

IDC, IIT BOMBAY

The Candy Tree

A short animation film

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Approval Sheet

This Animation Project entitled 'The Candy Tree' under the theme 'Pursuit of Nothingness' is approved in partial fulfillment of the Master's Degree in Animation and Film Design.

Signature

Date

Guide:

Internal Examiner:

External Examiner:

Chairman:

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I also owe thanks to my faculty, Prof. Nina Sabnani, Prof. Sumant Rao and Mr. C.P. Narayan for their support and guidance.

In addition, I thank my juniors, Naveen, Sumeet and Abhilash who helped me considerably at various stages of the film.

Over and above, I owe my thanks to my good friends Arun Kumar, Rakesh Nanda, Chaitanya Tamhane and Vinay Shukla who have time and again given valuable feedbacks that helped me mold the film's content with more clarity of thought.

Abstract:

'The Candy Tree' is a simple story of a little kid who invests all his efforts in a sleeveless notion. The story is not only representative of his genuine belief in the notion; it also revels in his unbridled desperate pursuit. In addition, it embodies a certain disregard for the maturity of an adult thought process.

Metaphorically, the film is a representation of one's belief in one's idea. It exhibits how an honest idea is nurtured, and protected despite the arguments of it being futile. It craves to support such nihilistic pursuits by supporting the idea of how every action has a reaction- in this case the end twist where the child's attempts bear fruit in a different world.

The pursuit in the film also supports the notion of 'phal' or fruit to one's 'Karma' or duty as described in one of the verses in the Gita, which essentially puts forward the idea of being committed to duty and not being driven by the fruit.

The end twist is a homage to a child's naivety; the child in the other world is representative of the joy he derived in the process, while the adult is a representative of discontent and dissatisfaction- one who is unable to realize the fruit!

Prologue:

There is no dearth of stories around us. Neither is there a dearth of story tellers. Yet, however, stories that move you are handful. Through whatever I could gather by observation, I concluded that it was the storyteller's considerable lack of honesty and attachment to the story that stood as the cause.

Stories like "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint Exupery, "The Devil" by Guy de Maupassant, "Notes from Underground" by Fyodor Dostoevsky have an inherent honesty in their narration. Even feature films like "Amelie" by Jean-Pierre Jeunet, "Underground" by Emir Kusturica, and short films like "Skhizein" by Jeremy Clapin and "Perspectivenbox" by Koji Yamamura also reflect on some very personal notes of the director.

My humble attempt as a student of animation in IDC, IIT Bombay is to try and maintain this honesty and attachment in narrating my stories.

Introduction

"The universe is made of stories, not atoms"-

Muriel Rukeyser, American poet.

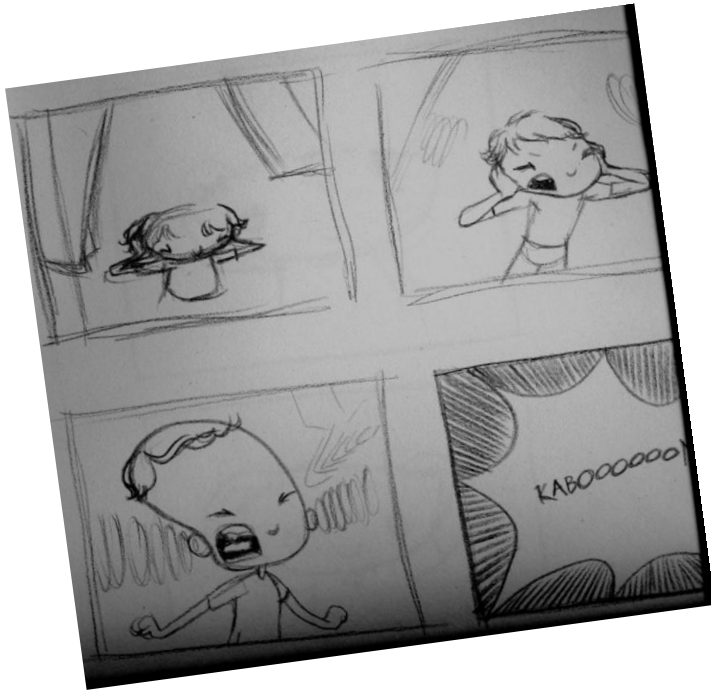
Arguably, the widespread belief and cultivation of the notion that stories are all scattered around and one simply needs to learn the art of narrating it is rather appalling- primarily for two reasons, it ignores to an extent the storyteller's attachment with the narrated story and second it disregards the idea of communication with his audience. Albeit, I do not disregard the notion of stories being all around, the act of choosing one and nurturing it is rather personal. As American author, Eudora Welty puts it- "Writing a story or a novel is one way of discovering sequence in experience, of stumbling upon cause and effect in the happenings of a writer's own life."- the process of writing a story involves a certain personal attachment and interpretation of the incident at hand. The story should either gestate in the writer's experiences, or it should have a personal appeal to the writer stimulating past experiences with it. The same notion of attachment is

being stressed upon by Ronald Steel when he says "Increasingly, I realized that I could not merely tell his story. Rather, I would have to tell my story about him."

Moreover, constructing a story isn't a mechanical or iterative process where you go by rules of storytelling to get your result, or so what I believe. It is instead, a meticulous effort to find out your voice and to communicate it with utmost clarity. The process is a punctilious practice of scrutinizing and re-scrutinizing the whole idea till you reach the final essential soul which constitutes the main story. 'The Candy Tree', to the best of my ability is one such effort.

The story is very personal in its root, and appeals to me not only because of the naivety of its protagonist's character, but also because of his devout attempt at the pursuit of nothingness. The story isn't an attempt to rationalize childhood activities, but merely to support the notion of disregard for a possible fruit for one's action and to revel in the joy of doing something you passionately believe in.

Throughout this process of hunting films I have been reasoned down by friends and seniors as to why I have been stuck on the character of a kid. The only reason is that it easily resonates with my naivety of perceiving things. It isn't a tool to evoke easy sympathy; however, it does indulge in joy of being a child.



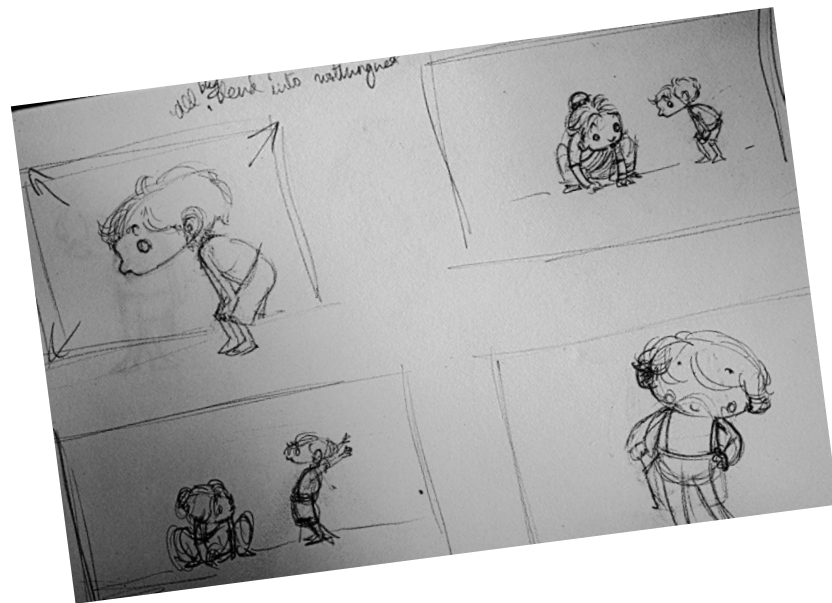
Idea Generation:

Even before the project started, I had almost decided to make the film on something written by me. First, it is easier then to visualize, as most of the visuals come naturally, and there is no confusion with regard to the interpretation you have in your mind. Second, it automatically has a sense of attachment.

For a short film, it is paramount important that the idea be considerably simple and has a wide appeal.

The first idea:

One of the self-written stories that is truly close to my heart is the "Box of Answers" – owe it to the deep sense of personal appeal the story intrinsically generates. In the story I talked about a boy seeking answers for questions and ultimately realizing that it is he himself who will write all the answers.



Reasons for discarding:

The raw story had to be adapted to fit into the short film boundaries. However, after several drafts/versions the whole concept became rather pretentious and unappealing.

In an attempt to adapt, I ended up including certain aspects which weren't there in the original story, but were important to explain certain ideas in the adapted one. Consequently, after several versions it lost the personal appeal.

The subsequent ideas:

There is one peculiar incident about my elder sister that I often heard from my parents. When she was three she sowed a candy into a pot in the hope of growing a candy tree. The raw idea was very fascinating as it held the childhood naivety that I so desperately wanted to capture. In addition, I felt I had scope for wrapping a serious undertone in the child's naïve actions, making it more rich and meaningful for the audience. I carried on with the idea and worked on it to weave a story on a child's perception. The first draft was of a little kid and his elder sister/ mother arguing out the possibility of planting and growing a candy tree. My idea then was to take it to level of fantasy where each of their sweet and evocative arguments are backed by visuals supporting the same. After some effort I



realized the loophole in the whole concept- the fact that ideas for the little kid's visualization came from somebody as old as me lampooned the whole notion. No matter how profound my research was, no matter how creative I could visualize, in any case it would have lacked the honesty of being a child.

The second idea was about an old man recalling his childhood experiences to grow a candy tree. He goes nostalgic when he sees his grandson attempting something similar. The culmination is when he builds his grandson a tree laden with candies. This version was too dull and predictable and hence had to be done away with.

Henceforth, the story essentially focused on kid trying to grow a candy tree. The third idea revolved around the kid's attempts at various stages in life comes back to the spot and tries to grow the candy tree. While this version was interesting, there were obvious loopholes about his growth and immaturity.

The Final idea:

The final idea was a modified version of its predecessors. Here the kid tries to grow the candy tree, and realizes the futility of it. Later, as an old man he returns to the spot and mocks at his vain efforts. However, the little twist to the story is that a tree has grown underneath the ground into a

new world- a quirky little way of showing how each action results into a fruit.

The pursuit in the film also supports the notion of 'phal' or fruit to one's 'Karma' or duty as described in the Gita.

"Karmanye Vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana
Ma Karma Phala Hetur Bhurmatey Sangostva Akarmani"

[Do your duty and be detached from its outcome, do not be driven by the end product, enjoy the process of getting there.]

- 2:47 SRIMAD BHAGVAD GITA

Here, in the story the argument of maintaining honesty is still in question- however I hope to get away because the notion is less conspicuous as compared to the previous concept.

I wanted the end to be hopeful, but at the same time less predictable and simplistic. Hence came the notion of a result that one cannot see- a result that is there supporting one's belief of efforts laid onto it, but at the same time hidden from the obvious. It had to be the conquest of that belief and honesty of efforts rather than a moral preaching of sorts.

Layering the story:

A childhood incident is just another innocent little act if it does not communicate to you personally. For a film it is failure if it doesn't. Hence the act of layering the story with simplified metaphors was needful. If a small incident can click a different chord in our lives, the whole experience of going through such an event becomes evocative and emotional.

Since the initial raw idea in itself appealed to me in a deeper way, layering the story came rather instinctively. I weaved the candy with the metaphor of being an idea, and the notion of planting it with that of a futile attempt. I then brought in additional strata of nourishment, cultivation, indulgence, defense and desperation with various visuals to strengthen the notion of the development and defense of an idea one truly believes in.

The layering of the underground world and the kid playing in it is reflective to some extent of the conquest of his spirit. But the adult- a victim of a self-designed mesh of rational reasoning never figures out the true fruit. The story at this juncture tries to subtly mock at the noetic reasoning of an adult mind- the last scene with the old man laughing at his guileless attempts is ironic as he himself is being laughed at.

The Story:

Act 1: Acquiring and planting the Candy

The kid looks at the candy jar! It was deliberately kept at that height- to deprive him of his sweetest pleasure. While the kid looks on with determination, the jar on the second shelf of Mama's kitchen behaves rather shamelessly. Despite the single candy, it flaunts itself in a manner that the poor kid couldn't resist himself.

He stepped on the flour container, and then with a mammoth of an effort climbed onto the first shelf. The jar was still far from reach. He tried to get his hands on it with a few skips, but in vain. The child then with his desperate hankering jumped and nudged the jar with his left hand. The jar swung on its base, and then dropped! The kid almost waiting for the moment grabbed it in his hands.

But he had no time to indulge in his victory. He never realized it as a victory against the odds- he merely put his hand in and took the candy out. For him, that was more important.

He then danced his way to the backyard, and looked keenly at the spot close to the mango plantations. He dug the earth a bit and planted his candy between the two.

Act 2: Nourishment

The last scene fades away after the kid plants the tree. A brief shot of the empty site and then the next scene fades in with him watering the plant. His eyes big and hopeful, look at the plant in silent anticipation. Then the figure fades out... another incident of him mixing the soil fades in... and then him patting the soil.

[Fade in] The kid lying on the ground with one leg on the other's knee and the head resting on his crossed hands. Aside a gramophone plays a classical tune- the kid's foot keeps tapping to the music. [fade out]

A small cycle of watering plants and patting the soil.

[Fade in] A few records piled up next to the gramophone. The kid changes one record.

Another small cycle of watering plants and mixing soil.

[Fade in] A lot of records piled next to the gramophone. The kid looking innocently at the spot where he planted his candy. The brinjal plant pops

out, and then the tomato plant. He looks at either of them and then stares back at the candy spot.

Act 3: Defend

The previous scene fades away. A brief shot of the empty site and then the next scene fades in with two birds flying into the scene. They land at the 'candy spot' and start pecking. The kid comes running in with a scarecrow made of a worn out teddy bear and installs it over there.

A dog walks in sniffing... and then starts barking at the 'candy spot'. The kid runs in with his bow and arrow and shoos it away.

Next scene: A violent storm. A tent flutters at the 'candy spot'. Inside the kid holds the tent in determination.

Next scene: A hailstorm. The kid struggles with an umbrella trying to protect the 'candy spot'. He dozes off in spurts, but is determined not to leave the place.

Act 4: Where he tries crazy ideas to grow the plant.

The kid looks intently at the 'candy spot'. Then runs out and brings a mirror and reflects the sun light towards the 'candy spot'. [Fade out]

Fade in. He is tightening a string of pipes, and joins the shower head at the end. He then makes thunder noise with striking to pans and turns the shower on.

He then brings in a beaker and chemicals and tries that too... and then takes a deep sigh, and moves out of the scene.

Black out and then into the scene with a shot of the empty site. A guy (looks like an elder version of the same kid) walks in and then chuckles at the 'candy spot'. Next to the spot, the mango plant has now grown in full bloom.

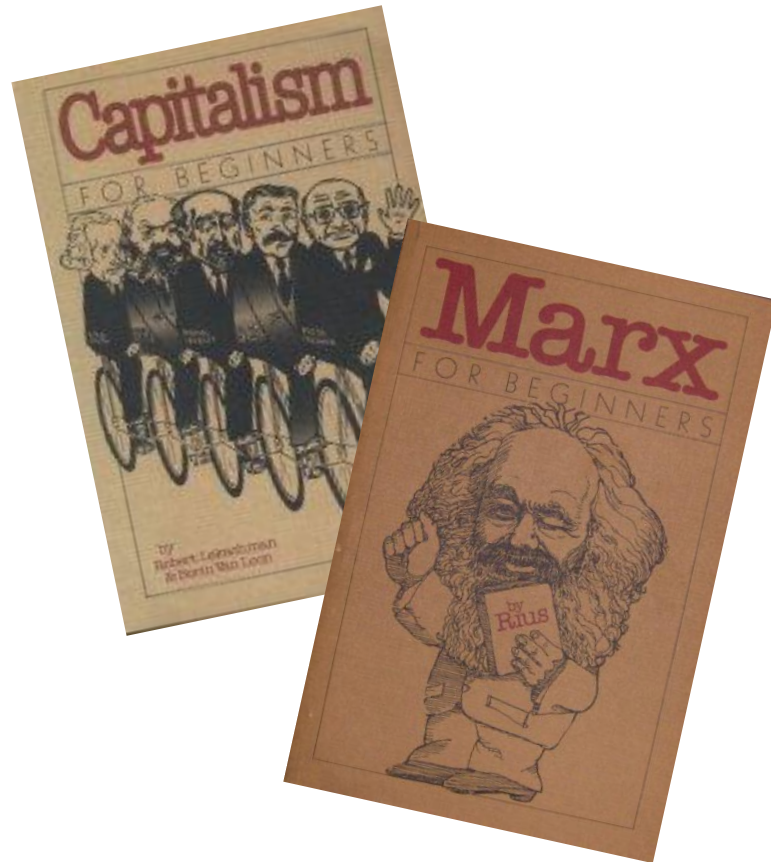
Zoom out the ground seems flat and a candy tree has grown upside down in a different world. The camera goes into this world, and the kid plays happily there- he seems to have found his candy.

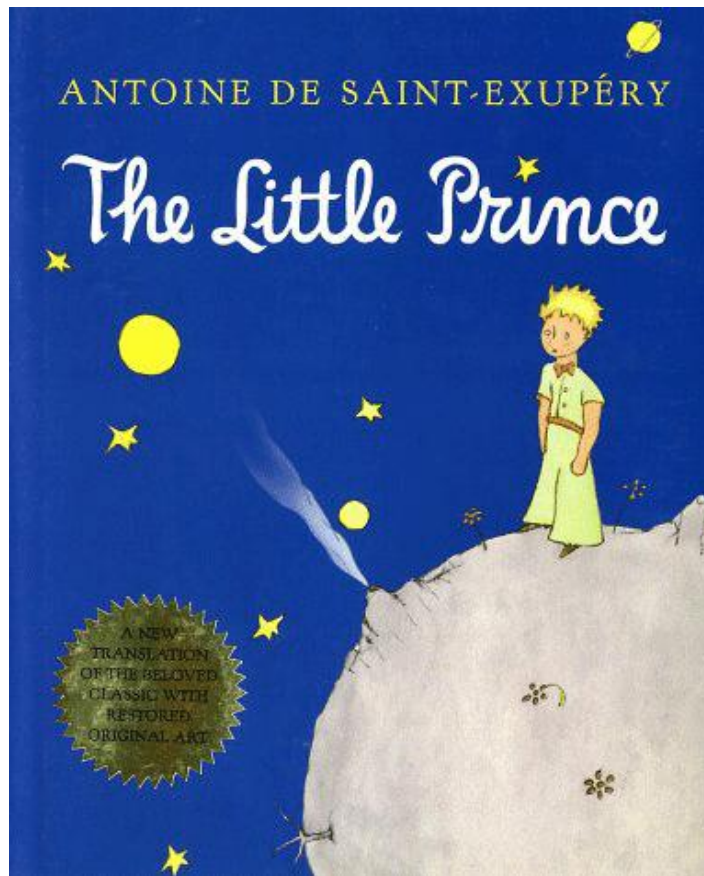
Research:

Books:

1. For Beginners series: Marx, Capitalism

The two books gave me a new tangent to story narration. They dealt with serious issues with satire and quirk, including interesting events and funny cartoons throughout the narration. Their narration was more provocative-information was shared through a less formal process of cartoons, funny trivia and sarcasm.





2. The Little Prince

The Little Prince gives an inside out view of the world through a kid's eyes. The book makes various profound observations about humans and life, still being true to the child-like innocence and simplicity. In addition, the book reflects visuals that are astounding and rapturous influencing one to think beyond the usual. The book guides one to perceive the most ordinary aspects of life in a different light building on it with the visualization of a child.

The story is a tribute to the thought process of child and dares to ridicule the way an adult mind works. The beauty of the theme together with its treatment sowed the seed of my story.

One of the other things that greatly impressed me about this book is its appeal of being highly personal. The narrator himself takes up the position of an adult and tries to understand what the little prince feels. His pangs of adult consciousness are thought provoking.



3. Abol Tabol (The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Ray)

The book recreates childhood experiences through a collection of non-sense poems and fantasy. It creates unusual characters and fantasy creatures, which together with its wordplay and explicit humor makes it a laugh riot for kids of all ages. For me, the book is a crucial study of outstanding visualization and exotic wordplay.

4. Calvin and Hobbes

The tit bits recreate the unessential, mundane everyday activities through the eyes of a child for whom they are no less than dragon attacks or space ship explorations. The world of Calvin is an accurate depiction of how kids see the world around us digging and weaving stories of their own.



Influences



1. 'Skhizein' by Jeremy Clapin

Skhizein talks about death in the most provocative fashion. Unlike most films on the subject it does not lament at the end of life, nor does it philosophize the idea of death, nor does it stand to answer the whole issue. Instead, it teases one to think with quirk and wit. It deals the issue with compassion and still doesn't make it effusively sentimental for the audience. It does treat it with humor but at the same time it refrains from making it juvenile.

Skhizein includes moments of contradicting emotions, as in a moment of profound seriousness and concern is dealt with subtle humor. It adds a different flavor to the film as it creates a concoction of two emotions in the mind of the viewer. I have tried to make a similar effort in different stages of the film. E.g. the character's attitude of defending the plant is dealt with light humor. However, there is considerable caution taken to avoid ridiculing his act of defense, which would have otherwise drawn the attention of the viewer away from the story.



2. 'The Man who planted trees' by Frederic Back

Quite like and unlike Skhizein. The film is about life, and one man's journey to create life. It is like Skhizein in its subtle approach to the subject. Again, the film refrains from didactic tinges, but is able to communicate the whole idea of unifying with nature. It does not glamorize an individual's effort of planting trees; instead it treats it with humble regard. It is unlike Skhizein in its issue- while one talks of death the other talks of creating life.

One of the aspects that really influenced me was its considerable simplicity. It was after seeing the film that I removed anything that came in the way of complicating the story narration process. The simplicity helped me achieve a certain fluidity that my initial attempts lacked. It also helped me realize the quintessential soul of the film that I wanted to communicate through the film.

'The Man who planted trees' is structured beautifully. It concentrates on one essential issue, and other events all lead up to that ultimately. I tried to follow a similar structure, where all my events lead to the ultimate point that I wanted to communicate all over.



3. The Cowboy needs a horse by Walt Disney Studios

This film is a reveling journey through a child's dream- where the little tot is a cowboy and he goes about saving people. The idea though simple has captured childhood with impeccable technical finesse.

As an animation film, particularly about the technique, this film has lots and lots to offer. It captures the true spirit of childhood. While making my film I kept the innocence of the character in 'The Cowboy needs a Horse' as a reference throughout. It was a sort of a benchmark that I made efforts to realize continuously in my animation.



4. Perspectivenbox and Mt. Head by Koji Yamamura

Koji Yamamura's films address various issues, and with such simplicity and wit that it is hard to ignore them. His films through simple protagonists and everyday plots often subtly comment on the changing society. However, he does not lament or blame, instead he brings out the dark aspects with such evocative sarcasm that one cannot help but think on



them. In addition, he keeps spicing his films with quirky and humorous little incidents making the whole process (of watching his films) enjoyable.

Both in *Perspectivenbox* and *Mt. Head*, Koji includes certain curious elements just to make the whole film livelier. Such elements are quirky and unusual, and hence titillate once senses during the film watching process. I have in bits and pieces tried to include certain events and elements which would similarly tickle the senses of the viewer. E.g. there are visuals of the little kid enjoying music, and reading with the plant. In another attempt I made the kid carry a scarecrow made of his own teddy bear. Not only does it encompass a message of sacrifice, it also improves the visual in the film.

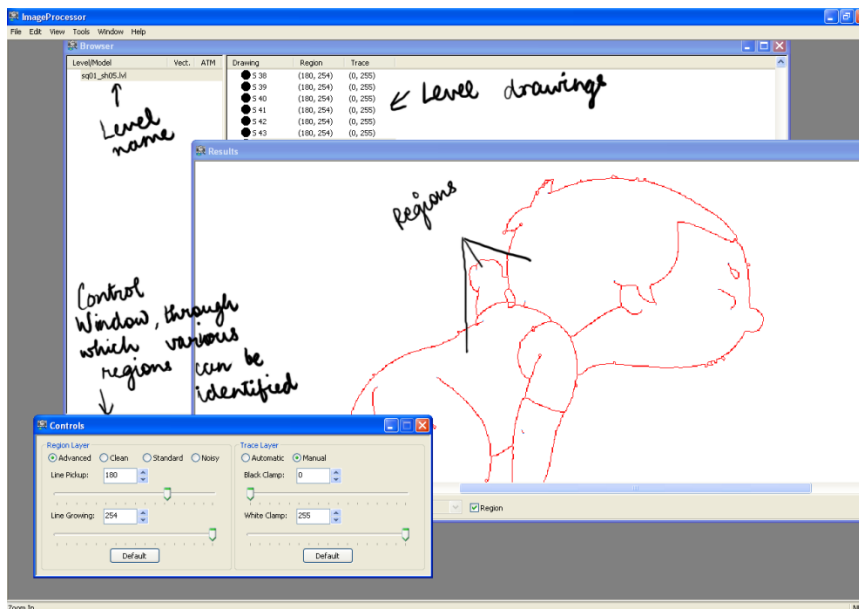
Treatment:

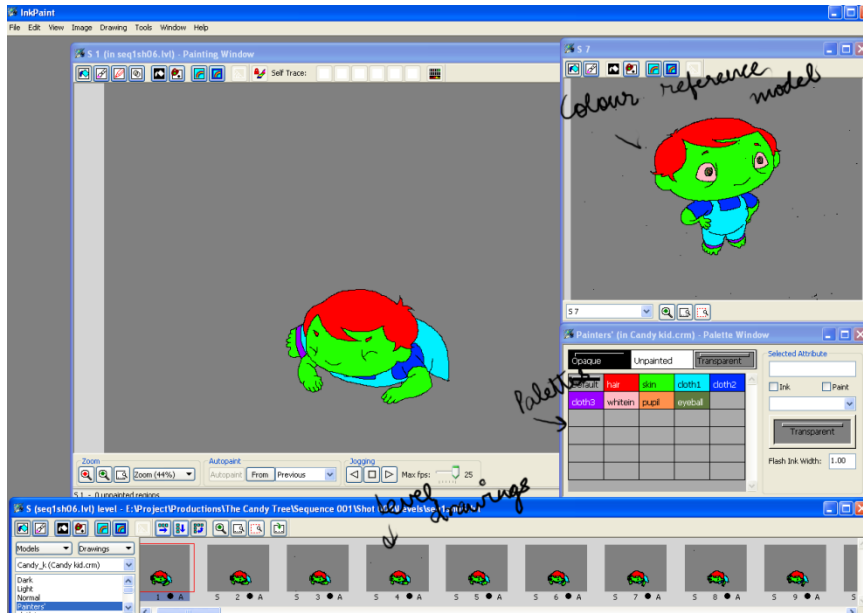
The story being that of a kid demanded a certain freshness in the treatment. Moreover since the film tries to deal some issues with honest sensitivity, it was incumbent to create a definite style which enhances the experience of watching the film. Eschewing the hackneyed approach of flat coloring, I thought of including water color painted washes.

After several trials and errors, I eventually was able to find a technique to include washes in a traditional ink and paint module of a 2d animation software.

Methodology:

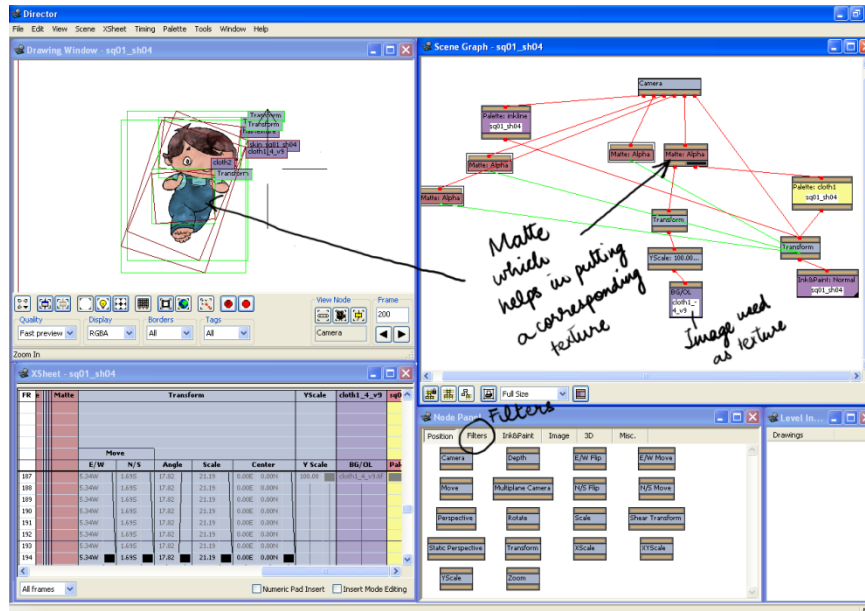
- The whole script was broken down into 4 Acts containing various scenes and shots.
- Further a story board was prepared which included the key moments of the story.
- The story board was played in time as an animatic to get the idea for the duration of the film.





- The rough animation was done for various shots followed by cleanups- both on paper.
- The clean-up images were scanned and converted into various levels in Animo through the Scan-Level module.
- The levels are then processed for region identification in the 'ImageProcessor' module of Animo.
- Inking and colouring was done for the various levels in the InkPaint module of Animo. Different color reference models were made for different characters (or same characters in different stages) in the film.
- For achieving the style I had initially set out for, I made several palettes in the InkPaint module for various regions of the character like hair, skin, different cloth regions etc. In each of these palettes the concerned region was left opaque while the others were left transparent.



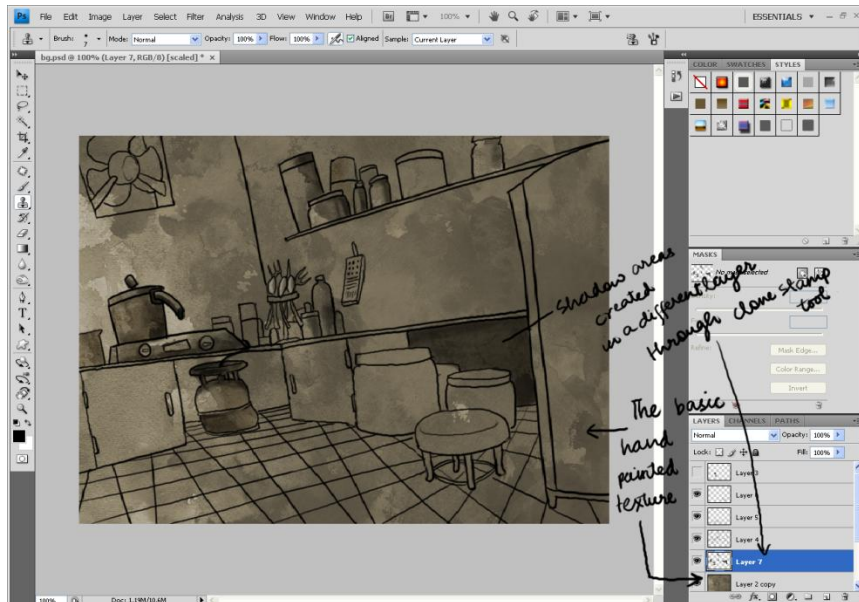


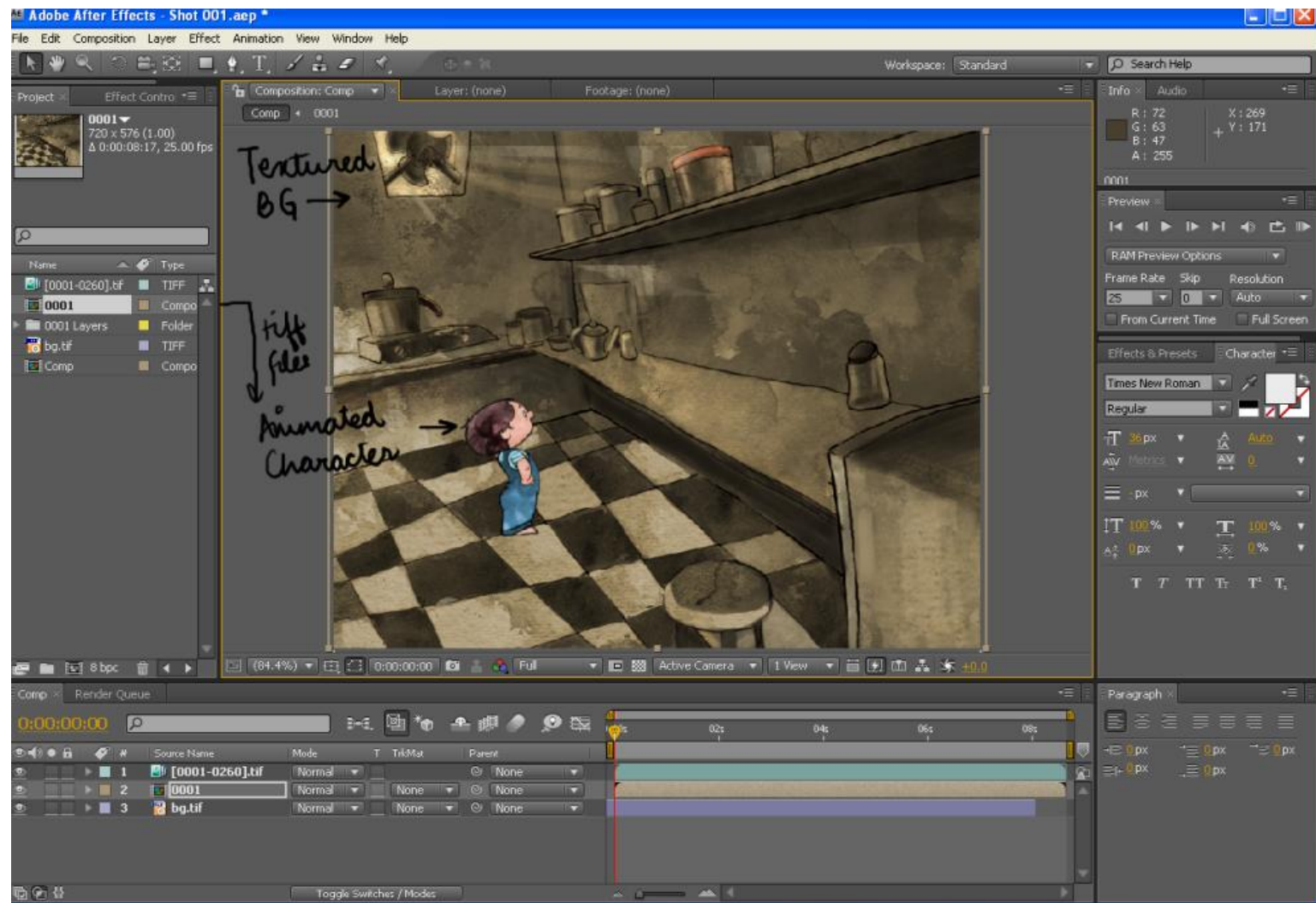
- They were further treated in the Director module of Animo. Through the Matte filter in the Node Panel the hand painted textures were included in the concerned transparent region in the respective palette. Separate washes were made for the clothes, the hair and the skin, and all were set as mattes in the paint module. Then, they were keyed as per the motion of the figure. However, the keying was not kept absolutely smooth- a little distortion was added deliberately to preserve the rawness of the character.

- These mattes were keyed in order to have a synchronization between the animation and the texture.

- Backgrounds were painted in Photoshop CS4. A rough monochromatic wash was painted and included as texture. The highlighted parts in the background composition were treated with a cloning stamp tool picking light areas from the texture wash. Similar process was followed for the shadow areas.

- The final compositing was done in After Effects CS4, where the painted backgrounds and the animated character are treated as two different layers.





Character Design and Story Board:

Generally in animation films, kids lack an essential character. They are merely cuties who run around in merriment. However, my storyline demanded a certain character so as to do justice to the sequence of actions that take place. In addition, I wanted it to have a sense of innocence embedded. After considerably scrutinizing I fixed my character to one who speaks virtually nothing in the film. It was a conscious decision hence to design him without a mouth. His emotions were to be delivered solely through his eyes, and hence the eyes were made large and expressive. However, the kid is not dumb, and such a misconception is shattered when he stands to defend his tree against all odds. In one incident he shouts at the dog that is planning to create nuisance around the tree. It is that moment where he stands to defend his belief.





A child stares at the camera, blinking.
Top angle shot



Camera reveals that he is looking at a candy jar.
Candy jar's point of view shot.



He tries to get on the shelf.
Flat perspective concentrating on the struggle.



Reaches the first shelf after some struggle.



Tries hard to get hands on the jar.
Change in camera angle showing the struggle
on his face



After some struggle, leaps and hits the jar.
Close up of the main action.



The kid manages to catch the jar.
Returns from the closeup to the previous
camera angle



Close up again of him laying hands on the last
candy



The kid runs.



Goes to his backyard.



And plants the candy.
Close up again to grab the action.
Fade out.



Fade in. The kid watering the plants.



Mizes the soil.



Oftens pats it and pampers it!



It also enjoys music with it!



But the music works for some other plant that pops out.



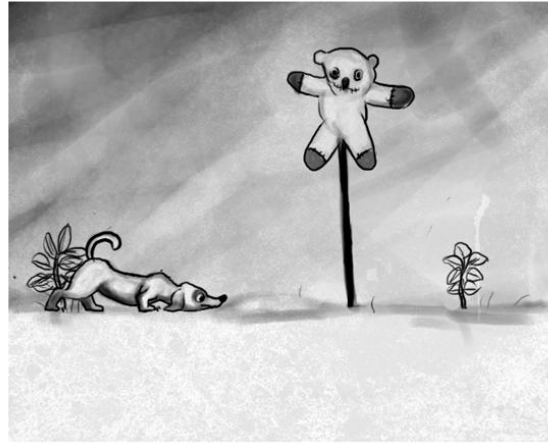
Close up of the kid's face. His eyes showing the despair. Blackout.



Birds pecking at the spot where the candy was planted



Kid comes running in with a scarecrow and scares the birds away. Top angle shot, kind of a bird's eye view.



A dog comes sniffing in after some time.



He shoots it away with his bow and arrow.



A severe storm. A tent fluttering helplessly.



Inside the tent, the kid looks concerned. His motif of saving the tree is evident. Close up shot.



A hailstorm. The kid struggling there with an umbrella, trying to protect his tree as a guardian.



Next scene. The kid tries to focus the sun's rays onto the spot where he planted the candy.



He even tries to germinate through chemicals. Close up.



You then see the kid tightening pipes. Mid shot.



And tightening nuts. Mid shot.



The camera reveals him fixing a shower, at the end of the pipe.



Through a low angle shot, it is revealed that he is trying to create false rain through a shower and false thunder by beating a drum.



The kid, disappointed looks at the spot.
Low angle.



And walks away. Blackout.



An old man walks towards the spot after the
blackout.



He is the same kid. Looks at the spot, and smiles at
his kiddish venture.



As he is walking away, the camera reveals a tree
grown under the ground in a different world, where
our kid scampers merrily.

Software used:

For Image Processing, Ink and Painting, and initial compositing: Animo
v5

Backgrounds: Adobe Photoshop CS4.

Textures: Hand painted with water colours on paper, and then
composited in PS CS4

Final compositing: Adobe After Effects CS4

Learning:

As an independent project, this film has taught certain key issues related to animation.

1. An exposure to the whole process of animation, from the inception of the first idea to the final compositing. Each stage in animation is of utmost importance, as one stage builds the foundation for the next. Faltering on any one leads to a vulnerable progress that is prone to disintegration.
2. The understanding of script development- figuring out what is working for the film and what is not.
3. Cultivating the ability to approach the same idea through different directions, such that although the story might sound different, it is still rich in the quintessential element.
4. Understanding the importance of sound design, and consequently working on it to make the film's content richer.
5. Exposure to wide variety of softwares which support the various stages of animation.

6. It is advisable to focus on a simple idea for a short film where time available at hand is less.

Conclusion:

In the words of Barbara Greene, "If you tell me, it's an essay. If you show me, it's a story". However, showing a story isn't merely a dramatic display of events. Every story should have an inherent structure, where one event leads to the other, and all of them together to the common goal. In order to achieve structure one must simplify an idea by scrutinizing and re-scrutinizing the story so as to remove plot holes and spurious content. Further, he needs to layer it up with elements that support the soul of the story. In this process, the nuances he is able to create through interesting visuals and incidents ultimately create an after flavor which a viewer takes home. If your visual elements are able to support the overall picture, structure is achieved automatically.