

BA Animation & VFX

Module: Experimental Animation Techniques

Lecturer: Phil Organ

Assignment Title: Portfolio of Work

Name: Scott Williams

Introduction

For this assignment, I am going to create an animated sequence on Adobe After Effects. There are plenty of After Effects and Photoshop tutorials on the internet showing the absolute number of possibilities that can be achieved on Adobe, so I wanted to try and make the most professional looking animation sequence I could do in the time I had.

Concept Idea

A Veil between Worlds

- Tracing paper can be used for a translucent arch way to create a mysterious atmosphere.

[1]



[2]

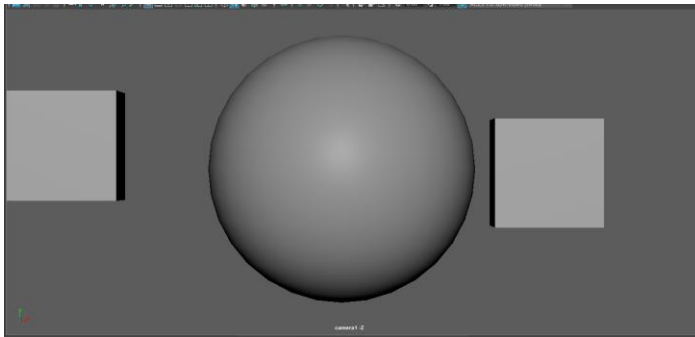


Research

- Light painting – this is an art form that involves the movement of light through space and over time, captured in a single photographic frame using long exposure photography. It allows artists to create dynamic images by painting with light, either by moving a light source or by moving the camera during the exposure. A prime way to create this effect is with a firework sparkler.
- Zoetrope - These toys are a circular open drum with a drawing on the inside and gaps for the viewer to look through. The animation is limited, but it is created when the zoetrope is spun around, and the figure will seem like it is walking or jumping depending on how it is drawn.
- Drawn-on film - Norman McLaren was an animation artist who created works of animation shorts that were drawn on to old stock of film reels. These were projected to the screen to show the audience the animated short film.

These are just a few options for experimental animation techniques and my own experimentations

Reversed Dolly shot animated in Maya. In this scene I animated a camera to zoom in on a ball and two cubes. I did this as my own recreation of the iconic reverse dolly shot in the 1975 film *'Jaws'*.



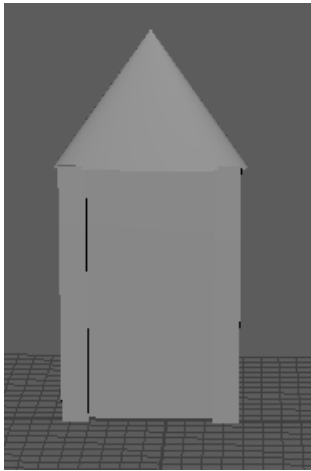
[3]



Outline

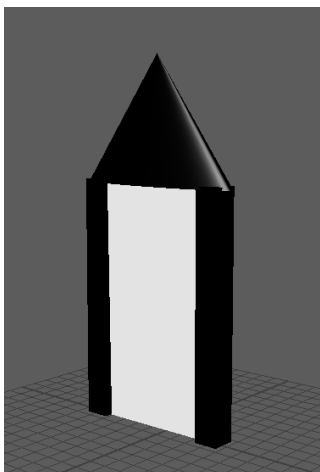
For this animated sequence I would like to make a 3d model of a Veil between worlds, as veils in fantasy films or shows like Harry Potter [4] and Merlin [5] are a strong interest of mine. It has come clear that I should be doing that one as my option.

Veil Model first attempt



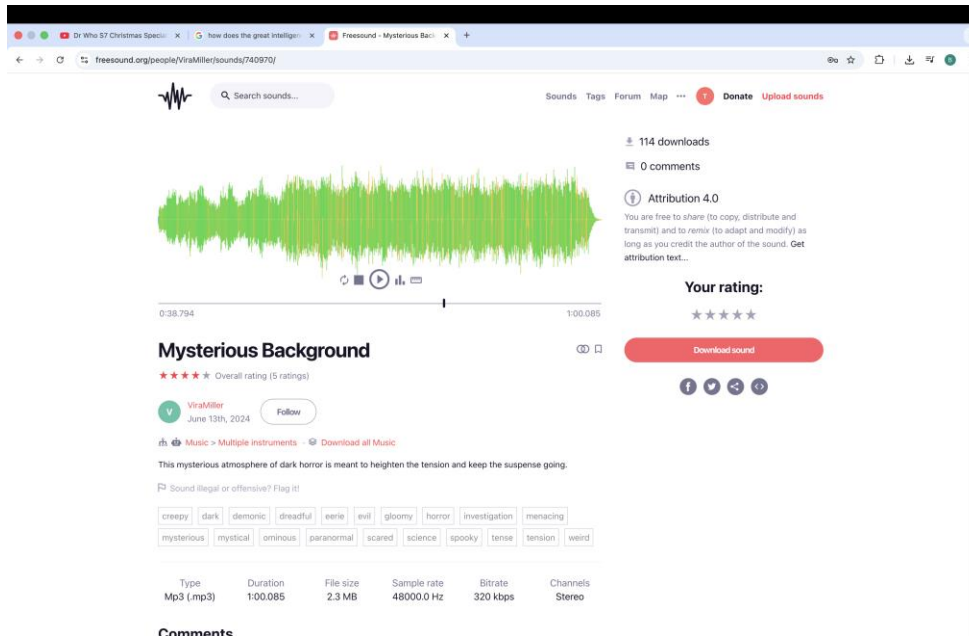
This model is the first attempt I have with making the Veil, I like the idea of it being an arch way because it makes it stand out and look creepier and more mysterious. The design I got from the Harry Potter veil as it is straight forward to put together unlike the Merlin one where the veil was a black cloak with no outline so the model would be more difficult to achieve.

The intention is to have a 3D model made from airdrying clay and transition created as mist in After Effects in the archway like a curtain. This method will use multiple different VFX strategies from After Effects and stop motion to cover as many different animation techniques as possible to create a full-rounded scene.



This one is another model of the arch created using Maya. The colors have been changed to give a second option of what the archway will look like when it comes to filming.

Music Choice



For the music, I selected a piece of copyright-free soundtrack from Freesound, I chose this music because it comes across as creepy and mysterious, hearing this music when the Veil is on screen, it fits perfectly as a veil is unearthly and supernatural, having mysterious qualities. This soundtrack brings the sequence to life and it was uploaded by a user called ViraMiller.

Use of Stop Motion

This project will be an animated sequence using stop motion. The Veil will be a physical 3d model made from air-drying clay; it stands at roughly 6 inches tall to fit in scale with any Doctor Who 5.5-inch figure from the Doctor Who figure line-up, so that way any of those figures can be used for my main character. This Veil shall be a doorway to two different worlds; one world will be a snowy mountain range, and the other is a cartoon world of stickmen. When it comes to digital effects, the veil will have a thin layer of mist for the archway. This will give it a creepy and spooky vibe, and it will fit the tone of music.

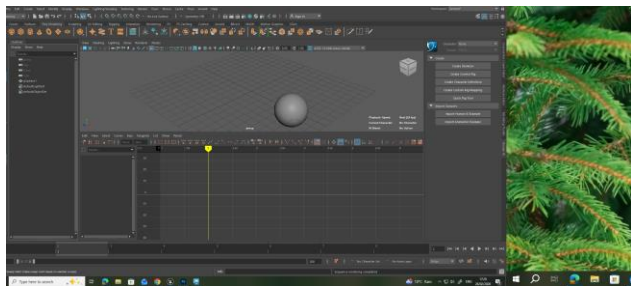
Concept

The sequence will play out with an old woman walking down a snowy cold street and sees the archway and gets curious about it; she walks up to the archway and goes through the misty entrance.

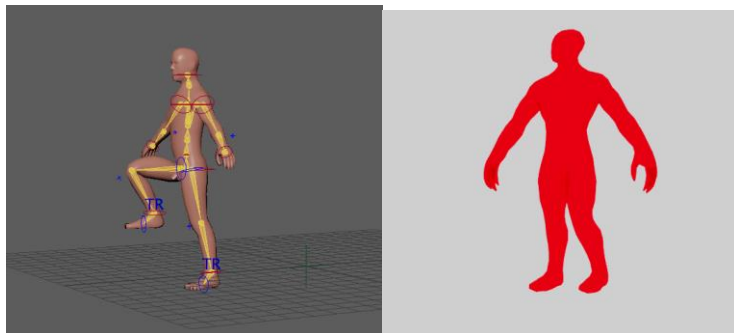
We cut to a shot of her walking through the Veil corridor with a VFX background, and a light starts to glow around her and then she finds herself a child again, on a different planet with lavish green grass and flowers. A 2-dimensional character walks up to her and says “Welcome to the 2-dimensional world, your new life begins! Implying, she has become a child again and her life has restarted.

Maya Model for the main character idea

For this sequence; the character was to be a 3D model person from the software Maya. The goal was to animate a walk cycle and export it with a transparent background to After Effects and add it to my film set. This is something never achieved by me before so it will be exciting.



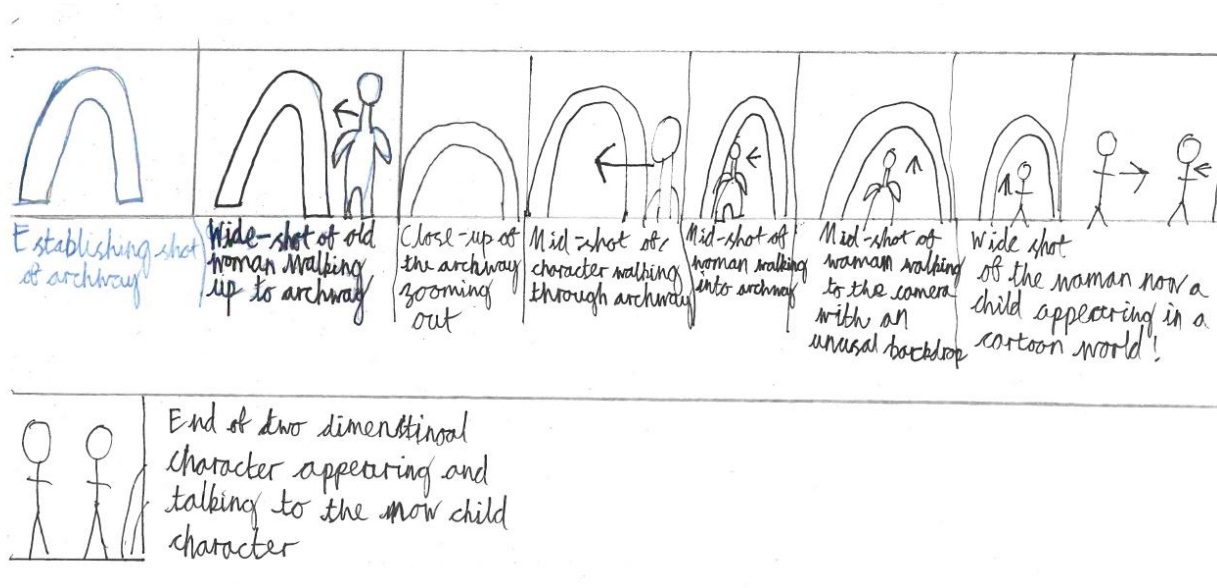
Unfortunately, despite following various YouTube videos on how to achieve this goal using alpha channels, when I exported out the sequences with transparent backgrounds, neither of the models appeared in the videos when imported into After Effects. All that showed up was a blank empty backdrop and nothing happened on screen. This is annoying because it has reduced learning on this method.



This is the constant result of rendering an animated sequence in Maya. No matter how many different YouTube videos watched, none of them have helped me with rendering a full 3D character animation suitable for Maya.

Storyboard

A storyboard has been drawn for the filming shoot; it is clear and easy to understand, so filming will be straightforward, but the ending scene will transform into a 2d cartoon world rather than keeping it all 3D. This will change the sequence more, and the result will be experimental with different animation types rather than the one type.



[6]



This image is from a tutorial video on how to make a 2d cartoon After Effects. From watching it, it seems to be doable within the timeframe to when this project is handed in. It has inspired me to give this scene a try, and I am excited to get started.

Filming Process

For the sequence, the archway and the old woman character were filmed on a green screen. This was decided because green screen is a VFX area, I want to get more practice with. This allows me to create my own digital generative fill or physical hand-drawn background for the scene which covers more areas of VFX skills for this project.



The vision with this scene is to have a 2D drawn character that talks to the child who is the old woman turned back into a child. As the veil transfers the old woman to a different world it grants her a chance to get a new life and start over again as a child in a 2-dimensional world rather than a 3-dimensional world.



Photoshop Generative Fill

For the snow background of the sequence, I went on to Photoshop and used the generative fill option [7] to generate an image of a cold, snowy backdrop to fit the footage I have shot of the old woman walking towards the archway, and from these test shots, I would say this image works great for the sequence.



The reason for choosing generative fill instead of selecting an image from Google because I wanted to have a part in creating this image, if I went on to google and found an image of snow it wouldn't be my image at all so this way I have a bit of a part in designing this image by telling generative-fill what to do.



Corridor scene

[9]



This scene from the film Coraline is the ideal visual look I want for the corridor scene in my VFX scene.

Live action and Cartoon

Mary Poppins

The most known film to have live-action and cartoon in one scene is '*Mary Poppins*' from 1964.

[8]



The mix of cartoons and live action was a massive achievement at the time, and it still holds up in today's standards. This type of animation. This type of animation and live-action style is what I want to do for this project.

Space Jam

The other film is '*Space Jam*' 1996. This film has live-action footage and cartoon characters on screen at the same time, as this film was a childhood favourite, making my own scene with live-action and cartoon and been a dream of mine for year and now I have the possibility to do it.

[10]



Background image update Generative AI



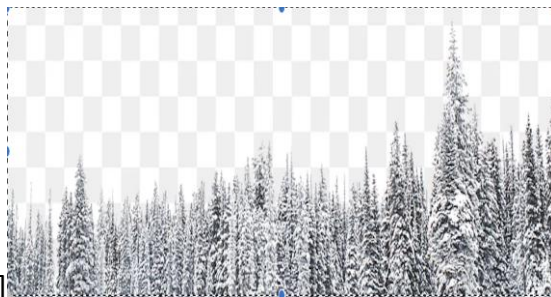
As the Lecturer thinks using an AI background is not a great idea, I decided to re-paint the sky and the trees to give it a more creative and cartoonish look. But to make sure it is not a complete AI image, I will add in either some trees or other objects from Google to make it my own backdrop with AI inspiration and other materials.

These images of trees I have decided to add in to my backdrop to make the background images to be more original and not pure AI generated. But from re-reading the assignment, creating pure AI images is not allowed so this backdrop will have to be scrapped

[11]



[12]



[13]



Generated AI images with additional add-ons for inspiration



These images are the same AI generated but I have added in some trees and painted in a snow man to create a more wintery and to change up the image, but it is still not appropriate for the final product. So, I am going to try and re-create this AI image by completely re-painting it, so the AI version will only be used for inspiration and research, for my own chosen design.

Snow Backdrop Final Version

This image is the one I shall be using as the official backdrop for the snowy sequence, the overall design was inspired by the Generative AI image, but this final image I made myself in Photoshop from using the paint and texture tools and it is definitely not Generative AI.



The thing I love about this image is the cartoonish look, it fits in perfectly with the main character walking like a 2D cartoon, if it was a real live action backdrop it wouldn't have fitted in as well. So I am going to use this design of image from the ending scene backdrop.

Keyframes and Puppet tool in After Effects

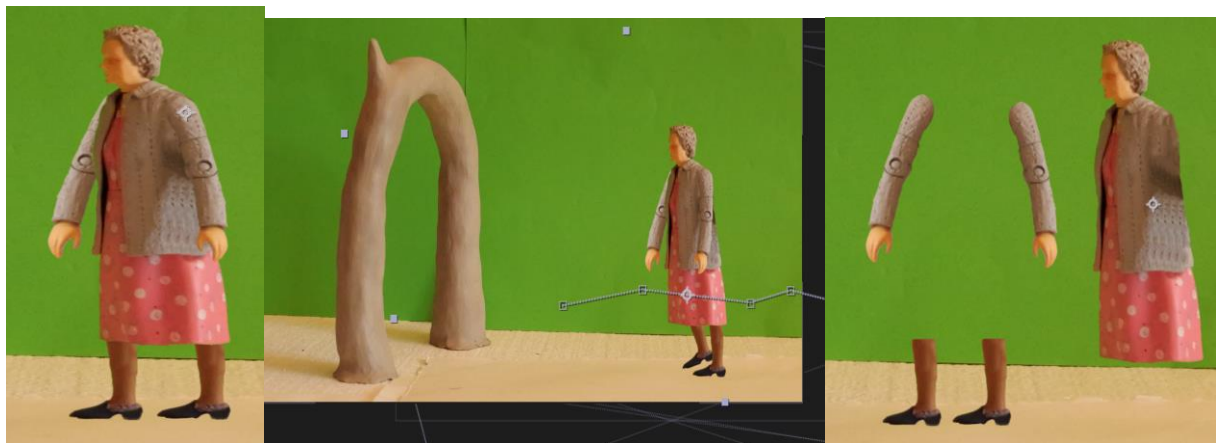


During the animated sequence the main character's legs are stationary and don't move; this was unavoidable when filming because the figure would simply fall over when trying to get the legs to move. This is a shame because the purpose of this assignment is to try different animation techniques and a walk cycle for the moving figure would be a great idea.

The only way to make the legs move is to cut out the arms and legs in photoshop and import them into After Effects as different layers and use the keyframe tools like the anchor point and the position tool to make the limbs swing back and fore when the character is walking.

When it came to cutting out the arms and legs, I only had to do the ones closest to the camera, once they were separated from the main body, I used the clone tool to extend the legs so they would be longer and the anchor point would fit under neath the skirt, so when the character is walking the legs will look more realistic.

The Lasso tool in Photoshop, I used that to cut out the arms and legs to get an even, smooth outline of the limbs to avoid them from looking jagged and tatty.

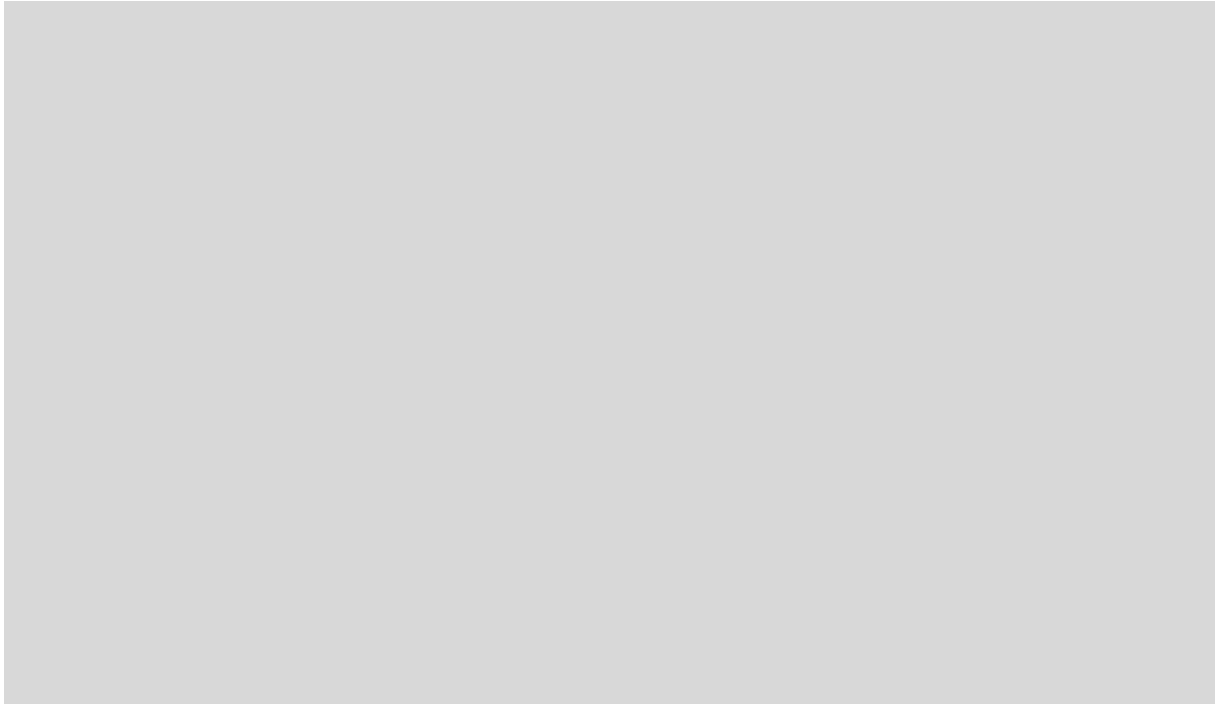


This walking effect is very mechanical and robotic looking because the limbs are moving in a way that isn't that natural or fluid, they come across as a piece of thin paper stuck on to a notice board with a pin and are swinging back and fore like pendulums. I don't consider this to be negative because it is more effective and realistic than the character sliding across the ground with no leg movement looking like she is on roller skates.



Experimental Animation Techniques scene without VFX

<https://youtu.be/rnzsQj53CO0>



Grizzly Tales

This is a cartoon show from 1999 – 2006, the 2d animation style, in series 1 – 4, the cartoon drawings were traditional animated with character expressions, hereas in the later series the character movements and the arms lengths are more robotic because they were digitally animated in Adobe Flash to speed up the animating process. This is noticeable; the character movements come across as cheap and repetitive and don't look as professional as the older ones. But that animation technique is the same one I am using for this project, so the movements will come across as similar.

Traditional cartoon animation

[14]



[15]

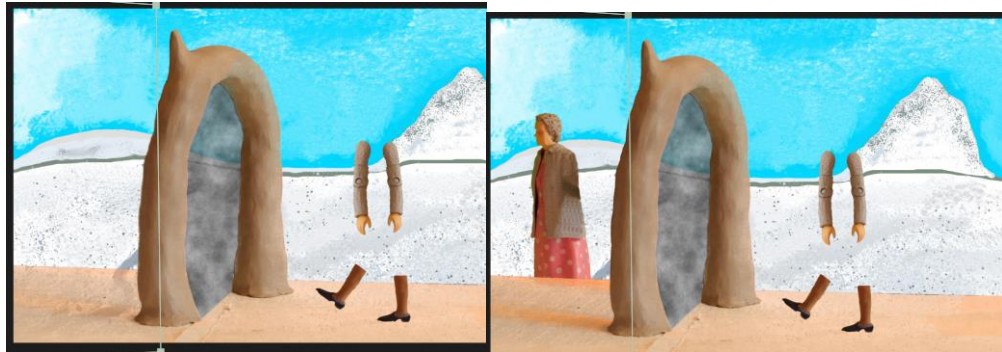
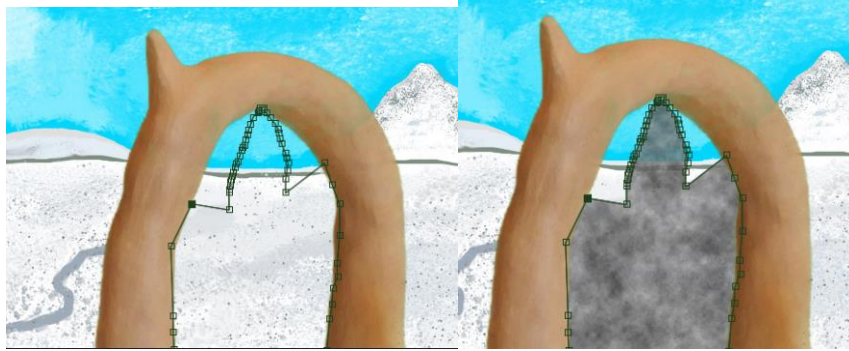
Digital Adobe Flash animation



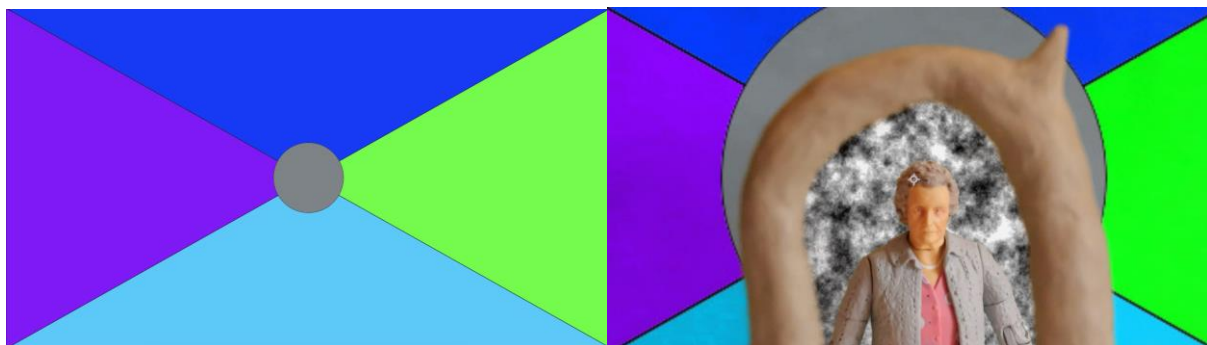
Fog Effect



The entrance scene will have a fog effect as a doorway. This was created with a new solid and using the fractal noise effect from the effects panel to create a fog like entrance.

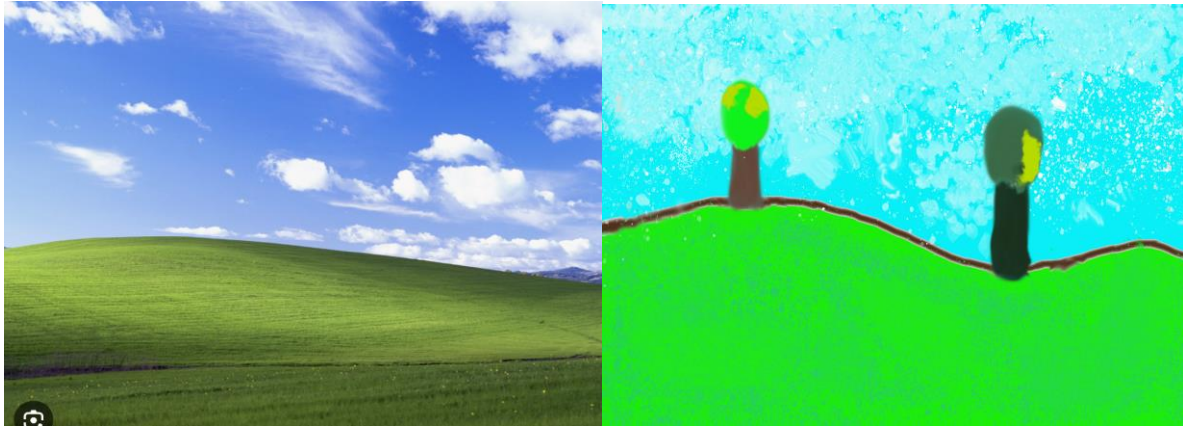


One issue I had with this is the archway image; the main character kept appearing on the archway like it was walking past it. To fix this problem, I had to duplicate the arch image and use the eraser tool to rub out one side of the arch, so it appears to be walking through it which is what I want.



Windows XP backdrop for Inspiration

[16]



The end image is a hillside backdrop I created on Photoshop based off the Windows XP computer screen image, I have chosen this image because it is bright and sunny to look at, and it gives a nice pure summer vibe when looking at. This sunny environment is what I want for the stick man world.

The textures for the backdrop were painted using different types of paint brushes. I had no idea these brushes existed until now, so this is another tool I have learnt from doing this project.

Final scene

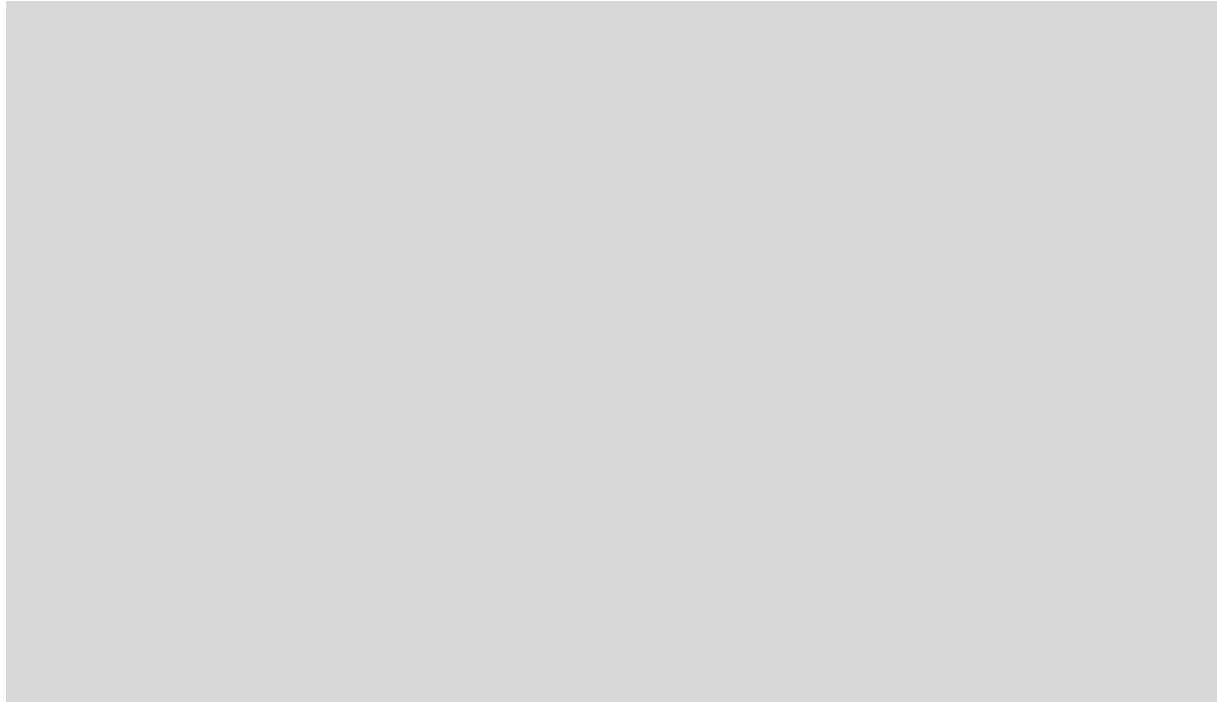


The end sequence where the newly de-aged old woman now a child I am very pleased with because the walk cycle flows smoothly and looks rather natural. This is an achievement I didn't

think was possible because I wasn't aware you could do these animation techniques in After Effects.

And the scene where the stick man appeared I am very pleased with because it is the first time, I have made a full CGI character and the walking is top-notch. This is another new skill I have learnt from doing this assignment and I am going to continue this skill for further assignments and other shorts films I will be doing in my spare time.

Final cut <https://youtu.be/dwanUREhINE>



Conclusion

Overall, this project I am extremely satisfied with. It has turned out to be a lot better than I could have imagined. Of all the assignments I have done so far at University this is the one I have learnt the most from, using the cut-out tool to separate the arms and legs from the main character in Photoshop and having them animated in After Effects to create a walk cycle is something I didn't realize was possible. Creating and animating a CGI stick man character is another fantastic achievement. From learning all this new skill and knowledge I will be using it to create my own animated shorts in the future and to discover what other incredible things I can achieve with Adobe. The future is looking bright.

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