

Design Course

Experimental Animation

An Exploration

by

Prof. Nina Sabnani

IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/course/experimental-animation>



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2. Process
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Source:

<https://www.dsource.in/course/experimental-animation/introduction>

Introduction

The term Experimental Animation is usually applied to animation that is somewhat away from mainstream studio animation and often uses different materials and techniques. It may be interpreted in several ways.

Amongst those who popularised experimental animation and showed how animation could be done differently are Norman McLaren, Caroline Leaf, Len Lye, Alexander Alexeiff, Peter Foldes, Jan Svankmajer, Paul Driessen, amongst many others. Norman McLaren who was called as the 'poet of animation' spent a lifetime experimenting with sound, music and motion. He painted directly on film and showed how animation could be done without a camera. He also painted sound and produced some amazing soundtracks that no human or object had created.

Norman McLaren's critically acclaimed film Neighbours that also won an Oscar in 1952 used pixilation, demonstrating how technique and content are inseparable. Caroline Leaf's The Owl Who Married a Goose is a beautiful tale told with sand. The Street which was nominated for an Academy Award is made with paint on glass. Alexander Alexieff and Claire Parker together invented the pin-screen that allowed them to create images like engravings by pushing pins on a board.

The audience of animation is no longer limited to children alone. That too is a result of constant experimentation with the form and function of animation.

Today we see examples of animation where the maker and their material are seen together. Animators are not hiding behind their images; they are also a part of the image, as performers. What appears to fascinate animators is the process and its demystification. So not only do we see the animation in our mind's eye, we also see the process by which it comes about.

Besides materials, processes and narrative structures what is also being explored is how animation is projected. Projections are made on buildings, on performers and on shop windows. Muto, a wall painted animation by Blu (blublu.org) is an animation on a life-size scale. The animation becomes a seamless part of everyday life.

In this course, we will explore experimental animation in three broad areas:

- Process
- Material
- Narrative Structure

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Process

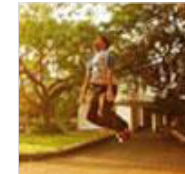
Exploring experimental animation by 'Process' means the way animation is perceived and recorded. Motion is perceived through a phenomenon known as the persistence of vision. Many animators have experimented with process to create imagery that is never drawn and sounds that have never been made, but all made possible through the technology available.

Process includes different techniques of animation like time-lapse, pixilation and rotoscopy. Here, the animator is exploring the given technology and the many ways in which the animation may be illustrated and recorded.

Different techniques explored here are:



Time-Lapse



Pixilation

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Time-Lapse

In this technique, we capture any phenomenon on camera at regular intervals. When they are seen in motion they appear to speed up the action.

For instance, if we were to point the camera at moving clouds and we took single images every one second then when the images are collated in a video the clouds will appear to move at a discernible pace. We can try this with clouds, with flowers blooming, with traffic etc.

The intervals for capturing images will vary according to the moving object. A flower takes much longer to bloom whereas traffic moves very fast. When we wish to capture images for a flower blooming, we need to know how long the flower takes to bloom. We also need to know how long we want the animation to be. So if the flower takes three hours to bloom, and we want our animation to be fifteen seconds long then we need to capture an image every twelve minutes. But if we want to capture fast moving traffic we will need to capture an image every second. Time-lapse is often used in combination with pixilation with interesting results.

Examples of these can be found in the gallery section.

Equipment Required:

- Tripod
- Digital Camera with minimum 2GB memory card
- Stopwatch
- Laptop or Desktop
- Firewire cable/data transfer cable
- Video/Image editing software (Movie maker, Adobe Premiere)
- Remote for capturing images (optional)

Assignment 1:

Directions:

- Choose the activity or phenomenon you wish to capture.
- Decide how long you wish your animation to be.
- Based on the activity decide the intervals at which you will capture the image.
- Set your camera to manual white balance, manual exposure and image format as jpeg.
- If not comfortable you could try auto settings but it is preferable to use manual settings for better results.
- Mount the camera onto the tripod and ensure it does not move.
- Using the stopwatch capture the images at the decided intervals.
- Image resolution needs to be 720 X 540 or higher but not bigger than 1024 X 768 at 72dpi.
- After the shoot is over, download images to your laptop/desktop.

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- Edit the images in Photoshop if necessary (optional).
- Assemble the images in the Video/Image editing software.

Follow this link for more info:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qw53eAD8FrE&feature=related>

- Add music or sound effects to complete your film.
- For a trial assemble the images from the candle folder and watch it burn.



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Pixilation

Pixilation is a stop motion technique in animation where live figures perform movements that are captured frame by frame. It is a controlled form of capturing images and shows interesting results. For example, figures can be seen flying, levitating or sliding in dramatic ways. This is achieved by capturing repetitive actions performed by the figures across a space. If we wish to show a figure floating then we will make the person jump and capture the image when the figure is in the air every time. When these images are assembled in the video editing software the figure appears to float. Pixilation is often used in combination with time-lapse with amazing results. Examples of these can be found in the gallery section.

Equipment Required:

- Tripod
- Digital Camera with minimum 2GB memory card
- Stopwatch
- Laptop or Desktop
- Firewire cable/data transfer cable
- Video/Image editing software (Movie maker, Adobe Premiere)
- Remote for capturing images (optional)

Assignment 2:

Directions:

- Choose the activity you wish to perform.
- Decide how long you wish your animation to be.
- Based on the activity decide the intervals at which you will capture the image.
- Set your camera to manual white balance, manual exposure and image format as jpeg.
- If not comfortable you could try auto settings but it is preferable to use manual settings for better results.
- Mount the camera onto the tripod and ensure it does not move.
- Using the stopwatch capture the images at the decided intervals.
- Image resolution needs to be 720 X 540 or higher but not bigger than 1024 X 768 at 72dpi
- After the shoot is over, download images to your laptop/desktop.
- Edit the images in Photoshop if necessary (optional).
- Assemble the images in the Video/Image editing software.
- Add music or sound effects to complete your film.
- For a trial assemble the images from the pixilation folder and watch the fun.

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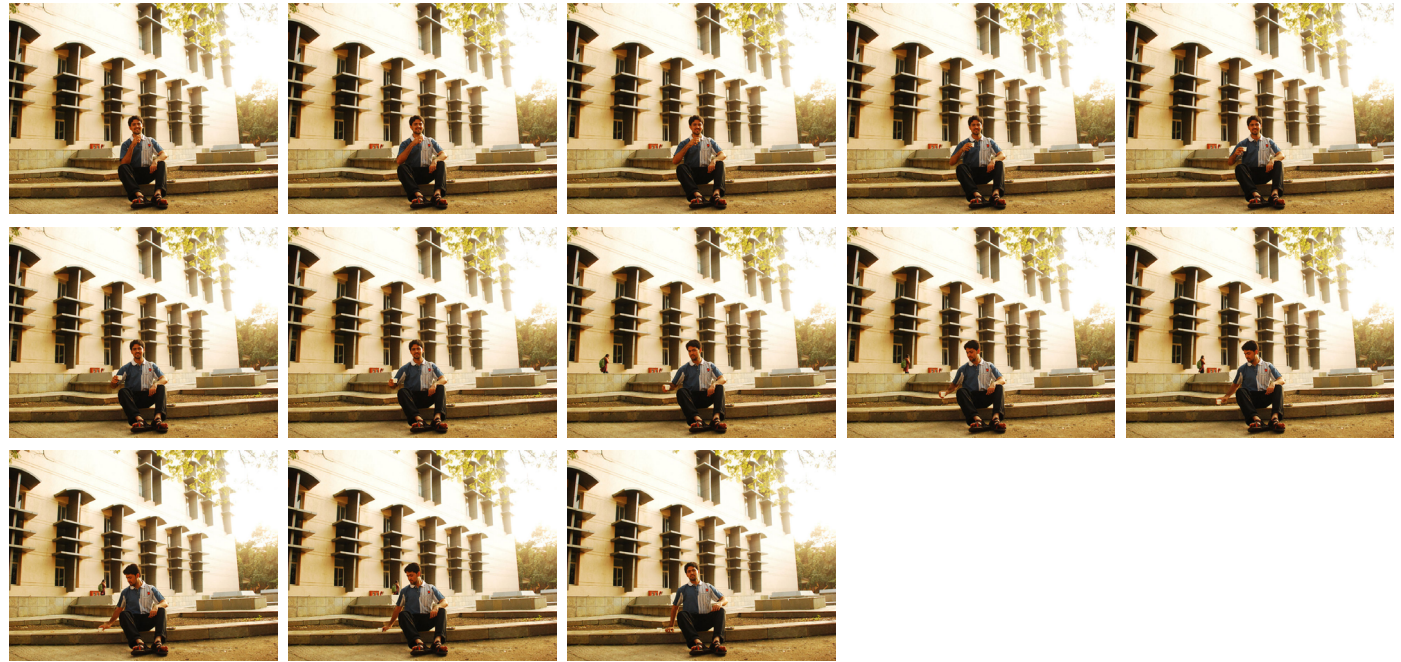
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Shot-1:



Shot-1:



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Sand Animation - Material

Materials:

Experimenting with materials involves animating materials like sand, beads, buttons, fabric and more. Here the emphasis is on using materials that magically transform into figures and situations while they continue to look like the objects that they are. Everyday objects like rubber bands, foil, bubble wrap, rubik's cube acquire new dimensions when framed and animated frame by frame. The animator relies on the viewers' ability to imagine and transpose meaning onto those objects even if they seem impossible.

Sand Animation:

Sand animation involves creating images in sand and capturing the incremental changes frame by frame. Sand particles are moved around using various tools on a backlit box covered with a translucent glass as shown in figure.



The camera is mounted vertically above the box and the light is placed inside the box; creating silhouetted images in sand.

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Because of its characteristics sand moves particle by particle creating a fluid animation.

Sand Animation can be done in Several Ways:

1. Moving the sand and capturing it frame by frame.
2. Performance animation, where the animator is seen transforming the images in camera.



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3. Sand-scapes are photographed and images created from them are animated using software.



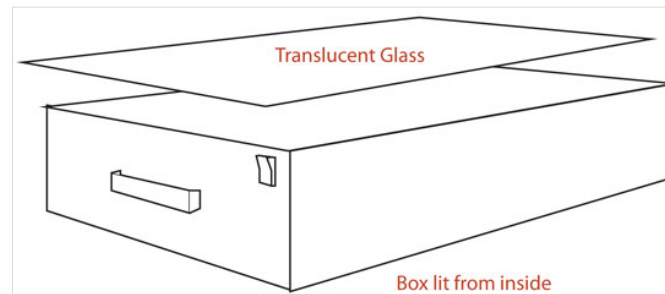
Requirements:

1. Materials
2. Equipments
3. Softwares

1. Materials:

Sandbox - Back-lit box, Rinsed sand, brushes, spatula etc.

• **Sandbox: back-lit box:**



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• Rinsed Sand:



2. Equipments:

Digital Camera with minimum 2GB memory card, tripod (camera stand), Table, Video Camera, Projector, Data transfer Cable, RG cable, white screen for projection.

3. Softwares:

Stills Capturing software (dragon), Video Editing Software (FCP, Adobe Premiere).

Types of Sand Animation:

- Frame by Frame
- Performance Animation
- Sand Cutout Animation
- Animation Techniques

The above types are explained in details in next session.

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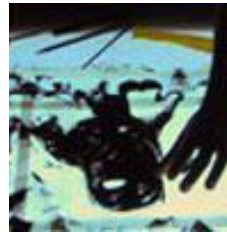
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Types of Sand Animation

Types of Sand Animation are discussed in detail in points below:



Frame by Frame



Performance Animation



Sand Cutout



Animation Techniques

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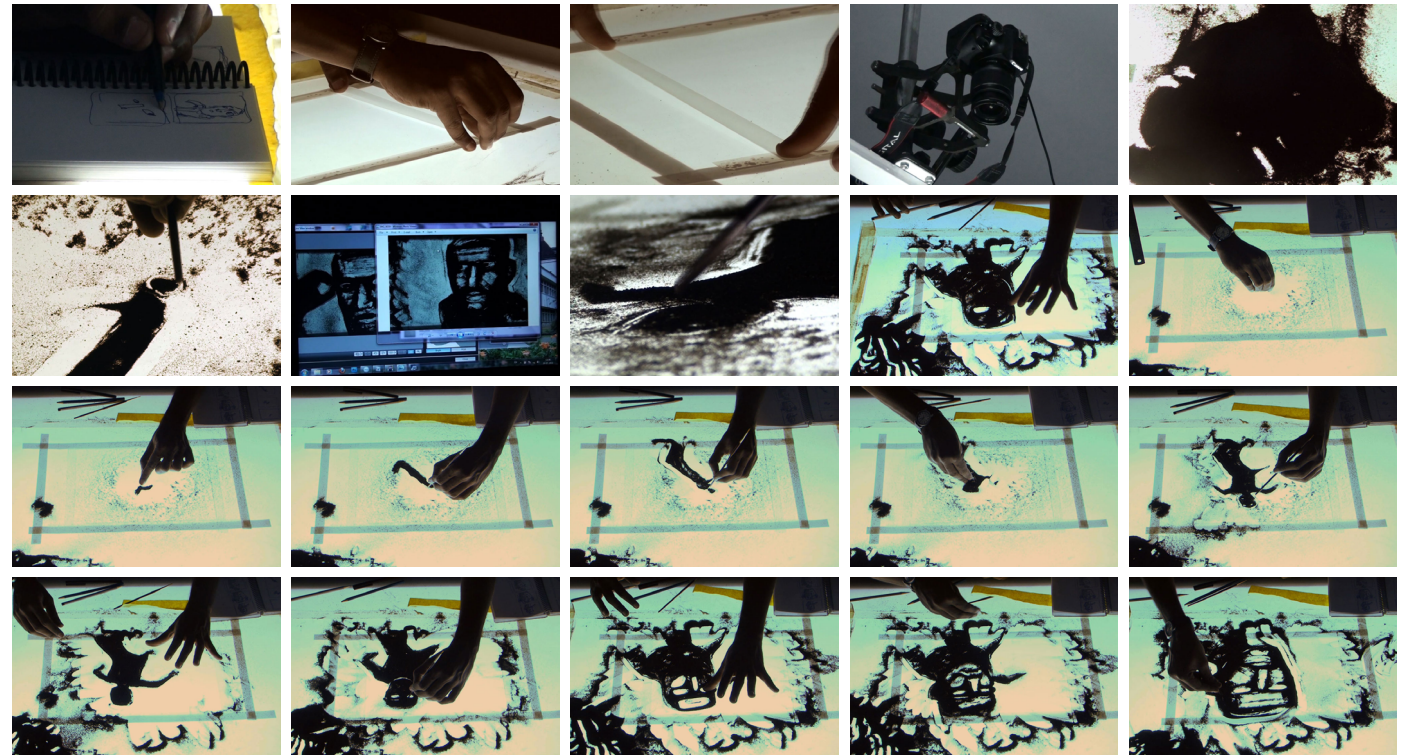
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Frame by Frame

Moving Sand and Capturing it Frame by Frame:

Directions:

1. Draw the storyboard for the film/action to be filmed.
2. Calculate the time required for each action.
3. Set the frame size for animation - Draw a boundary on the sand animation box within which the animation will take place.
4. Mount the camera firmly above the backlit box and ensure it is steady. Make sure the camera covers the frame on the backlit box.
5. Connect camera to a computer/laptop to capture images, view/ play them in timeline.
4. Move the sand to create images and capture each change frame by frame.
5. Import the images in video editing software to take a video output.
6. Edit with sound and export as mpeg, avi or mov file.



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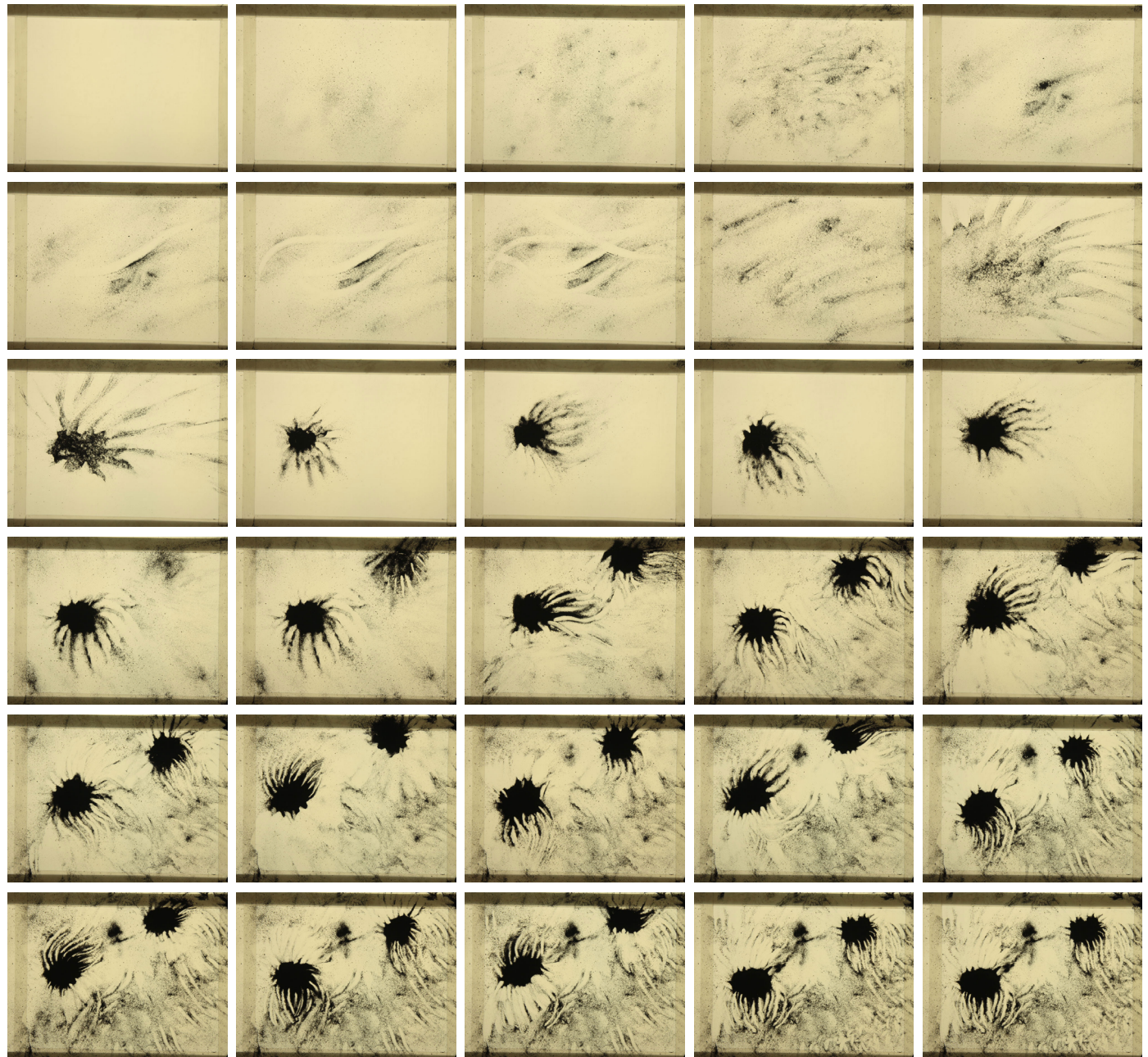
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Frame by Frame Animation by Jayamuthu Edirisinghe:



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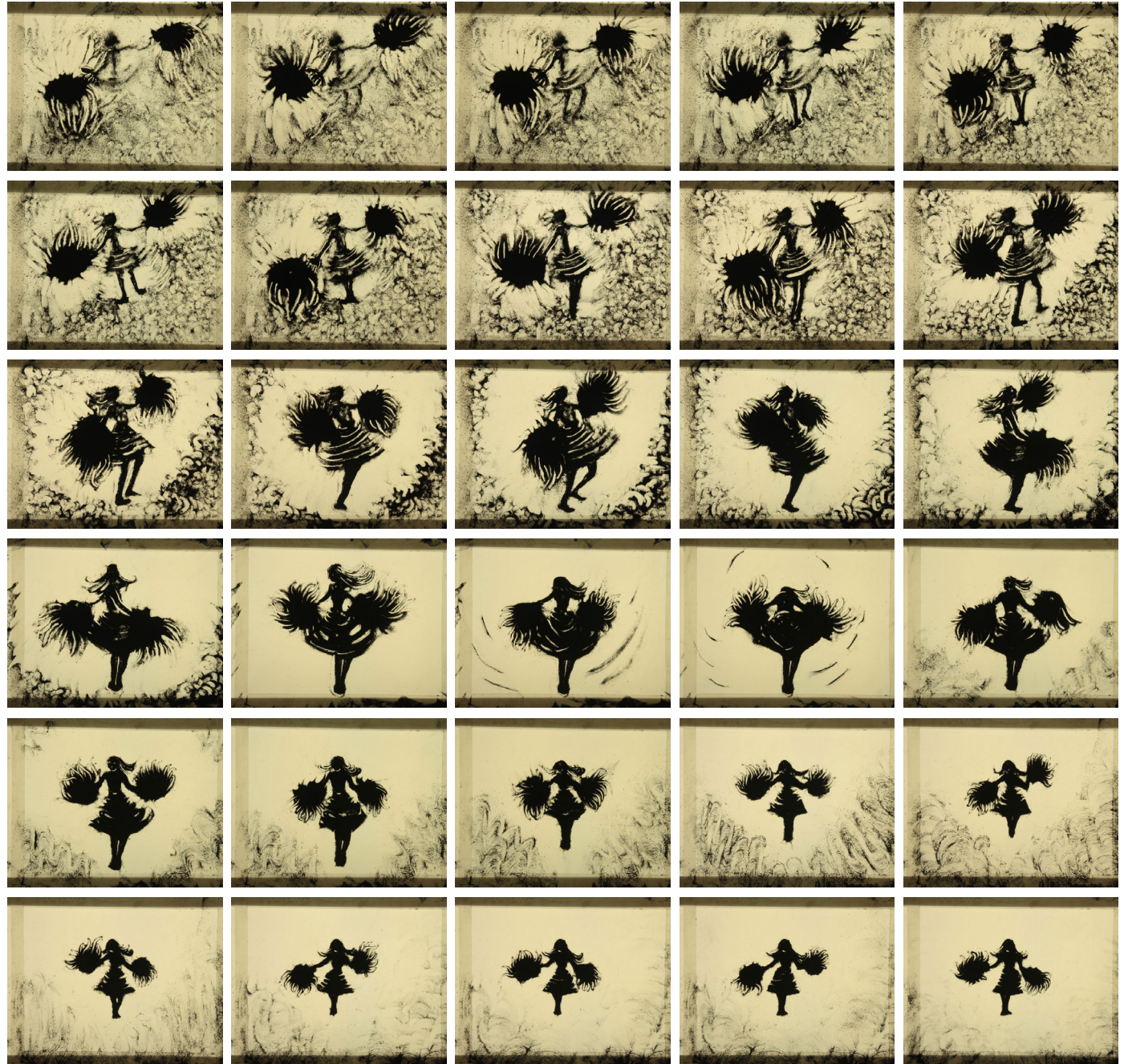
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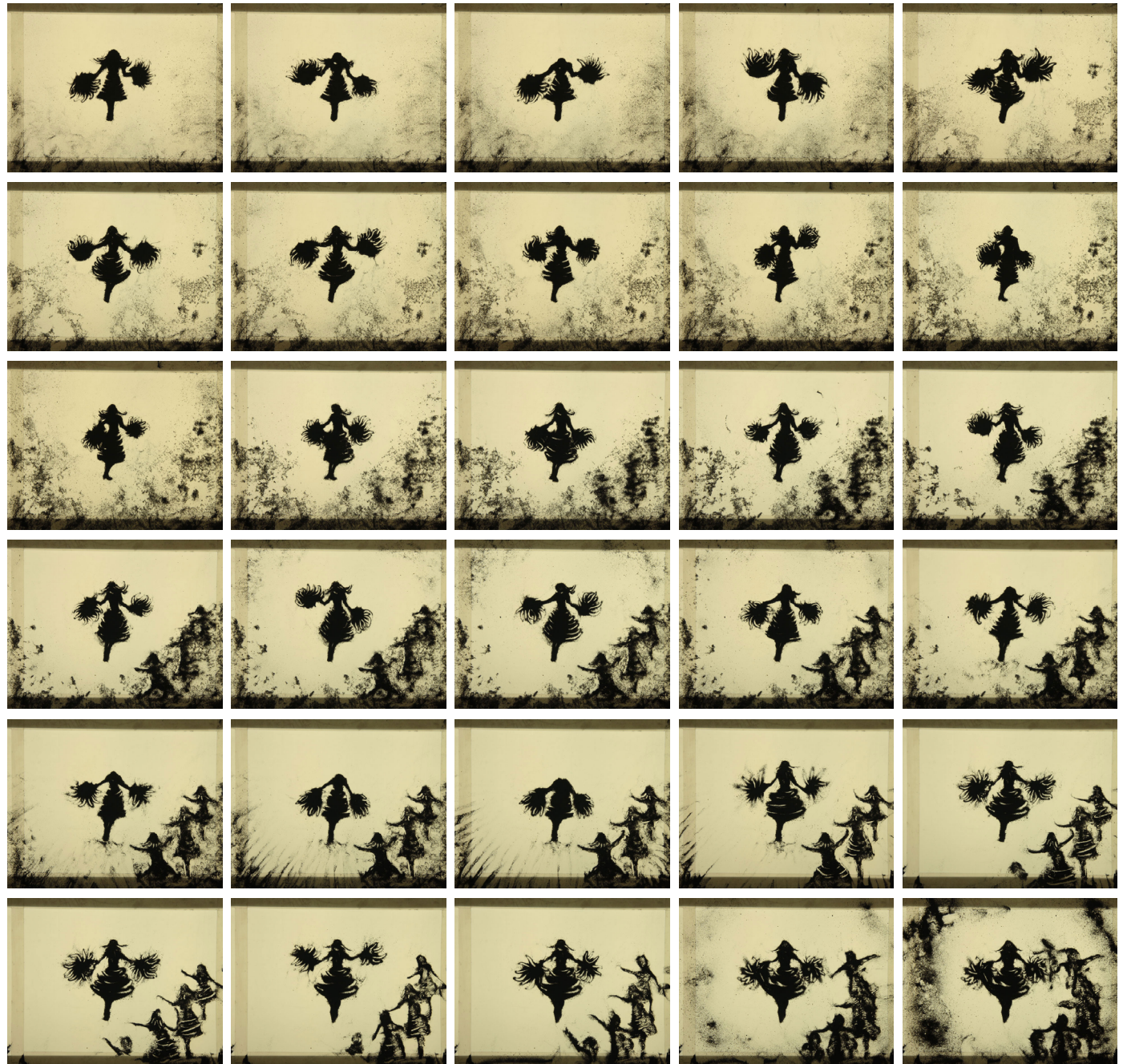
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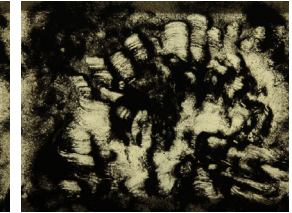
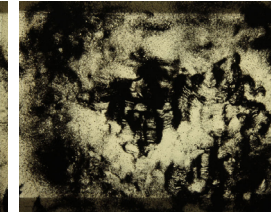
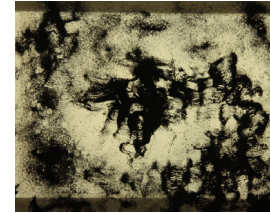
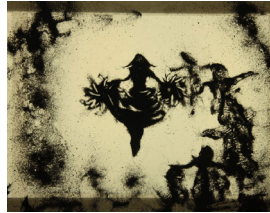
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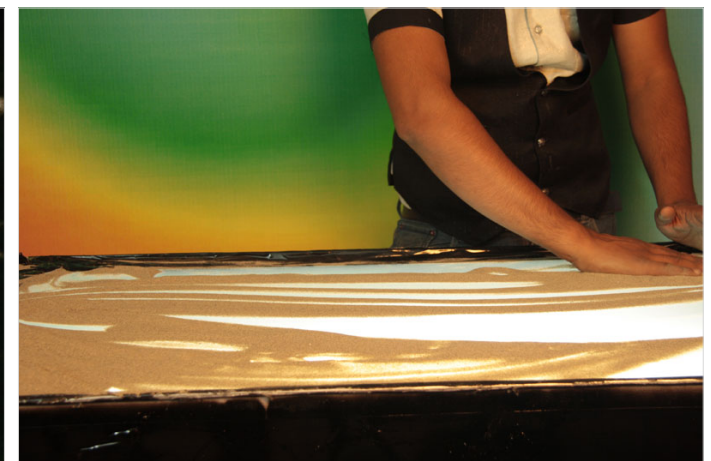
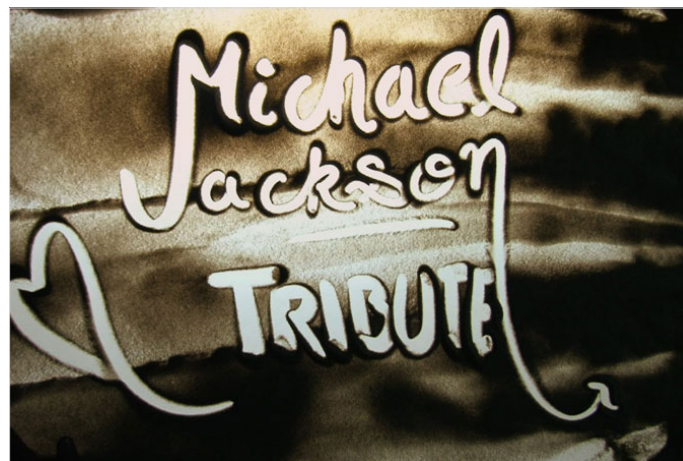
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Performance Animation

Directions:

1. Draw the storyboard for the chosen theme.
2. Select a suitable music to be played during the performance.
3. Mount the Video camera firmly above the backlit box and ensure it is steady. Make sure the video camera covers the complete frame on the backlit box.
4. Connect video camera to the projector through RG cable.
5. Make sure the ambience is dark enough so that the projection is clearly visible.
6. Move the sand to create images along with the music.



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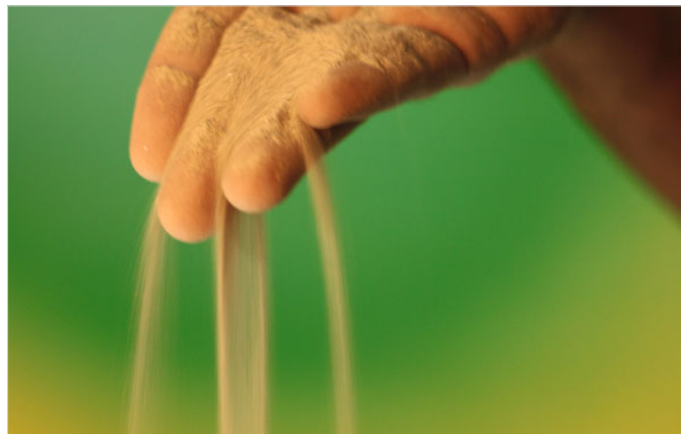
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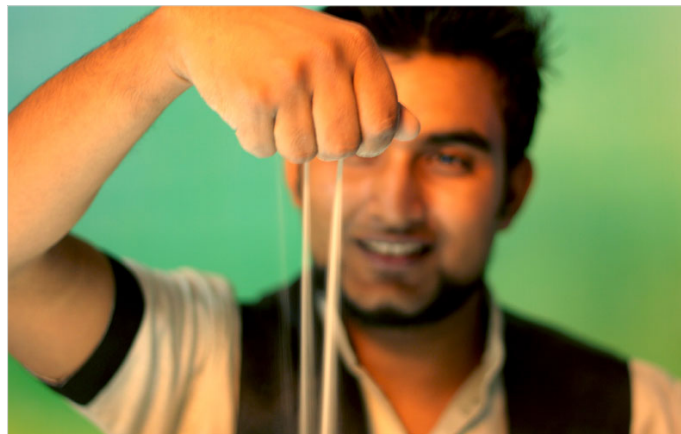
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Sand Cutout

Directions:

1. Capture images of sand.



2. Separate any visibly distinct forms from the images using Adobe Photoshop. These forms can be in the shape of bird, animal, fish etc.



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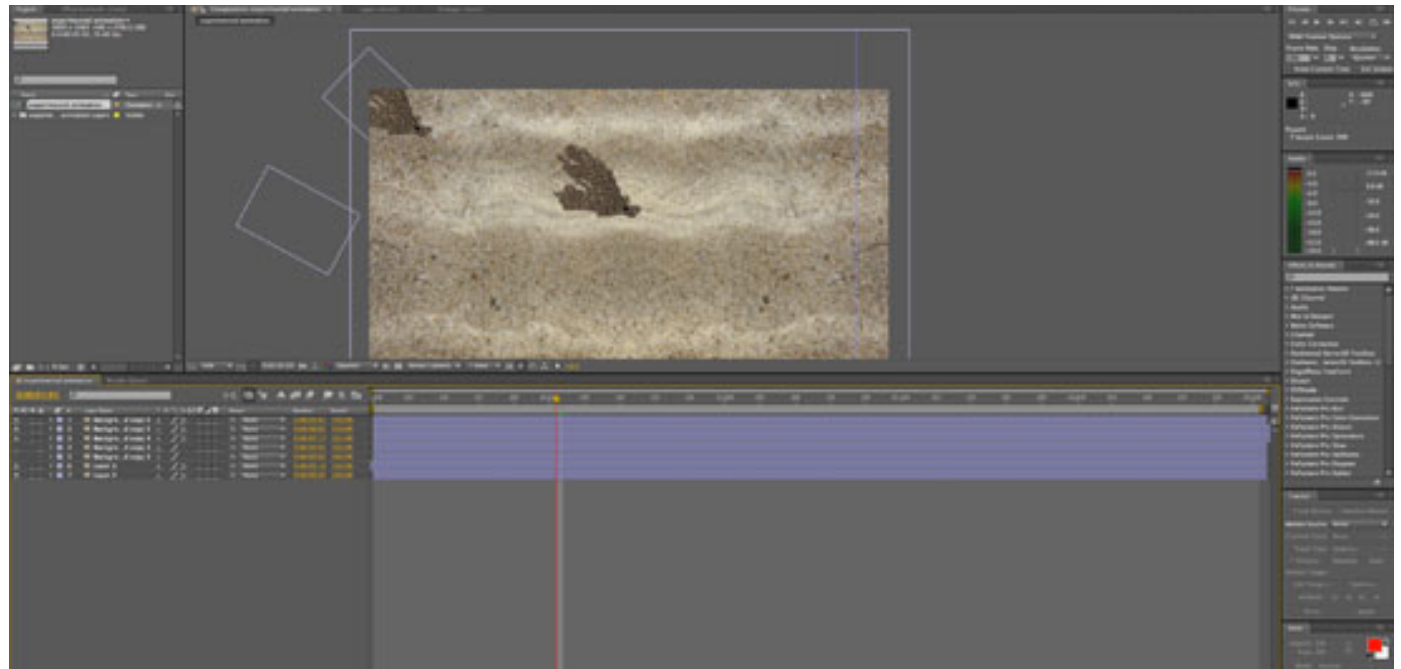
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3. Animate them like cutouts in after Effects.



4. Edit with sound using any video editing software. Export as avi or mov file.



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Animation Techniques

There are two types of Common Sand Animation Techniques :

- Pouring Techniques
- Manipulation Techniques

Pouring Techniques:

Pouring is an additive technique that varies depending on how much of the canvas is affected. Canvas pouring is used to set the texture and initial context for painting (Fig. 2 left), or, to change context while storytelling. Skinny pouring is used to draw tiny details, lines, and shape (Fig. 2 right).

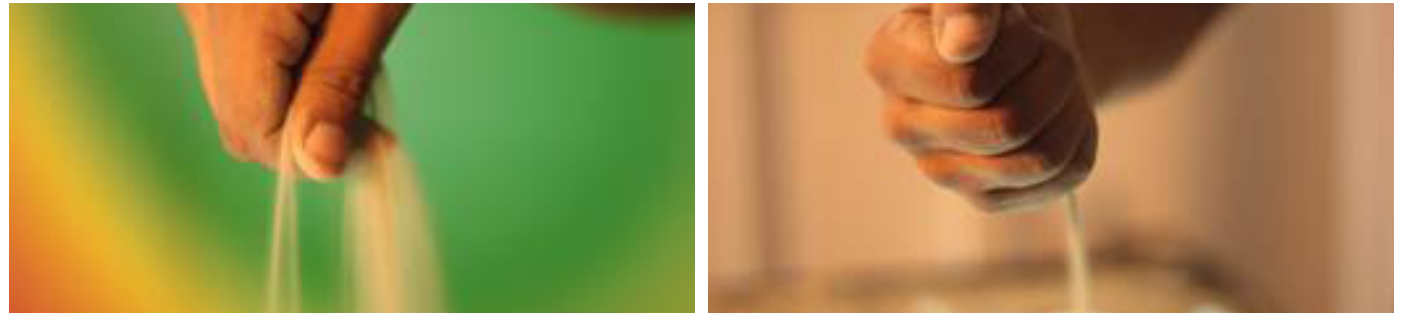


Fig 2: Canvas pouring (left) creates background textures, while skinny pouring (right) is for drawing lines.

Manipulation Techniques:

Sand manipulation techniques move sand rather than adding it. Fingertip drawing traces outlines with the tip of one or more fingers. While, finger carving uses the whole finger - index finger, small finger or thumb, for drawing and fine-tuning shapes.



Fig. 3: Fingertip drawing (left) and finger carving (right) to create and manipulate shapes.

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- **Palm rubbing:** Palms are often used to create circular or spiral like patterns.
- **Hand sweeping:** Whole hands are often used to make big sweeps to clear the canvas and set up a new stage for the animation.



Fig. 4: A palm rub (left) draws patterns, and a Hand sweep (right) clears part of canvas.

Sand animators also use both hands simultaneously to quickly draw or pour symmetrical patterns in sand.



Fig. 5: Symmetrical hand sweep (left)



Fig. 6: Fluid transformation of images.

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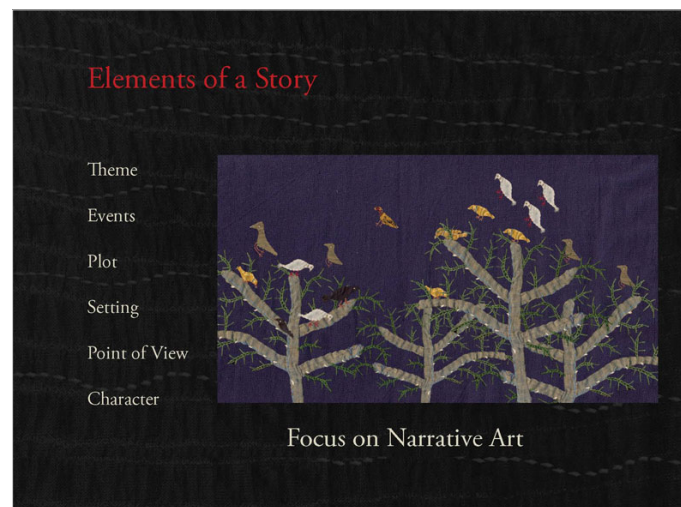
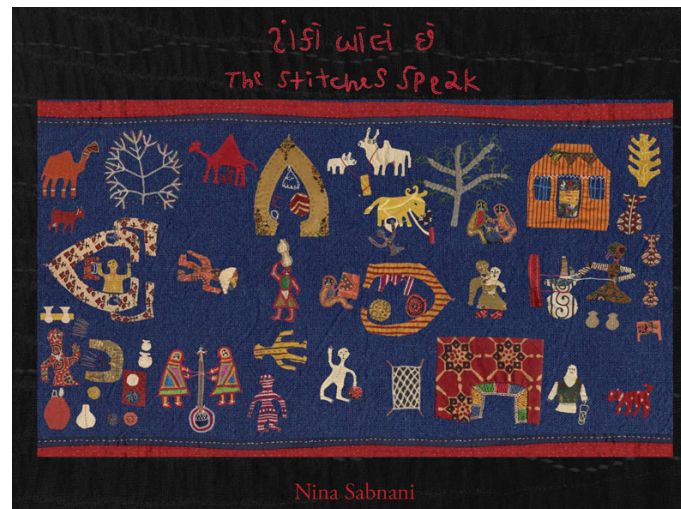
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Narrative Structure

Lastly there is exploring narrative structures and the many ways in which a story may be narrated. Conventionally, a story consists of a beginning, middle and end. Story has a conflict which is ultimately resolved. Filmmakers have explored different plot structures to challenge this convention, relying on the fact that narratives will be constructed by the viewer even if the story is not told chronologically. We may cite a few examples like The Street of Crocodiles by the Brothers Quay and Three Misses by Paul Driessen.



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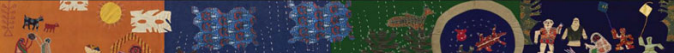
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Events

- India and Pakistan go to war in 1972
- Journey to India across the desert
- Migration and its problems
- Migration due to marriage
- Integrating into a new culture
- Dealing with hardships and natural disasters
- Evolution of the craft
- Evolution of an organization

Plot

Non-Linear / Parallel Plot
Conversations

Setting

All the characters come together in Sumrasar



Multiple journeys





Point of View

Multiple narrators

First Person
Third person

Characters



Voices

Meghiben Mariya
Sumrasar Sheikh, Kutch





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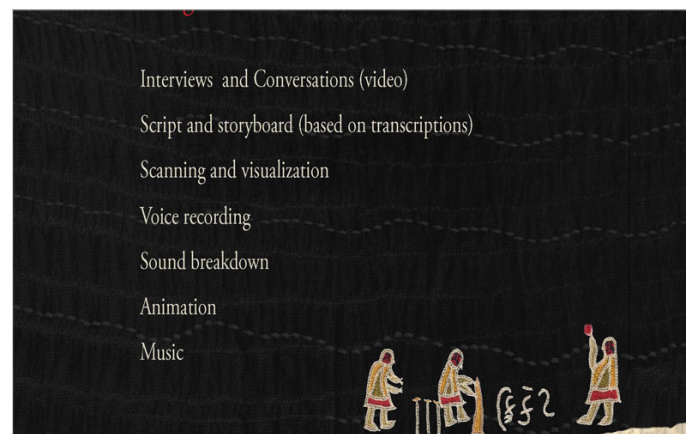
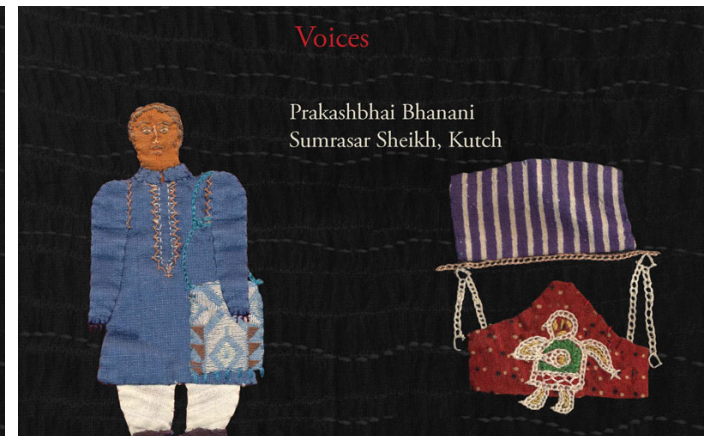
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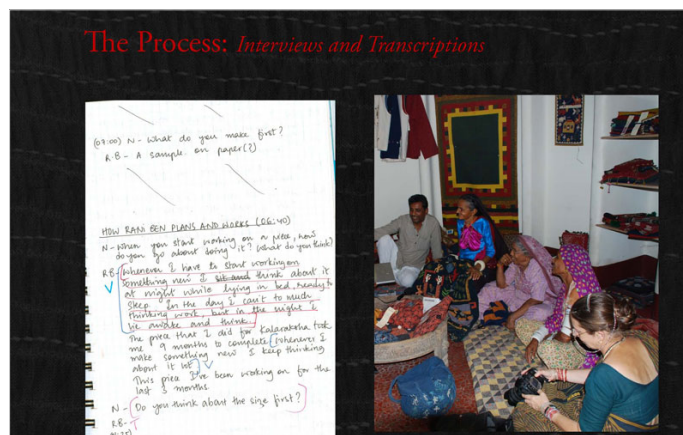
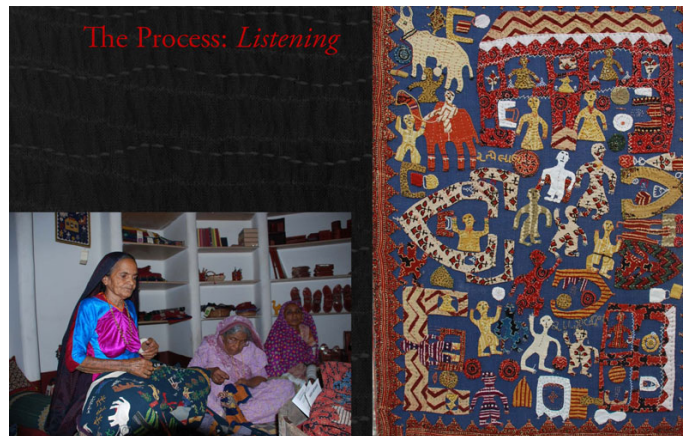


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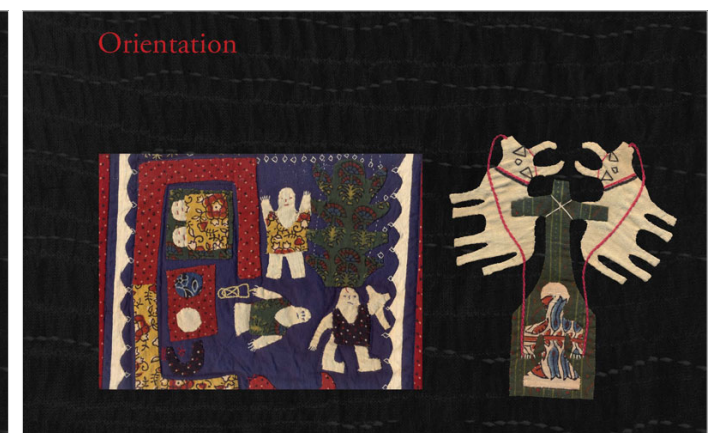
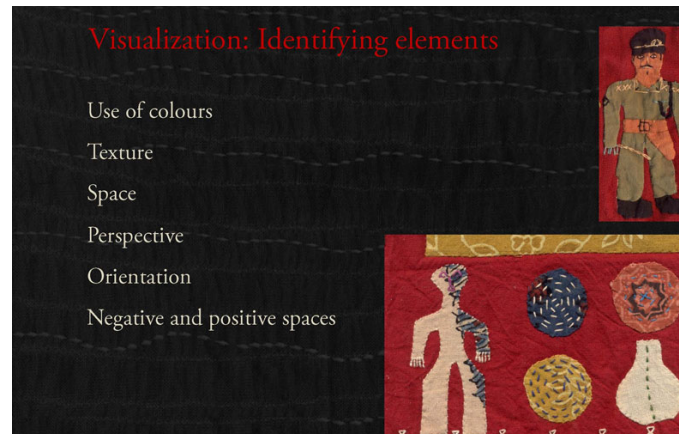
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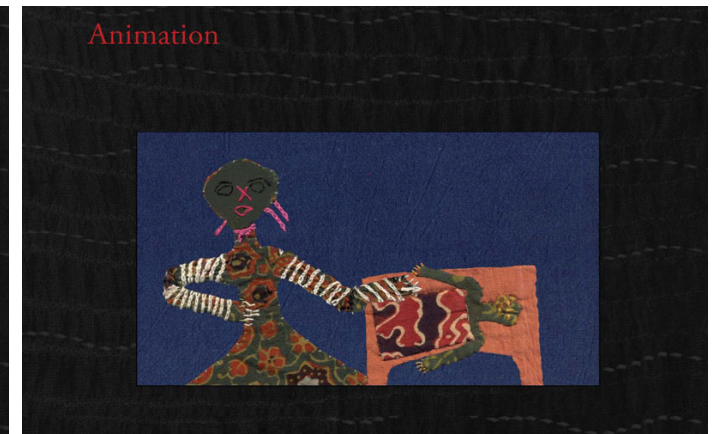
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Thank you!

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Links

For more details about sand animation check the links below:

- Sand Animation and stopmotion on glass by Cesar Diaz
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ihqr-P200XI&NR=1&feature=fvwp>
- The owl who married a goose by Caroline Leaf
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fusYZ7elhps>
- Live Sand Performance by KseniyaSimonova
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=518XP8prwZo>



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Videos



Introduction



Time-Lapse of a Burning Candle (Making)



Example of Time-Lapse 1



Example of Time-Lapse 2

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Example of Time-Lapse 3



Example of Time-Lapse 4



Example of Time-Lapse 5



Short Film High on Chai

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Making of Short Film High on Chai



Example of Pixilation 1



Example of Pixilation 2



Example of Pixilation 3

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Frame by Frame



Performance Animation



Sand Cutout Animation



Frame by Frame Example

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Tanko bole chhe



Bemata



Baat Wahai Hai - Making



Baat Wahai Hai

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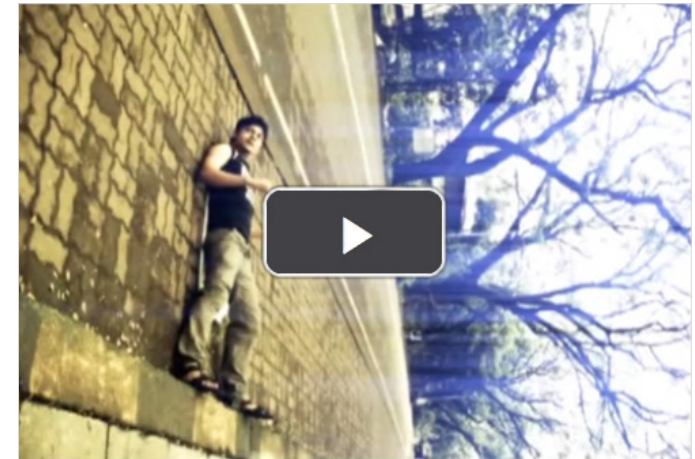
Auto



Broken Wings - Music video



Cycle



Gravity

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Materials Animation Samba - All Groups



Music Animation Yere - All Groups

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Contact Details

This documentation for the course was done by Professor Nina Sabnani, faculty at IDC, IIT Bombay.

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