



VISUAL NARRATIVE ELECTIVE 01

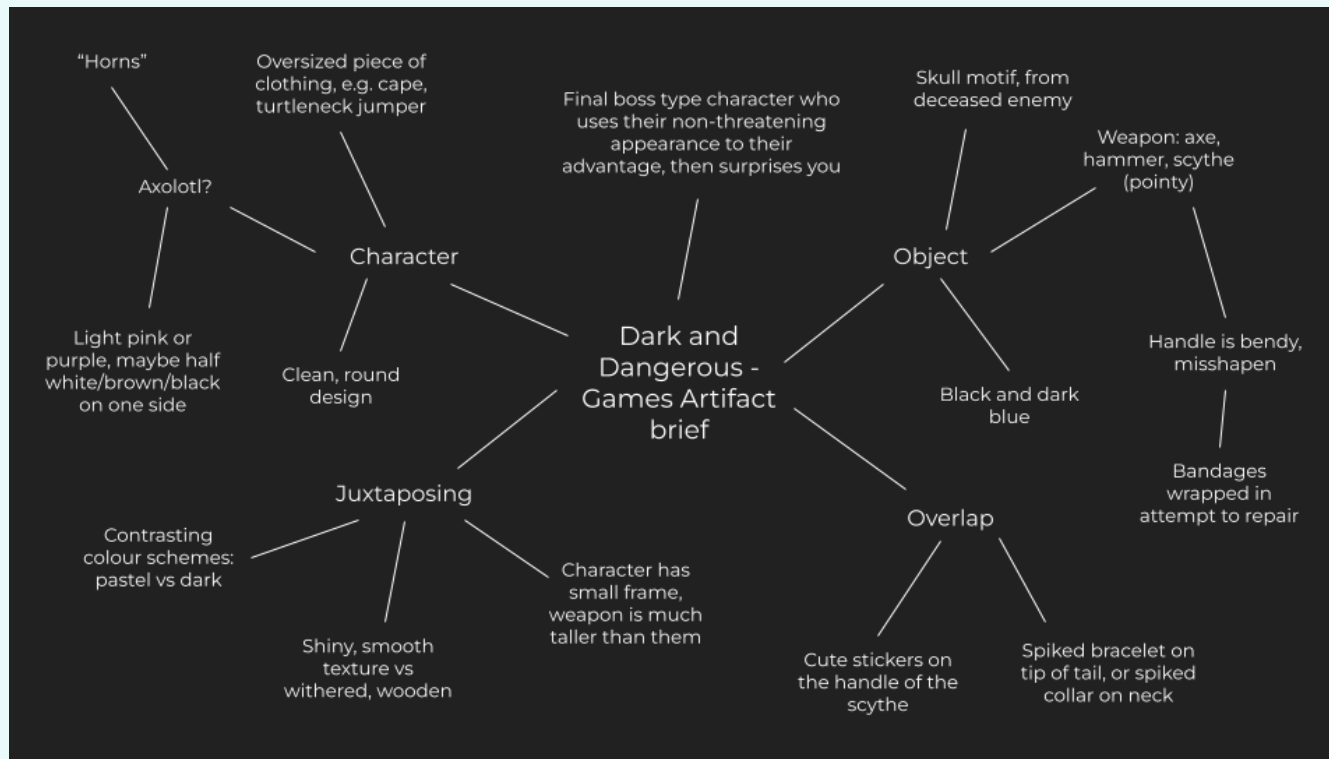
# Games Art

LUCY MOLES | 18045074

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14.02.22



We worked on making this mindmap of ideas, outlining how we'd create a juxtaposing character and weapon and tie it into the prompt. Then we moved on to do a writeup of our intentions – regarding backstory and character motivations, and the kind of scenario they'd find themselves in in a game.

### Games Asset - Backstory

There was a mythical biped wolf creature who resided in a dense forest. One day they found a helpless, abandoned axolotl child and decided to take care of it. They raised it as best they could in the forest, with the axolotl learning mannerisms and self-defense from the wolf.

The local townspeople hated the wolf for its scary appearance, despite being sweet in nature. Due to one misunderstanding a bounty was placed on it. The wolf managed to stay out of danger, until one night they were cornered, and the hunters were threatening the axolotl as well. As such, the wolf sacrificed themselves.

The child vows to avenge their guardian. They find the wolf's carcass and their now discarded weapon, a scythe. They brandish the skull on top as a reminder of what they're fighting for, now an innocent looking yet bloodthirsty warrior with unnaturally predatory tendencies, becoming the antithesis of what their guardian was.

This is the story that would be shown at the start of the game, in a static, storybook style with pictures and captions (similar to Rosalina's backstory in Mario Galaxy). Then the game itself would be a sidescroller/platformer based model, whilst battling enemies, as they seek to find the final boss who is the person who delivered the killing blow on their guardian.



Moodboard of real life and video game influences towards design and character, leading to initial sketches and exploration of silhouette, scale, shapes, pose and facial expressions.





Final design and turnaround, with and without the weapon.



*Nath.ilu*

Their style is perfectly clean and shiny, and I'd love to be able to model exactly like them. They consistently use features like prominent eyebrows, lips, nose and cheeks, which really brings their gallery together, as well as beautiful gradients.



*Thedaintyheart*

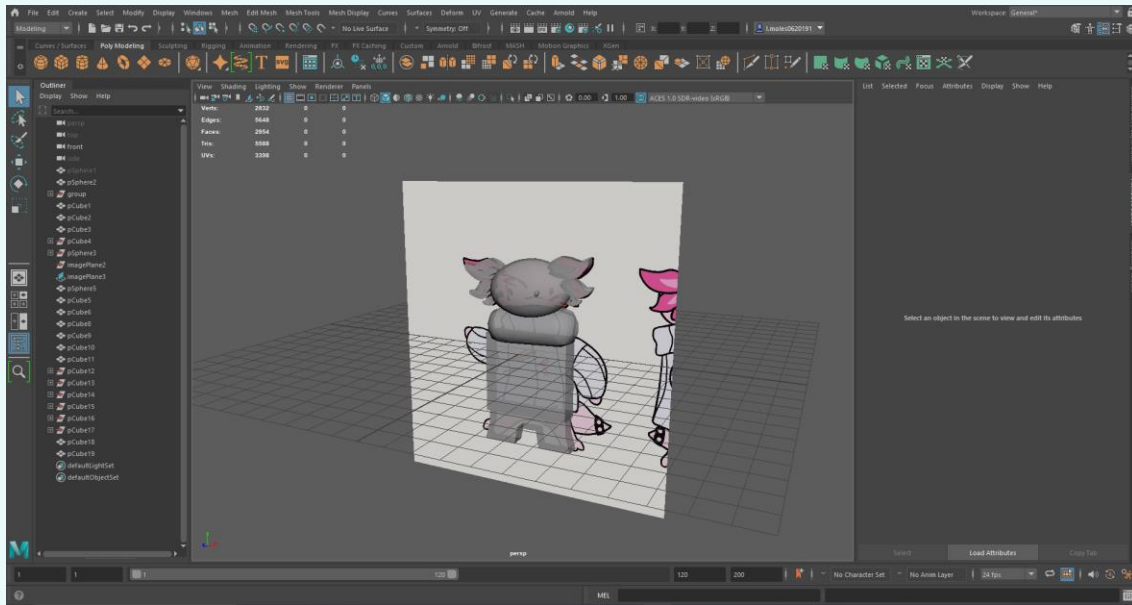
She evokes childhood nostalgia of old video games through these little creatures, using fuzzy textures and round shapes combined with harsh patterns. She then sells these as sticker sheets.

*Some of my  
favourite 3D  
modellers /  
inspirations*



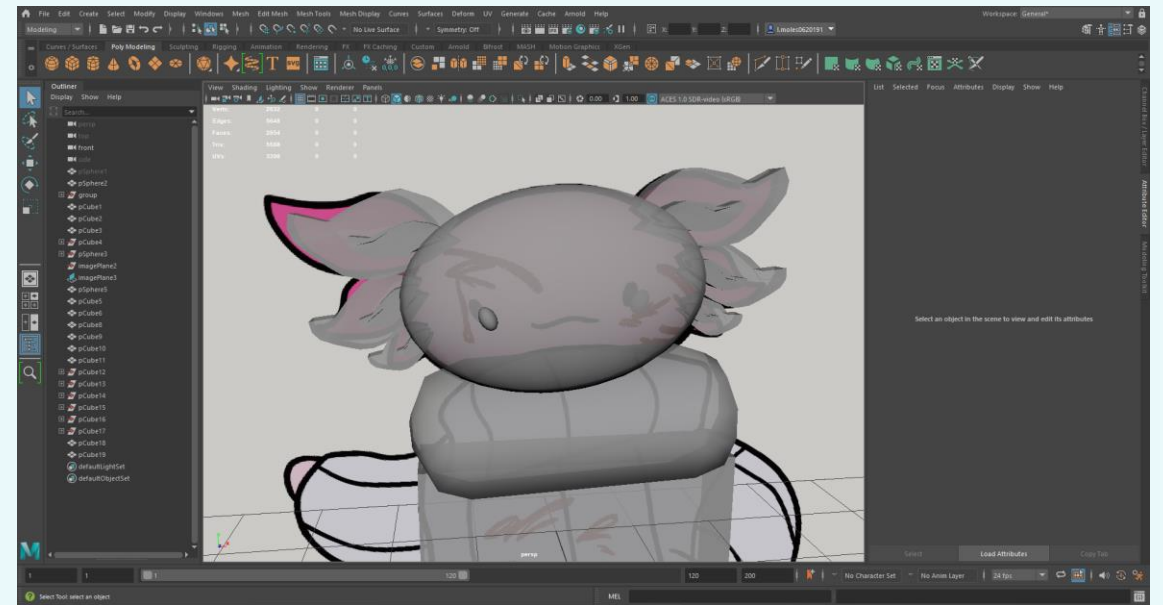
*Yasmini*

A successful artist based in Mexico City who teaches blender with another simple style, making for adorable creations. I purchased her character modelling course so I'm looking forward to trying that.

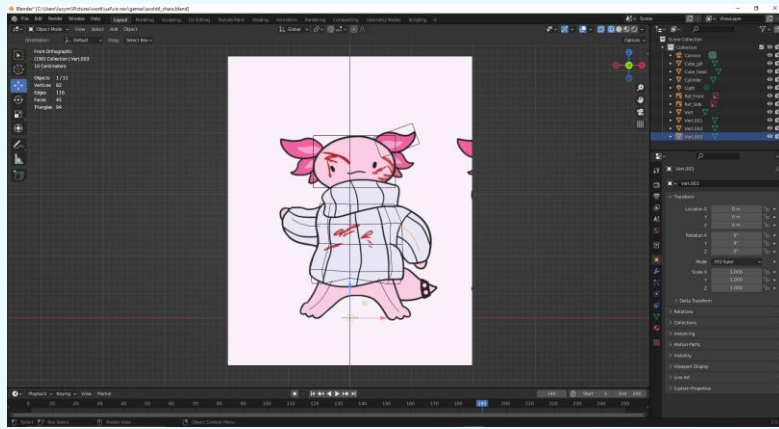


## Maya window

My first attempt left something to be desired – the main issue was the spheres taking up the polycount, and me being a little unfamiliar with Maya itself, the controls just don't really come naturally.

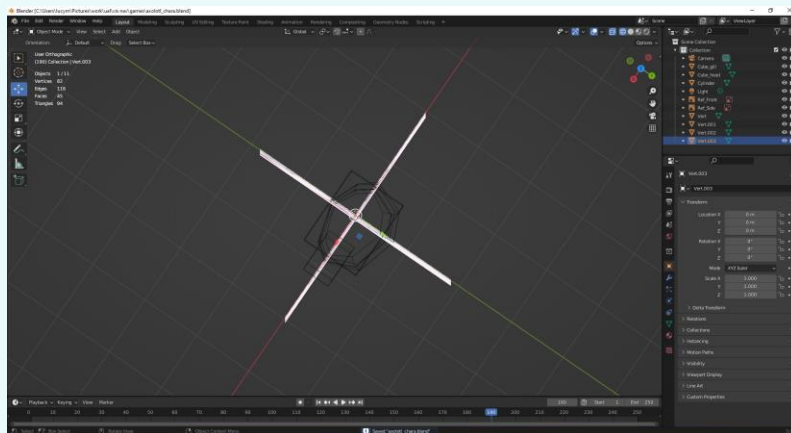
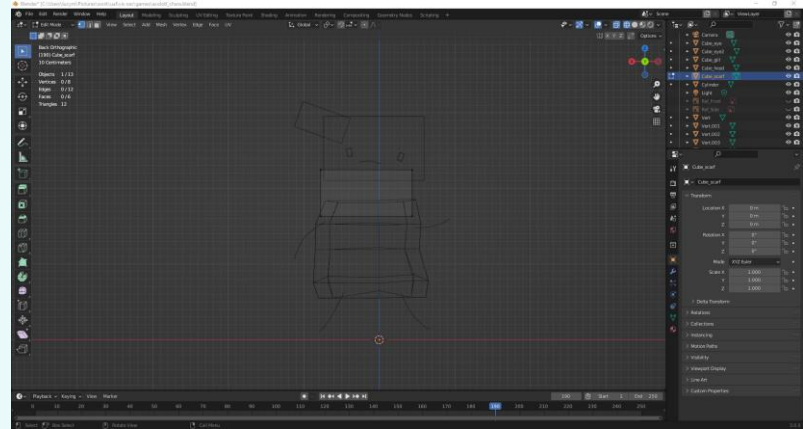


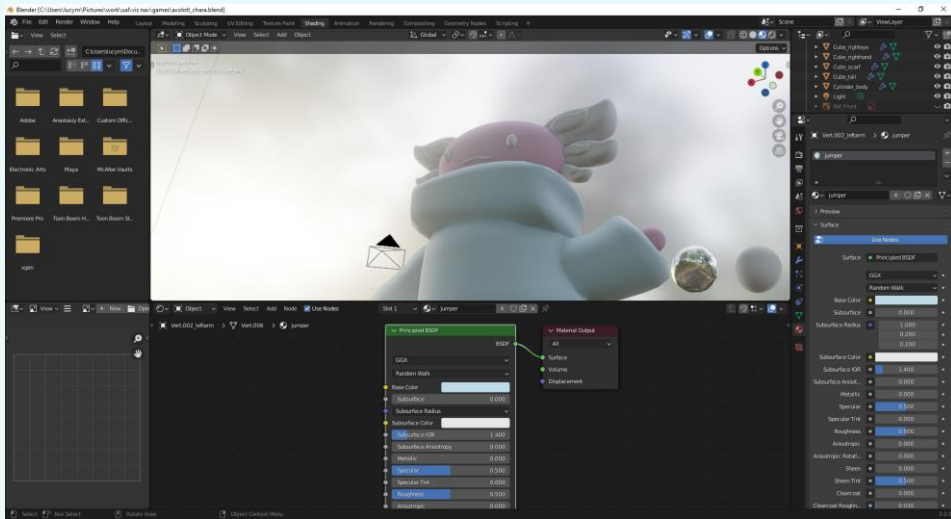




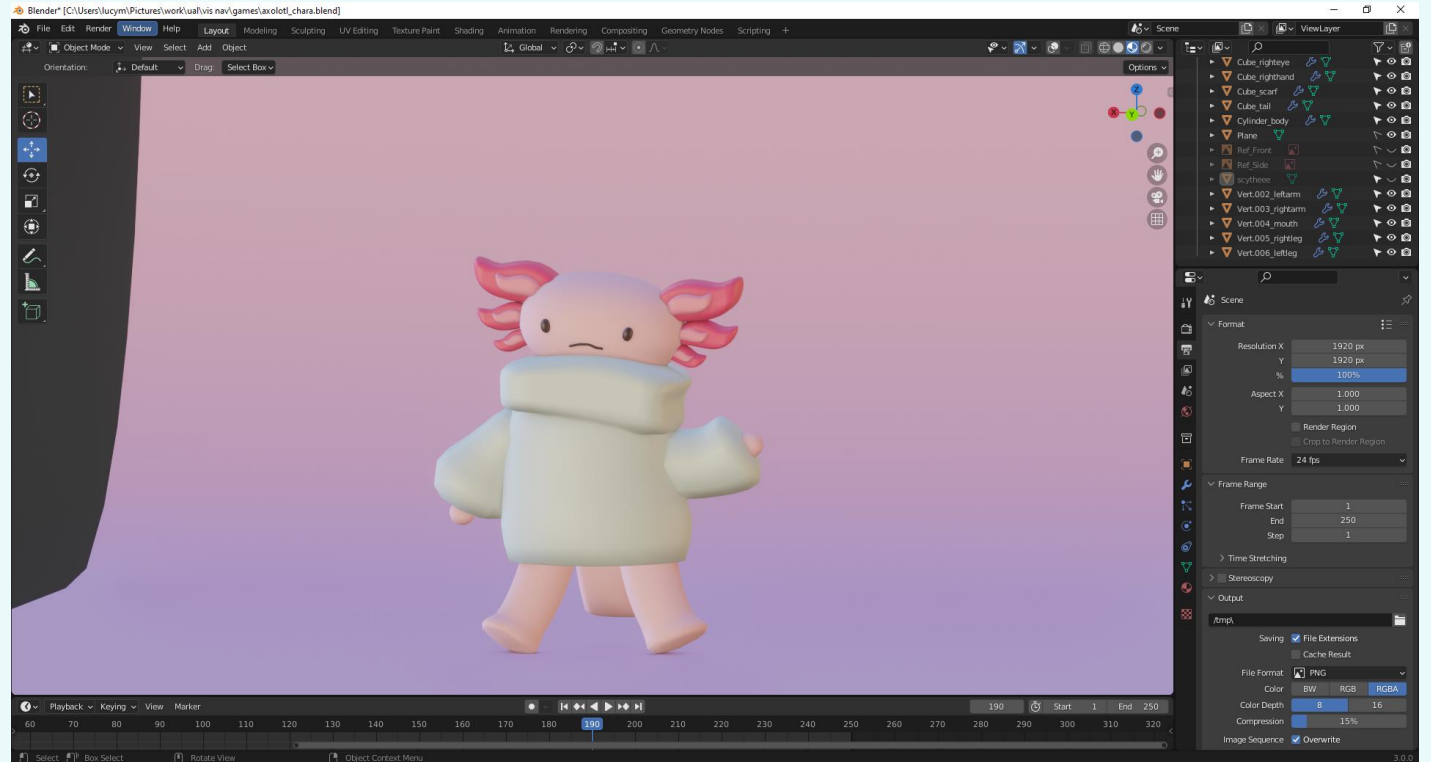
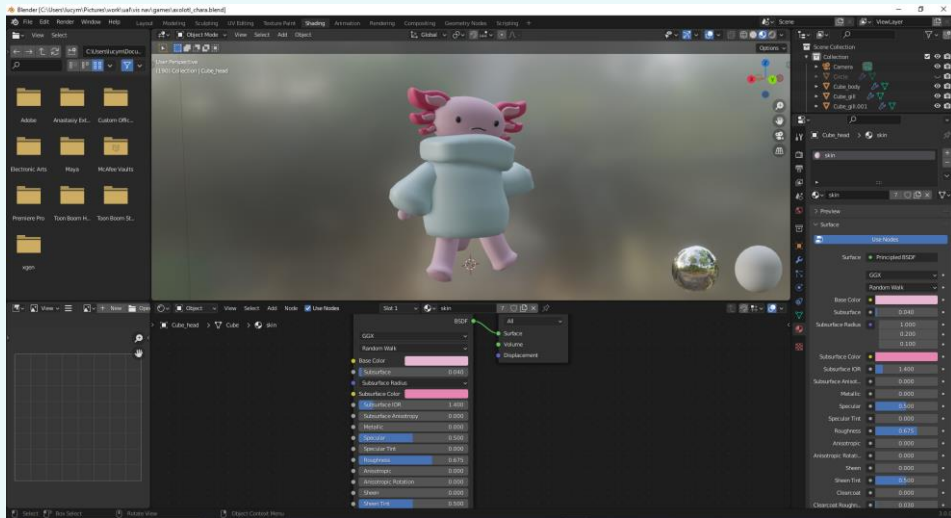
## Blender Workspace

Although not the 'industry standard' software, as a hobbyist I find the interface and user friendliness just works so well for me. This revision is way better so I'm glad I took the time to remodel.



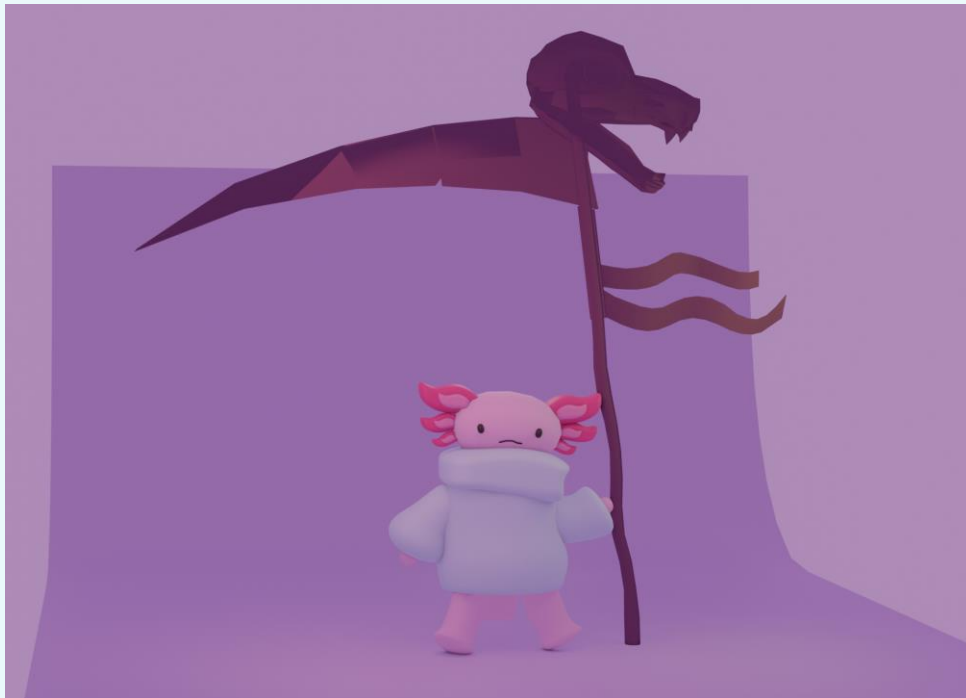
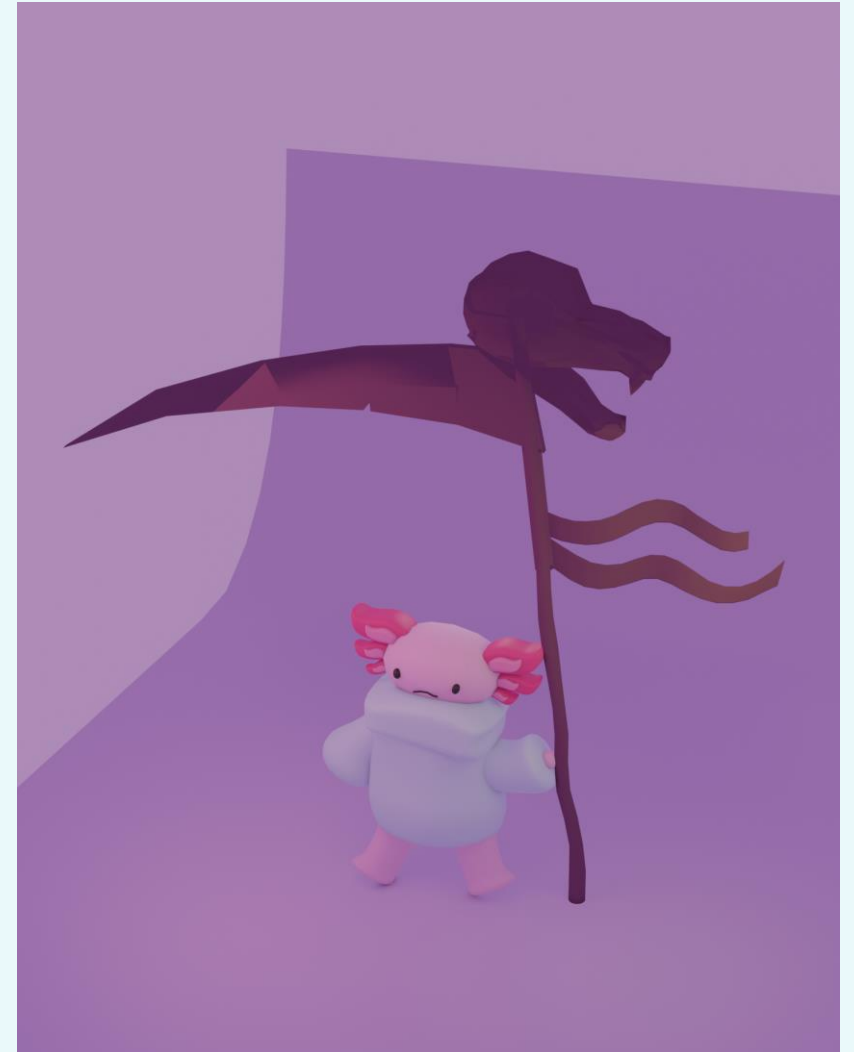
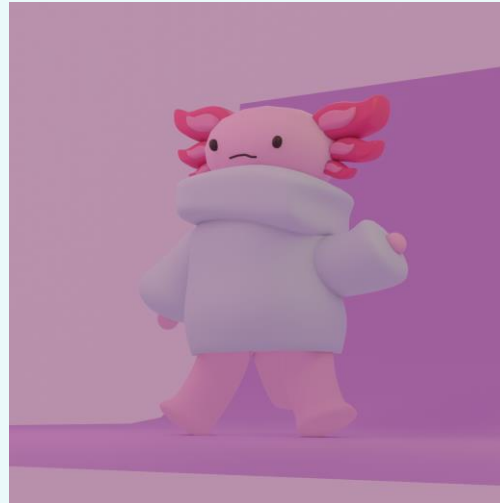
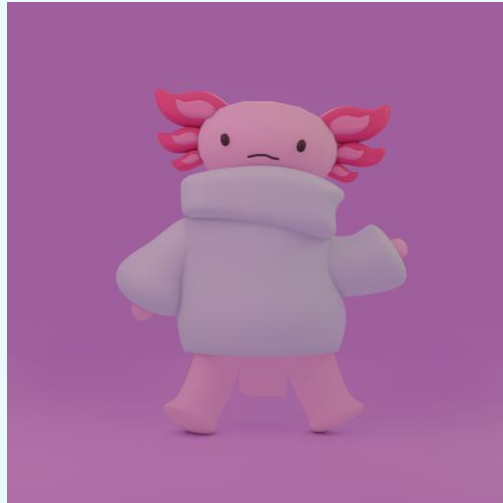


Then it was just onto materials, textures, lighting and camera etc. I liked playing around with the studio light types in the material preview, some of them produced amazing effects.





My final render!



<https://lucymoles.myblog.arts.ac.uk/2022/03/15/game-artifact-3-rendering/>

<https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/axolotl-chara-f2fce8b6b0234fb5a8989791a51c1bc8>

## Reflection

For my first taste of the pathways, I went with the games option, as I am interested in exploring 3D character modelling as a freelance/hobby prospect. I also definitely needed more practice in 3D software like Maya, as well as sculpting software like Zbrush.

I joined a pair with Keyleigh in order to tackle the brief 'dark and dangerous.' Our idea was to create a juxtaposing scenario by having an innocent-looking character holding a massive weapon. So, we brainstormed until we had a mindmap of our concept: A small anthro-axolotl with a dangerous scythe. We also needed their origin story and motivations, so I wrote up a backstory as well as what type of game I imagined it to be. The idea was that the axolotl was raised by a wolf, who was killed for their appearance even though they weren't hostile. The axolotl would brandish their skull on their new scythe and vow to seek revenge against the killers. The game itself could be a platformer, or open world, with the final boss being the person who delivered the killing blow.

My measure was to make the character. I created a moodboard with real life references, pre-existing character designs, and art styles from games that fit well. I think that new generations of classic Nintendo games like *Pokémon Sword and Shield* and *Kirby Star Allies* are a good example to follow, as they're relatively low-poly and simple, but still have lots of different character types that fit well together (e.g., 'fairy,' 'ghost'). Going off these, I did some sketches exploring silhouettes, pose, expression and scale, as well as different 'gill' types which would be the most eye-catching part.

I wanted a lot of antithesis in the design - the axolotl would be short, pastel in colour and wear a jumper, but also maybe have some more hardcore elements like the spiked ring on their tail and blood splatters. The scythe would be a lot bigger in comparison, and rustic/wooden, but also covered in stickers to show that the axolotl still retains some of their childlike desires, despite having to take on new responsibility.

The character would be pre-posed holding the weapon, as I wasn't intending to rig it or make it symmetrical. After a few revisions, I now had a final mockup and turnaround, ready to be made into 3D.

So now it's time to move into Maya. This is always a little bit of a challenge for me as I'm more comfortable with Blender, but I wanted to give it my best shot. I imported my front and side reference sheets as an 'image plane' which allowed me to block out the character accurately. I started with the standard shapes like spheres and cubes and pulled the vertices around to create the design I wanted.

One setback was trying to adhere to the initial polycount, as 2000 faces wasn't a lot for someone with a 'cute' character, therefore having a lot of round edges in the design. But I understand that in the industry, sticking to a strict polycount is important to alleviate pressure on developers and rendering time, etc.

This is another reason why I was leaning towards Blender - it has the subdivision modifier and 'shade smooth' that allows you to increase the level of detail to give the illusion of being smooth, without massively increasing the polycount.

Zbrush also proved to be a little difficult as we only had access to the free 'mini' version at home, but we couldn't transfer files from the full version Zbrush program we used on campus or open any other type of file. I did learn Zbrush and had a go at sculpting on my first model (didn't get screenshots, unfortunately) but ultimately, I was still planning to restart. This led me to look at other sculpting software, such as Nomad (although they're only an app without a desktop version so that wouldn't really work for me) or Sculptiris (but this had ended support and I couldn't find a legitimate download link) or substance painter (not part of the adobe student subscription).

So, unsatisfied with what I'd made so far, I ended up restarting. My second attempt went a lot better – loop cuts made it easy to distort objects and warp them around to my liking. Though I mainly used cubes, I also used a lot of single verts to make the limbs. And as well as subdivide, I also got a lot of use out of the skin, solidify and mirror tools.

I coloured the model by adding materials in the principle shader editor, and then played around with the roughness to make the skin rubbery, but the eyes and gills more reflective.

Then setting up the render is always the best part. I added a plane and background, three area lights, and one main camera, switching between different aspect ratios. I did some poses and angles, brought in the scythe, and it was all done. Although I always see rendering as a magical process where you see your character going from solids to all lit up, this one didn't fail to surpass my expectations. I'm so happy with how it looks in the end, despite all my adversity. I was able to stay pretty on model, and I really surprised myself with what I could achieve. Once I got the ball rolling this was enjoyable, and I will be practicing making more character models, now that I understand the software.



VISUAL NARRATIVE ELECTIVE 02

# Living Voices

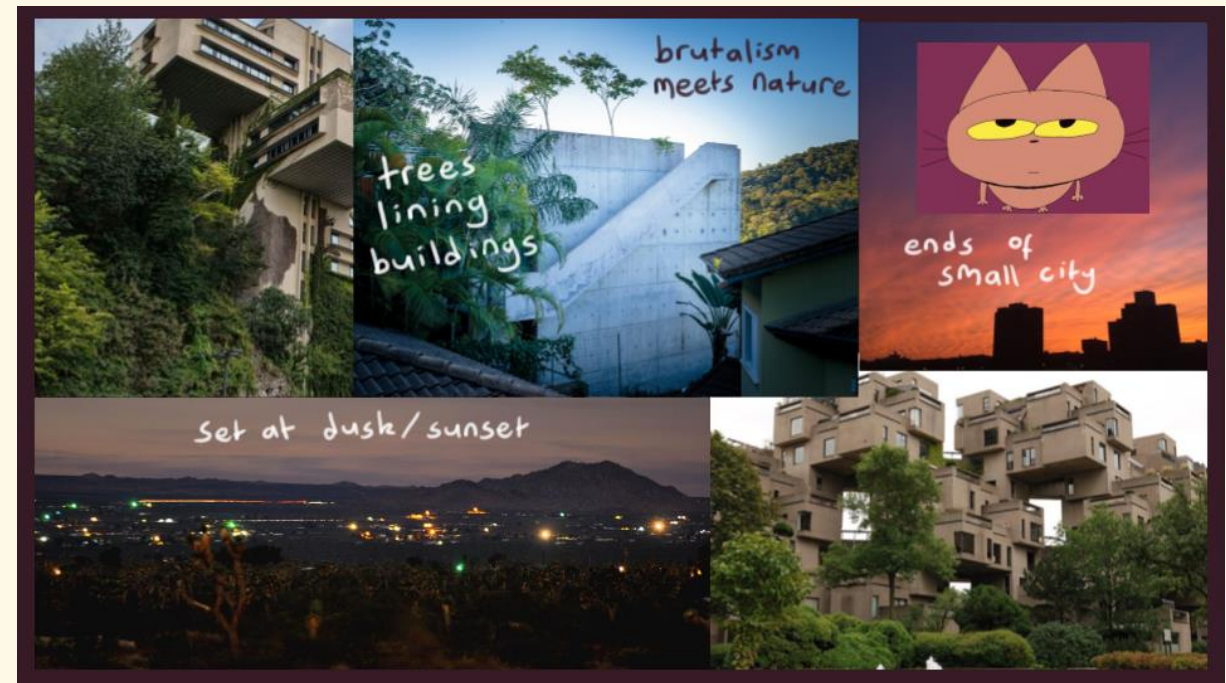
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22.04.22





Moodboards detailing character design, setting and animation art style

Referenced artists:  
 Ivonna Buenrostro  
 Rachel Kim  
 Ian Worthington / Worthikids  
 Veronica Vincent / Vewn

Chosen audio: 06 [Canada Goose jacket]

I liked the humorous, confrontational nature of the clip



<https://lucymoles.myblog.arts.ac.uk/2022/04/19/ani-arts-living-voices-1-research/>





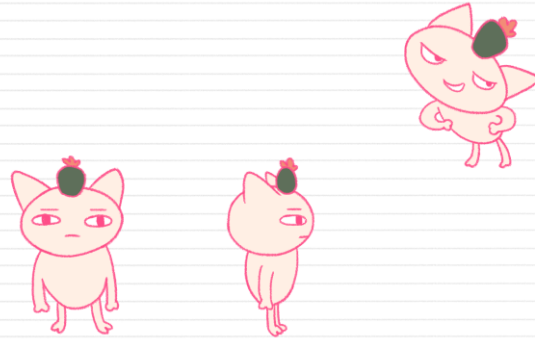
Initial sketches of character designs and potential shots

The idea is that in this story, people and animals have plant/flower themes – so we have a tulip girl and a cactus cat. The girl is a frivolous spender, and her companion belittles her new jacket.

Tulip girl



Little pet



Both

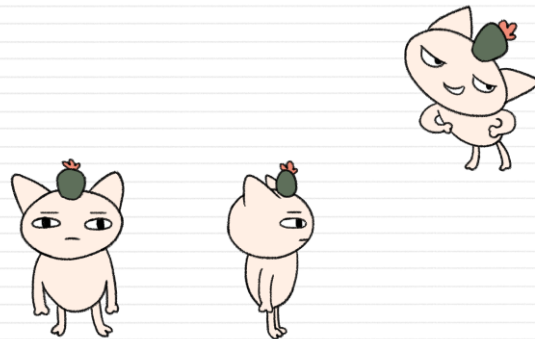


<https://lucymoles.myblog.arts.ac.uk/2022/04/27/ani-arts-living-voices-2-design/>

Tulip girl



Little pet



Both



Turnarounds  
+1 expression

Made two  
versions with  
different  
coloured line-  
art, which can  
be easily  
changed in  
Toonboom.





A: mate you're the one wh-  
you're the mug wearing a £700 jacket and  
can't afford like-

B: 975.

A: 975- you're complaining you're skint  
right- and you're wearing a brand new  
canada goose jacket

B: 'ts fake innit

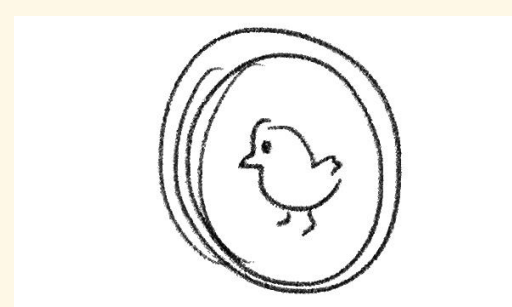
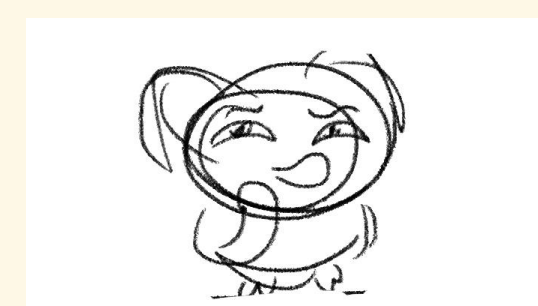
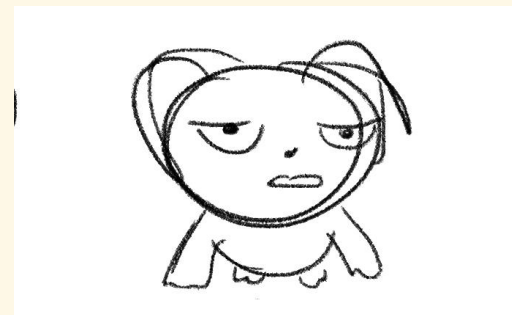
A: so is it like american goose or summit

B: nah man it's canada goose but  
obviously-

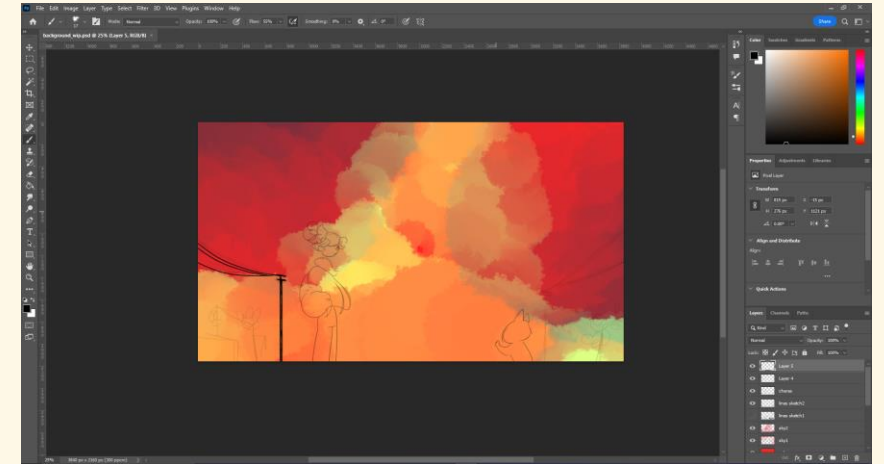
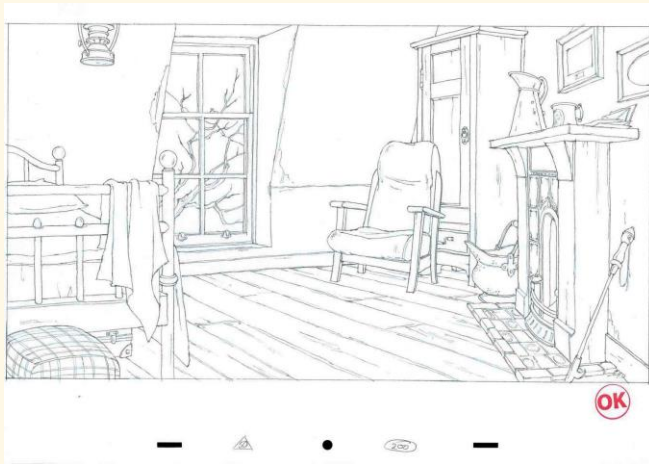
A: canada duck

C: canada duck man

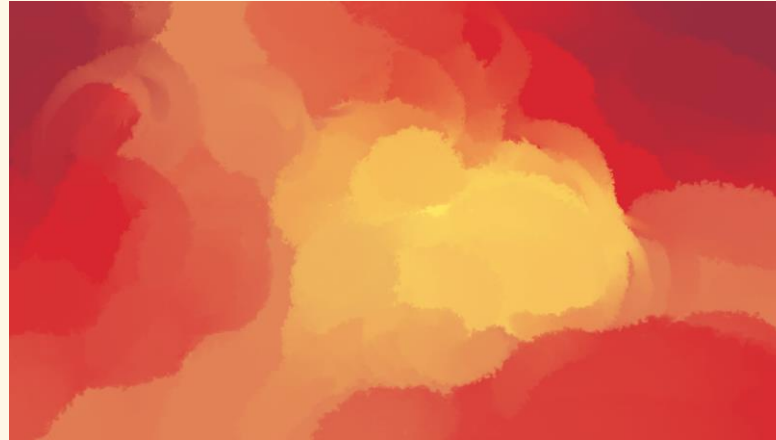
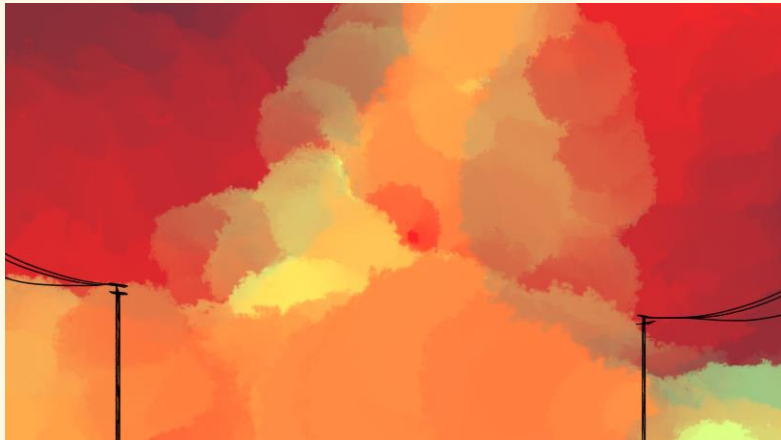
Audio transcript and initial storyboard, which turned  
into the boards I used to make an animatic ->



Established screen side from  
the beginning, and also give the  
duck the last word for effect



Provided with lineart to practice with values and greyscale, before moving on to make my own backgrounds



Focused a lot on warm sky and cloud patterns, conveying that they're walking home after a day out together before stopping abruptly to argue. I strayed away from putting a lot of background elements as they weren't really interacting with them, only with each other, so it may have been distracting.

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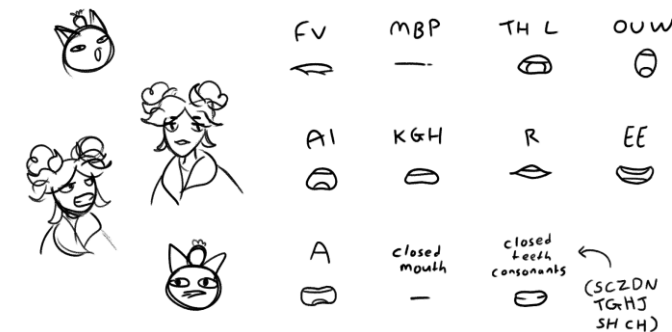
## X-sheets

Always making sure to move the dial back a couple frames before the sound beat hits, in order for realism (speed of light is faster than sound)

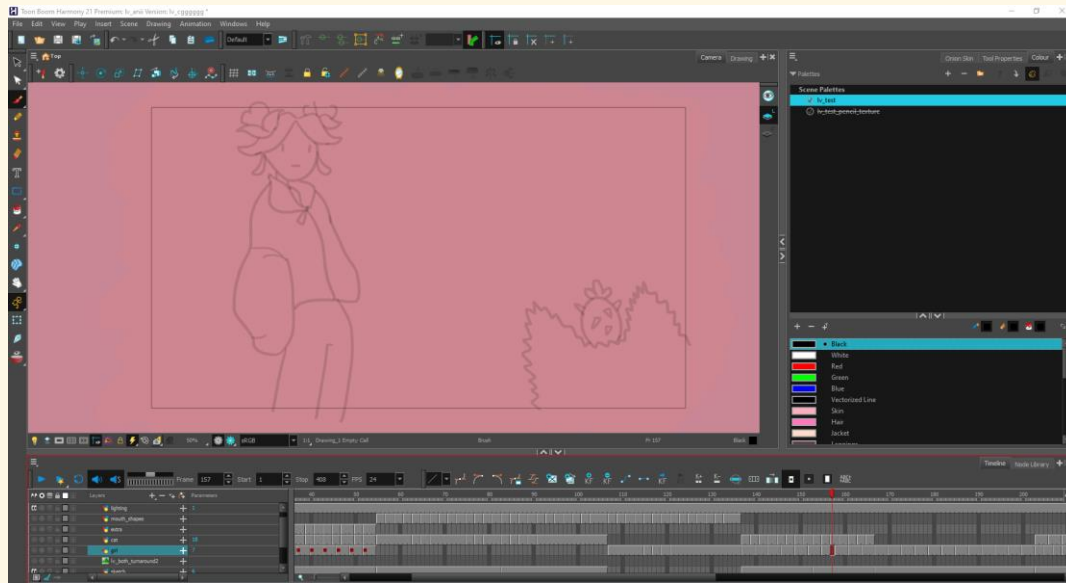
This was a helpful exercise that made me understand phonics in animation a lot better

## Mouth shape reference sheet

Fairly simple and expressive, and luckily I could use the same mouth for both of them







Working in ToonBoom wasn't as bad as I thought it would be – once I was more comfortable with the interface, doing frame-by-frame came naturally.

See here for video exports showing journey of progress (rough keys > clean keys > inbetweens > colours etc)

<https://lucymoles.myblog.arts.ac.uk/2022/05/12/ani-arts-living-voices-4-animating/>

My final film!



<https://lucymoles.myblog.arts.ac.uk/2022/05/30/ani-arts-living-voices-5-video/>

<https://youtu.be/swT-u8Mkwyo>

## Reflection

At first, I was debating between finding my own audio or picking one from the given sounds (either 02 or 06). In the end I chose to do 06 to show I can respond to a brief, and I like the comedic aspect of it - it was light-hearted and kind of staging an intervention, with someone confronting their friend over their new expensive jacket. I had to trim it down ever so slightly in order to be closer to 15 seconds, and still ended up being a little over, but I think it was still a manageable workload as not every shot had a ton of moving parts or lip sync.

Then I made some moodboards outlining animation style, environment design and character inspiration. I watch a lot of thesis films on YouTube, and I thought this would be a good place to start as they're also made by students, so it's an achievable look. *Cat City* by *Vewn* was my favourite - featuring a girl and her erratic pet cat, a warm/pink palette, boils, and a wacky style with lots of atypical angles.

I moved on to sketching a flower girl and her judgmental pet, making sure to create something that fits my art style but also animation style as it would have to be drawn many times. In the turnarounds I was torn between a traditional black lineart versus a more stylistic pink, but I didn't have to worry about it until the end as it was very easy to change in ToonBoom. I asked other people in the class for their opinions, and pink was widely preferred.

The flower-like gradient on the girl's hair was also something I toyed with as it depended on if I would have time to do it in ToonBoom. I also added eyebrows to make her a little more expressive, although I ended up using her eye shape more for this. I wanted their designs to fit their personality - the cactus also reflects the cat's prickly nature.

We also did a background paint test, by assigning grayscale values to a lined piece. I wanted to mimic lightning illuminating a room through a window, with an eerie atmosphere. This helped me when I moved onto the backgrounds for my animation as well. I love using the Kyle wet blender/smudge tool on Photoshop, it makes for great clouds.

Now for some initial boarding ideas. I wanted a lot of quick comedic cuts, and a lot of high/low angles to emphasise the height difference. I made a transcript then drew a 12-panel storyboard, with dialogue captions. I tried to make sure to follow the 180-degree rule. I also intended to boil the lines whenever characters are semi still and have a few cutaways/breaks in action. I had feedback from tutors that suggested I move the final shot to the beginning in order to make their 'screen side' more established. I updated my animatic to reflect this, as well as made the duck logo speak at the end, which I thought was funny. I then created an image sequence in Premiere Pro, to test the timing and correct the 16:9 aspect ratio.

Moving on to x-sheets and mouth shapes, in order to precisely plan the animation. First, I drew a reference of common shapes in the style of my film. The exposure sheets themselves took a bit of time to work out what I was doing. There were a lot of tricks and rules to adhere to, such as focusing more on sound/phonics than individual letters. I also made sure to put the dial in which a beat hits a couple frames before the sound itself, to make it more realistic. As frustrating as they originally were, I think x-sheets are a very useful tool.

Now everything was ready to move into ToonBoom. Although it was intimidating at first, I found it was an intuitive program and was able to get the basics like drawing frames and navigating the interface down. Although we were only required to use it for keys, I ended up making the whole film there as it felt important to get to grips with industry standard software, especially if I wanted to work for a studio. I was fine doing pose-to-pose as that was my preferred method, and I made sure to consider the twelve principles - I have a few moments of anticipation, as well as follow through/overlapping action (in particular, I like how the flower on the cactus sprang when the cat talked).

I did my rough keys, then cleaned those up and started on in-betweens, boils, lip sync, and lastly flat colours and overlays (which was a little bit of a pain as I hadn't closed all my lines at first).

I was looking forward to composition, which I planned to do in After Effects, but I realised as all I had to do was move the background in the first shot, I could just tween this in ToonBoom. I separated the poles and the sky onto separate layers, and made the poles have a bigger zoom as they were closer. This gave a more realistic illusion of the characters walking.

I'm so pleased with the result; I think the film turned out great and will be using it in my portfolio. This was a fun learning experience, and I feel that now that I have ToonBoom knowledge I can go ahead with making more animations for myself.