Protecting the spark

The process of making an animated short film
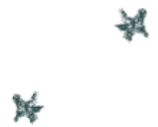
Linn Grankull

Introduction

The creative process has its highs and lows. Even for people whose passion is creating, often the journey of actually realizing one's ideas can turn into a grueling thing. In the worst case scenario it gets to a point where the artist ends up burning out, losing faith in the project or simply not wanting anything to do with the idea anymore after a long, frustrating artistic process. Animation in particular is a medium that requires an incredible amount of work. Realizing even a short idea takes a huge amount of time and effort. Because of this work intensive nature it is generally true that it takes a lot of preparation and planning to make sure that the project can reasonably be made.

In my own process of making an animated short film I started out with an idea I was excited about and a great flow in the planning stage of the project. However, once the idea had been developed and the plan for how I would make it was laid out before me, I hit a wall in my process. All that was left now was to make it happen. Playing with that idea and figuring it out was very fun creatively, but starting to make the film would mean locking in what the idea has to become. For me it felt as if I did not get to be creative in the same way anymore. Instead I had to work very hard only following a blueprint for many, many months ahead of me. As I was trying to find it in me to proceed with the project the core questions of this paper were bubbling in my brain:

How can you manage the creative process without burning out? How do you find a balance between that fun spark of creativity and practical productivity, so that you can realize your ideas?

Through my own process of creating my short film "Meteoria" I have had to proceed through this big blockage in my journey as well as several others. The goal for this paper is to gather the most important and helpful insights I have learned about going through the process of creating an animated short film.

I approach this research with with a focus on protecting ones creative spark through a creative process and taking steps to make that process manageable. By discussing my journey and what made me able to progress through the blockages I have faced in it, I hope to be of help to others who face similar struggles while venturing to realize their own creative projects.

Meteoria

The process that is explored here is the making of my short student film "Meteoria". It is a hand drawn animation about 4 minutes long, which I am making with the software's Toon boom Harmony and Procreate. The film is based on the meteorite crater Söderfjärden in my home village in Ostrobothnia, Finland. It is mostly made up of fields and in the middle of the crater is a small museum, "Meteorian". In the film, the main character makes a visit to the museum on a late summer evening. The cloudy sky interrupts her plans to stargaze however, and she waits for it to clear up with no luck. As the night falls, her boring, disappointing excursion takes a magical turn when a meteorite falls from the sky and the world is transformed into something ancient and mythical. In the end, the main character takes the fallen star in her hands, pockets it and drives away into the night.

Images: Early concept art for Meteoria

Since I grew up close to the crater I visited there as a child on school trips. When we were learning about the meteorite I would imagine it hitting the village while the life living there watched. However, I didn't have much of a grasp on time periods or what was real and not, so I envisioned animals from wildly different eras as well as mythical creatures like trolls and fairies. A few summers ago I visited Söderfjärden again after having moved far away years ago. Me and my friends went there in order to watch a meteor shower, but it was so cloudy that we couldn't see anything. We just waited around, taking silly photos and talking until we were sitting in darkness. After a while we simply went home, having just sat around an empty museum in some fields at the end of the day. This was the visit that sparked something in me. Spending time there again made me think of how this place had this magical feeling for me but also was mundane and dull at the same time. It filled me with this feeling of how much had changed, how both I and this place felt so different now to how it used to be.

This paper and the film Meteoria both explore something that has been living in my mind these past couple of years since then, but of course in quite different ways. Thoughts about changing and finding your way back to yourself. Finding that fallen star somewhere on the way, a little spark to carry with you even when the world around you feels less than magical and easy.

The idea

Starting small

The first stages of a creative process are exciting; A whole new idea to play with! Of course, you first need to have the initial spark of inspiration for what it is you want to make. Often, and perhaps ideally, an idea can come to you on its own. Forming from a handful of impressions and thoughts you have in your life and then developed in its own time as you play and tinker with it in your mind. However, we don't live in a world free of schedules; Unless a creative project is made in our spare time or we don't have any end goal in mind for it, we most likely will be creating with some sorts of limits.

A creative that needs to make things within a time limit or consistently come up with ideas will need to cultivate said ideas; To create the circumstances that make them appear. In that case you have to find the idea after it has been decided that *a project will be made*, which can come with a handful of challenges. At worst it can make the whole thing feel like a chore, which I think is one of the worst things that can happen to your own joy for creating.
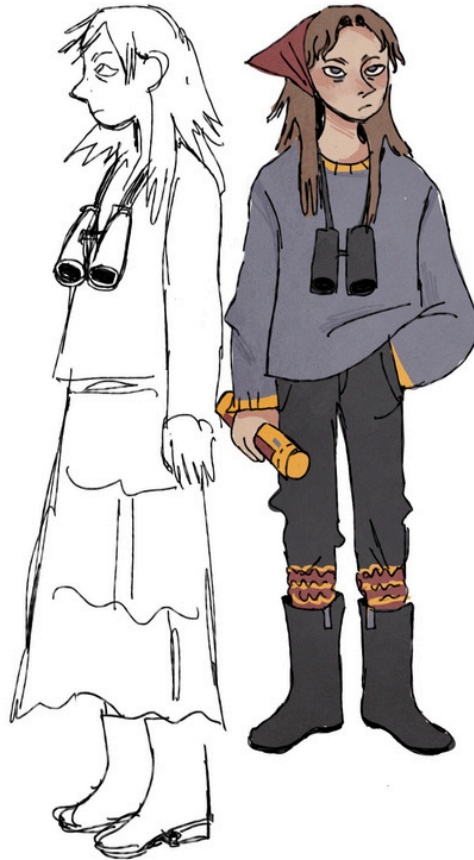
Images: Earliest concept art of the main character.

I wrote the first draft for what would become Meteoria for a scriptwriting class, along with three other short ideas, without thinking it might be what I want to make my student film about. This helped me a lot to find an idea! Because I didn't set out to write my "Big important master thesis film" it felt easy and fun to throw around some ideas. That is probably one of the hardest things when planning a big project, you get stressed out about the idea before it even exists. Quickly jotting down many small concepts might be a great way to get the ball rolling without overthinking it. Then you can pick one to build on from from there.

Outside of this class, I was kind of stressed about coming up with a good enough idea to be worth working towards over the course of my degree. It was a fear that I would make something bad or embarrassing, something that wasn't important enough. I was getting way ahead of myself, getting worried about the final product before I even started. After getting a small start for my idea in the writing class, it began to feel a lot better to think of it as an opportunity to experiment and try new things. Getting dramatic about having to make something great does not really help you actually get there, so I would recommend taking small steps so you get somewhere at all in the beginning.

Follow your bliss

That is all well and good for making the beginning feel easier, but how do you find that first little spark of an idea? Isn't coming up with an idea because you need to forcing it, compared to a genuine, spontaneous spark that just comes to you and and makes the process flow?

While it might feel that way, the materials for an idea are already in your mind; You just have to identify them and put them together. There are already a lifetime of impressions from ones life to pull from, it can just be hard to remember them on the spot. Think of what it is you like, what interests you, what sounds fun to dive into for a while. If that is hard to do, make it a point to figure out what those answers are. Look through pictures you take, jot down when you think of something you find interesting, think about moments in art or media that you find compelling. A lot can come down to gathering bits and pieces from your experiences and combining them into something new.

If this still is not helping all that much, it might be that you have had a period of not really absorbing a lot of new impressions that inspire you. In "The artist's way", Julia Cameron describes creativity as an inner well that needs care and upkeep.

 "In order to create, we draw from our inner well. This inner well, an artistic reservoir, is ideally like a well-stocked trout pond. We've got big fish, little fish, fat fish, skinny fish – an abundance of artistic fish to fry. As artists, we must realise that we have to maintain this artistic ecosystem. If we don't give some attention to upkeep, our well is apt to become depleted, stagnant, or blocked. Any extended period or piece of work draws heavily on our artistic well. As artists we must learn to be self-nourishing. We must become alert enough to consciously replenish our creative resources as we draw on them – to restock the trout pond, so to speak."

Cameron, J., & Bryan, M. A. (1992). The artist's way: a spiritual path to higher creativity. New York, NY, G.P. Putnam's Sons.

One way to take care of this well that Cameron describes is taking some time out of your schedule to have "Artist dates": A date with yourself and your own inner artist. These dates could be taking a walk somewhere new to explore new sights or something simple and fun like going bowling. The point is simply giving yourself some time and space to take in some new impressions and take care of yourself and your creative spark. Those fun and interesting activities might fall to the wayside when we become adults because they do not seem important or productive enough. If there is a struggle with finding ideas, you might just need to take some time to experience a little bit of simple joy and whimsy to restock your creative reservoir.

My own inspirations and influences

When trying to find ideas that would be interesting to include in a film I thought of making something based on places that are familiar to me. The main source of inspiration for this was some media I really like that base their environments pretty closely on references to real places. Anime does this quite often, some works of studios Kyoto Animation and Studio Ghibli come to mind. To me, basing background art on actual places is really charming, capturing the small peculiarities of the place depicted. It can give otherwise mundane scenes a lot of personality and specificity that makes it stand out.

On this and the next page: Images I took at Söderfjärden in order to use as references for the film's backgrounds.
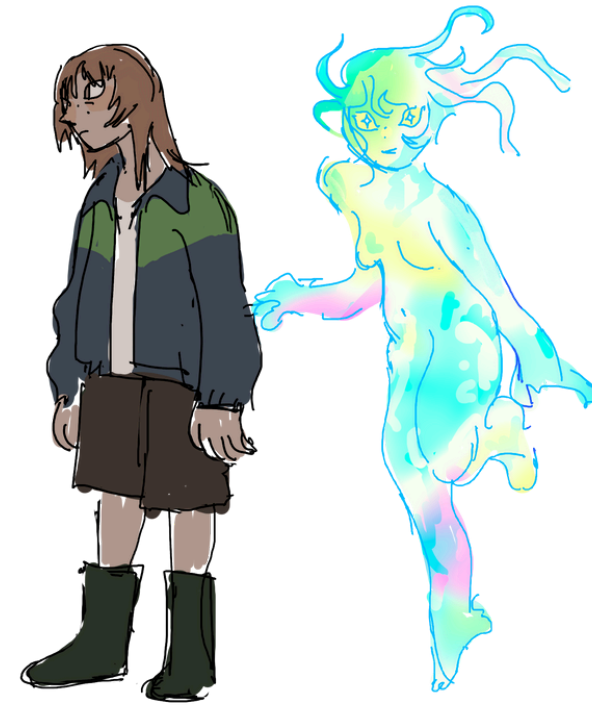
Ponyo on a cliff by the sea by Studio Ghibli has probably been the biggest single media inspiration for the animation of Meteoria. This was not something I consciously thought about before I was quite far into the process, but once I did it felt kind of funny how obvious it was. It is one of my favourite animated movies after all, and I already know that I am quite influenced by the style of Studio Ghibli. In Ponyo there is a moment where ancient sea creatures return in a magical event, which is quite similar to what happens in my film. Another influence the film has had on my approach is how characters look while underwater. The animation becomes wobbly and a bit off model, which i think is a really nice way to draw something that is supposed to be submerged. I approached the dream sequence of Meteoria aiming for a similar effect. Utilizing that also turned out to be practical in the sense that animating in a looser style is a lot faster. The wobbly style allows for less time spent on making everything consistent and smooth. However, while I made my first concepts for how the dream sequence would look I focused on the aesthetic, not on how it would animate. Later I would have to reexamine how this style would look animated, as it is quite different when an image is still or moving.

I had thought about the idea of making a story set in my home village someday before, often thinking about it while visiting family since I live abroad and feel a little homesick at times. The thought of making art of where I grew up tickles me as those small places have this feeling of being kind of irrelevant. The thought of taking the time to appreciate the details of places from home feels personal and fun to me, and so this became one of my starting points. From there I thought of Söderfjärden and my trip there a few summers earlier, which got the ball rolling.

While I have some interest in settings that are grounded in reality in animated works, I am usually drawn towards animation that is more fantastical and abstract. I generally like to draw in a more loose and stylized manner, so I wanted to somehow compromise between some different approaches.
What I came up with was to split the film into two styles: The art style before the meteorite hits would consist of digitally painted backgrounds, realistic colors and a slightly cleaner, more static animation style. After the meteor hits the animation style would change to a much more loose and abstract style that is constantly moving.

Some of my first sketches of the two styles of the film.

Getting started

Planning can become paralyzing

After coming up with my idea it was time to figure out the details and get started. It was also time to present the idea to teachers and classmates to receive some feedback. I drew up a lot of concept art of scenes and mapped out what my film would become. I absorbed the feedback I received when I presented my idea and kept building on it to make it even more solid. I wrote, discussed, presented and planned until it was fully mapped out and sounded good and clear to everyone. Everything was set to go. Then I ran into a small problem; I realized that I had no desire to make this movie anymore.

This was one of the big blockages I had in my process and it is what got me to think a lot about how one could balance productivity and fun in a creative project in the first place. I knew making an animation is hard and time consuming. I wanted to do it *right* and not fail to make a finished film. Therefore it would be best to know exactly what I was going to do before I started as to not waste time. Instead it felt impossibly hard in a different way.

I had lived with this nice concept of what the film would be in the end, until it felt like there was little to no fun left for me until I reached that end goal. It hadn't helped that I had built up my idea a lot while presenting it to others. The idea became just a little bigger, a little more important and artistic every time I needed to explain it to someone else. Now that was the expectation I had set for myself and my peers. It is easy to get lost in things that sound impressive, even if you don't want or don't really know how to create it. While the idea is in your head, in this pretty, summarized form, it will forever be a nice little vision of how great it would be if it existed. When you have to actually make the idea into reality you have to tackle that you might not have the skills, time or resources to actually make those impressive ideas real, or that the method to get to that end result is not something you enjoy doing. It is hard starting to actually make your project real when it means you have to face the risk that you will not be able to achieve that your exact vision and do the idea justice.

It helped me a lot when I began to focus on what I *enjoyed* with the process instead. A child learning to draw isn't thinking a lot about how and when and what to draw, they draw because they want to. Sitting on your idea forever will not make it appear, but just starting gives you a shot at making *something*. That something might become very good. However, you will never know if you put such high stakes on the idea that it paralyzes you from starting. "Just start!" is very basic advice, but it is basic for a reason. You can always go back and rethink if things don't feel right later, but overcoming that self imposed pressure and need for control is so important to allow your project to blossom at all. It may also be good to watch out for seeking validation from others for your project so early. That may come with a sense of shame if you do need to make changes in the project, since others now know and expect it to be a certain way.

While planning out what you actually want to do and how you will do it is smart, it can be hard to gauge if your plan actually will work well when you execute it. Only when you start making will some things become clear; Maybe the program you wanted to use in order to learn it proved to not be able to do what you needed it to, or you underestimated how long different parts of the process would take.* Not getting into actually making some animation until after you have spent so much time thinking about it opens you up to wasting a lot of time on things that will not work.
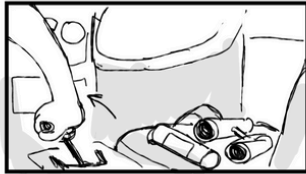

My nemesis, the binoculars I made my character wear through the whole film.

Storyboard for Meteoria.

Meteoria - 1
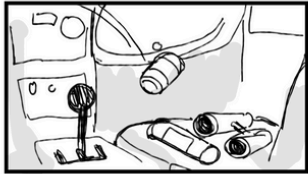
Car Seat

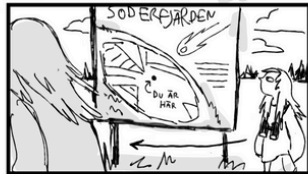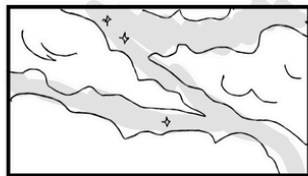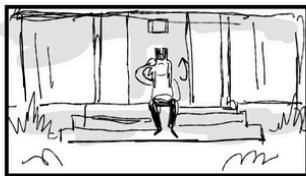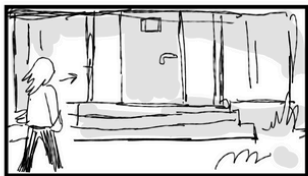Car door thunk! — Hand pulls

Driving through forest

Forest clears

Slight pan up ↑
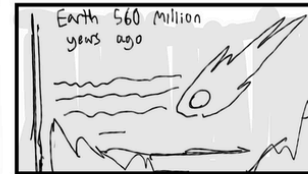

Steps out of Car

Walks across

Clouds roll in...

Meteoria - 2

Peeks in

quiet...

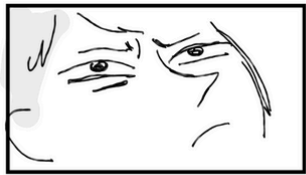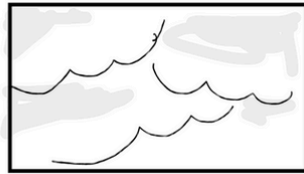Earth 560 Million years ago

Remembers something...
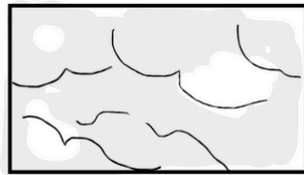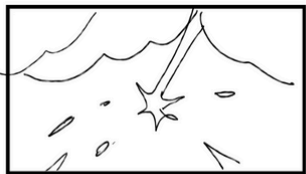

Walks up to watchtower

Meteora - 3

Time passes - Scene cuts forward,
Character and clouds move

Lifts binoculars

ominous..

BRIGHT! LOUD!

Meteora - 4
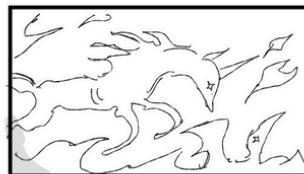
Floats down towards towards surface

Fwoosh!

"water" settles, all is still

Trees grow, creatures emerge..

Meteoria - 5

Light fades...

Magic washes away...

Meteoria - 6

Wind, rumble of distant thunder

Begins to look

Looks away before she sees anything

Looks up

Closed fist into pocket

Sound of Car door closing

Shot of the crater, it begins to drizzle

End

Practicalities

Work flow and structure

Personally. I struggle a bit with organisation and following a plan. My initial strategy was to focus on making a rough version of th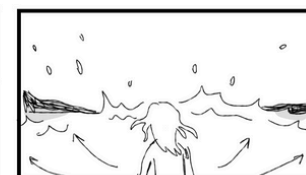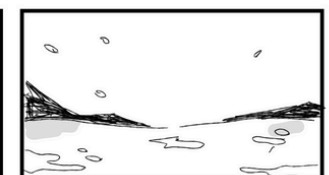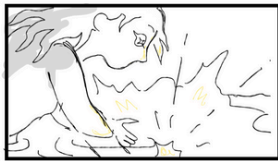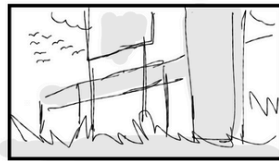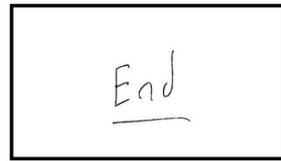e whole film first and then go over it with as much polish as I would have time to add. That way I could at least have a whole movie at the end, which I then could make as nice as possible with the time i had left. I found this strategy to have some pros and cons.

Pros: It helped me get started. The pressure of beginning to animate scenes that would actually be in the final film was a big part of what kept me from starting. If I knew the scene I was working on didn't have to be perfect it let me start without worrying too much. It is also easy to throw out or change some stuff that doesn't work and catch some problems that are more apparent when you can watch a rough version of the whole film earlier.

Cons: Working this way kind of creates even more work. If you don't plan well, it leaves you open to oversights and having to redo things. First of all, updating scenes to add more polish adds some time spent on importing and reanimating parts of the film that might have been easier if done all the way the first time. It can be hard to just "Add polish" on top of what you have already made. If you animated a scene hastily and it looks wonky it is often easier and faster to start over instead of repairing what you have. It may also make you lose track of the scope of your film. If you fully completed each scene in order, it would be pretty easy to know how much you have left and when you will be done. At the end of my own process I couldn't keep track of what was done and what was not, and I experienced a lot of stress because of it.

I think the way to go ahead with a larger project like this is pretty individual. From my own experience I would recommend making at least one scene from start to finish before continuing with the rest of the film. If you make one scene complete, with the level of quality you want the end result to have, you will have a good idea of what works and how long things might take.

Because of my approach I didn't realize the extra work I made for myself because of the details of the character. She has long hair, a pull tab on her jacket and a pair of binoculars around her neck for most of the film. All of these need to swing and move with her movements, which takes a long time to animate. Even though they seem small, it adds up over all the scenes. If i finished a shot fully instead of doing a rough version first I might have caught onto this problem and made some changes. For example simplifying some details or making her leave the binoculars behind at some point so they don't need to be added in all scenes. Small things that would make it easier to complete the film on time. Instead I missed how much I had put on my plate for the project since the rough version didn't need to include all those details fully animated.

I tend to lose track of time when a deadline is far away and then get a LOT done right before a deadline. Because of this, I often try to set my own deadlines earlier so that I will keep myself going. Keeping deadlines is generally a good idea; Not to whip yourself into working more and faster, but to adjust how much you can spend on each part of it. Giving yourself a rough idea of when things need to be done helps you gauge if you need to adjust the scope of the project. Just mapping out how many scenes there are and how much time you actually have to make them in time is pretty helpful. That can be a little tricky though, because different parts of the process may take different amounts of time. A struggle I experience with self imposed deadlines are that they can lead to some problems with balance. It can create unnecessary stress when failing to meet a deadline; Even if it actually doesn't have any consequences and that stage of the process simply needed more time than predicted. On the opposite end, it can lead to forgetting that there is still a larger project to do and checking out when you meet a deadline early. A different approach that I found helpful was to keep time-based goals instead of task-based. For example, instead of deciding "This afternoon I must finish the fifth scene of the film", one would decide "Today I will work as far as I can on the fifth scene of the film from Kl. 13 to 17". It can help you find a good pace to your workflow and I find it carries less pressure and guilt to know that you have done all that you can with the time you had available. Some combination of these different approaches may lead to a good balance.

Compromise and accepting changes

Starting and progressing will probably mean that things have to change to accommodate for the reality of the project. In theory, all my ideas sounded fine, but in practice, they didn't all work out for me as they were in the beginning The dream sequence in particular ended up going through some changes. The concept I had drawn had a painted and colourful look, going for a feeling of light refracting every color of the rainbow and washing over the dull, normal world. Pretty early on I wasn't very sure about how to animate this concept though. The painted look would mean both animating the line art and painting a background that would flow and move with the character for every frame of the sequence. I also wasn't sure about the colours, which felt a little messy to me.
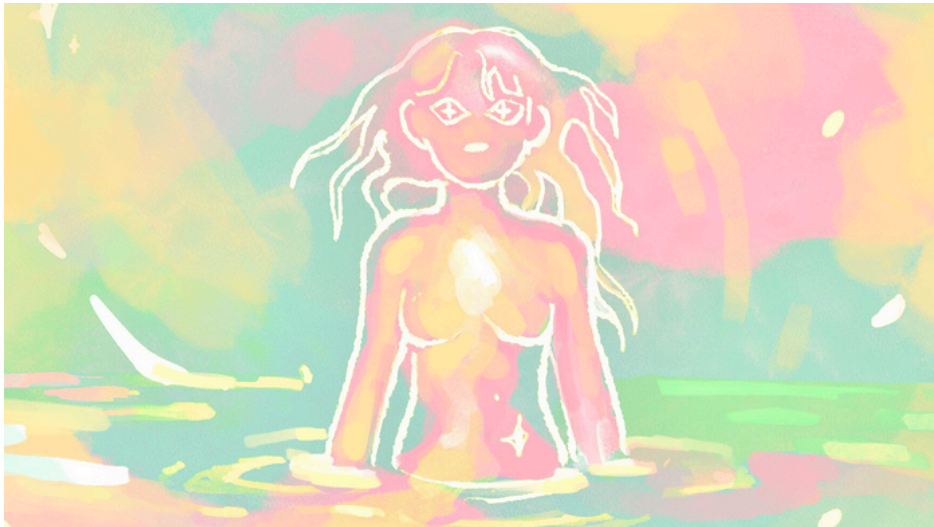

Images: First concept of the dream sequence and experiments on paper

Then I had a completely different idea: To animate the dream sequence traditionally on paper. This would make the art styles automatically contrast a lot and I also thought it was just a cool and artistic thing to do. I got swept up in this idea for a while, until the time came to start animating it. I had failed to consider a small detail:

Animation on paper is HARD. I had done some smaller animations on paper before which I thought looked good, but making several scenes that would need to be consistent with one another was a whole different beast. I needed to figure out what tools to use, where to work, how to scan the papers and if I could even then edit the animation once it was scanned to achieve the look I wanted. Basically, a lot of new things to assume I could just do within my time limit without much previous experience. It was also easy to gloss over the parts of paper animation that I dislike as long as I wasn't actually doing it. It is for example a lot harder to know what you are doing, since you only see the finished animation after you scan it. It takes a lot of time, and it is unforgiving if you mess anything up. It was an idea that was incompatible with the project's limits and how I work.

Instead I started animating this part of the film on my ipad, which I draw on almost everyday. It is a way to work that is easy and comfortable for me and I enjoy it a lot more than animating on paper. Even though I admire traditional hand drawn animation a lot it was not right for this project. In the end, I think it turned out a lot better than it would have been had I animated the sequence on paper and doing it this way made it possible to make this whole project with the time I had.
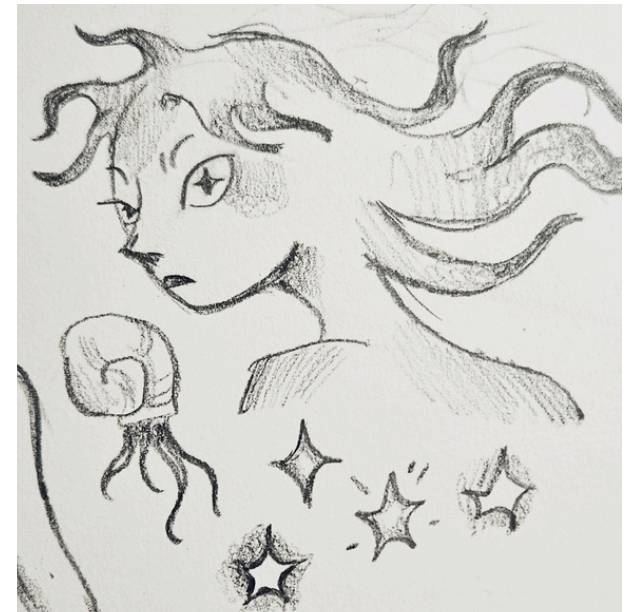
When I went back to my concept images I found that I liked the colours more when some more dull, cool tones were included. The bright, rainbow shift would contrast and pop out a lot more, instead of being this overwhelming mess of rainbow colors. However, the style of this image below was still not even remotely something that i could realistically animate with the time I had. Drawing both lineart and painting a moving background for every frame was simply not realistic if I wanted to finish my film. Another problem was the white lineart, which needed to stand out against a background that was also pretty light and colourful. I needed to rethink.

Concepts for this new look.

I went back to gathering impressions and inspiration, which made my direction for this sequence take a very different turn. I stumbled across images and illustrations of sea creatures and tiny organisms under microscopes, which felt both like space and deep sea at the same time. This was very different inspiration for the scenes but it instantly felt right. I made some tests, trying to find a way for the animation to be as manageable and easy as possible while still looking nice, since i wanted a lot of movement. In the final style the animation could basically be only simple, uncolored lineart with some effects on it. Much more manageable than my concept painting, but still in a style that felt interesting and pretty.

Shot from the finished film.
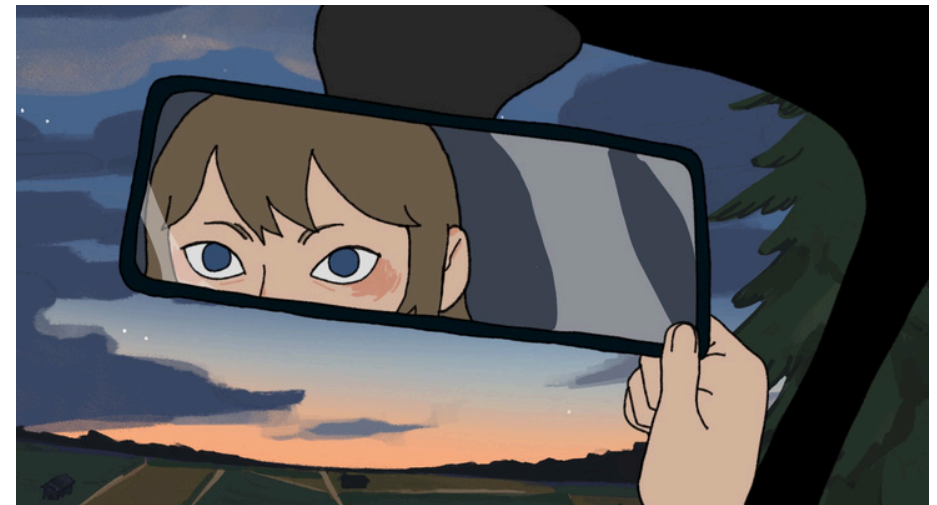
I always think of Richard Williams film "The thief and the cobbler" as a cautionary tale of not compromising when it comes to animation. In brief summary, the film was meant to be the masterpiece of legendary animator Richard Williams, a culmination of skill gained through the years. The approach of the film seems to have been to make all the animation in the hardest way possible to show that the animators working on it could do it. The film is full of characters with complicated designs that move constantly as well as intricate, animated environments and machinery that fly past the camera in seconds. For an animator it is dizzying to imagine how much time and skill went into every second of it.

Richard Williams worked on the film for nearly 30 years and never finished it. The closest thing you can find to the original movie now are fan restorations on Youtube*. The film never being finished had to do with a few different factors, but the perfectionism of the animators making this movie was at the core of making the production drag on so long and become so bloated. Being ambitious and uncompromising in the pursuit of making an artistic project is not necessarily *the* path to making something great. Dedication and passion for a project is wonderful, but not if it isn't paired with some honesty about what is reasonable. Single-mindedly pouring blood, sweat and tears into a project might not get you where you want to be if you cannot see the larger picture. Animation is already a beast of a craft to practice, so evaluating if there are more manageable solutions is often key to making a project possible at all.

Progression of a shot, from references to final shot. I was thinking about having the signs coming towards the camera as she drives, which I thought would look cool. However, animating from that angle would be time consuming and not something had time for at that point. I exchanged this idea to something I like even more in the end and worked better for the feeling of the scene.

*The thief and the cobbler archive official (2022 January 31) "The thief and the cobbler recobbled cut Mk4" Youtube.

Do your thing

## Confidence in your own expression

When working on a project like mine in an academic environment there are lots of opportunities to have another pair of eyes on your work. Of course one wants the film to be as good as possible and to catch how it is received by others, so feedback is something that can be very valuable. Being open and receptive to critique would help me be realistic about my idea. Does the audience understand what is being communicated, or does it need to be changed so that they do? How do you make this story beat more clear? Or is it okay if it is vague? Does the film drag on too long? Is it meaningful?

But as more and more presentations and feedback sessions took place, I started to feel a little troubled. I*s this even anything?*

I hit another blockage where I felt more and more that my idea was not all that good. On top of that I had no idea how to resolve the issues i started seeing and felt unsure of my own instincts and judgement. Suggestions of what I should be doing would send me down rabbit holes of trying to figure out how to do things differently, only for it to end up feeling wrong anyway. My peers opinions could also go such different directions that it left me scratching my head about what was actually the right way to go forward.

There was a final relief when I discussed this conflict with a visiting lecturer and he responded essentially saying "Ha, that is so typical with student films. They listen to so many opinions that the film doesn't know what it is in the end." It confirmed a feeling I wouldn't quite let myself feel then. I wanted to be open to critique, not dismissive, not a person who cant take feedback. However, you need to pick what feedback seems helpful to you and not take all of it as if they are commands. You end up trying to make something that is good for everyone; It might risk becoming something that isn't quite right for anyone instead. If you absorb every opinion, the work that was meant to express something in your own mind becomes a confused mash of other people's thoughts, making the original core of the idea get lost on the way.

It is also good to keep in mind that it is hard for someone else to gauge what will work in your film. Getting across what the experience of the end result is going for in only words and images while the project is a work in progress is not an easy task. A very good idea can sound quite underwhelming when you summarize it like that, and the opposite can happen as well. It is good to be able to accept and consider feedback, but it is also important to have some confidence in yourself and your ability to know which feedback you might want to apply and not apply.
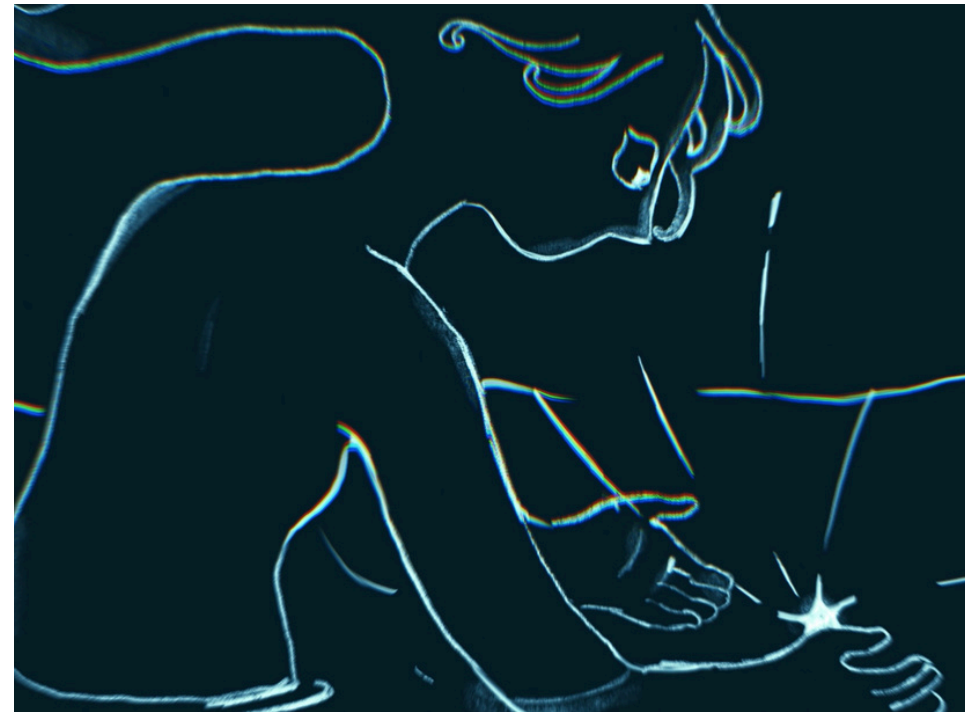
A scene from the finished film.

Similarly to how there are many opportunities to hear others opinions in a school environment, there are also a lot of impressions you get through lectures, seminars and generally being in a place where artistic processes are in focus and talked about. The academic art environment can unfortunately feel somewhat alienating, based on both my own experience and what I often hear in discussion with fellow students. Approaching art from a research perspective is quite different from how many of us have done it before. It can make something that has felt natural and easy into an unfamiliar and complicated concept, which was a source of some discomfort and confusion through my process.

Me considering to make the dream sequence entirely on paper was possibly an effect of the doubt this caused, making me feel like something in the film needed to seem more special and artistic. Perhaps it was something that would sound more interesting when written about later compared to animating on an Ipad. There was this conflict between the concept of the film as something to be discussed versus the film itself as it was. The actual way I wanted to work on my film did not always feel as if it resonated in this environment. Käthrine Yan's "Chaos and order: 13 ways to finish what you start" is a great paper that has been very insightful to read while working on my film. She discusses the academic environment and how it adds pressure to our process.

"To me, what mainly differentiates the feeling of flow and intuition from procrastination and "prescribed" work methodology is that there isn't a constant pressure and silent promise of deeming your process "innovative" or "forward-thinking" enough.

Yan (2022), CHAOS AND ORDER: 13 ways to finish what you start

Something that I had to develop at the end of my process to be able to progress was to have the confidence to move past this "prescribed" way of working. When trying to stay true to your own expression and following your bliss, you need to remember to do that with the way you work as well. Like with feedback you need to *yourself* evaluate what is helpful and right for your idea. For me this was to detach a little bit from the structure around me. I found I needed to take a break from this academic way of looking at my film and instead get back to what I know works for me. After all, this is what I do best and what I love to do. I have spent countless hours of my life doing this, so I must know *something* about how it is to be done.

When you find your flow to creating and actually want to to do it, things start to fall into place a lot easier. Of course, if you have to work on something everyday for a long period of time it is unlikely that you will just organically want to do it from the moment you wake up to the end of the day on all days. However, taking care of that feeling as much as you can within your circumstances is very helpful to making progress.

Because of this it is only logical to want to preserve that feeling throughout for the success of the project. However, this deep into my process I also feel like the project is not the entire point. I feel I have somewhat gained a new protectiveness over my own voice and instincts. I hope that it is something that will help me be a more resilient and confident artist in the future when doubts creep in. That creative spark is not only there to make one project better and easier; It has gotten you where you are now and will carry you forward if it is allowed to.

Wrapping up

Peace with what you have made

Finally the process is drawing to its close, whether it be because deadlines are approaching fast or because the work is arriving at its natural conclusion. At the very least, it *should* be drawing to its close. At this stage, it is easy to have leaned into the artist madness, grinding away and working overtime so that the project will be as good as possible. There can be a similar pressure to ending the process as there can be when trying to get started; This is a step that decides what the project will ultimately become. The instinct to prolong the work can be strong, wanting to do just a *little* more, make it just a *little* better. Remember that almost three decade production of The thief and the cobbler? Do keep in mind that in order to do our project that we have worked so hard on justice we need to not let the moment pass us by.

So what happens then, when we actually end the process? Perhaps we didn't manage to finish our project completely in the end. You might not have been able to navigate every blockage and problem encountered in the process gracefully. There might be regrets to the decisions you made when you pull yourself out of this bubble you have been living in while working on the project. Perhaps you failed to manage your time or changed your idea to please others. Perhaps you feel the final piece does not do justice to what you envisioned in the beginning and you feel unsatisfied with it. Was this all even worth it then?

Well, guess what, your ideal version of this project that you had in your mind doesn't exist, but what you did end up making does. Making any artwork, whether it is animation, a painting, a poem etc. doesn't entail somehow beaming that perfect idea into existence directly from your brain. Creating comes with translating that idea in your mind into a version that exists outside of it. Your resources, circumstances and skills will impact what that new version will become. Any piece of art goes through this translation to evolve into it's final form.

"Each painting has its own way of evolving. When the painting is finished, the subject reveals itself." -William Baziotes

Quote cited in "The artists way" J.Cameron, 1992

I am as of writing this paper in the final steps of making Meteoria, having just finished a work in progress version that is close enough to the final product. I still have a million things I want to do; Details to include, backgrounds to rework, mistakes to fix, but I am undoubtedly arriving at the conclusion of my process and deadline for being completed. At the end of my process, I feel that it wasn't really about figuring out how to do a creative process the "right" way. It was developing a skill for starting, making and releasing a project like this at all. Figuring out HOW to make things, letting things change, and ultimately being okay with what it became.

I was determined to finish my animation on time, something I viewed as the ultimate failure to not be able to do. This became a real fear at the end when I realised just how much there still was to get done. I underestimated the amount of work that goes into animation, even if it was something I actively thought about during the entire process. As a person who loves animation, it is pretty easy to have very high standards for your own animated projects. Animation is like the final boss of making a lot of effort and skill invisible in the final product. It is a medium that takes a LOT of work, and it is easy to forget even for an animator. We admire the incredible animations made by people at the top of the art form. When we want to start making our own animations, our big film, there can be some real disappointment that we cannot achieve that level of animation on our own. It can be good to remember that those impressive animations are mostly team efforts, often with years of work behind them and big budgets. We do not see the struggle or the roughness of animation as much since the cream rises to the top, so to speak. There is a very different scope if you are only one person making a student film and it can be hard to accurately predict how much you can do with your time.

I am fortunately finishing my film and it is all coming together with a lot of effort and elbow grease. However, I no longer feel as if it would have been a catastrophic failure should I not have managed to finish it. I have never made a project such as this on this scale before. Thinking that you can figure out how to manage all the moving parts of a new creative process just like that is quite a lot to expect, especially if you have not gone through similar projects many times before. No matter what it became in the end, you *have* made it through a process and are all the more experienced than you were before. You have trained a muscle that will help you do it again in the future, probably to even greater results.

Conclusions

I decided to approach this paper somewhat chronologically through a creative process, which I thought would be a logical way to discuss the different stages of making a larger project like my film. What has become more clear to me while gathering my thoughts and writing them down is that there are some common threads running through what I have learned. Thoughts that has come up in the idea stage might come back later in the process, but expressed in slightly different ways. For example, picking ideas you gravitate towards, staying true to your own expression and working in ways that help you find flow are all a form of taking care of your creative spark. I feel it has boiled down to three broader themes:

Following your creative spark where it leads you - It is easier to run with the wind instead of against it, and it is for the best of the artist and their work to find that flow throughout the process.

Being honest about your limitations- Think honestly on how things will work and what you are actually able to do with the resources you have.

Embracing that it is a journey - Expecting everything to go perfectly is unrealistic and bumps in the road are normal, not a failure.

My question of how one can balance the artistic process found some answers within the two first themes. Instead of viewing balancing the process as choosing how much you must push and sacrifice yourself, I feel I found healthier ways to approach what felt like a split between fun, self indulgent creativity and practicality. Being practical is less about pushing yourself to do things you don't want to and more about being honest about what you need to do to realize your project as you want to make it.

While trying to pick out all of this, the way to do things, how one can make it all work out just right, it has become clear to me that this mindset also was part of the problem. Blockages are not something you overcome once and then they are never an issue again. I wanted to do things the right way, to know how to make the right decisions so there wouldn't be more problems and I would succeed. However, that was part of the pressure that made me stress so much about the whole creation process. You cannot completely control that a process will go smoothly or the artwork will be great, you can only do your best within your circumstances. But making it through it all with starting and finishing a project does hone your skills and develop tools that can help you do it again in the future, while keeping your creative spark with you through it.

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