has a bunch of lame characters sitting around and talking for page after page!"

wally

Wally Wood:

1. Never draw what you can swipe.

2. Never swipe what you can trace.

3. Never trace what you can photocopy.

4. Never photocopy what you can clip out and paste down.



01. All illustrations in this booklet are the original work of Comic Artist Wally Wood.

02. They are used here only as a part of an educational text and all copyright of the images remains the property of the Wally Wood Estate.

03. Text has been written by Tony Flowers (c) 2021



The story behind the panels

The 22 panels we know today were assembled by one of Wood's assistants, Larry Hama. Wood developed the 22 panels not as a teaching aid but instead as a working tool. It was a way for Wood to have a reference set of compositions that he could use when pencilling his comic book layouts. "He was always trying to kick himself to put less labour into the work!" (Johnson, 2006).

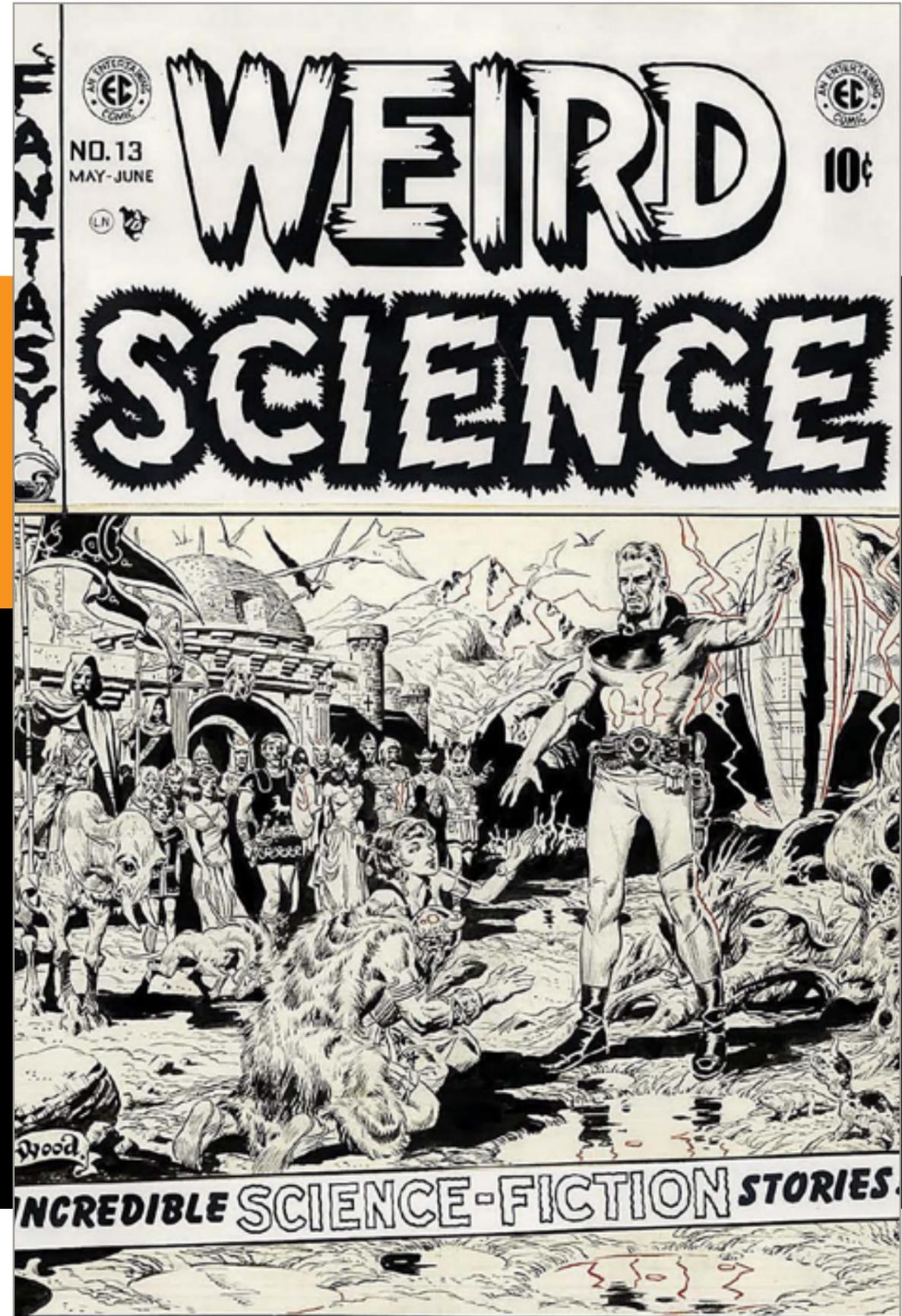
When Wood created his set of panels, they were not the single sheet collection of images that we use today. Instead, he would draw them up on sheets and pin them to the walls of his studio (Vandehey, 2020, Freeman, 2019). This was not only for his benefit but for his assistants: as time went by, copies of the sheets were made and handed around. Woods assistant Larry Hama came



Larry Hama, "When I was starting as an editor at Marvel, I found myself in the position of having to coach fledgling artists on the basics of visual storytelling, and it occurred to me that the reminder sheets Woody made would help in that regard" (Vandehey, 2020)

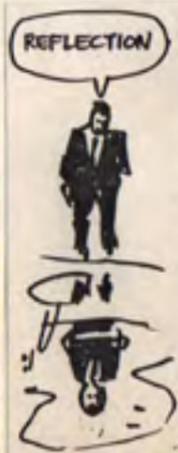
Wood 22 panels are not a foolproof recipe for success. Some artists look down on the use of the panels that are sometimes referred to as 'Wood's lazy layouts'. Comic book writer Mark Evanier observed that "Whether it's a good idea for a comic artist to resort to these tricks is, of course, arguable. Wally Wood could get away with repeating compositions, but few artists are Wally Wood" (Evanier, 2006)

Wood's panels are not a strict set of rules to follow as a reference guide. They reference classic design compositional principles for visual storytelling conventions (Richmond, 2006, McEwan, 2014). As will all of the aesthetic design elements and principles, wood 22 panels will not answer every situation. Only through



WALLY WOOD'S 22 PANELS THAT ALWAYS WORK !!

OR SOME INTERESTING WAYS TO GET SOME VARIETY INTO THOSE BORING PANELS WHERE SOME DUMB WRITER HAS A BUNCH OF LAME CHARACTERS SITTING AROUND AND TALKING FOR PAGE AFTER PAGE!



TONY FLOWERS 2022

STANDARD



Brad Bird's "The Incredibles" 2004 Pixar Animation

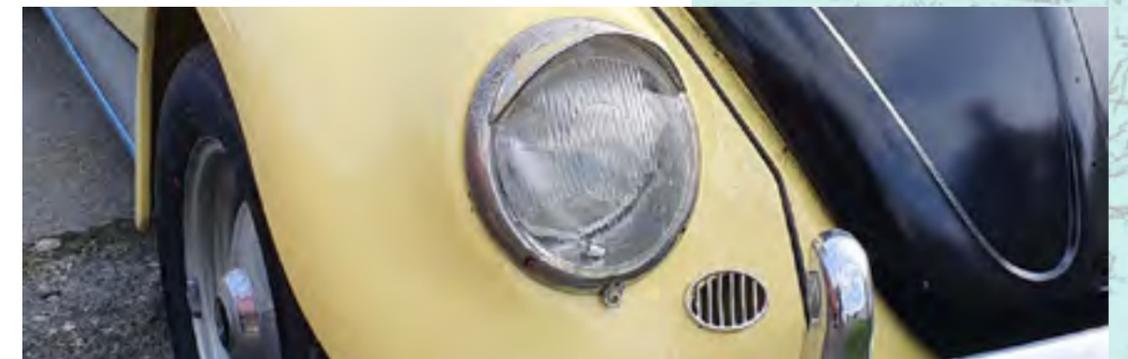


Keanu Reeves as John Wick in John Wick 4 2023 Summit Entertainment

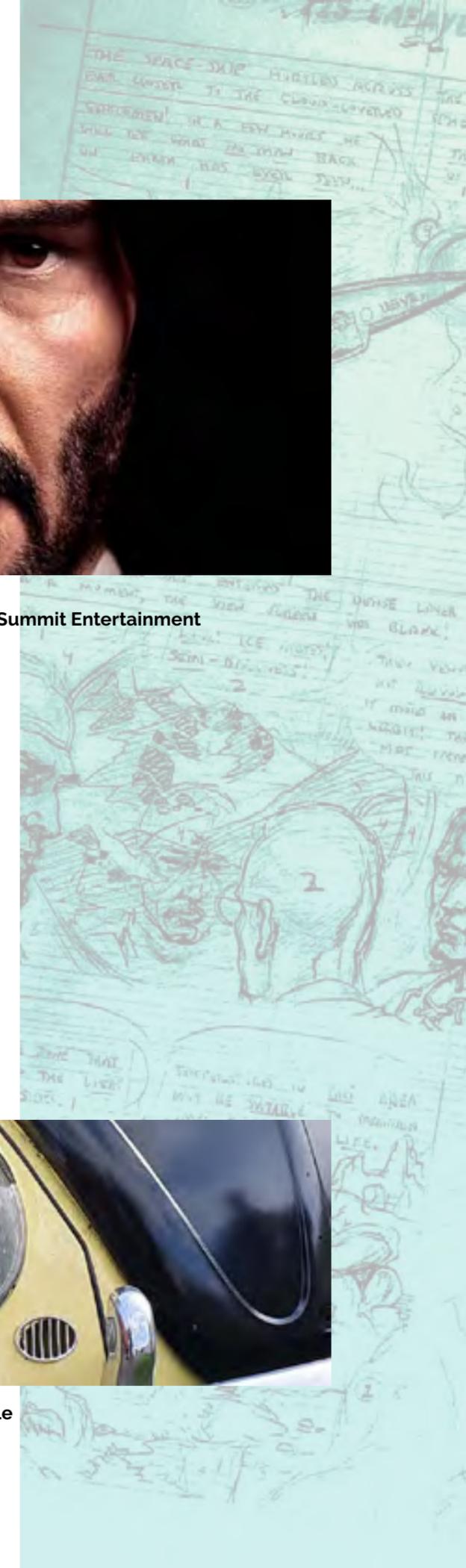
You will notice that many of these framings are also commonly used in film and photography. The 'Big Head' framing is a version of an extreme close-up shot in film and photography.

The extreme close-up shot is used to bring focus to a subject.

This subject may be a person or an object.



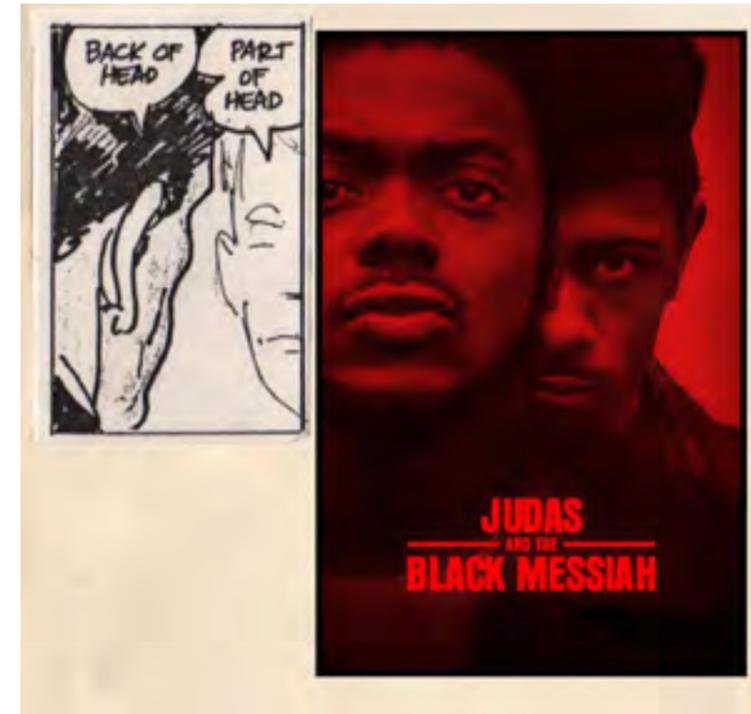
My 1961 VW Beetle



panels in action



2020 Oscar winner cinematographer: 1917 (2020)
 director Sam Mendes, cinematographer Roger Deakins



How relevant are the 22 panels today?

If we look at screenshots from the two critically acclaimed films for their cinematography from 2020 and 2022, we can see the panels apply to visual storytelling.

2021 Oscar nominee cinematographer: Judas and the Black Messiah (2021) director Shaka King, cinematographer Sean Bobbitt



2022 Oscar winner cinematographer: Dune (2022), cinematographer Joseph Ruttenberg



ben day and illustrator

Ben Day

Within the 22 panels, Wood refers to 'BEN DAY'; this is an industry term for adding tonal shading to an image. Tonal shading in comic books is achieved through the use of dot patterns that are called 'Ben Day dots' in the printing and publishing industry (Lawley, 2021).

01.



01. Ben Day panels.

02. Letratone - ziptone

In the past with would be achieved through hand-drawn techniques or with the use of 'zip tone'. Zip tone was a dry transfer material available in a wide variety of dot patterns.



03.

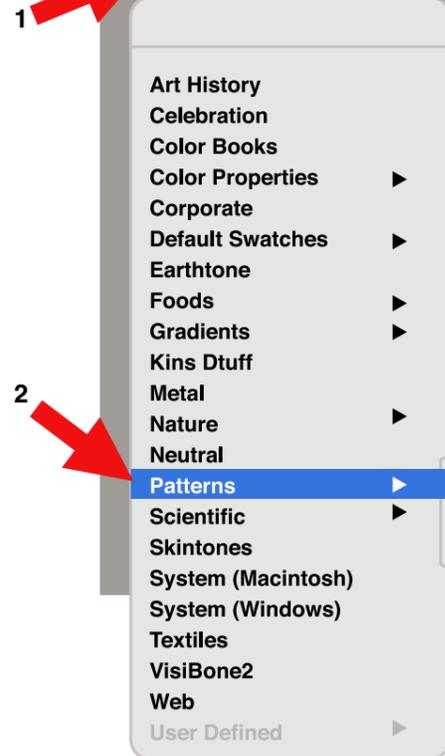
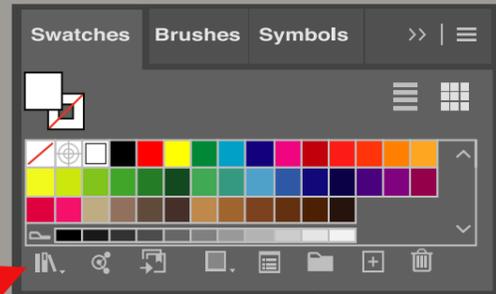
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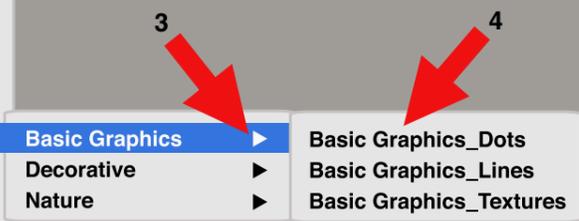


Adobe Illustrator

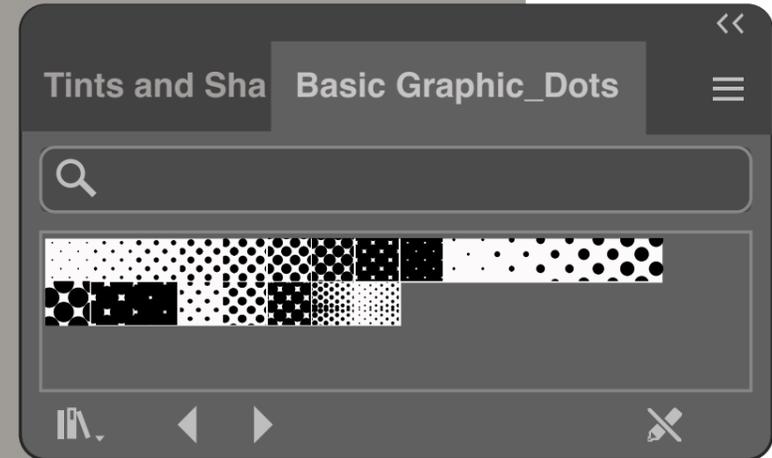
Vector-based programs such as Adobe Illustrator have the ability to create the 'Ben Day' effects through the use of graphic fill patterns.



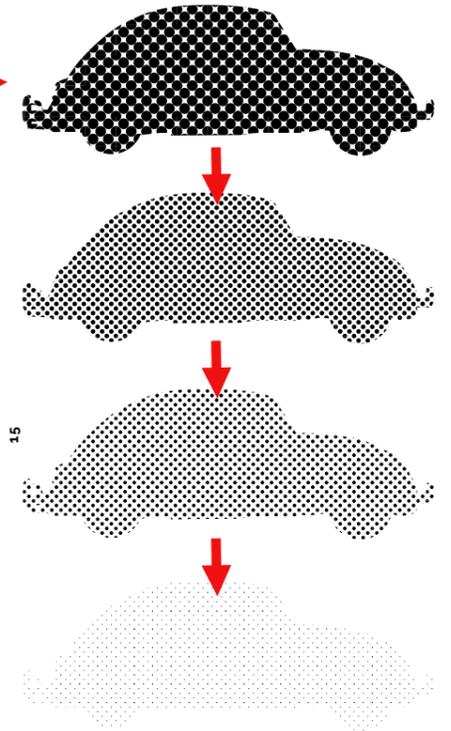
The dot pattern function is accessed from the colour swatch tab on the right margin toolbar. Once you have selected the 'swatch' tool, you will see the library tab (1) in the bottom right of the swatch panel. From the library drop-down, select the 'patterns' (2) option, then 'basic graphics' (3) and finally 'basic graphics_dots' (4).



This will open the Basic Graphic Dots panel with a range of dot pattern options.



The shape will be transformed from a shape into a dot pattern by selecting a shape and then selecting a pattern.



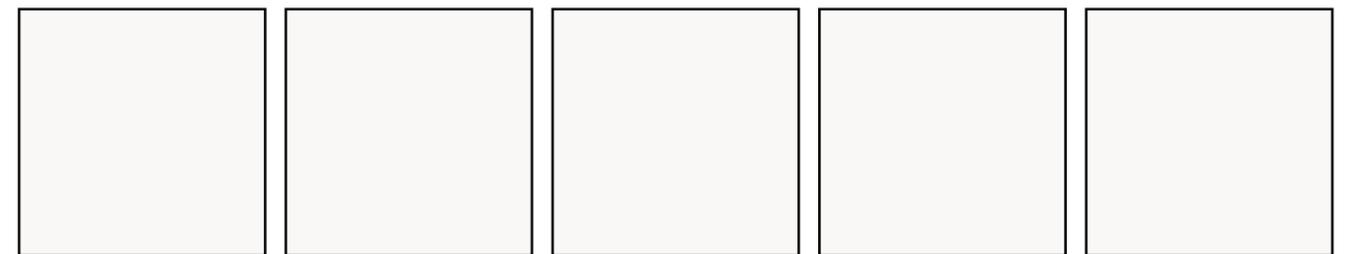
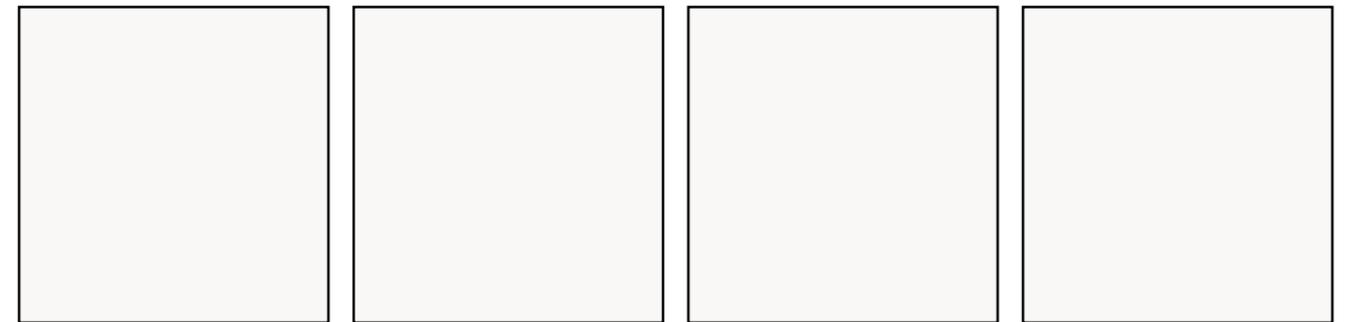
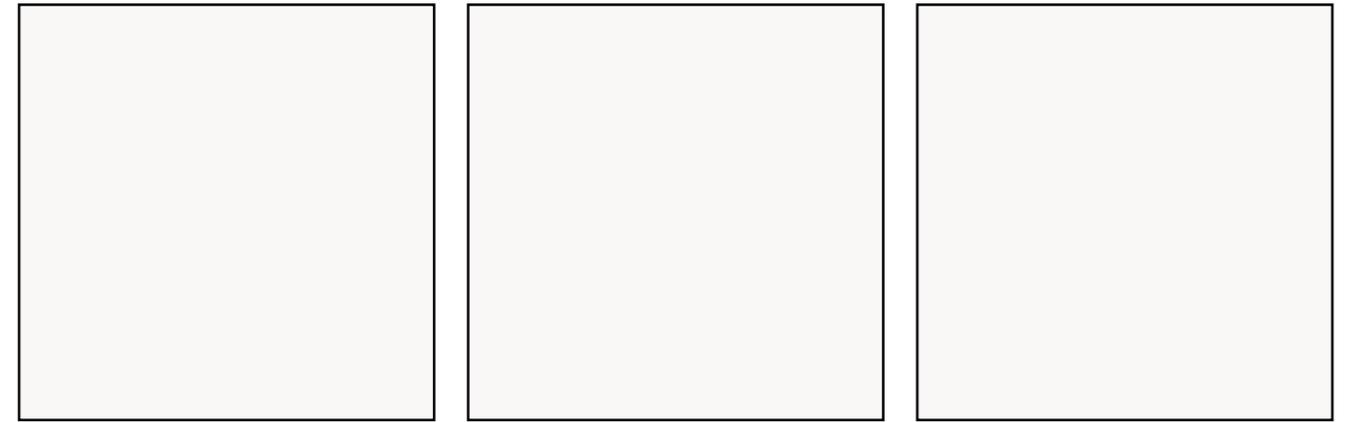
working the panels



The 22 panels were never intended to be a complete set of compositional frames for visual storytelling. Rather these are devices that work well for visual storytelling in all forms. It doesn't matter if you're creating a comic, an illustration, taking a photo, filming a movie or directing a play. The 22 panels offer 'some interesting ways to get some variety into those boring panels where some dumb writer has a bunch of lame characters sitting around and talking for page after page!'



While it was never there intended use, they are also a useful tool for creating a narrative. By arranging a number of panels into a sequence, it is easy to see how a narrative can be developed. This is the process of storyboarding.



Here we have some 3, 4 and 5 panel comic frames. Your challenge is to sequence images from the 22 panels into an order that creates a visual narrative in either 3,4,5 or across all (12) of comic frame panels.



About Tony



Tony is an academic with diverse experience as a professional design, including book illustration and glassblowing. Creatively he is focused on illustrations for children's literature, where he has worked on over 60 titles. He teaches Design Thinking and Aesthetics at the University of Tasmania by combining academic theory with his industry experience.

Tony is passionate about education and sharing knowledge, presenting at international academic conferences on Visual Literacy and the creative process. He also is a regular presenter at schools and writers' festivals around Australia, where he presents and conducts workshops for adults and school students on creating stories within illustrations, how he uses illustration as a part of the writing process, the creative process and the publishing industry.

Contact Tony directly at tony@flowersink.com.au or anthony.flowers@utas.edu.au if you would like to arrange a presentation or a workshop at a conference, festival or for a school visit.

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