Collaborative Project Report

Project Title

Fragments of the Real

Experimental Animated Short Film Project

Team Members

Jingwen Zhang / Songyue Huang

Project Type

Experimental Animation / Stylized Narrative Animation / Black-and-White Sketch Animation

Project Overview

This project is an experimental animated short film centered on the themes of war, trauma, and perceptual collapse. The story takes place in an abandoned theater where a young girl dances alone at center stage, surrounded by silent, expressionless soldiers. As the dance progresses, reality begins to fracture, leading her into fox-guided visions of battlefields, forests, and ritualistic spaces. These fragmented images blur the boundary between memory, hallucination, and reality. In the end, a soldier shoots the girl while the others continue applauding mechanically. The final image is a fox standing alone on the stage. Through fragmented visual language, the film explores how war erodes perception, emotion, and empathy.

Story Concept

The narrative revolves around the question: 'Is she dancing, or is she reliving war?' The girl's dance becomes the external manifestation of her psychological condition. The fox serves as both a guide and a symbolic link between reality and illusion. Battlefields, forests, rituals, ruined cities, and hanging bodies merge into a fragmented mental landscape. At the conclusion, the girl is shot, yet the soldiers remain emotionally detached and continue applauding, emphasizing the dehumanizing force of war.

Visual Style

The project adopts a black-and-white sketch aesthetic characterized by darkness, oppression, and subtle unease. Visual references include hand-drawn linework, woodcut textures, rough print surfaces, and unfinished illustrations.

Key Visual Elements

Black-and-white, sketch imagery, ruins, theater, war, soldiers, fox, fragmentation, psychological space, subtle horror, emotional coldness, and mechanization. Visual experiments focused on linework, shadow, texture, and unstable image quality to create a space between reality and fantasy.

Response to the Brief

The project responds to the themes 'Fragments of the Real' and 'The Artificial.' Rather than presenting a complete reality, the film explores how trauma breaks reality apart and reconstructs it through memory. Theater spaces, battlefields, forests, and urban ruins are rearranged through the girl's consciousness to form an unstable psychological map. Animation, environmental construction, and visual experimentation transform physical spaces into psychologically meaningful artificial environments.

Division of Responsibilities

Jingwen Zhang

1. Environment Design and Construction: Designed and built the abandoned theater, battlefield spaces, forests, and urban ruins.
2. Visual Style Development: Conducted experiments with sketch aesthetics, linework, shadow, texture, and atmosphere.
3. Partial Character Animation: Animated sections of the girl's movement and conducted cloth simulation tests.

Songyue Huang

1. Storyboarding.
2. Character Animation: Animated the girl, fox, soldiers, and figures appearing in hallucination sequences.
3. Camera and Editing: Responsible for camera movement, shot pacing, composition, and transitions.

Project Reflection

This project uses experimental animation to transform war and trauma into a fractured, cold, and unstable visual world. Instead of directly depicting war through traditional storytelling, it expresses the gradual loss of perception and emotional connection through dance, hallucinations, the fox, and mechanized soldiers. The project also served as an exploration of environmental storytelling and visual-style development, allowing space itself to become part of the narrative.