

Euphoria

A Short Animation Film on Dance

Project by
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Project Guide
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Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Design in Animation Design, Degree Project Stage I.

Batch of 2007-2009

Industrial Design Center
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Approval Sheet

The project II titled “EUPHORIA” by Ketki Saxena is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirement for M.Des. Degree in Animation.

Guide

External Examiner

Internal Examiner

Chairman

Acknowledgement

I would sincerely like to thank my guide Prof. Nina Sabnani for her immense guidance and support and correcting me throughout the course of this project. Her belief in me gave me the freedom to explore my own thought processes.

I also thank Prof. Sumant Rao for showing me the right directions and pushing my limits. Prof. Shilpa Ranade and Prof. Raja Mohanty for their valuable suggestions and guidance.

I would also like to thank all my friends for their constant feedback and suggestions. My Family Members without which the project was not possible.

I am thankful to all the people at IDC who have helped me to fulfil the requirement for my project by lending their support and facilities all the time.

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Abstract

This film celebrates dance. It is about a person who finds a way out of the agitation and anxieties brought on by worldly matters through the act of dancing: she dances away her anxieties. Dance provides her a sense of identity and freedom. This is a short 2d animation film exploring the process of abstraction in dance combined with music and colours yet following a narrative pattern.

*Sitting by my side my lonesome shadow,
All I got is loneliness blended with sorrow.
Never knew my way as these hurdles clogged me,
No one to hold my hands and say just 'break free'.*

*Grief and misery just, strapped me always,
I want to set free and dance my own way.
Every journey has been painful from the time of my existence,
Let me split this shell and just be the charming dame.*

*I have a ray of hope to witness a serene life,
The flame within me tells me, come lets fly by.
Then sorrows supersede my inner self,
And again I am left trapped, in a dodgy web*

*Been enough now, I can see my destiny.
How long will I fear this world to just set free?
So I hear my soul and take this step,
I Want to break these knots to be myself.*

Introduction

1. Why dance?
2. Inspiration

This is my first film and initially I just had one thing in mind that I have to do something related to dance with which I started my project. I was trying to figure out a storyline, trying to choose whether to be just an artist or be a narrator also. I was really confused for a few days but all that confusion subsided when I asked myself “why dance? What makes it so special for me? Why I want to do this film? And I started with my research on dance

This project was like going for a search for myself and I did all those things to find the answers of all the questions that came in my mind while doing this project which I never even thought of before. Being a kathak dancer and a choreographer, I danced, choreographed dances and performed at festivals and found that the process of abstraction in dance has a power to reach the inner depths of our consciousness just as music and colour. This gives me the inspiration for making this film which had two goals

1. To send a message across that within oneself is the happiness and peace that everyone tries to find in life.
2. To learn to express myself to the fullest through this medium.

My film is called “Euphoria”, which means ecstasy, elation, exhilaration, high spirit, excitement, joy and that is what dance means to me and over all it gives me that force to stand alone for myself and by myself and live my life to the fullest.

Research

i.) Primary research

Lecture on Indian traditional dances _ By Mandakini Trivedi

Essence of the lecture

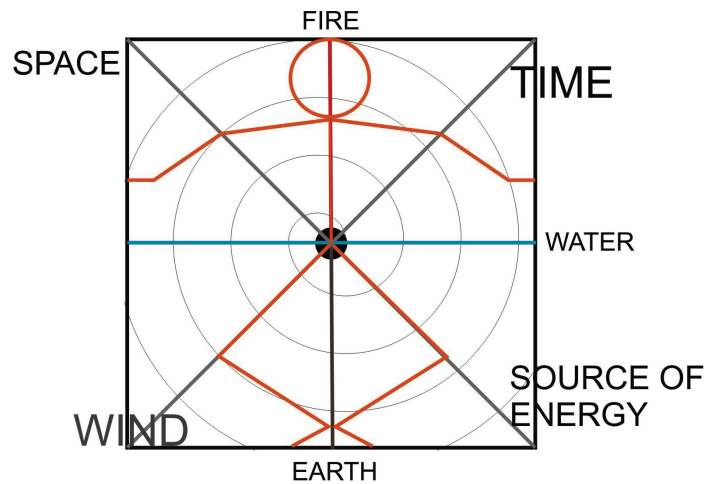
There exists a formless energy, the ultimate truth that we call as God. This vision of truth is moulded in culture. With time our ancestors created a form, a ladder, to reach the formless energy. These forms are called culture.

The language of Indian dance was created for the following

1. to communicate
2. to express
3. discipline self ego
4. expand consciousness

The elements of this language are gestures, expressions, colours, textures etc.

The grammar of this language is created by the World-view which is moulded in the form of a design using geometrical figures. Below is the graph which explains the world-view. As in the graph the line of fire depicts the spine of the dancer and the centre is the ultimate source of energy



GRAPHICAL PRESENTATION OF TIME AND SPACE
WITH THE FIVE ELEMENTS
AND ITS RELATION TO DANCE

ii.) Secondary research

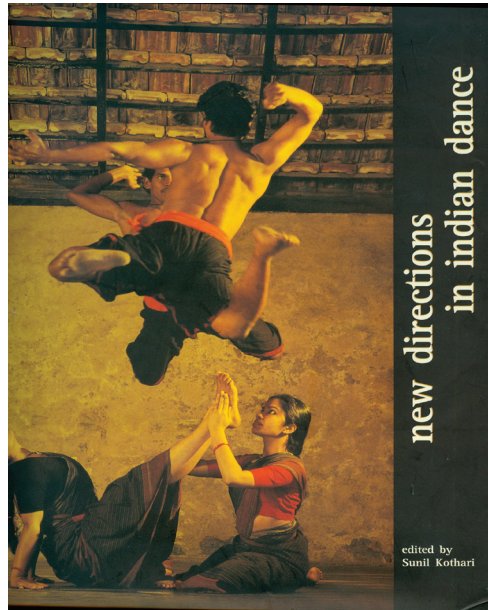
Books

The Natyasastra

New Directions In Indian Dance

Natyashastra - English translation by Adya Rangacharya.

Natyashastra remains the origin of our dramatic tradition. A dramatist, a popular theme, actors-actresses, director -producer and the audience – these are the four essential ingredients of the theatre as described in Natyashastra. There should be no weakness in any of these. The playwright should have the capacity to grasp the speech and manners of the people and represent them in an interesting way. The story should hold the attention of the audience. Physical fitness, control over body and voice, clarity of speech and pronunciation are the indispensable requirement for an actor. And lastly the audience should be one accustomed to understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the performance. These have been described in detail as the essential elements of stage craft, thousands of years ago, by Natyashashtra.



New directions in Indian dances – Sunil Kothari

This book really helped me give a broader view about dance its history and the term contemporary dance, this book aims to present 20th century innovations in Indian dance. One sees a definite shift in the thematic content and the search for a new kinetic language is on. The innovations within the traditional forms are being given importance. Even within the traditional forms like Bharat Natyam, the kinetic language has changed the movements of the dance has been altered.

The awareness about the “male gaze” the point of view of women, women as an object of pleasure, the depiction of women in thematic content, and other have come in for critical examinations. The origin of dance and the issue of “invented tradition”, the re-examination of the fundamental concepts of the Natyashastra, the exploration of the energizing principles of dance, and a corrective to imbalanced approach to dance have been addressed by the dancers in recent time. This book explores these new directions put forth.

Papers

Dance to deviation

In the paper titled “Dance” by Nancy (Vedder-Shults,2004), she explains that

One can achieve a state of ecstatic trance by moving repetitively to the rhythm of drums or to the melody of a chant. Scattered thoughts and feelings get concentrated which leads to a feeling of expanded consciousness. While dancing, you become one with the essence of the music, a state of mind that can ultimately open and expand so that you merge with spirit itself.

Jalaja Bonheim (2001), who studied Indian temple dance for many years, suggests that any ecstatic practice needs to alternate movement and quiet, sound and silence, extroversion and introversion.

“Dancing can awaken you to ecstasy, but for spiritual purposes, you need to turn the ecstasy inward in order to connect with your inner wisdom. Containing the energy raised — allowing it to sink into the silence of your spiritual core — keeps you from dissipating it into the outer world, whether as extraneous gestures or unnecessary sound. This in turn allows the energy to be used for divination.

To receive inner guidance, all we need is to open ourselves to what our body/mind tells us, what our emotions display, and what our unconscious knows. In this way, we can begin to hear with our inner ears and see with our inner eyes. Using these mystical senses — what we might call the sense organs of the unconscious — we perceive holistically, noticing relationships and patterns rather than isolating, classifying and judging what we observe. Once we have gathered this wisdom, we can then use the rational mind to interpret what we have learned.

We live in an interconnected world, a web of life. Each segment of that web reflects the whole just like fractal designs or holography. That’s why the patterns we discover through divination give us information. They mimic the relationships of the whole at a particular moment in time.”

Semiology & How Semiology Explains Cinema.

According to semiotics (semiology), signs are everywhere and everything is a sign -- words, images, sounds, and absence of them -- in short, anything from which some meanings may be generated. The Semiotics-Machine is constantly working in our brains. It can be applied to all sorts of human endeavours including cinema dance, theatre. Painting etc also, we use a variety of gestures (signs) in everyday life. Semiology can be defined as the study of signs: how they work and how we use them (Ferdinand de Saussure).

The linguistics (studies of language) introduced semiotics as a theory; spoken or written word is highly symbolic, we see all three elements right away. In film, on the contrary, every image seems to be an iconic sign. Since there is no learning of conventional connections between the sign and signified involved, we recognize screen images in every culture. At its birth film offered us a new "international" language. The art of film language is not in iconic signification.

Semiotics is applied in order to understand how fast the sign is been read on the screen and how much of it. To understand that every shot doesn't have to be fully understood in order for spectator to wait for the next shot. The richer the sign is more significant it becomes. Due to the extreme iconic nature of photography in every shot, every shot is naturally recognized; the film-maker has to overcome the natural mimesis of the film and has to assign a different meaning to the shot by using the 2nd & 3rd level of significance.

Films of Erica Russell

- Feet of Song
- Triangle
- Soma

Russell, Erica (1951-) - Director, Animator

Born in New Zealand in 1951, Erica Russell's parents emigrated to South Africa in 1953, and she spent her childhood there, finding inspiration in the local folk traditions and especially African music and dance. She regards these three films (all funded by Channel 4) as forming a 'dance trilogy'.

Feet of Song(1988) The film is a near-abstract exploration of colour and rhythm depicted through fleeting impressions of dancers' bodies, the film is worth studying for the rapturous conversion of movement, music and colours giving a pure sensory experience.

The Oscar-nominated Triangle (1992) depicted the travails of a love triangle (one man and two women) through pure movement.

SOMA (2001) is inspired by graffiti art, street dance and the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat.

PRE-PRODUCTION

Ideation

I was planning to do a complete abstraction in dance using visual form selecting a particular piece of music, but finally after going through my research for understanding the various aspects of dance and constantly questioning my conscious about “what dance means to me?” I decided to express the journey of my mind while dancing, it’s a journey where the suppressed emotions break free, from being depressed to being elevated, a victory of positive over negative.

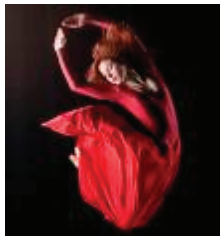
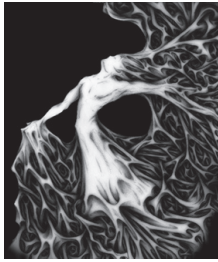
Breaking down the storyline

- a) Depression
-protagonist in the state of depression
(being forced into a ‘box’) getting tied up.
- b) Fight for freedom
- c) Discovering personality
- d) Becomes peaceful & self content

I turned my attention to music, dance being the medium of expression music plays a vital role. Though the flow of the film was decided the dance moves were dependent on the kind of music I chose. According to the break down steps I figured out the required flow of the music from start to end

Flow of Music

Oppressive music › silence › a new beginning › gathering force › liberation › peace.



Visual Explorations

There were many ways to interpret this journey visually, I did not want to use a very direct approach to show this journey so I put in use my study of semiology that I did during my course in Film Theory. I wanted to give a smooth flow between the narrative order in performance to near-abstract in the film.

Application of my research in visual explorations

Use of Metaphor

Ropes are used as a metaphor for the abstract problems binding the protagonist.

Denotation and Connotation

Denotation, obvious or the explicit meaning of the sign.

Connotation means the interaction that occurs when the sign and the feelings of the viewer meet. At this point, meanings move toward the subjective interpretation of the sign. connotation is the implicit meaning of the sign.

In conventional semiotic terms, connotation uses the first sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signified. Connotations 'derive not from the sign itself, but from the way the society uses and values both the signifier and the signified'. Connotation involves emotional overtones, objective interpretation, socio-cultural values and ideological assumptions.

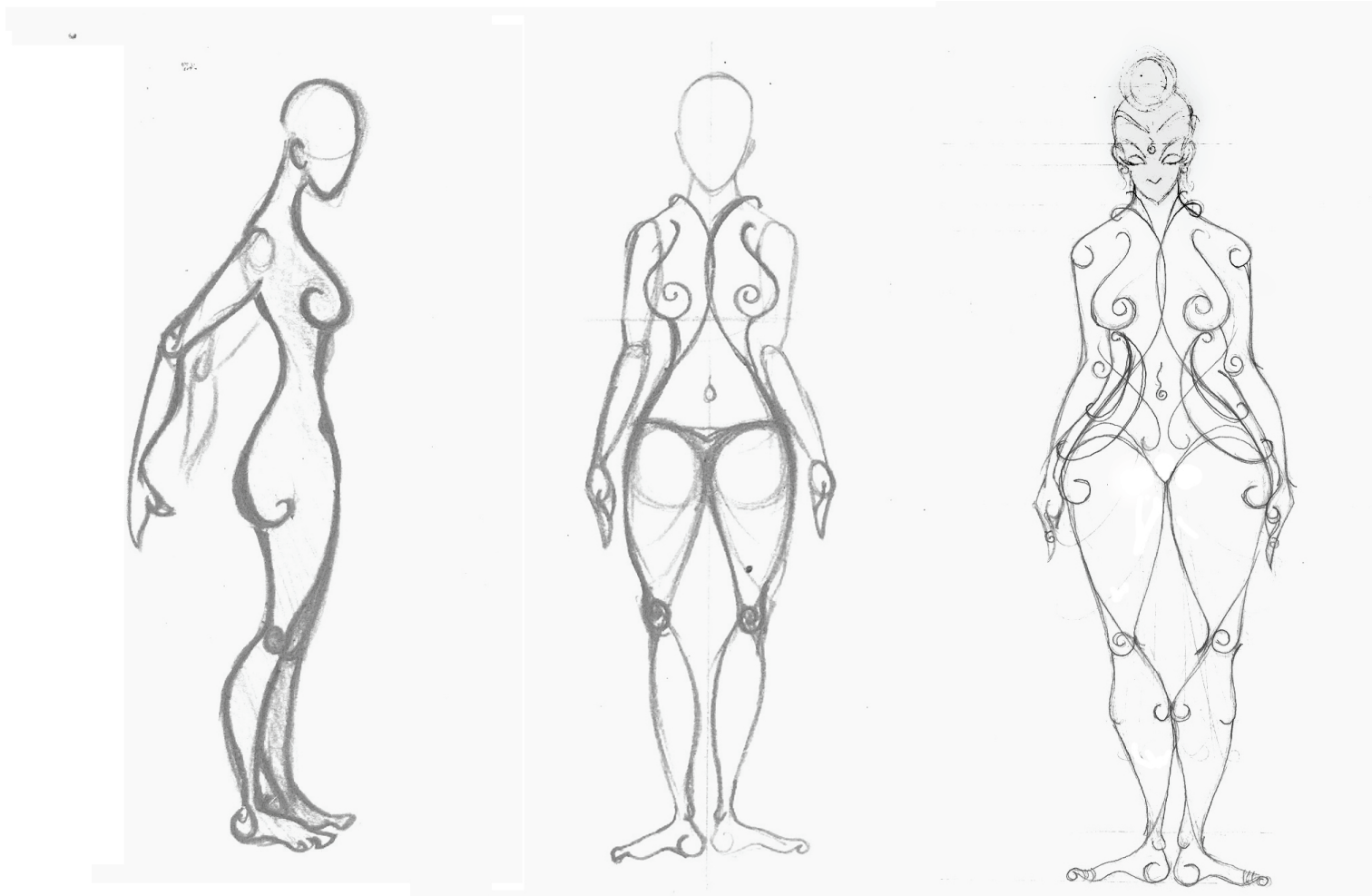
The signs of the flame used in the film carries implicit meaning. The flame that originates from the body of the protagonist is her unconscious mind that is longing for freedom. Also denoting the line of fire in the body i.e. the spinal cord and follows the same movement of the spinal cord.

Final script and screenplay

The protagonist is sitting down depressed. Her mind is blocked as she feels dejected, lonely, constrained. While she is deep down in depression there are ropes coming from all sides tying her up. She looks up helplessly seeing herself getting tied up as if she has no more stamina to fight for her existence. Ropes tie up every part of her body making a web like structure and the screen fades to black. A very soothing music of a flute starts playing which lights up a flame on the screen and the screen lights up showing the web like structure and the protagonist tied up in the centre like a spider's prey, the flame is the unconscious mind of the protagonist which is longing for freedom and starts moving freely along with the music and also provokes the protagonist to move. As soon as the protagonist makes an effort to move she realizes that she's no more in control of herself rather the ropes are controlling her and making her dance like a puppet. Few ropes try to tie up and control the flame also which in turn blows up the flame bigger and evoking her anger. This provokes her to take her first step towards her freedom by breaking the first rope.

Then is the journey for freedom and discovering self personality through the medium of dance, where the protagonist gets in control of herself and the ropes tying her. Instead of the ropes controlling her and making her dance their way it's the protagonist now tuning her body to music and dancing her way out which further turns into abstraction of the struggle between the ropes and the protagonist. When the ropes find tough to exist and control the protagonist anymore they breakdown into triangular arrows which then attack the protagonist. But the protagonist with her high spirit turns away the arrows that transform into birds on touching her and dances her way to feel the state of ecstasy, joy, contentment, victory which in one word can be defined as "Euphoria".

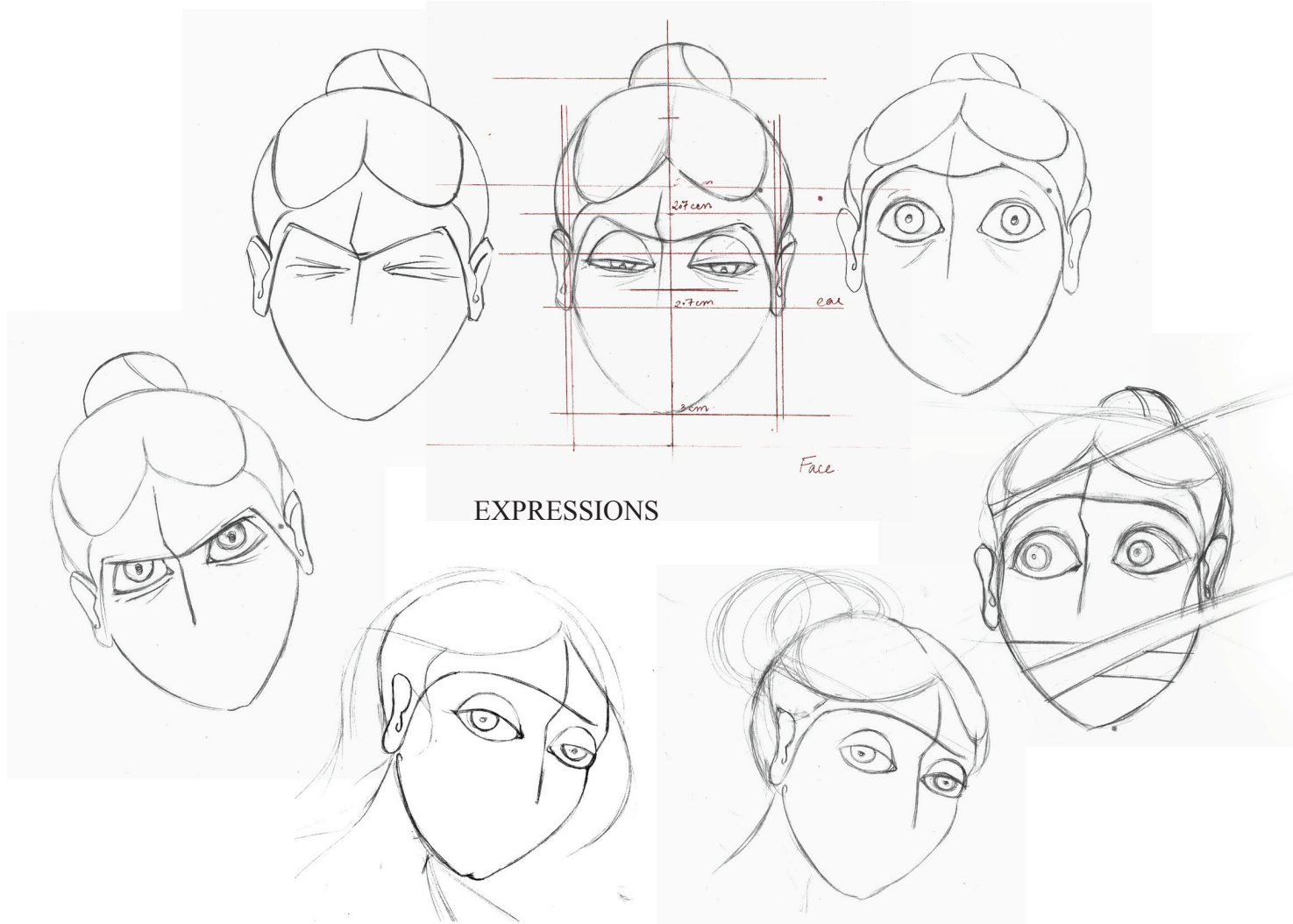
Character Design
Initial sketches



Character Design

Finally I chose simple flow of lines to design the character. The character is not a specific character with personality for a conventional narrative.. It is more like the Anime or the essence of female energy in any person. Therefore the design of the character is partly realistic and some parts of the body are made abstract.

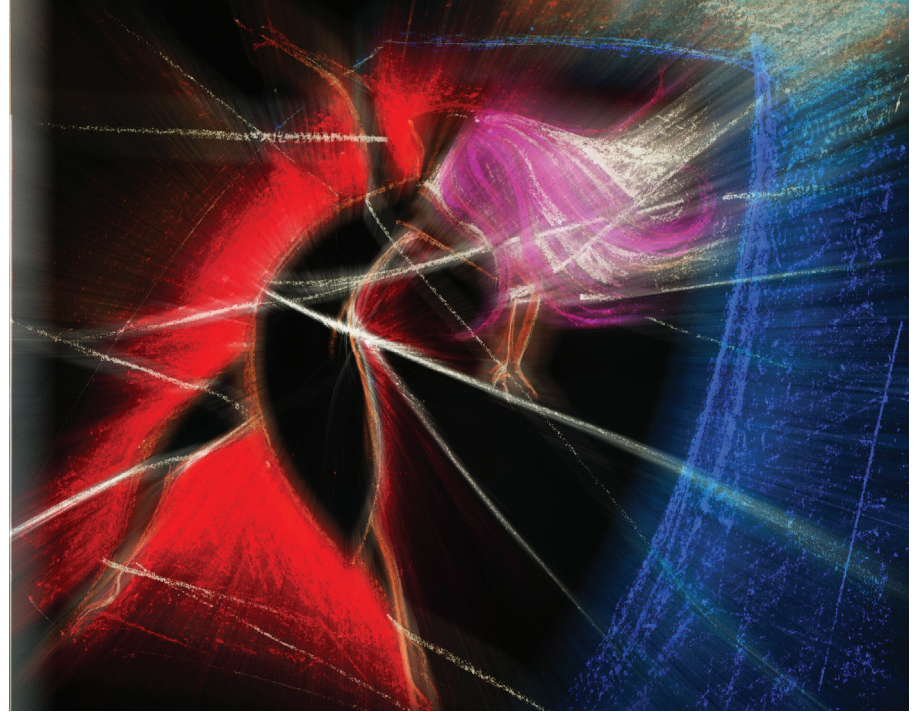
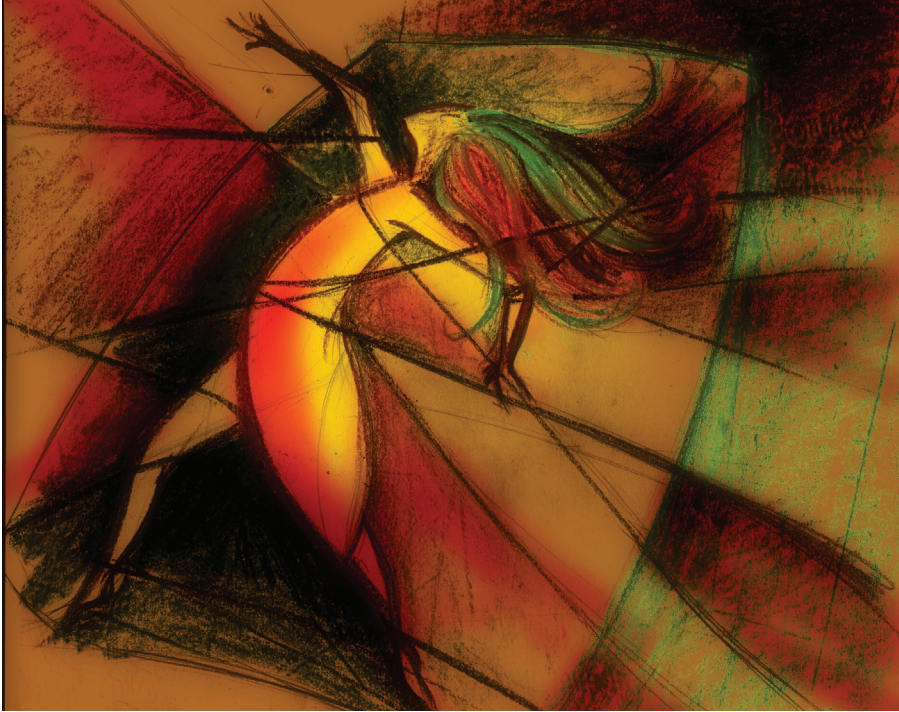


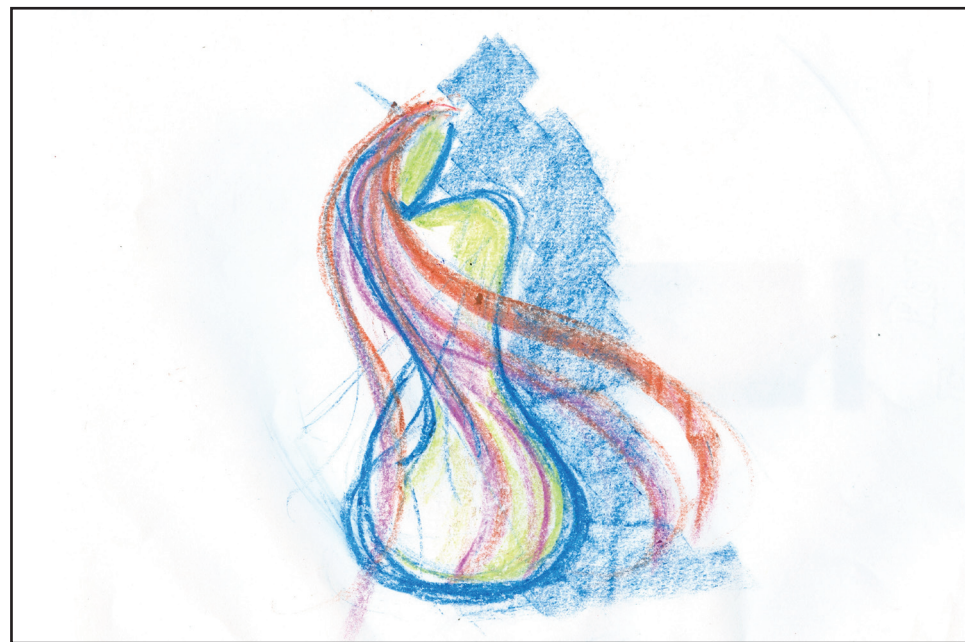


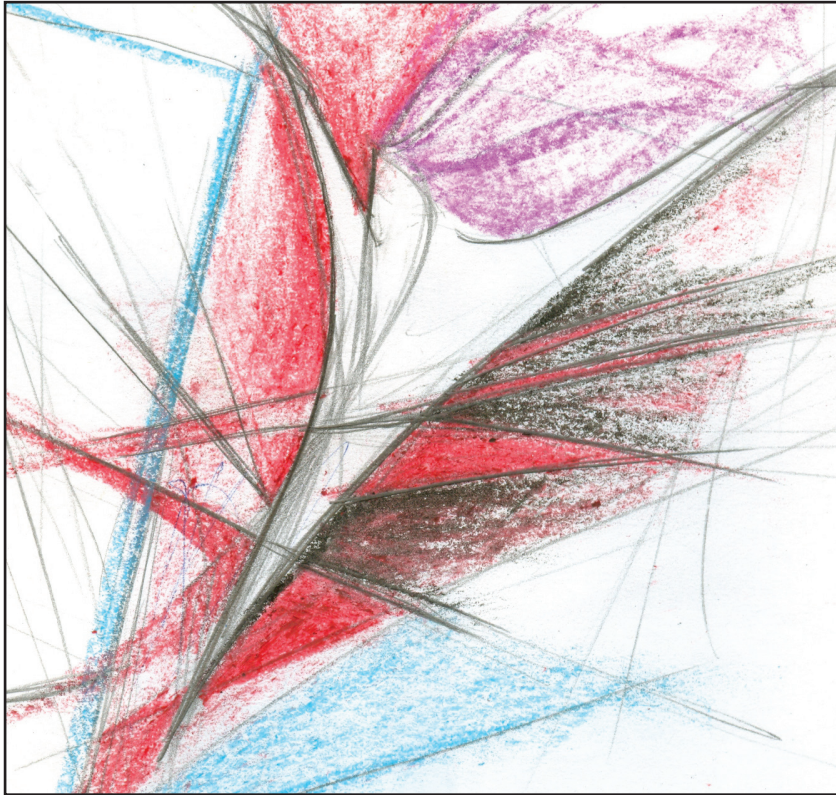
Concept art & Styling

Visually the film had to express the mood of the protagonist and the journey that she is going through of self development. So the film starts with a dark and complex look and little by little colours start adding in depicting the changing mood. According to the sound breakdown of the film, I tried to visually express the four main stages. I chose a 2d medium to express this journey with the help of lines, colours and textures. Finally I used various layers of textures to visually meet the approximate mood of every stage in the film. The originally hand drawn lines are also maintained which look a little scattered and disturbing in the start and become more prominent and confident by the end.



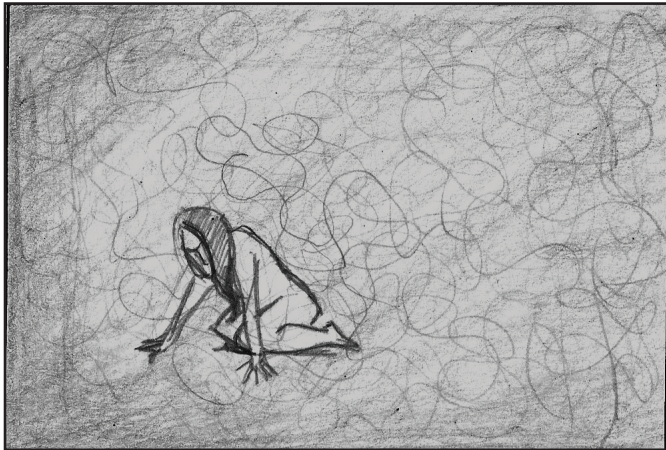








Storyboard



Video : A girl sitting down depressed. Camera above eye level. extreme long shot.

Audio : Background music start, slow Oppressive music.



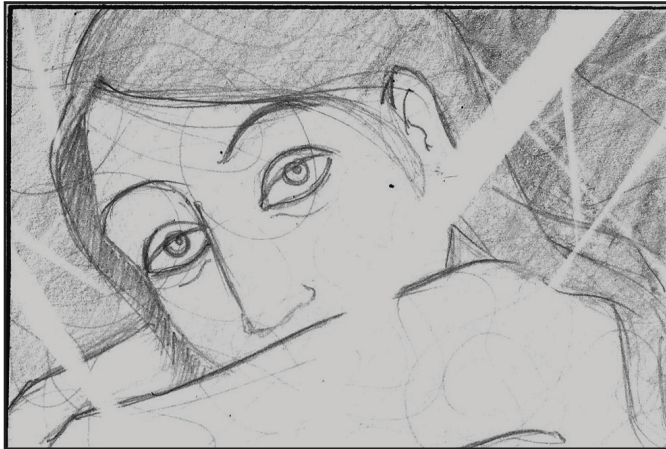
Video :Close-up shot of the girl sitting down hiding her face.

Audio : Background music continues



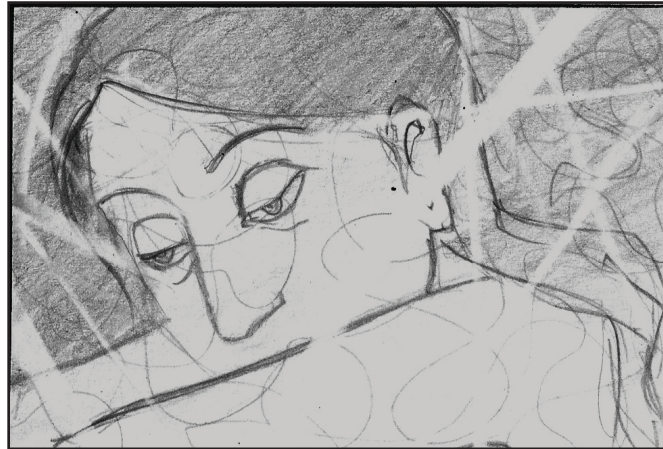
Video : Ropes coming from either sides and tying up the girl

Audio : Background music continues



Video :she looks up seeing herself getting tied up, camera zooms in.

Audio : Background music continues



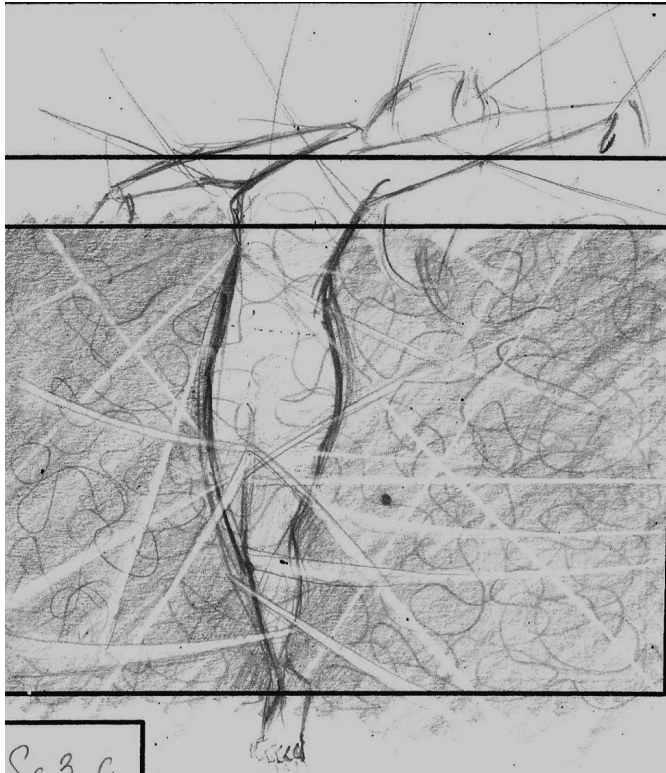
Video: but she dose not resist at all, and gives up feeling helpless. extreme close-up shot

Audio: background music cont.



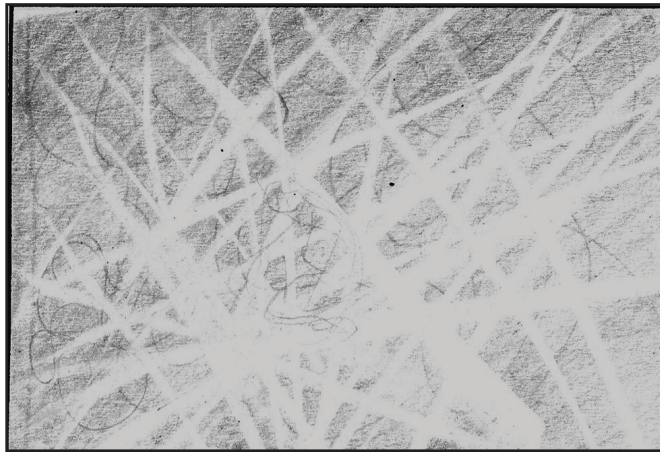
Video: ropes tying up every parts of her body restricting her movements.

Audio: background music cont. Heavy breathing sound effect.



Video: Camera pan from top to bottom, ropes tying up every parts of her body restricting her movements.

Audio: background music cont. Heavy breathing sound effect.



Video: more ropes coming in forming a web like structure.

Audio: background music fades out.



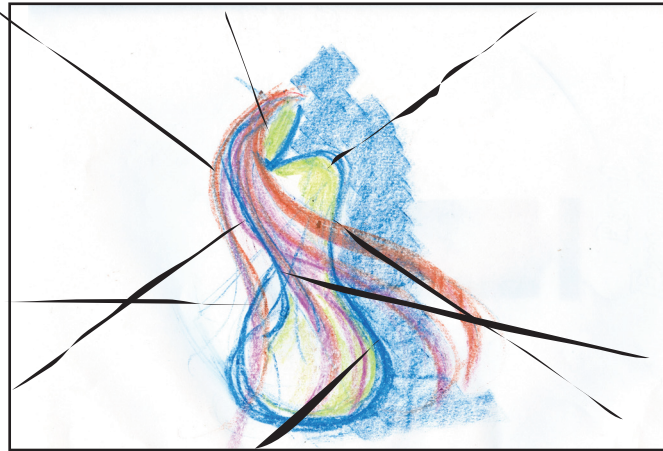
Video: screen fades to black.

Audio: silence



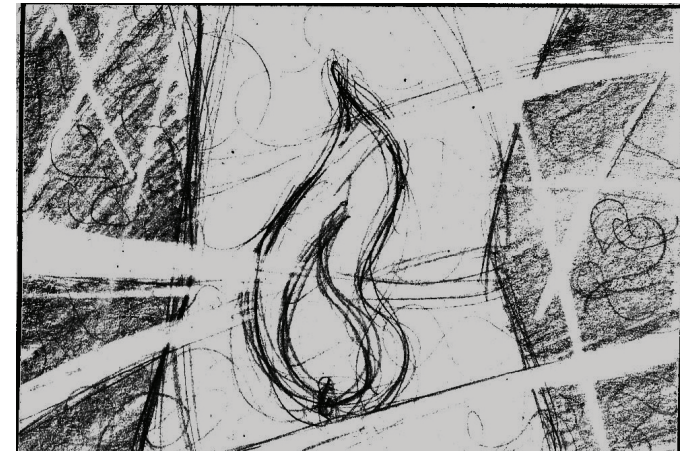
Video: a flame lights up with the music.

Audio: a new beginning of soothing and refreshing flute.



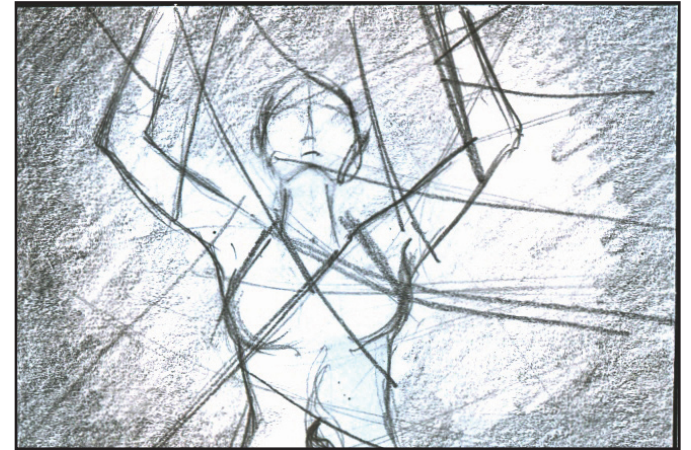
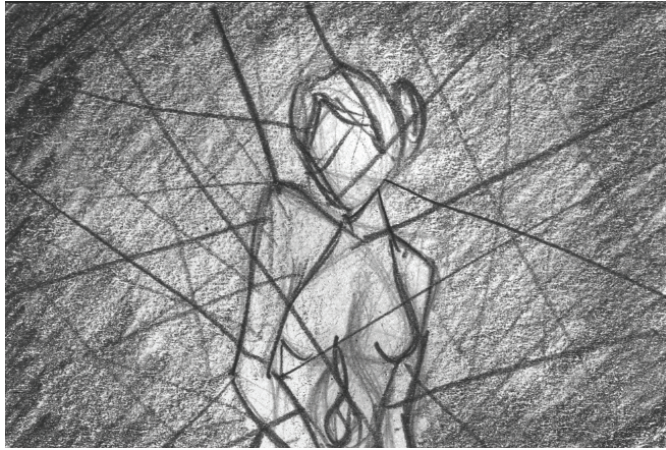
Video: the light of the flame within the protagonist partially lights up the frame so that the protagonist is seen tied up in ropes.

Audio: flute cont.



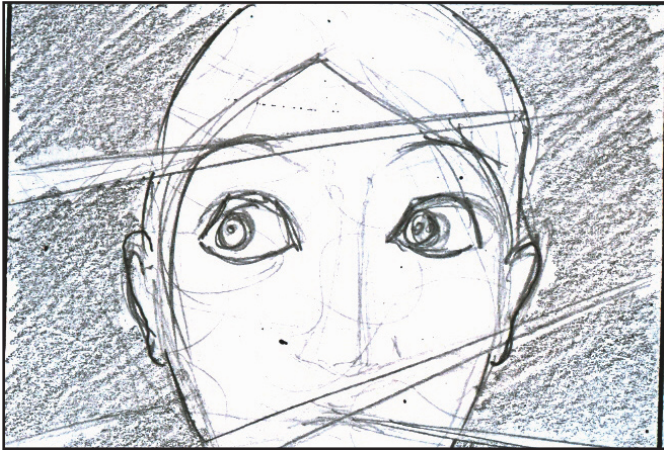
Video: Cut to extreme close-up shot of the torso, the flame is moving with the music provoking the protagonist to move along with it.

Audio: flute cont. More instruments add in with a constant beat.



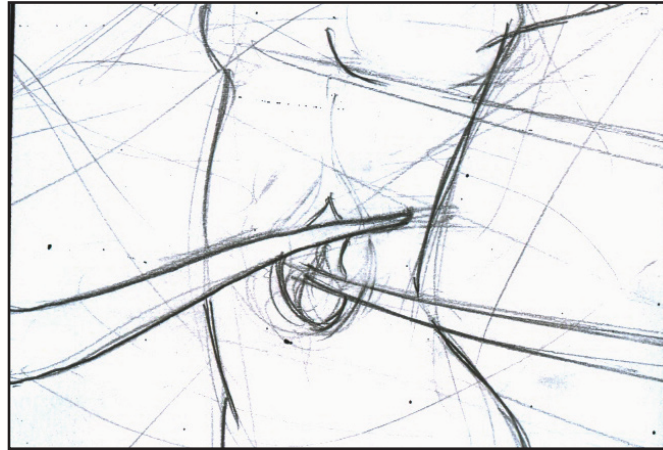
Video: But the protagonist is totally being controlled by the ropes tying her which make her dance like a puppet.

Audio: musical beats continue.



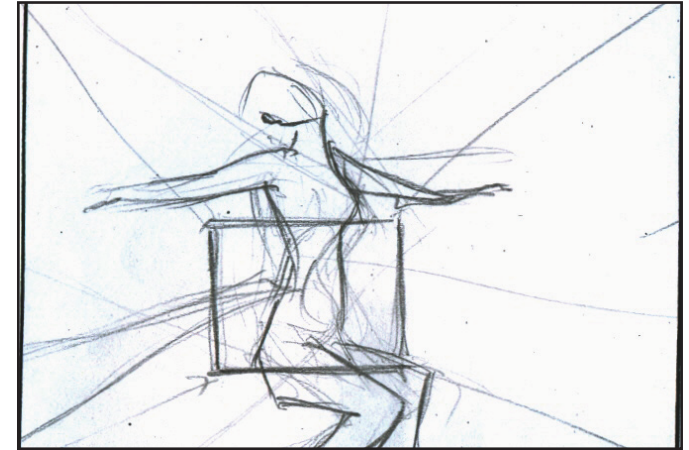
Video: Cut to extreme close-up shot of the face, her eyes going to and fro seeing herself being controlled by the ropes.

Audio: music cont.



Video: the ropes head towards the flame to tie it and restrict its free flowing motion

Audio: music cont. effects of drums



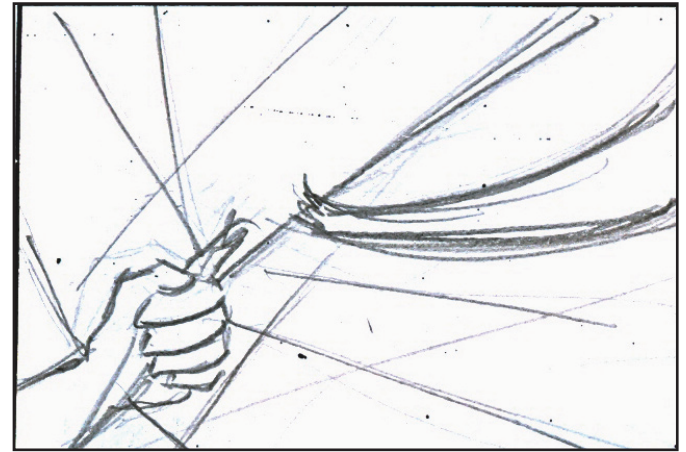
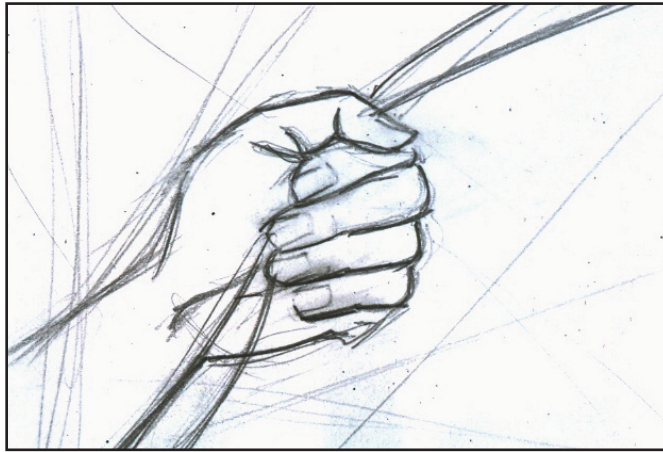
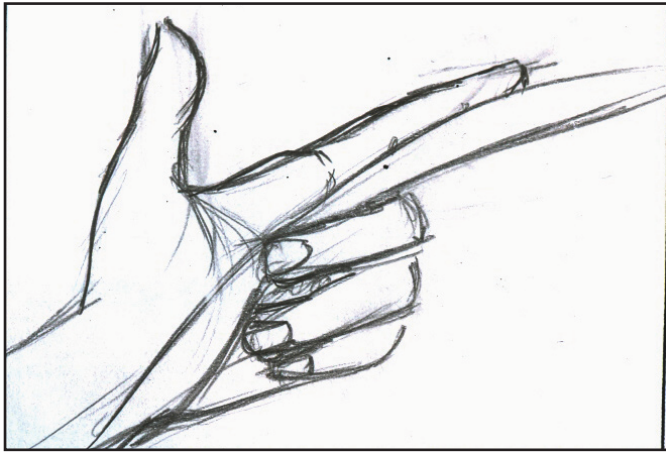
Video: the girl panics as the ropes try to tie up the flame too while the flame gets bigger.

Audio: music cont. effects of drums



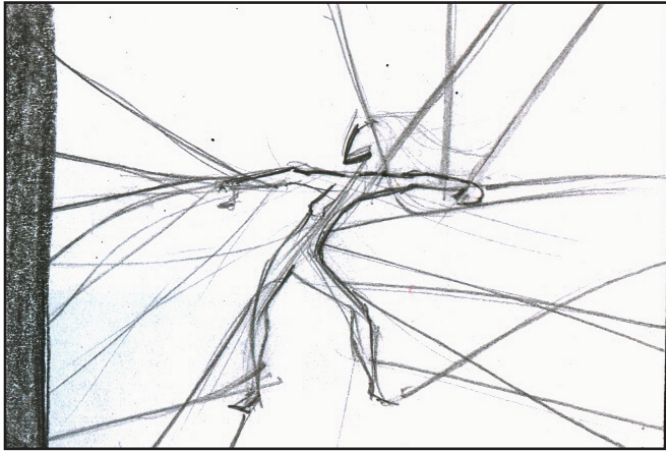
Video: She gets furious, the flame provokes her to show her desire to be free

Audio: musical beats continue.



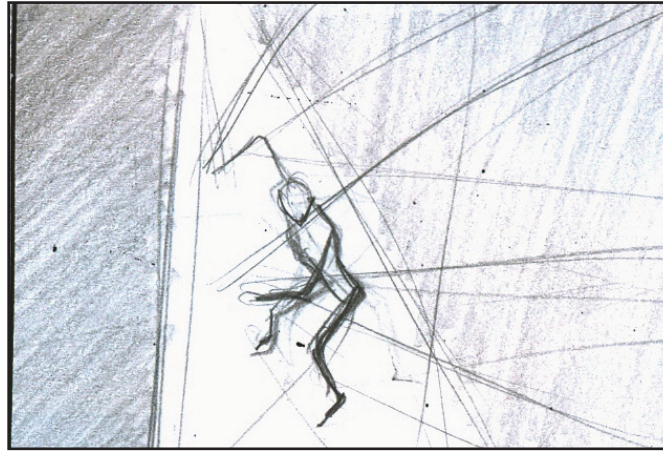
Video: and she takes the first step towards her freedom by breaking the first rope, close-up shot of the wrist as she breaks the rope.

Audio: sound effect as the rope breaks and fading out the music.



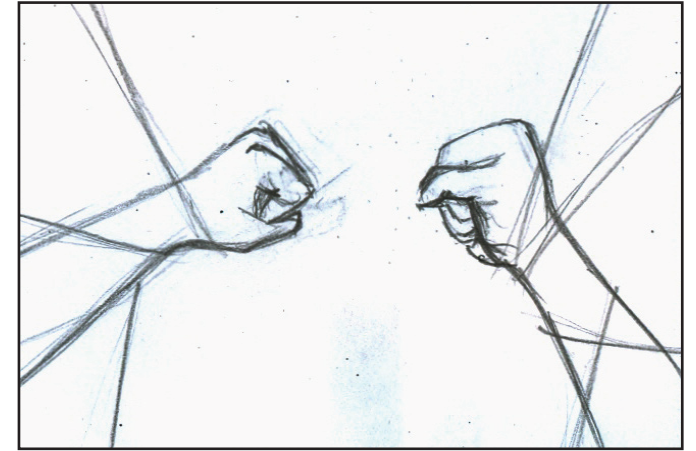
Video: long shot, the girl pulling the ropes and try to control them instead.

Audio: tempo of the music rises



Video: she struggles to get rid of the ropes through various dance moves

Audio: music cont.



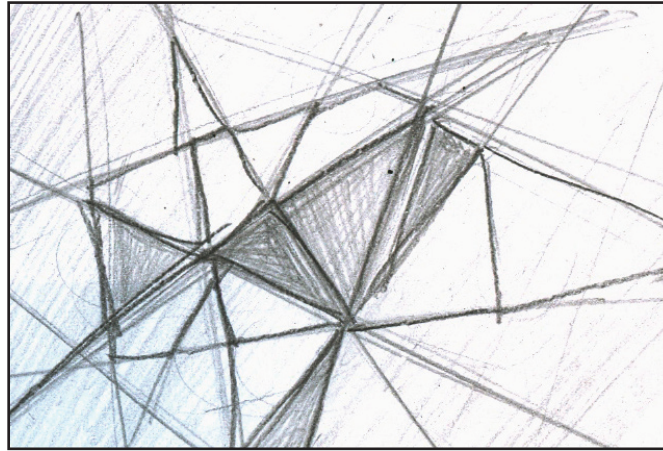
Video: Breaking free her hands completely

Audio: music cont.



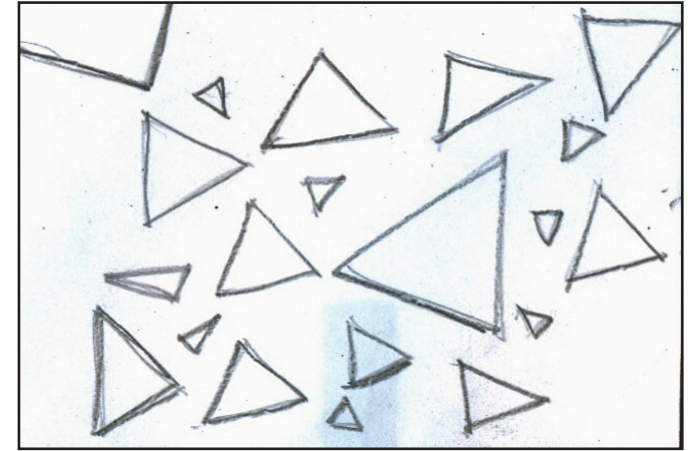
Video: She is almost free, swaying her body she moves across the ropes

Audio: music cont.



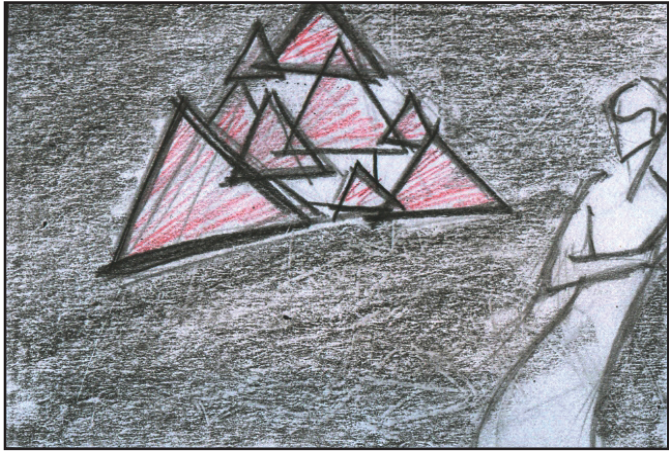
Video: Abstract exploration of colour and rhythm depicted through fleeting impressions of dancers' body and the struggle with the ropes.

Audio: music cont.



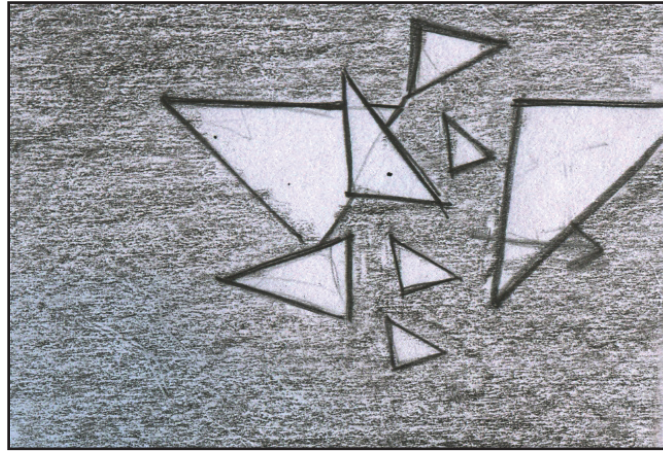
Video: The triangles formed within the ropes breakout suddenly

Audio: music cont. add special effect



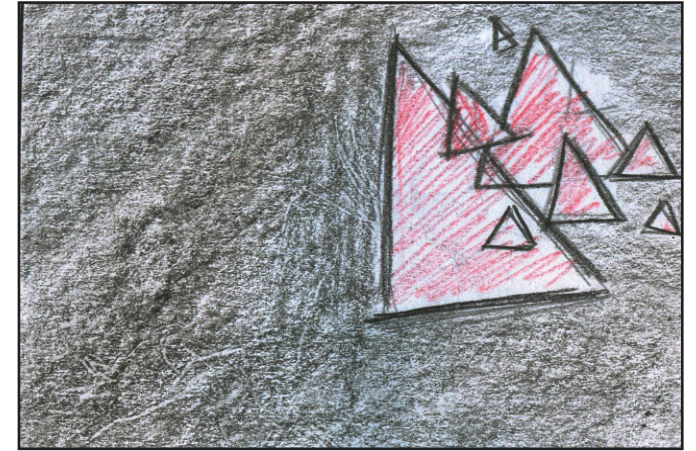
Video: The triangles group together and form an arrow pointing the girl and trying to suppress her (push her down), the girl pushes them away.

Audio: music cont.



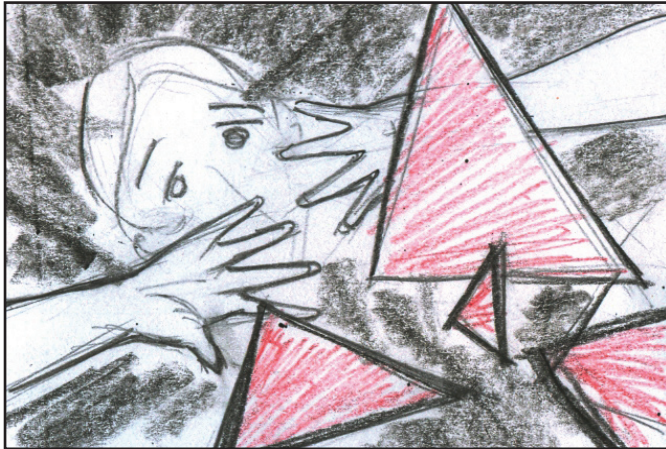
Video: as they are pushed away they rise high up moving in space.

Audio: music cont.



Video: gather force again by grouping together and speedily flow down again to hit the girl.

Audio: music cont.



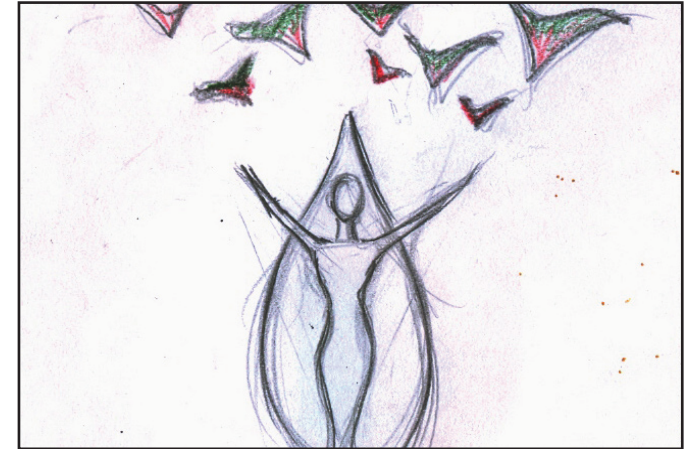
Video: triangles speeding towards the girl

Audio: music cont.



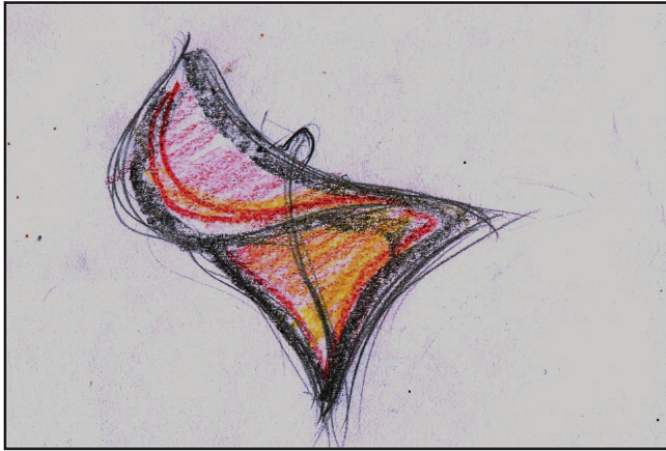
Video: but the girl is much more confident this time, close-up of the face

Audio: music cont.



Video: the girl pushes them away transforming into birds as they touch her, and the flame within her explodes and is now as big as her

Audio: music cont.



Video: abstract exploration of and rhythm depicted through fleeting impressions of dancers' body and the flame.

Audio: music tempo rises high following a repetitive pattern in rhythm.



Video: the protagonist is finally free, content and peaceful

Audio: music ends with the effect of deep breathing sound.

PRODUCTION



Music

I created a reference track for the film first, as it was the deciding factor of the style of performance and also the timing of animation was dependent on the music track. For mixing and editing I have used the software Sony Acid.

Shooting live footage

I started with choreographing the dance on the reference track I created. The dancing style performed is a fusion of kathak and freestyle. I performed And shot it live with the help of my friends. This footage I used to study the motion and also for rotoscoping some of the actions.



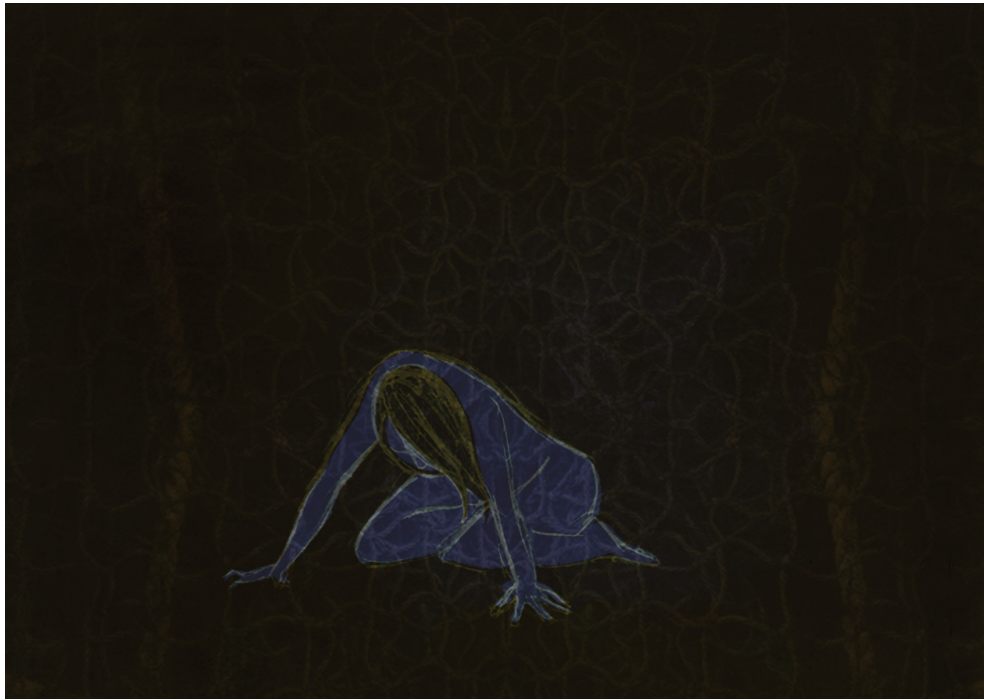
Animation

This film is done in 2D, I chose classical animation to express the flow and energy of dance through the motion of lines. Being a 2D animation movie, most of the time I had to sit with my light box to draw different layers of frames. Once the drawings were done for cleanup and positioning I used Animo.

POST-PRODUCTION

The compositing is done with the use of After Effects 7.0. Finally all the audio and visual sequence are composited using Adobe Premiere 3.0.

Stills from the Film



CONCLUSION

This project was like a search for myself, but finally I realized this is what means to be a director to know what you want to express through every frame of your film. I remember these words by Anand Gandhi (Director) in his lectures in IDC that - the directors knows exactly what not to show in the film and is in constant search for the right way of expressing his vision. I really enjoyed the whole process though it was filled with a lot of ups and downs, my keen interest in the subject and constant support of my guide, all my professors, friends and family really put my spirit high to take the first step towards my dream and make my first animated film.

REFERENCES

BOOKS

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Films

Feet of song
Soma
Norman Mc Laren Films

Music

Divine light
Taal theme