

Sims Shows How a Picture is Worth a Box Office Hit

By KAIA N. SHIVERS
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Like one of his creative print advertising campaigns for a film or television project, entrepreneur and advertising designer Art Sims carries a dynamic and intriguing vision. Guided by a strong spiritual faith and sound connection to his roots, he is determined to be one of the most powerful African American design advertising and marketing companies in the entertainment industry.

With only a handful of black design advertising companies that are involved in the entertainment sector, Sims' 12 year business, 11:24 Design Advertising and Marketing has planted seeds that are blossoming into productive fruits from his labor. The impressive company that carries the name of one of his favorite scriptures in the bible, has Spike Lee, Steven Spielberg and Master P as clients, along with international patronage. But Sims' focus on urban advertising hasn't limited his work.

"With 11:24 we got our own niche," explained Sims. "We are an urban advertising agency that does a lot of African American projects as well as non-black. I think it's important we have as much say in anything that deals with us so we can put out respectful, quality work and images. That's what I'm about and that's what our clients see—good work, whomever they are. I am comfortable with our niche, but we do have plans to expand because we should be doing Pepsi, Coca-Cola and McDonald's. We buy those products. And I'm sure we'll get those corporate clients. The company is still young and we are growing in many ways."

With films like the "Malcolm X," "Amistad" and "The Color Purple" on his resume, Sims' artistic work has been seen in the promotion of quite a few blockbuster hits. Many of the urban posters that have caught the eye of moviegoers were first captured through the ideas of Sims. The warm and lively posters of "Mo' Better Blues," "School Daze,"



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"Crooklyn," to the eerie, yet captivating art work of "New Jack City," "Summer of Sam," and "Menace II Society," are all from Sims' colorful mind.

The posters or visual print imagery that is used in the promotion of film and television, called key art, has been Sims' specialty.

"I'll see something that will trigger an idea for a poster. There's a process I can't figure out. God put something in my mind that if I see a tree, then I think a leaf. People laugh, but I got the idea for 'New Jack City' sitting in the bathroom."

Sims was first given the opportunity to work on a large scale in key art with Spielberg's "The Color Purple."

"I got hooked up through my own persistence. Quincy Jones and Clarence Avant helped me to get into the industry. Jones, being

who he is, and Avant at the time an executive at Motown, helped me get 'The Color Purple.' My job was to come up with a poster for the movie. Spielberg is a perfectionist and very hands on, but easy to work with," said Sims.

Impressed by his accomplishment being a part of the success of the multimillion dollar film, Sims had bigger plans. He wanted to work with Spike Lee, at that time, an up-and-coming filmmaker. Impressed by the movie "She's Gotta Have It," Sims was sure he would be an asset to Lee's productions. After plugging into a couple of channels, Lee and Sims finally met.

"He called out of the clear blue sky and said something like, 'Art Sims, this is Spike Lee, meet me at the Chateau in one hour.' When we met, it was like an instant click. We talked for hours and found

out some of our ideas were similar," recalled Sims.

The business relationship between Sims and Lee worked out so well on the movie, "School Daze," that Sims has done the key art for Lee ever since. "With Lee, it's like working with your own brother. Lee is also a perfectionist and very thorough, but he is very good to work with," said Sims.

Though Lee is just one of the many notables Sims has worked with, Sims' experiences with the talented director has brought many lessons. "The most enjoyable time I had was on the set of 'School Daze,' said Sims. "It was wild. We did the photo shoot from 2 a.m. to 9 a.m. and there were all these young actors like Spike, Tisha Campbell and Laurence Fishburne there. Now everybody is making money."

Sims added, "Believe it or not, the most difficult project was 'Malcolm X.' That poster with just an X looks easy, but there was a lot of pressure on Warner Bros., Denzel and Spike. Warner Bros. was trying to cross the film over to a white market and Spike was trying to keep it a black movie. Denzel was very involved in the process and very nervous. We had to go through a lot of different ideas to get back to the X, which was the initial logo we got from Spike's hat."

The determination and passion of Sims has paid off in many ways. The Detroit native admitted that his intense focus and ambition has carried him through his educational process, as well as his career.

Involved with art since he was five, the gifted artisan decided to forgo the "starving artist" lifestyle and use his talents in a commercial arena. After obtaining a BFA degree from Michigan State University, he began his pursuits as an art director of CBS Records in New York. While working at CBS he began to slowly develop his own business.

"It's hard to get loans so I saved by money and worked hard to get

the company in place. I did things little by little to set up my office in Los Angeles. I used CBS studios until I wore out my welcome. I used their studios for my own projects, but it became a problem. I was eventually asked if I was going to stay with CBS, but I had already set up my business in Los Angeles," said Sims. Initially a company primarily involved in print advertising design, 11:24 has branched out to the production of radio spots, film

and economic barriers that may seem impenetrable.

Said Sims, "There's a lot of African American design advertising agencies going on in the music industry, but in film and television it's very few because there is an 'old boys' network in the industry and there is a lot of racism. They have their own groups and they only like to work with their own. Very rarely is there someone that is not connected with them that is brought in from outside of their circles. In this business there is a lot of nepotism and favoritism."

Through his battles, Sims has become wiser and has maintained his awareness about the pitfalls of being black in the industry. "The entertainment industry, they're still on the plantation. They still don't respect us. I refuse to promote any thing that makes us look like fools. I thought the '3 Strikes' poster was offensive. A white person obviously did that. It was just flat out offensive to see a black man in handcuffs. That doesn't appeal to me as a black person."

As a resolve to issues in the industry Sims suggested, "African Americans need to form a group whether it is one group or a number of groups that include high profile actors, directors and people that are in behind-the-scenes, from television to the Internet. We need to create some directives and make commitments to help each other. Not just their friends, but other African Americans that are trying to make it in this industry. These powerful African Americans need to use their power, and then use it not just for individual situations or for the purpose of monetary gain. That shouldn't always be the purpose, especially for us."

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trailers and even general marketing. Sims' business started off by creating free trailers and radio spots for independent films. Once the company's style began to catch on, larger, paying projects were taken.

"The key to a good trailer is the voice narration and the cut. You don't want to see too much of the film, but you make the film look enticing," explained Sims. "Radio spots can be real funky. But they are really critical to serving the urban community."

Unfortunately along with the ups of the business, has come the challenging side. The company has dealt with apparent racial, political

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