

Assignments for Arts 264: Stop-Motion Animation

Stop Motion: n. a *cinematic technique whereby the camera is stopped and started (still images), with the animator manipulating an object or image in a physical setting to create an illusion of motion.*

It is different than

- *live-motion which uses continuous movement in a shot*
- *cell animation which utilizes a series of separate drawings*
- *computer generated animation (Flash, AfterEffects, Maya)*
- *TimeLapse: still images compressed into shorter time for speed.*

*All of the work you do in this class will fit into the category of art that would interest a gallery going populace, **not just children or young adults**. To that end you can always consider using methods and materials that might also be seen in still art work that is either sculptural or flat. You will always follow the conceptual and formal goals of a visual artist.*

1 Artist Research/Journal

Over the course of the semester review /watch **30** of the links on our website for both student and professional artists. Write a paragraph report for each of 10 pieces that were compelling/sustaining and surprising to you and why. Would you suggest any improvements? Send these to Claudia by the due date. We will also view many, but not all of these projects in class. Previous student reports on professional artists will be helpful and contain links you should follow. (total of 4 pages over the semester)

2D stop motion: a personal story from your family history

Using a two-dimensional (flat) method from the following list, create a short piece that allows you to *explore this story* in a subtle, non-clichéd way. You will be shooting from a copy stand straight down rather than from the side. First choose a topic that you can find material for from your family history. It can be a simple memory...or particular event. It can be during your life time or before you were born. Write a one-page journal entry about the topic and send it to Claudia (5 pts).

Gather and prepare the two-dimensional materials, bringing them to your editing station where you will work with them to create a piece. Your idea may develop as you gather materials, but don't demand that the piece remain with your initial idea...instead respond to what you find and have a dialog between your initial idea and the materials. The piece can end up being quite abstract with simple forms or structure relating to aspects of the topic. It can move away from fact and toward fiction as memories sometimes do. It's not a direct documentary.

Bring your piece into Premiere Pro to edit into about a one minute piece. The Sound can be simple, appropriated if it amplifies or layers content...**not just a music video**. The sound can be made by you or a friend, with foley sound effects. It can be narrated but not lip-synched.

Use one of the following two-dimensional methods for imaging including:

- torn or cut paper or fabric
- sand, coffee grounds, particulates on light table (possible glass protection)
- collage: old magazines, books, printed photos

Aesthetic Goals:

- To explore some element of your story
- To work intuitively more than rationally.
- To discover the voice of the piece within the process
- To find some unity in diverse materials

Technical Goals:

- To control exposure, focus, lighting with still cameras
- To use copy stands
- To use DragonFrame efficiently
- To edit effectively in Premiere Pro
- To use Sound: simple, possibly appropriated/ redorded, etc

Artist Examples: (collage) Lewis Khlar, Kelly Sears, Virgil Widrich (Fast Film)

Drawn: Wm Kentridge, <http://www.pbs.org/art21/specials/anythingispossible/watch-now/>

Daniel Sousa, Cocina/Leon/Atallah,

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Building Unusual Character(s) for a social commentary

This is the beginning of your final, main stage project and will be built on *your* reaction to a prompt based on your observation or experience of a *social or political issue (broadly defined)*. It can be a loose narrative or relatively abstract exploration but is *not* a direct illustration or report on the topic. You might find your topic from another class, your interests or the news media. It will be developed in three stages and it will use 3D animation with hand-built characters and set.

Consider content you are interested in. Write a journal style one page of thoughts/research about the topic and send to Claudia in an email (5 pts) Consider what type of non-traditional character(s) might expand, contradict, illuminate this topic. Could they be based on molecules, animals, nature, technology, dreams, non-human forms etc? What simple sequence of actions might they do to explore your idea?

Using either traditional or non-traditional stop motion materials, create at least one character that can be moved and posed in a variety of positions. Film them across and around a *simple set* using good lighting and camera work. Try different camera angles, rigs to fly, magnets to position or tie downs. Make the motions as extreme as possible at some points. Use a tripod or camera slide for smooth motion. Choose frames per second based on desired smooth action.

Edit a ONE MINUTE sequence with added sound effects Use foley, voice, layers, etc in the sound.

4 Creating a sense of place: building a set and sound.

Develop a 3D animation **set** based on an idea you explored with your character, or a contradictory set that would challenge your character to be more unusual (a cave, a temple, a tunnel, a lookout window, a farm, an elegant dining room, etc.) You can use unusual materials, lean toward realism or abstraction. Explore how a camera and character can interact with this set while on a tripod or other stabilizer. Develop a plan for lighting the set and do so.

The materials you use can again come from art sources, goodwill, antique stores, home, hardware store and can be entirely fabricated with building materials. You should show good construction skills. Film and edit one of minute video with good lighting from at least two camera angles and include the character in at least some of the shots. In the final segment the character will be integral to the set. In this segment, it can almost be like the camera is a character exploring your set. Add simple sound.

Aesthetic Goals:

- To create a unified and challenging sense of place.
- To imagine a relationship between character and place that is non-traditional.

Technical Goals:

- To make your set with good skills, appropriate to your topic and style
- To use lighting to enhance the quality of your image
- To explore the camera options/ angles available for three dimensions

Here is a prompt from my reading that I might consider to help me imagine a space...how about you?

"The rust-colored earth was covered with a threadbare, meager tablecloth of snow full of holes." "My father would walk along the shelves, dressed in a green baize apron, like a gardener in a hothouse of cacti, and conjure up from nothingness these blind bubbles, pulsating with life, these important bellies receiving the outside world only in the form of food, these growths on the surface of life, climbing blindfold toward the light." Bruno Schultz, The street of Crocodiles

5 Putting it together: Place/Character/Abstract Narrative /Editing/Sound

Create a stop motion piece with the characters and set that is about 3 minutes long using all the skills you have developed. Use test still images to develop a storyboard or animatic. Write a journal entry that explores your options and opinions and plans and send it to Claudia. (5pts)

Edit it in Premiere Pro. You can add narration if desired, but do not try to lip-sync dialog. If you include a final version of text, write experimentally or poetically. Your text and image may even contrast if this adds mystery or complexity to the piece. Sound may be constructed by you or in collaboration with a friend, or appropriated if necessary (and following the rules of appropriation). You should edit relating to the sound.

Consider the ways in which contemporary art often deconstructs the artifice of its approach or content, or parodies historical or contemporary culture. Make sure your piece has a self-awareness of its place in the art world today.

Process will involve:

- writing to discover how the character, set and evolving ideas work together, even if you do not plan narration
- taking test shots to make an “animatic” (photographic storyboard)
- capturing in Dragon Frame
- editing in Premiere Pro

Aesthetic Goals:

- To develop a long, rich, complex and complete project
- To show an understanding of how the forms (materials, style, textures, composition, etc) are appropriate for the content or meaning of your work.

Technical Goals:

- To show good attention to detail
- To show excellence in photographing, editing and sound construction
- To research technical needs that are specific to your piece and accomplish them.

Animation Artists:

Chris Doyle, Ladislav Starewicz, the Quay Brothers, Jan Svankmajer, Lewis Klahr, Kelly Sears, Erin Cosgrove, William Kentridge, Janie Geiser, Marina Zurkow, Rose Bond, Gregory Barsamian, Jenette Thomas, Photographers: Patrick Nagatani, Gregory Crewdson, etc.

Methods Artists have used for Animation: (from the Animation Bible?)

- Visual Tricks: Because we can start and stop the camera, we can change out elements, make them disappear or disconnect (Melies), enlarge or shrink (Svankmajer stones, King Kong) fly (Doyle, Kinsley) it's a sort of magic.
- Use elements that could not act if alive (insects: Starewicz, letters helena)
- To help fool the eye we can use these techniques:
A static counterpoint. If the rest of the set remains still while the character is moving we will see the movement more clearly (or at least gentler motion to contrast wild motion).
- At the same time, detailed movement throughout lends believability to the set.
Use motion like a dancer would showing counterbalance and weight in your manipulations.
- Texture: the size of the set often requires miniaturized textures, but these catch the light and make the 3D form more interesting.
- Lighting: can emphasize volume, just like lighting for live video, a three-point system of varied lights can give an object volume and pull it out of the background. Of course, the lights should be smaller too.
- Detail can make something more interesting and even in drawn animation, the extent of detail should be considered.
- What the surface of the drawing material can contribute, frosted mylar or vellum with charcoal or graphite/ cutting / layering/ transparencies.
- Keying out with Green or Blue screen areas of the scene to later drop in another scene or live action or texture in (see Japanese academy award piece)
- Smooth vs. Jerky...how many shots per second and how far each one moves.
- Set: Proscenium or real/round? Change camera angle?
- Building sets with foamcore, balsa wood or real world elements.

Chris Doyle's themes are drawn from the psychology of everyday life. By using only the most low-tech special effects, he transforms everyday images into short films that are magical and moving.

Doyle is perhaps best known for *Leap*, a public artwork sponsored by Creative Time in April, 2000, for New York City's 2 Columbus Circle. A celebration of hope, *Leap*, showed moving images projected onto a tall building of various New Yorkers from all five boroughs jumping skyward. Beginning at dusk, depictions of a continuous stream of New Yorkers appeared at the base of the building, and one by one, four hundred and twenty jumpers soared up the height of the facade, slipping into the night sky.

In recent years, Doyle has worked less in the public sphere, and more in the private fictional spaces he creates in his videos. This selection of videos shows a wide range of Doyle's interests, but each manifests a dreamlike vision in which the quotidian becomes extraordinary. Doyle likens his practice to a "Pathetic Magician, a sad sack trying to make magic out of what is at hand." * Writing in *Art News* magazine Linda Yablonsky said "(Doyle) has cast hot dogs, red bricks, and lawn chairs as human surrogates in videos that constantly mix storytelling with abstraction." **

Flight (2005)

Flight (2005) shows the artist doing aerial circuits in a Superman pose around his Brooklyn studio before heading out the window. Today, when even amateurs have access to Hollywood-quality special effects, the artist's goal is clearly not a seamless effect. The jerky motion is left as a clue to his methodology, in which the artist performed 230 individual leaps and then sequenced the still photographs to depict flight.

Tower (2005)

Tower (2005) uses an animation technique known as "claymation". Doyle has turned the descriptive form upside down; and we see the effects of unseen artist's hands on the tower, wounding and suturing the form. and twisting it like taffy.