

Animation Experimentation and Process

by

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# Ege Soyuer Senior Project: Animation Experimentation and Process

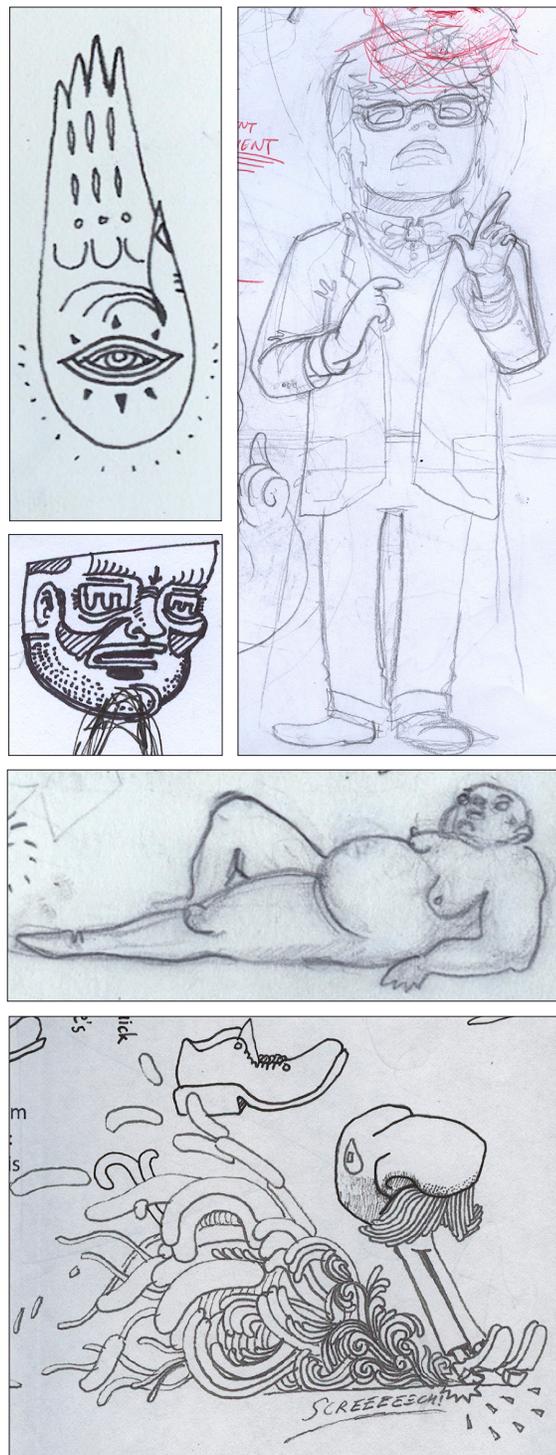
When deciding on a senior project, I knew that I wanted to create a motion piece that would represent my acquired aesthetics and technical skills. My first instinct was to produce a motion reel, a prerequisite for anyone intending on entering the motion graphics field. One of the advantages of a reel is its capability to link completely disparate, unrelated works together in a cohesive way. There is no need for a story; the only glue is the beat of the music, emphasizing the highlights and transitions. Having produced several animations, it would have been relatively easy to edit them together into an impressive reel, but I ultimately shied away from this idea, because I wanted to challenge myself to create a solitary animation piece with a cohesive look and feel; something I had never attempted before.

My project has gone through several iterations since then, ultimately resulting in a short animation dealing with the struggle of creating, especially under deadlines with little or no sleep, and the surprisingly pleasant results that can be achieved through released inhibitions. In a typically backwards fashion, I developed the story after the animations, not the other way around as might be expected. This backwards technique was directly derived from my passion for doodling.

I doodle constantly, often as a form of stress-relief, but more so for the sheer joy of mark making. I've filled countless sketchbooks. As far as I'm concerned, the line between drawing and doodling is a blurry box that envelops both. When I draw more for the repetitive pleasure of creating lines of surface (doodle), as opposed to drawing for a specific artful end, the results usually turns out to be far more interesting. Thus, my animation followed a similar direction. Disconnected, repetitive creation; to be contextualized at a later date.

My eyes have always been drawn towards the aesthetics of hand-drawn animation, especially the experimental works of Norman McLaren from the 1940's. McLaren was a pioneer of animation, developing a number of groundbreaking animation techniques, many of which involved drawing directly onto film. The free-spirited, whimsical, and fun nature of animations always appealed to me. In his 1940 animation, "Boogie Doodle," he uses amoeba-like forms to visualize music. The biomorphic nature

*examples of doodles used as source material*



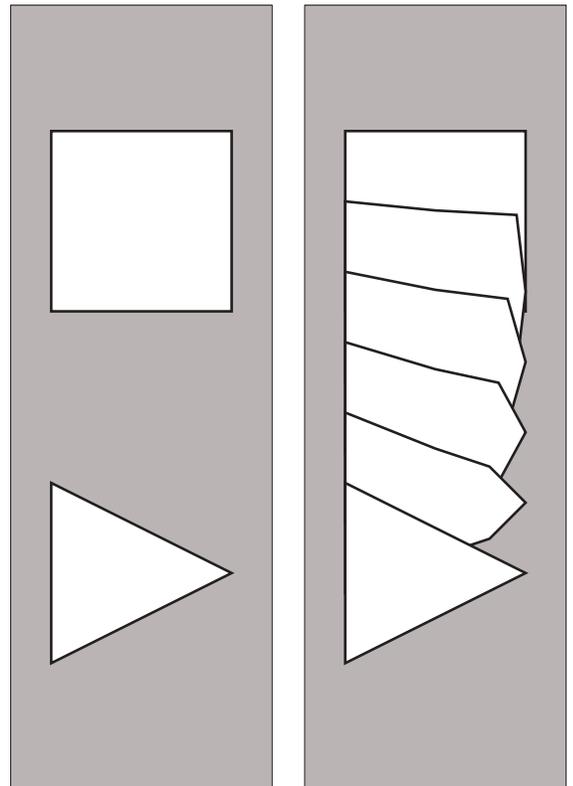
of the forms reflected the aesthetics of the time (as seen in the works of Miro), but were revolutionary in their movement. The hand-drawn, tangible animations of Terry Gilliam, as well as the psychedelic animation style of the 60's in films such as *Yellow Submarine* have made undeniable contributions to my aesthetics as well. More contemporary sources of inspiration include the programming-based animations of James Patterson aka Presstube. He combined animation and code in novel ways that inspired a generation of programmer-artists. Many of his innovations are in the field of randomly generated drawings and animations. He took the concept of automatic art, as developed by Pollock and Arp, who allowed gravity and chance to make their mark making decisions, and applied mathematical randomness. His randomly generated work puts a technological spin on beauty in chance. Most recently, Patterson developed software that allows the user to draw in 3d space in previously impossible ways, rotating the axis and depth of approach. Patterson's developments in automatic art generation were a huge inspiration for me, motivating me to harness the full potential of software in my own work.

*an example of James Patterson's randomly generated artwork*



Having compiled my aesthetic values from these, and other sources, I developed my own biomorphic, hand-drawn animation style. As my skills in motion graphics increased over the past several years, my ambition grew from simple kinetic type animations to more complex figurative animation. The animation process I use in this piece was actually an accidental development; a result of several years of experimentation. I began my discovery by making prints using Adobe Illustrator. Illustrator's Blend tool allows the user to interpolate iterations between forms, as shown to the right. Eventually I discovered that these forms could be exported as individual frames (in the form of Flash .swf files), and then imported into After Effects as animations. At first this technique seemed limited, since Illustrator has a very specific way in which it interpolates. For example, if you attempt to blend two or more forms that have a different number of vector points, the results can be unexpected, but often interesting. Once I developed control and learned the quirks of the blends it proved to be a powerful animation tool.

*Illustrator allows the user to take any two or more forms and interpolate the steps between them*



As I was discovering this process, I applied it to the the doodles that I've collected over the past several years. They contained the forms, figures, characters, and other source material to fuel countless animations. So, with no particular direction in mind, other than the desire to bring my drawings to life, I started by collecting, scanning, and digitally cataloging the most interesting drawings I've made over the last couple of years. Literally hundreds of disconnected drawings became my source material. Sorting through these drawings, I developed and storyboarded sequences. I had no intention of developing a linear story. After all, they were disconnected in their creation and to force them into cohesion seemed exactly that: forced. I've always found acci-

dental beauty to be more interesting than the intentional. I eventually narrowed down these stories to one that I saw through to completion, however in the process I created several animations, all of which will be further developed and used in my motion reel.

Despite my original lack of specific direction, I was surprised to find that the visual language of my drawings was consistent enough to develop cohesion. However, I still wanted to find a way to give them context without forcing them into a particular narrative. The idea of incorporating live-action footage of myself was added as an afterthought to give the animation some context. As a dream, the animations can be as silly, repetitive and nonsensical as my heart desires, while ultimately still making sense.

My animation is a self-portrait in many ways; it represents my style, my struggles, my skills, and hopefully my sense of humor. The story is as follows: I am at my desk, face to face with a blank piece of paper and a pen. The paper is bright white; intimidating in its blankness. It has infinite potential. I am exhausted and frustrated. My fatigue overcomes me and I pass out on my desk. In my sleep, forms emerge from my nose and mouth and begin to dance on the blank paper. More and more forms emerge as I fall deeper into sleep. Eventually, I stir from my sleep and the forms disappear as I rise. This short story deals with my inhibitions in the face of a creative task. When allowed to release, the forms within escape into a joyous dance. It shows my vulnerabilities and hopefully, my strengths.

I do not view this as a completed piece. This is merely one state of completion, but there is infinite potential for experimentation and expansion. I will be working on a more developed version for the BFA show in the Spring of 2010. I plan to further elaborate the cacophonous nature of the animation. My goal is to completely fill the screen with animated elements. In its current iteration, the link between the dream world and the real world is maintained throughout the piece. In further developments, I would completely immerse the viewer in the dream world, with its own sets of disconnected stories.

The process has been educational. I know that if I want to be successful in the industry, I'm going to have to find a way to develop a more linear process. This, in fact, may be one of the biggest failures of my project. In industry, work is created from the ground up, starting with concept, then developing appropriate animation; as opposed to trying to stretch a concept over disconnected animations. The analogy that comes to mind is starting with an answer, and then trying to find the question. It's possible, however, that the nature of my goals prevented a linear process from the outset. Finding a common context for doodles that had been made over the course of several years is certainly a difficult task, perhaps requiring an unconventional process.