



CATÓLICA
ESCOLA DAS ARTES

PORTO

BUS STOP

Relatório de Projeto Final apresentado à Universidade Católica Portuguesa
para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Som e Imagem

Alina Didenko

Porto, Julho de 2024



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- Especialização em Animação-

Alina Didenko

Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação de
Sahra Kunz

Trabalho efetuado sob a coorientação de
David Doutel

Porto, Julho de 2024

Dedication

І мертвим, і живим, і ненародженим..¹

To active youth of Ukraine and to volunteers' movement all over the world.

¹ *To the Dead, the Living and the Unborn* – famous Ukrainian poem by Taras Shevchenko

Gratitude

To my recovering mental health.

To my family in Portugal and in Ukraine.

To Nexus 3.0 program and to Associação D. Pedro V for supporting my studies.

To Laura, Mariana and Eliana for being such warm and supportive classmates.

To professor Sahra and professor David.

To Armed Forces of Ukraine.

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Glossary

Animatic - a movie made by sequencing the panels in a storyboard, and timing each panel for the rough duration of the action they represent, and in sync with the soundtrack. Animatics are used to convert the storyboard into a very rough draft of the final movie, to determine the time allotted to each scene and each action and to synchronize the action with the soundtrack (Toon Boom, 2021).

Background - the artwork that fills the camera field and which is behind the characters and props. Typically, this artwork represents the decor or stage in which the action occurs (Toon Boom, 2021).

Bitmap - an image defined by a mesh of pixels, as well as the individual colour of each one of its pixels. Bitmap graphics are known for being preferable to vector graphics for highly detailed or photorealistic artwork. However, bitmap graphics cannot be scaled, rotate or skewed without losing picture quality (Toon Boom, 2021).

Bone - in animation, bones are the unit of a character's rig used to create animation (DeepMotion, 2018).

Clean up - after rough drawings have been tested and approved, all the noise in the image (excess lines, notes, etc.) is removed to create final drawings which can be inked, painted and shot. The clean-up process refers to either tracing a clean line over a rough drawing to achieve the final version or removing dirt and extra lines left by the scanning process (Toon Boom, 2021).

Concept art - images of the idea that depicts a visual project before it takes its final shape and looks (Argentics, n.d.).

Frame - an animation frame is a single photographic image in a movie (Toon Boom, 2021).

Keyframe - important positions in the action defining the starting and ending points of any action. A keyframe is a computer-generated position at a specific moment (frame) on a given trajectory (Toon Boom, 2021).

Layer - in animation, a layer is an individual column, level or character. A scene's layers are superimposed to form the final image (Toon Boom, 2021).

Parenting - the process of creating a hierarchical system of the rig, it dictates how bones affect one another (DeepMotion, 2018).

Rigging - the process of attaching the various parts of a cut-out puppet (Toon Boom, 2021).

Scene - a shot in a movie or show. A sequence is composed of several scenes. A scene changes to another scene by a simple cut or transition (Toon Boom, 2021).

Script - the original text containing all the movie or show information. In animation, the script contains all of the location descriptions, dialogue, time and more (Toon Boom, 2021).

Sequence - a series of scenes or shots forming a distinct part of the story or movie, usually connected by unity of location or time (Toon Boom, 2021).

Shot - a scene in a movie or show. A sequence is composed of several shots. A shot changes to another shot by a simple cut or transition (Toon Boom, 2021).

Storyboard - a visual plan of all the scenes and shots in an animation. The storyboard indicates what will happen, when it will happen and how the objects in a scene are laid out (Toon Boom, 2021).

Transition - an effect placed between two scenes as they pass from one to the other (Toon Boom, 2021).

Vector - a vector-based image is composed of points and Bézier curves. The computer reads the points and traces the segments, linking them to reproduce the image shape. There is no fixed size or resolution in a vector image. The graphic can be enlarged and distorted as much as desired, and the system will simply recalculate the segments and rebuild the shapes. Vector images are translated and displayed in pixels once the calculation is done (Toon Boom, 2021).

Resumo

Este relatório pretende descrever todo o processo de produção da curta-metragem de animação *Bus Stop*, que se insere na conclusão do Mestrado em Som e Imagem com especialização em Animação por Computador para o ano letivo 2023/24.

Este filme retrata o ponto de vista subjetivo da autora sobre a situação contemporânea na Ucrânia, servindo como meio de comunicação com o mundo.

O relatório está dividido em duas partes, sendo estas teóricas e práticas. A parte teórica explica o objetivo, a motivação e a metodologia utilizada, bem como a pesquisa bibliográfica e filmográfica. A parte prática fornece uma explicação detalhada da produção cinematográfica, desde a formação da ideia até os toques finais no projeto.

Palavras-chave: Animação 2D, Ucrânia, Paragem de autocarro soviética, Pinturas de Petrykivka, Guerra, Descomunicação, Animação digital

Abstract

This report aims to describe the full production process of the animated short film *Bus Stop*, which is part of the completion of the Master's in Sound and Image with a specialization in Computer Animation for the 2023/24 academic year.

This film depicts the author's subjective point of view on the contemporary situation in Ukraine, serving as a means of communication with the world.

The report is divided into two parts, those being theoretical and practical. The theoretical part explains the objective, motivation, methodology used, and bibliographical and filmographic research. The practical part provides a detailed explanation of the film production, from the formation of the idea to the final touches on the project.

Keywords: 2D animation, Ukraine, Soviet bus stop, Petrykivka paintings, War, Decommunization, Digital animation

1. Introduction

1.1 Objective and Motivation

From a young age, I considered myself a creative person with a vivid imagination. I cannot attribute this to the influence of television programs or the Internet, as the first internet connection in my house appeared around 2010. I would say I was born imaginative. That was crucial for my decision to study art in my bachelor's degree. During my fine art studies, I fell in love with the cinema and animation in particular. Sadly, this was not entirely due to the influence of my university. Some professors happened to be Soviet-minded people, whose strict criticism focused on perfection rather than on the personal perspectives of the students. Despite this, my diploma project still focused on digital concept art and animation.

Ukraine, despite being a relatively young country, has a significant history in its 33 years of independence. As a child of the 2000s, I experienced a large part of it. Russia's aggression has created a shift in Ukrainian society, while continuous EU integration arises new challenges and questions to be solved (Holger Nehring, 2022).

I had many topics that could be addressed in my graduation project, and I was looking into the ways of addressing it. The focus point arose when I came across a post from a young Ukrainian activist who initiated a project to restore neglected bus stops, inviting others to join in cleaning one. This single post brought together all my ideas and thoughts for the objective of my personal project (Oleg Levi, October 2023).



Figure 1 – Three photos from an Instagram post by Oleg Levi (2023), sharing information about volunteer work cleaning the mosaics of an old bus stop.

1.2 Synopsis/description of the final project (format, duration, genre, etc.)

1.2.1 General information

Title: Bus Stop

Year: 2024

Duration: 3:35 min

Format: 16:9

Resolution: 1920x1080p

Genre: War, Fantasy, Drama

Technique: Digital 2D animation

The film is available through the link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LxE-HZOZ3E0Mf3qUaXENrLzU24Mu83rG/view?usp=drive_link

1.2.2 Synopsis

The main character is traveling on a country road, carrying art supplies. He is followed by a mysterious companion in the form of a raven. The character comes across an abandoned bus stop lined with sandbags. On the facade of the stop is a Soviet sculpture of a man and a woman holding a sickle and a hammer as a part of a communist symbol. He puts his equipment on the ground and begins to prepare for work, while the raven sits on top of a bus stop with Soviet symbols and begins to caw loudly. This distracts the main character from his work, and he throws a stone at the cursed symbol, which destroys it.

After starting to paint the facade, the audience is immersed in a narrative that touches on the symbolism of the Petrykivka painting², depicting the Tree of Life and the birds on it, and the sculptures of a woman and a man become alive. The story ends with the arrival of the Red Army, which causes the Tree of Life to wither.

The character finishes painting the bus stop by adding viburnum dots with his fingers. As he steps away, he observes the renewed facade, where the faceless gray Soviet sculptures are now decorated with Petrykivka paintings, and the raven is quietly cooing on the destroyed

² Petrykivka painting – is a form of decorative Ukrainian folk art that originated in the village of Petrykivka. It features vibrant flowers and fauna and is part of the UNESCO-protected Ukrainian cultural heritage (UNESCO, n.d.)

symbol in their hands. The character begins to gather his supplies as the sun sets. When he starts to walk away, the raven flies down and turns into a dog, which still follows the main character further.

1.2.3 Character Descriptions

The main character

We employ personification in the characters of the film. The main character is a person of the arts, likely connected to the countryside, someone who cares deeply about their homeland as a collective symbol of Ukrainian progressive society, cultural activism, and volunteerism. He comes to the abandoned bus stop to transform it with the paint.

The character-companion

In the beginning appears in the form of a raven but transforms into a dog at the end of the film. During the film, it follows the main character. This character represents our vision of human intentions - something ethereal that accompanies us all, sometimes directing our attention or guiding us through life.

The Bus Stop

A neglected Soviet bus stop is a setting of film action. On the left side, it has a sculpture of a woman and a man on its facade, they hold a sickle and a hammer as a part of a communistic symbol. On the right side, it has stocked sandbags, which reference the fact this bus stop was used as a road-block post. We aim to explore its role as a silent witness to history. Once instruments of ideological control, these bus stops have evolved into repositories of cultural narratives, particularly through the lens of modern people. At the end of the film, it will be decorated with Petrykivka painting by the main character.

The Tree of Life

The tree formed with flowers, leaves, and red berries with a big flower on top and birds sitting on the branches. It is a symbol from Petrykivka painting drawn by the main character as a part of the storytelling process and as a part of the transformation process of the Bus Stop.

This character as a part of Petrykivka painting has a broad sphere of symbolism. After the arrival of the Red Army, it withers and Viburnum berries³ appear.

1.3 Final Project Team

The final project was curated by advisor Sahra Kunz and co-adviser David Doutel. The theoretical and reference part was led by Sahra Kunz, who reviewed our paperwork and academic materials. David Doutel led the production part, helped to shape a solid idea, reviewed our produced materials, and gave professional critiques and advice to assist us in our production.

The final project team included people who produced the sound for the film: voice actor Oleksandr Kobylinskyi and sound designer and composer Andrii Savdeiev; both colleagues worked online from Ukraine.

³ Viburnum berries - the viburnum plant, known as Kalyna in Ukrainian, holds significant cultural and spiritual symbolism in Slavic folklore. Representing femininity, love, and rebirth (Ekaterina Pavlova, 2024).

2. Approach and treatment

2.1 Research and References

Our project in its core has the component of personal experience and subjective artistic way to approach its realization. The research part plays a vital role in creating a contextually based story. Since the subject can be sensitive to some people and comes from the contemporary situation in Ukraine, we need to provide enough historical context to help the audience understand the film from a close perspective. The key reference of this film is a Soviet bus stop in Ukraine, and to start the research we can explore the phenomena of these public architectures.

In the book *Soviet Bus Stops* (2015) by Christopher Herwig, the author travels around post-Soviet countries collecting photos of Soviet bus stops. Herwig mentions that in Canada, where he is from, and in modern public architecture in general, bus stops have the same standardized design across the country (Herwig, *Bus Stops*. – 2015, 9). In contrast, Soviet bus stops are unique to one another and to each region of the former Soviet Republics. He connects this to the era of stagnation in the USSR, where ideology regulated all spheres of life and left little space for creativity. Although this was mostly seen in the sphere of Soviet elites and larger architectural forms, bus stops, as “minor architectural forms,” especially those in rural areas, were left to young architects, university students, and local artists. This resulted in more creative designs, and it is even possible to see changes in fashion through the different bus stops created at different times (Herwig, 2015: 11). Bus stops were meant to last for ages. Their materials were long-lasting, and their designs were solid, devoid of glass (Herwig, 2015: 14). This resilience is one of the major factors that make these pieces of art still present in Ukraine today and interesting to explore throughout history.

In the book *Малі архітектурні форми у благоустрої населених місць* (1971)⁴, we can see examples and norms for these public architectural elements in Soviet Ukraine. During this period, we can see norms for bus stops in cities could use light materials such as glass or plastics, sometimes they were merged with buffets or cafes (Будівельник, 1971: 32). Also, they provide “light” versions of bus stops (Будівельник, *Малі архітектурні форми у благоустрої населених місць*. – 1971: 46):

⁴ Budivelnik Publishing House, *Small architectural forms in the improvement of settlements*. Kyiv, 1971.

A pavilion-stop. The lightweight design of the structure allows it to be moved to another location if necessary. Covering made of asbestos-cement sheets or fiberglass. If bright plastic is used, the risers are painted black. Gray asbestos-cement sheets go well with red or orange. The structure is intended for transport stops.

With the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, these concrete bus stops became life-saving structures (Oleh Suprunenko, 2014). In the article *Мистецтво Автобусної Зупинки: погляди українців та іноземців*⁵ by Oleh Suprunenko, the author mentions the new role of these architectural pieces as battlefield protection and roadblock posts (Oleh Suprunenko, 2016):

Often, these old bus stops, covered with bags of earth, appear in disturbing television news and even in music videos, such as the one we see in the Yarmak band's song “White Bird”, with Ukrainian army soldiers fighting under the cover of tiled concrete slabs. No less symbolic was the destruction of a unique bus stop designed by Eleonora Shcheglova, an Honored Artist of Crimea, and member of the National Union of Artists of Ukraine, in Masandra in the first month of the occupation of the peninsula.



Figure 2 – Bus stop serves as outposts from the border area during Russian invasion in 2014. Chongar village, Kherson region.

⁵ The Art of the Bus Stop: Views of Ukrainians and Foreigners by Oleh Suprunenko



Figure 3 – Bus stop serves as block post and concrete shelter. Tryohizbenka village, Luhansk region.

But what happens to these bus stops in areas that were not touched by war? The answer is harder to find in research or books than to discern from personal experience. Our personal view is supported by a blog post called *Українські зупинки*⁶, written by UA LiveJournal user Kamienczanka. They collect and discuss photos, expressing their minor disappointment that old, uncared-for bus stops in rural areas are usually renovated either not professionally enough or completely driven by enthusiasm. They suspect some bus stops could be painted by school students. From our personal experience as a Bachelor of Fine Arts, we can confirm that we had the chance to paint some old monumental architecture in our city (Kamienczanka, 2008).

Another great article collection of such photos was posted by the TV channel BIKKA. They used a selection by Petro Hrushko from Kyiv. Back in 2020, he travelled around the Cherkasy region by bicycle. He posted his selection on his Facebook page, but sadly, the original post was deleted (BIKKA, 2023).

Art, as a product of human activity, can serve different purposes. One of them is self-healing purpose. International Journal of Art Therapy in their article *Art, as a product of human activity, can serve different purposes. One of them is self-healing. The International Journal of Art Therapy, in their article “Art Therapy Interventions for Active-Duty Military Service Members with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury”*, explores the

⁶ Ukrainian bus stops

healing effect of art on people who have come from the battlefield. They mention how art therapy offers a safe outlet for expressing inner experiences, particularly when verbal communication is challenging. It helps individuals manage negative emotions by channelling them into creative expression (International Journal of Art Therapy, 2018: 83).

However, military personnel are not the only people affected by war. With the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the world has witnessed a new wave of art coming from Ukraine. *War in Ukraine Through Visual Arts: When a Picture is Worth a Thousand Words* by Vira Hrabchuk is one of many examples of how Ukrainian civil society expresses itself in these hard times. Some are professional artists trying to speak to the world, some are children who have to hide in basements during Russian missile launches, some create art for self-healing, and some use art to heal others (Vira Hrabchuk, 2022):

Hello. I am from Mariupol (a city which has been almost entirely destroyed by Russian forces). Please, draw my dog Amur. He lost his hearing due to constant shelling in March, and in April Russian soldiers shot him dead. They took away not only my hometown, they also took away my best friend.



Figure 4 – Painted walls of the bomb shelter. A kindergarten in Volodymyrets, the Rivne region.

This is not the first time the world has heard about Ukraine through art. One of the most famous avant-garde artists in the world, Kazymyr Malevych, created an art series called *Peasants*, which depicts the tragedy of the Ukrainian people (Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group, 2021). *Rediscovering the Origins of Kazymyr Malevych* discusses his will to speak out despite

Soviet oppression and highlights the importance of exploring his Ukrainian heritage to fully appreciate his global contribution to art, especially since his work subtly reflected historical events like the Holodomor⁷.

Another great example related to this topic is found in the article *From ‘Shchedryk’ to ‘Carol of the Bells’: The Untold Story of the Famous Song by Ukraïner*. *Carol of the Bells* is a well-known Christmas song with roots in the Ukrainian song *Shchedryk* by composer Mykola Leontovych. It has become a symbol of Ukrainian resilience and the fight for independence. Used as a diplomatic element after the First World War, this song became one of the most well-known melodies in the world (Ukraïner, 2023).

Important part of our project is dedicated to the phenomenon of decommunization, initiated in 2015 as a response to police brutality during Euromaidan 2013-2014. Ukrainian youth have played a vital role in civic and political movements. The Maidan is both symbolic and physical evidence of the courage and resilience of a nation working towards a better future for Ukraine within the EU, free from Russian influence (Yekelchik, S. Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2016). The decommunization process involved removing symbols and names of the Soviet past from the public space, starting with the help of people’s intentions and later enshrined in law by the Ukrainian parliament (Portnov, A. Dnipro: An entangled history of a European city. – 2022, 327).

The most popular monumental decoration for Ukrainian Soviet bus stops were mosaics. Like many other monumental art pieces, Ukrainian mosaics were also filled with Soviet propaganda, therefore, they are considered “illegal” today (David R. Marples, 2018: 2). Some have been demolished, some remain uncared for, and others are protected by volunteers and activists. In the book *Art for Architecture: Soviet Modernist Mosaics from 1960 to 1990*, Polina Baitsym, together with photographer Yevgen Nikiforov, writes how Lenin’s Plan, initiated in 1918, linked art to state policies, aiming to glorify the October Revolution through statues and other monumental objects. With the further development official art method, introduced in 1934, demanded art to be socialist in content and national in form, focusing on ideological education. Soviet art often depicts idealized images of workers and common people. Recent laws have led to the removal of Soviet symbols and artworks, including mosaics, from public spaces in Ukraine.

⁷ Holodomor—an artificially induced famine in Stalin’s Soviet Ukraine which killed an estimated 3.9 to 5 million people (Kristina Hook, 2021).

To leave the topic of Soviet bus stops and move forward in our research, we should explore several more topics related to our project.

An important part of our project is dedicated to our Ukrainian ancestors and their beliefs, as our film uses several elements related to the mystery of life and the spiritual realm. In the book *Українська міфологія*⁸, Volodymyr Galaychuk writes about his exploration of the mythology of the creature called Lelet (Ukrainian: Лелет), a bird that symbolizes the human soul, whether dead or not-yet-born. This symbol is commonly used to discuss the death of unbaptized people or children (Galaychuk V. *Українська міфологія* – 2016: 341-342). This symbolism inspired us to create a companion character for the protagonist. The development of this idea added an additional subjective layer to the plot.

Probably the most influential pagan culture in the modern Ukrainian territory is the Trypillian culture. Cultural and historical portal *Спадщина Предків*⁹ broadly explores this topic in their article *Якою була релігія тринільців?*¹⁰ The Trypillians likely laid the foundations of the Ukrainian worldview and cosmogonic models that are still present in Ukrainian customs, traditions, folk songs, carols, tales, and legends. They were, essentially, the creators of the pre-Christian Ukrainian worldview. Trypillian pottery is the primary source for understanding their beliefs and worldview. Trypillian symbols served not only decorative but also ideological and ritual functions. Their ceramic altars, shaped like crosses or squares, correspond to the cycles of the seasons, times of the day, and stages of life. The religion of the Trypillian people was rational. They believed in what they understood and practiced what they believed. The goal of their religion was to restore the connection between the spiritual and earthly consciousness. They also had a fire cult and a practice of destroying old items by burning them, freeing themselves from material attachment. Their moon cult was dedicated to agriculture, fertility, and mysticism. Besides many other beliefs, it is important to mention Triunity (the vertical structure of the universe, symbolized on pottery, with earth, air, and sky levels. This includes the cycle of life, death, and rebirth) and Quadripartite Symbolism (representing the four cardinal directions, often depicted with a cross or swarga symbol, and the fertility of the field with a rhombus) (Спадщина Предків, 2018).

⁸ Ukrainian mythology by Volodymyr Galaychuk

⁹ Cultural and historical portal *Heritage of Ancestors*

¹⁰ The article *What was the religion of the Trypillians?*



Figure 5 - Trypillian amphora with a zoomorphic image



Figure 6 – Trypillian pedant-amulet with solar symbol

Petrykivka painting was also used to represent the symbolism of circled natural phenomena such as the four seasons. This traditional Ukrainian decorative painting style recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage came from a small Ukrainian village. Media platform Ukraïner in their article *Worldwide unknown Petrykivka* explores the origins of this tradition and develops the conclusion together with the interviewed artists that Petrykivka is not only a symbol of Ukrainian folk art but also a living tradition that adapts to contemporary times, promoting Ukrainian culture internationally (Ukraïner, 2019).

Another article *Майстри петриківської витинанки. Витоки й сьогодення*.¹¹ by Olena Kharchenko explores another type of Petrykivka art called Petrykivka vytynanky what is the paper-cutting type of art. Despite technical differences the symbolic basis of Petrykivka stays the same. The primary motif in Petrykivka vytynanky is the “Tree of Life”. Commonly it is a tree with a central trunk with symmetrical or balanced branches that blooms with leaves and flowers, and sometimes it contains birds. Artists drew inspiration from the surrounding landscape, incorporating elements from plants like flowers and leaves that were native to the region (Olena Kharchenko, 2012).

¹¹ The article *Masters of the Petrykivka Vytinanka. Origins and present*.



Figures 7,8 – Petrykivka vytynanky by Ludmila Babich.



Figure 9 - Petrykivka vytynanky
by Margaita Valeshina

In the article *Символізм народної культури українців: дерево життя*¹² Ihor Poshivaylo writes “tree of life” in Ukrainian folk art usually depicted to emphasize its flowering and fruit-bearing nature. It signifies immortality, the diversity of life, and the unity of past, present, and future. Birds, often depicted around the tree, symbolize the world's soul and the creative forces of the universe (Ihor Poshivaylo, 2006).

Another important symbol from Ukrainian culture are the Viburnum berries (Ukrainian: ягоди калини). They are one of the symbols of the Ukrainian fight for independence. A viburnum bush is commonly planted on the graves of those who died fighting for Ukraine as a symbol of spilled blood. (Українська Правда¹³, 2013). Kalyna is deeply rooted in Ukrainian culture symbolizing the nation itself. It represents resilience and the struggle for national independence, often associated with times of war. Kalyna appears in folk songs, tales, and proverbs, embodying themes of love, beauty, and loyalty. This plant is used in various ceremonies, from weddings to funerals, symbolizing life transitions such as maidenhood to womanhood and life to death (Ivanova J., 1997).

¹² The article *Symbolism of the folk culture of Ukrainians: the tree of life*

¹³ Social and political internet media *Ukrainian Pravda*



Figure 10 – Viburnum, photo from Pixabay



Figure 11 – Viburnum in Petrykivka, photo by Ukraïner

2.2 Artistic/Technical Treatment

In this project we wanted to explore digital media and digital 2D animation. Previous experience in digital illustration provided a strong foundation for creating visuals for this project. Although, the lack of experience in animation required us to find an artistic style and develop a working pipeline for the animation process.

The main application used to create 2D artworks for the project, such as storyboard sketches, character references, backgrounds, and more, was Adobe Photoshop. The main application for creating 2D animation was Toon Boom Harmony. Additionally, we used Storyboarder during the pre-production phase and Adobe After Effects for the post-production phase.

Our project's visual art style was not shaped by filmography. Our goal was to create subjective film from our inner feelings about the topic. Films we explored served more as a subjective view of other Ukrainians on different aspects of Ukrainian history, even if some films were documentaries.

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (Parajanov, 1965) is a truly unique film in Ukrainian history. Despite being Armenian himself, Parajanov created a deeply Ukrainian film that brought him significant success and many awards. Later, Parajanov was imprisoned by Soviet authorities for this film, and his further career was stifled by the oppressive political environment. This film is remarkable for its impact on world cinema, with its distinctive style and thematic depth (Wheeler W. D., 2022). We used this film to explore camera work in the depiction of Ukrainian culture and nature.



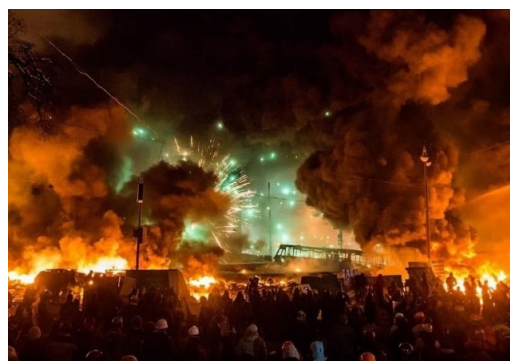
Figures 12,13 - *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965)

Sniper. The White Raven (Bushan, 2022) started as a film about the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 but was completed during the full-scale invasion. This film is a symbolic tale of loss, resilience, and the harsh realities of war, reflecting the author's view on Ukraine's struggle and the desire to share it with the world (Vera Sivachuk, 2022).



Figures 14,15 - *Sniper. The White Raven* (2022)

Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom (Afineevsky, 2015) is a documentary film summarizing the 93-day Euromaidan resistance movement that started in late 2013. This powerful film captures the resilience of Ukrainians in their fight for self-determination against authoritarian oppression (Brian Biery, 2022).



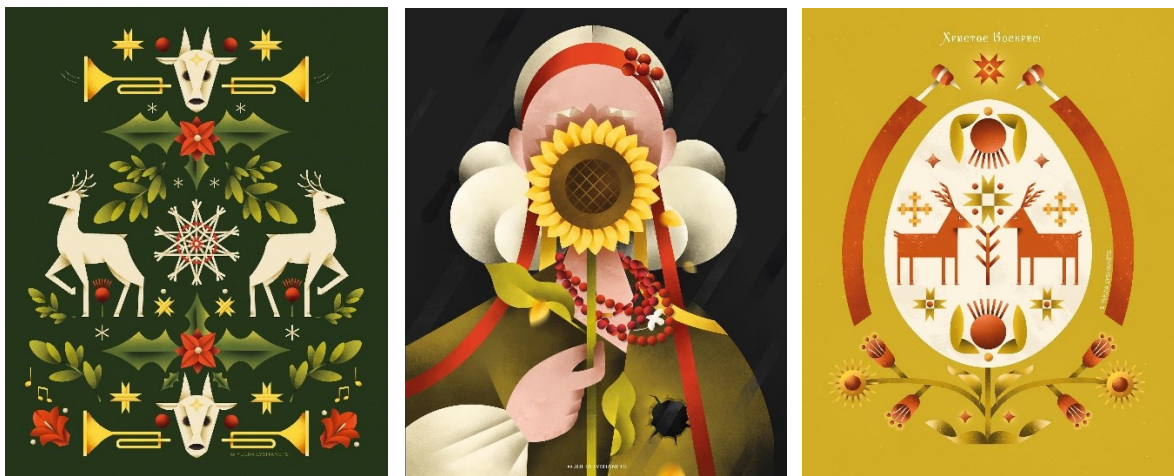
Figures 16,17 - *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom* (2015)

2.3 Methodology

Subjective perspective was the main prism through which the project was shaped. Our exploration of references went through our minds, shaping a new fictional reality that seemed to exist somewhere far away.

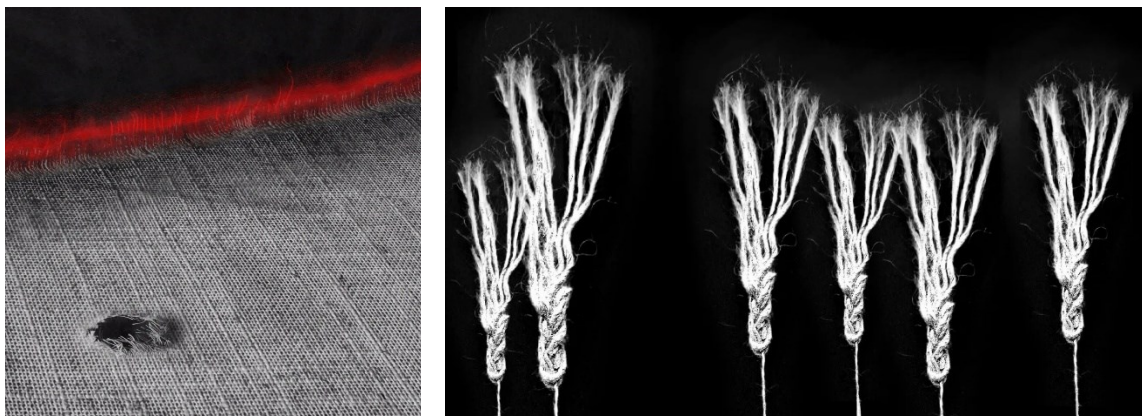
Our bachelor's degree in fine arts helped us apply academic art basics to digital illustration, and the first year of our master's program shaped our general understanding of animation basics.

One of the challenges was to transition Petrykivka painting to the digital world while maintaining its connection to nature and traditional painting methods. For this, we used the digital works archive by Yuliia Lyshanets (Yuliia Lyshanets, 2023).



Figures 18,19,20 – Digital works of Yuliia Lyshanets [@jullial], 2023

Another web archive of digital works by Anna Dudko Shatkivska was used during exploration (Anna Dudko Shatkivska, 2022-2024).

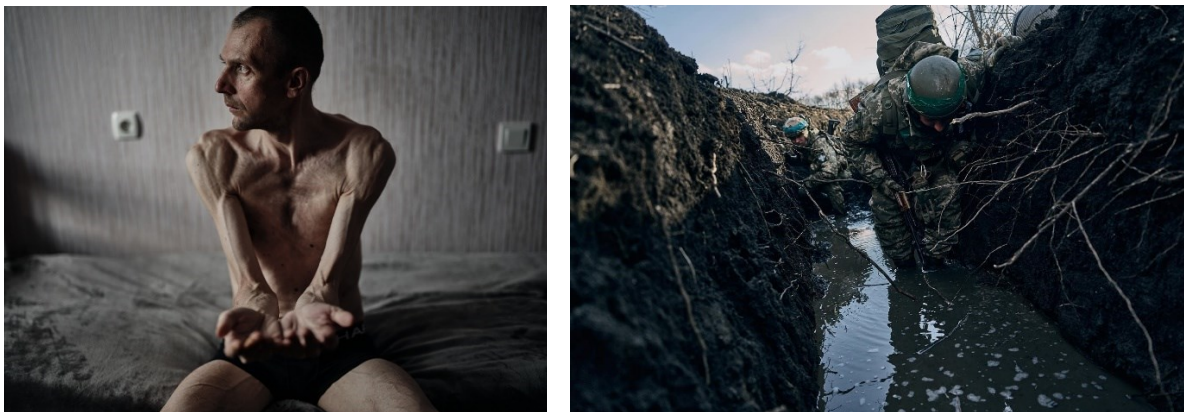


Figures 21,22– Digital works of Anna Dudko Shatkivska [@andy.rooth], 2022-2024

One old memory from our childhood in kindergarten became one of the highest emotional points in the film. We remembered how we used to draw Viburnum berries with our fingers. After exploring the symbolism of this plant in our culture, we were touched by the realization of how tragic it can be. Later, we added this reference to the film.

It was crucial to make the audience feel the emotions of the author and to show how these emotions represent the collective memory of many people and generations in Ukraine.

We were exploring multiple archives to use real-life photoshoots as references. Kostya and Vlada Liberov are two of them. Their account contains their photo works about war in Ukraine:



Figures 23,24– Photo works by Kostya and Vlada Liberov [@libkos], 2023-2024

Additional archives that shaped our project were the archive of architecture photographer, writer, tour guide Dmytro Soloviov [@ukrainianmodernism], Ukrainian documentary photographer on pause Yevgen Nikiforov [@enikiforov], and web archive *Soviet Mosaics in Ukraine*, research platform and database of all mosaics, based on the territory of Ukraine by IZOLYATSIA Foundation.

2.4 Chronogram

Our production process was divided into pre-production, production, and post-production. During pre-production, we developed the narrative, researched materials, explored bibliography and filmography, developed character designs, created concept art, and drew the storyboard with an animatic. When the plot was finalized and the main scenes were clearly set, we started drawing the backgrounds. The entire pre-production process was completed before March 2024, but creating the backgrounds took more time and somewhat became a part of the production phase itself.

During the production phase, we collaborated with a music composer. Midway through production, we had to replace this person. Production included the entire animation process, from sketching to the final look. This phase was supposed to run from February until May. However, delays occurred because we decided to participate in a secondary project alongside this one. Half of March and almost all of May were dedicated to creating the trailer for the CINANIMA festival in a small team.

Post-production was affected by general plan changes and took significantly less time than expected.

		O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J
Pre-Production	Development of narrative										
	Study of Bibliography and Cinematography										
	Character design										
	Concept art										
	Storyboard and Animatic										
	Background design										
Production	Layout										
	Animation sketch										
	Animation clean-up										
	Animation colouring										
	Compositing with the music										
Pos-Production	Final assembly of film										
Project report	Collection of results and data from practical research										
	Writing of the project report										

Tablet 1 – Expected working schedule

3. Production History

3.1 Pre-Production

The pre-production started with the shaping the idea. Our goal was to find an important topic to portray through our art.

The very first idea emerged from contemporary reality: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in people who have experienced war. This concept aimed to physically depict the mental impact of enemy aggression on the characters, transforming them from animal to anthropomorphic forms to show the human side in a wild world. However, with further conceptual development (Appendix A), this subject was rejected due to a lack of a coherent storyline and the sensitivity of the topic for the author.



Figure 25 – Concept art to the first idea

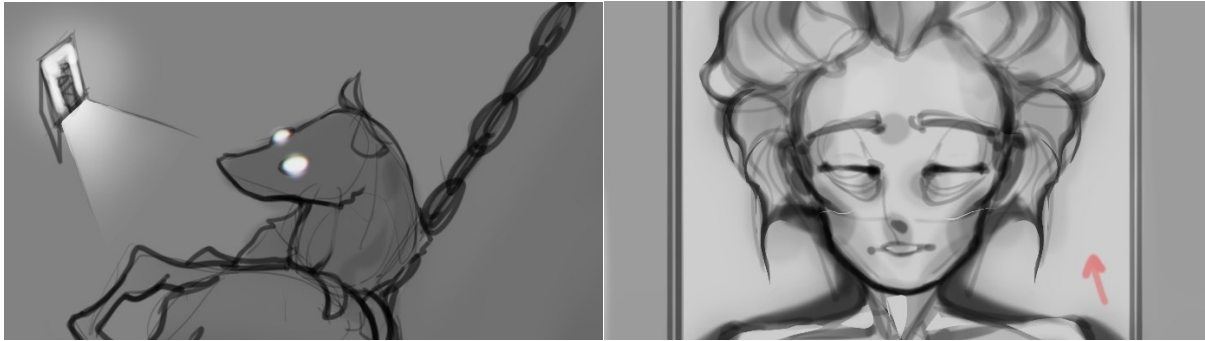


Figures 26,27 – First two pages of the plot concept

The next idea aimed to depict not modern reality, but the past of intellectual and political prisoners of the Soviet regime in Ukraine. The core of this idea was the poem “Спочатку вони вбивали людину...”¹⁴ by Ukrainian poet and dissident Vasyly Stus. The goal was to illustrate

¹⁴ "At first they killed a person..."

the Heritage we gained from the USSR era and how individuals from that system continue to impact Ukraine's current history. A key reference was the real person Viktor Medvedchuk, a pro-Kremlin Ukrainian politician and personal friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Medvedchuk, who was the last advocate of the oppressed Stus (who later died in prison), was arrested 42 years later during the full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine and was handed over to Russia in a prisoner exchange. This idea to animate Stus's poem was rejected during concept development (Appendix B) due to the author's susceptibility to depression.



Figures 28,29 – Storyboard pieces from the second idea

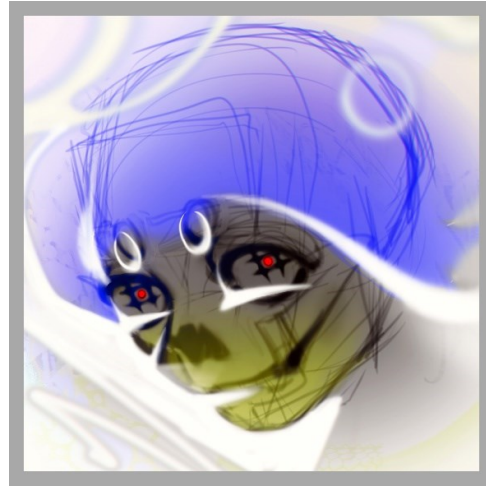
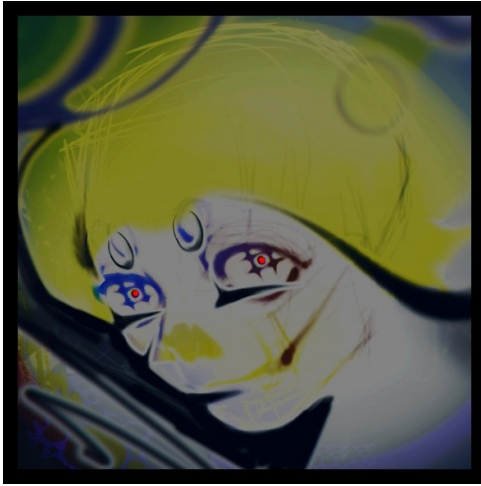
During the process of finding the right topic, we considered many different subjects we wanted to express through our art. At one point, we thought about creating a "film carousel" featuring various unrelated topics, with Ukraine itself being the only common theme.



Figure 30 – Concept we called *Under the Microscope*



Figure 31 – Concept we called *Collection*



Figures 32,33 – Concept we called *Two Faced*

We also had a concept for a small animation (Appendix C) from the concept of *Two Faced* that we initially tried to create in Adobe Photoshop. This experience helped us realize that Adobe Photoshop requires a lot of time for animation work, which is why we switched to the animation program Toon Boom Harmony.

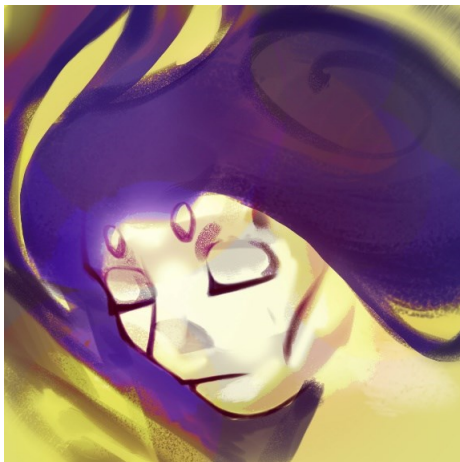


Figure 34 – The first frame of the animation test

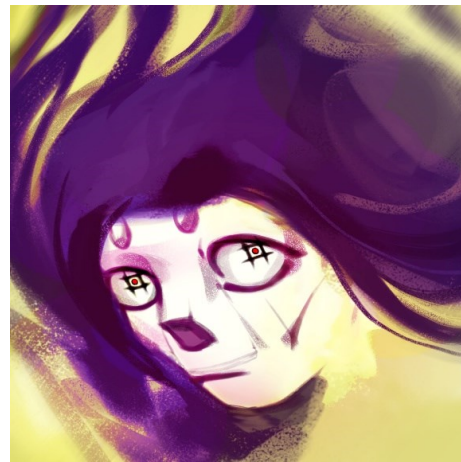


Figure 35 – The last frame of the animation test

With the first storyboard, we had a larger plot that focused more on the protagonist's arc rather than the bus stop transformation idea. At this stage, we created the character as a symbol of the common Ukrainian person. The opening scene depicted the character as part of a micro world, with us, as the authors, playing the role of scientists exploring them.

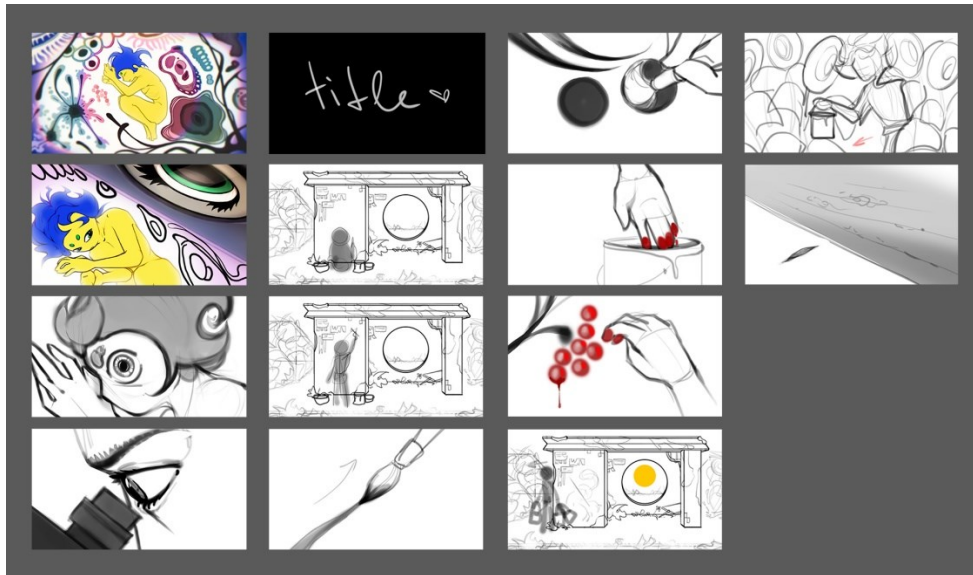


Figure 36 – The first storyboard

This plot already included elements that remained in the final idea: painting Viburnum berries with fingers to represent war blood, and the abandoned bus stop with the sunflower field in the background.

At the same time, we were developing the concept art for the main character. We wanted to dress him in a mix of traditional Ukrainian clothing and modern one. Our experiments resulted in a simpler design, with the hair meant to resemble flower petals.



Figure 37 – Sketches of the main character

During the process of clarifying the plot, our focus shifted to the concept of the bus stop as the main plot element and one of the characters in the film. The bus stop became a setting character with its own arc of transformation.

During our development, we skipped the script-writing phase because certain parts of the storyline were highly visual. Instead, we created an animatic using the program Storyboarder.

The final character design used Ukrainian vyshyvanka¹⁵, simplified in form. He is depicted wearing two baskets filled with art supplies carried on a stick.



Figures 38,39 – Traditional Ukrainian clothing, photos from The National Museum of Hutsulshyna & Pokuttya Folk Art



Figure 40 – The final main character reference

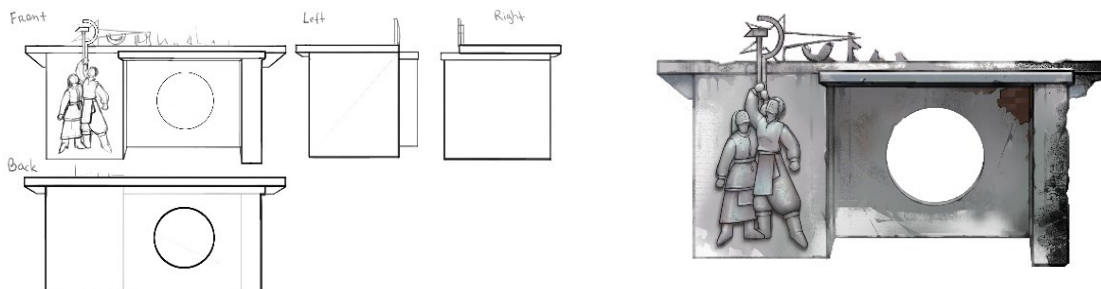
The mystical character-companion was designed next. In the beginning it appears in the form of a raven but transforms into a dog at the end of the film. This character symbolizes human intentions: it accompanies the main character from the beginning, alongside their intention to restore an old Soviet bus stop. By the end of the story, after this intention is fulfilled, it transforms into a new form that aligns with a new intention.

¹⁵ Vyshyvanka is a kind of traditional clothing in Ukraine. It is a part of the Ukrainian national costume, and also a piece of clothing often recreated in the modern fashionable version (UkraineNOW, 2022)

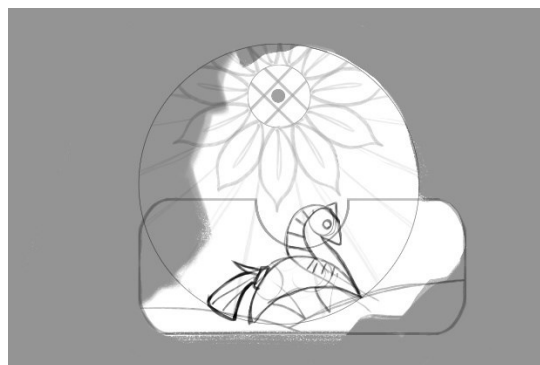


Figure 41 – Character-companion final design

The old Soviet bus stop was initially designed with a destroyed mosaic but was later changed to feature two faceless human figures, one male and one female, on its facade, each holding a hammer and sickle. The star behind the Soviet symbol references the Red Army. The bus stop has severe damage on one side caused by the war. Around the bus stop, we see sandbags, symbolizing its use as a roadblock post.



Figures 42,43- Concept of the old Soviet bus stop



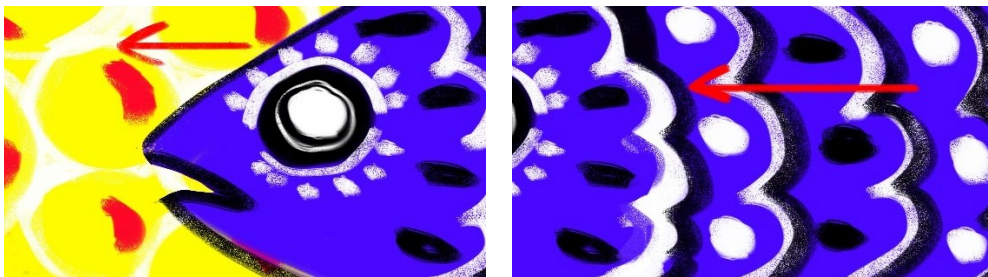
Figures 44 – First concept of the mosaics on the facade

The design of the tree of life was created not just as an illustration but with each moving part on a separate layer, as it was meant to be animated with bones. The design is full of bright colors to represent blooming nature and life in general.



Figure 45 – The *Tree of Life* concept using Petrykivka painting

During the animatic production, we created another symbol: a fish drawn in the style of Petrykivka. It is important to describe our idea behind this symbol. The fish appears as a transition element between the scenes of the Tree of Life blooming and the scenes featuring the wheat field and the living Soviet statue that is later executed by the Red Army. The fish serves as a symbol of the afterlife.



Figures 46,47 – the fish in the animatic

In the pre-production phase, we were unsure if we would use voice acting in the soundtrack, but we created a text narrative for it. Throughout the storyline, the protagonist's text is intended to clarify the symbolism we applied in the film:

“Birds are embodiments of the ethereal: be they ancestors long gone, the spirit stewards of these plains, or the yet-to-be-born souls...”

“...they live on trees, full of blossoms, the flower of earthly life, the life that surges on this land.”

“As enemies tread upon this land, this flower is severed, blood stains the soil, and on branches burnt by war, the Viburnum's berries flourish...”

By the end of February 2024, we had drawn a major part of the backgrounds. The pre-production process was completed with no delays.

3.2 Production

The production phase set the goal to complete the animation with clean-ups and main colors for the entire film first, and then add textures and color the line art, since texturing and line art coloring are time-consuming, and we had no animation team for this project. Initially, we tried using EbSynth, which can use several frames as references and apply textures to other frames, but the quality of the results was not acceptable to us.

For the animatic parts that were too schematic or sketchy, we had to clean up the poses and frame compositions of the keyframes before starting the process of sketch animation.

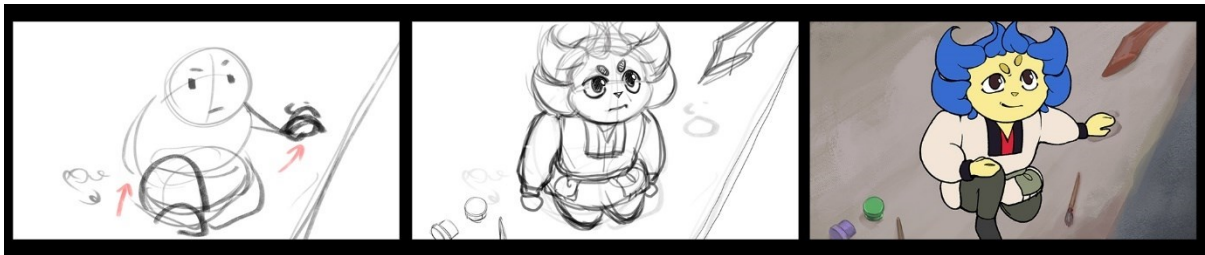


Figure 48 – Tree stages of the shot: animatic sketch, pose layout, final look

The animation process was primarily done in Toon Boom Harmony using vector tools. We chose this option because the program offers a wide range of animation tools, and filling the line art with color is very adaptive. If needed, we could change a color in the project palette, and it would automatically update throughout the entire animation. Textured vector brushes helped our characters integrate into the background style. In some scenes, we used the camera tool; for example, we used it to create a camera tilt in the first scene. Additionally, this program provides a wide range of effects, such as the blur effect, which we used in some shots.

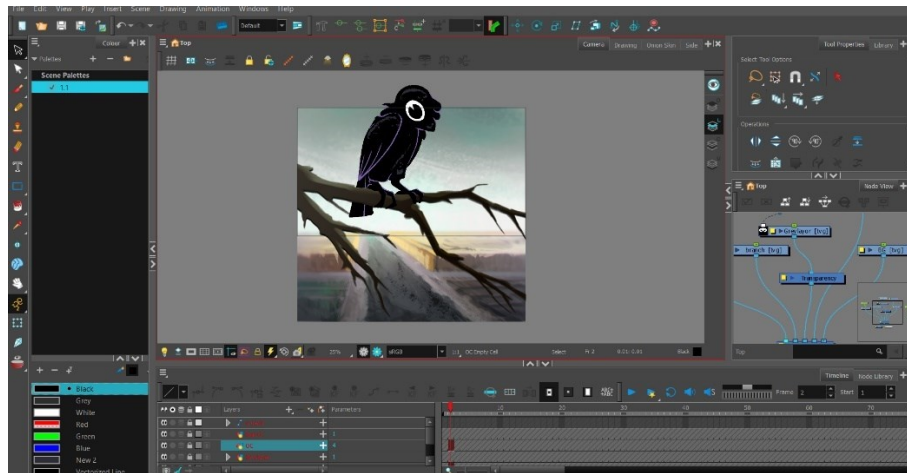


Figure 49 – Toon Boom Harmony working space

A completely different type of animation was used for the Tree of Life and the birds. To bring the Petrykivka style to life, we decided to use rig animation of the bitmap images in Moho 14. Our method involved creating a mesh for each moving part, adding bones, parenting the bones to the necessary parts of the mesh, and animating the shot using keyframes.

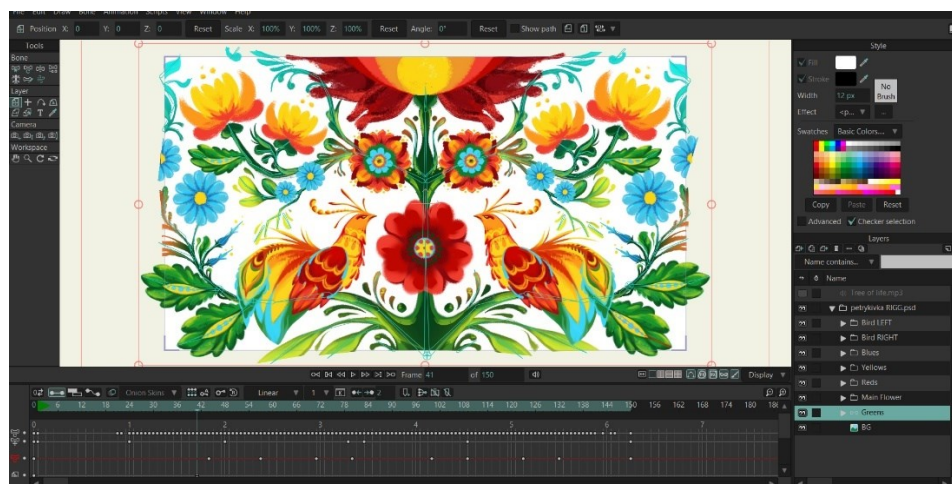


Figure 50 – Moho 14 working space

To merge the two different types of animation, we exported the rig animation as an image sequence and added brush strokes on top in Adobe Photoshop.

In the middle of the production phase, we changed the sound collage and started actively working on music production, as we were behind schedule. To help shape the mood of the soundtrack, we created a visual scheme.

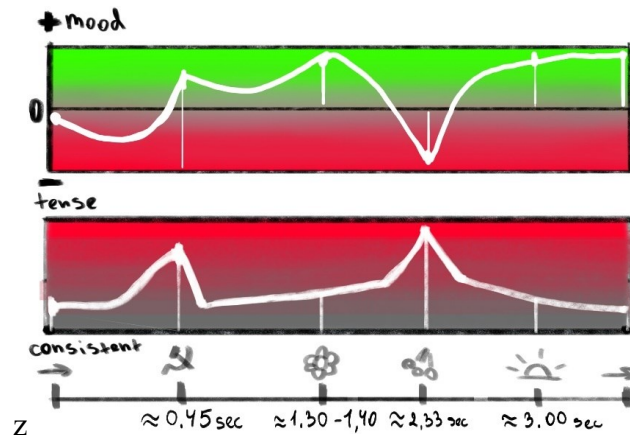


Figure 51 – graphic-visualization of the soundtrack

Almost all of May 2024 were dedicated to a side project for the CINANIMA animation festival, so we could not affectively work on the film production and significant delay appeared. Our production shifted also to June 2024, and we left with the small time for the post-production phase.

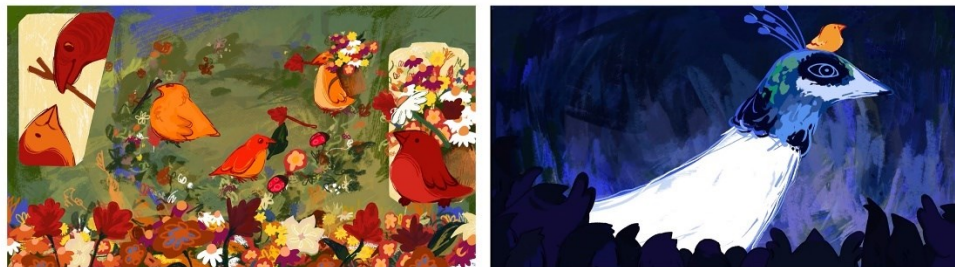


Figure 52,53 – Cinanima trailer screenshots

3.3 Post-Production

The transition from the production phase to the post-production phase was initially expected to be smooth, but it faced obstacles because of our participation in a side project for the CINANIMA animation festival. This resulted in a significant delay, extending our production timeline to June 2024 and reducing the time for post-production.

The post-production process consisted of exporting all animations as TIF sequences for the best resolution and merging them with the previously mixed soundtrack, which included the voice acting. This was done in After Effects. Minor color corrections were also made in the same program. There were slight challenges for my sound colleague since the Russian

aggression towards Ukraine resulted in everyday blackouts, which affected productivity, but we managed to complete it.

Additionally, we plan to draw the poster to promote the film, and we plan to create merchandize to this film that can connect the film with the emotions of the audience. Also to produce informational art cards can help to share Ukrainian traditional Petrykivka paintings and information about contemporary situation in the country.

4. Critical Reflection

4.1 Comparison of Results Obtained with Proposed Objectives

Before starting this project, we had not much of experience in making a personal animation film. Even though we tried to organize every step, we faced numerous obstacles stemming from our lack of practical experience as directors. One of our goals was to develop an organized system for managing the production process. Although we faced challenges, we managed to achieve it. All mistakes gained through this experience will have closer attention in future productions.

Our strong desire to express ourselves through art led us to conduct extensive research. This deep research base was vital for informing our creative decisions and grounding our narrative in a rich cultural and historical context. My personal experience as a Ukrainian provided a subjective lens through which we could explore and depict contemporary issues in Ukraine, making the project not only a creative endeavor but also a form of communication to a broader audience.

Working with a music composer and sound editor was a valuable experience. Creating a visual scheme to shape the soundtrack's mood was a practical solution that helped align our creative visions.

4.2 Reflection on the learning process

Throughout the project, I had to get used to various software tools, such as Toon Boom Harmony and Moho 14. Initially, I attempted to use Adobe Photoshop for animation, but this proved too time-consuming. Transitioning to Toon Boom Harmony allowed for a more efficient workflow, particularly with its adaptive color-filling features and textured vector brushes that integrated well with our background style.

Learning to rig and animate in Moho 14 was another significant step. The decision to use rig animation for the Tree of Life and birds in Petrykivka design required understanding mesh creation, bone structures, and keyframe animation.

One of the main challenges was managing the entire production process without an animation team. This meant taking on multiple roles, from director to animator to sound editor.

4.3 Production constraints

During pre-production, we successfully developed a narrative, created detailed concept art, and established a clear animatic. The pre-production phase went smoothly, with major parts completed by the end of February 2024 as planned. However, production and post-production phases revealed our inexperience. The production phase, which aimed to complete animation not only with clean-ups and main colors but with the textures and colored line art, faced delays due to our participation in the CINANIMA festival trailer project. These delays, coupled with technical challenges such as the limitations of EbSynth and the need for more people in the art team, extended the timeline and impacted our workflow.

We did not manage to add textures and color the line art to make the film completely finished, but we did achieve the overall goal of completing the film on time. We will continue to polish the current animation to gain better visual look of the film.

However, we succeeded in other areas, such as the rig animation of Petrykivka designs in Moho 14 and the blending of different animation types, which required creative problem-solving that we resolved successfully.

Another significant challenge was the impact of external factors, such as the Russian aggression towards Ukraine, which caused blackouts that limited sound team in their production.

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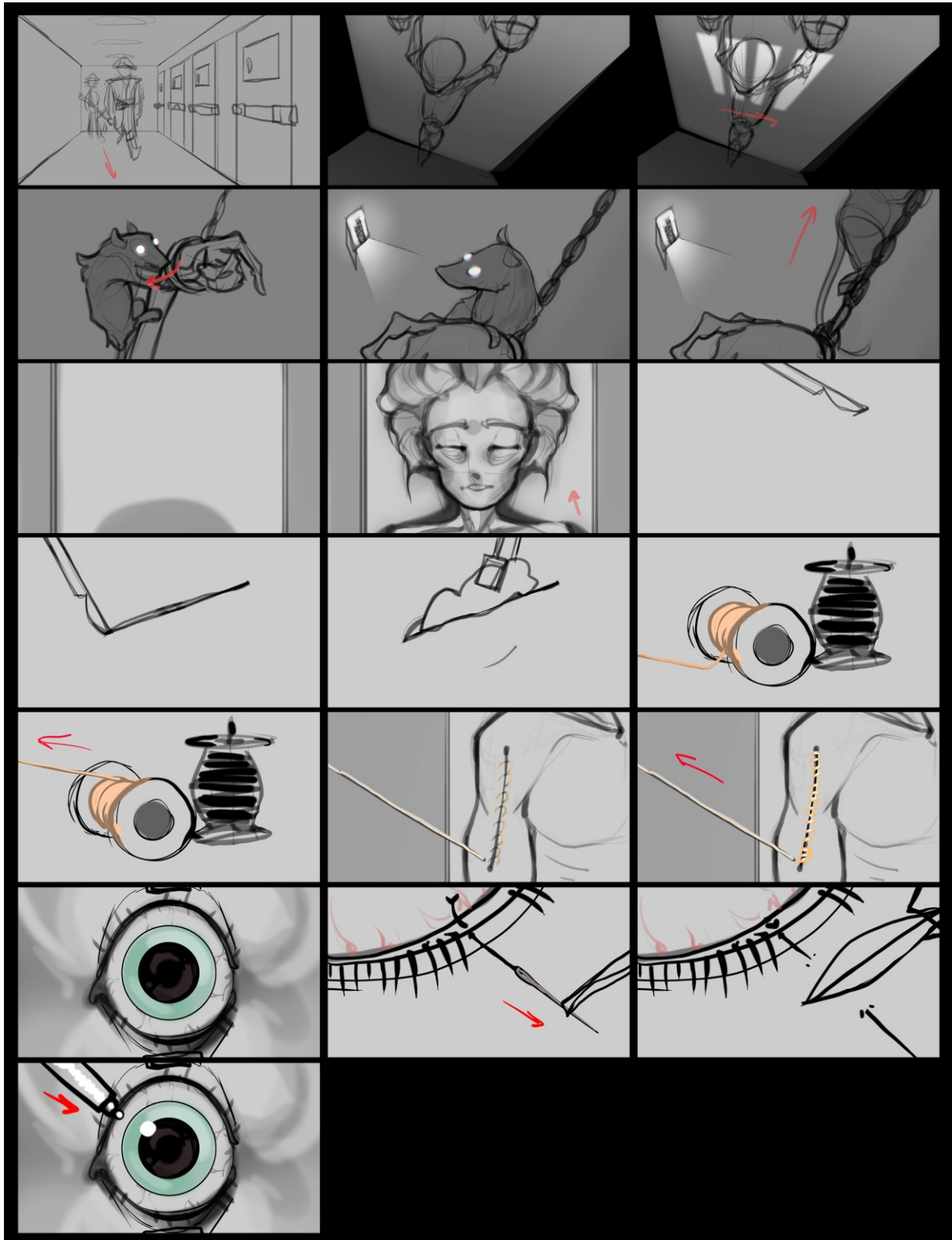
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Appendices

Appendix A – First idea concept development



Appendix B - Stus's poem storyboard development



Appendix C – *Two Faced* animation sequence

