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Goldfish

Author: Maryam Farahzadi

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in
Film And Animation**

Department of Film and Animation

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology(RIT)

Date of Approval: 12/17/2019

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Abstract

Goldfish is a film about Maryam, an 8- or 9-year-old girl whose dream is to pursue her artistic talent of painting. She encounters a problem due to the strict influence of her mother, who prevents her from fully pursuing her dreams. Each time Maryam is able to engage in painting, her world is filled with color, and her joy is clear. Maryam is however unable or unwilling to stand up for herself and make the autonomous decision to paint, until she observes the goldfish, who feels trapped and constrained in the bowl in which it is kept. Maryam falls asleep, after her colors are taken away, and has a dream in which the fish leaves the bowl and makes her dull paintings colorful. She learns of the importance of pursuing the dreams that fill her with life, and chooses to release the goldfish in the pond, within their courtyard.

Maryam has to face her mother, before releasing the fish in the pond, and for the first time, she becomes brave and proceeds to act on her intention. Her mother is supportive of her decision, and the film ends with Maryam happily painting beside the pond, while the goldfish swims freely and happily in it. The film, which is based on the poem, *Ali koochike (Little Ali)*, shows the happiness and self-fulfillment experienced when one follows their dreams. The essay analyzes the process of creating the film and delves into all the steps in production, the techniques, style and software used to effectively relay the message in the film. The paper shows the challenges faced by children who attempt to pursue their dreams within the Persian culture and the necessity of independence and courage in the decision-making process.

Introduction

For my thesis, I wanted to push my creative and technical skills in filmmaking, since the film I intended to make would not be my first. I had a vision of creating a film that would show my journey to the point of completing my studies at RIT. I wanted the film to encapsulate the journey I had taken and the courage I had developed to pursue my dreams. I also wanted the film to reflect my cultural experience when I chose to become a film producer. Furthermore, I had the objective to show my rich cultural heritage, the Persian influence in my films and the cumulative experience that has shaped my choice as a producer of films and animations. To relay the vision I wanted it to be set in Iran. I also realized that the impact of social pressures on the career decisions would be clearer when the story was from a child's perspective.

I had a clear plan on the story and the message I wanted to relay, having undergone various challenges to become a film producer. I knew that I wanted the story to be told from my perspective as a child. I was initially torn on the age of the main character of the film. After much thought on the age when I first became aware of my passion for art, I knew that I wanted the main character to be of a tender age. I chose the age of 8 or 9, since I could clearly remember memories from that period, and the joy I felt when I saw or did art, especially drawing and painting. I further settled on the age of the main character after consultation with my committee members, who also supported the decision to use a young character to relay the message. I wanted the film to be personal and reflect the contrasting relationship of society, my family and myself. I decided that there would be two distinct settings in the film: the family home and the school, which would contrast the support I received at home to pursue my dreams and the strict

regulations I experienced outside the home, where I was obligated to obey social conventions and pursue the visions that others had for me.

The message in my film required me to impart strong emotions to the audience and make them supportive of the message. I knew the moods I wanted to make the audience of the film feel. I wanted them to be aware of the sadness that people feel when they are barred or discouraged from pursuing their interests, especially those for which they're talented. I wanted them to also see the joy felt by people who are engaged in pursuits that they love and how important it was for their wellbeing. I decided to use these contrasting ideas to relay the different moods to the audience.

My committee asked me how I would effectively relay the message in the story. I knew that I would use different techniques, including music, color, and other animation features that could be used to move the facial and body features of the characters to make the message in the film more perceptible to the audience. My experience in using various software and plugins, including Duik Bassel, would be useful in making the audience more involved in the story, since it would make the characters and their movements more realistic. As there were numerous techniques that would be used to make the film's emotional nuances more perceptible to an audience, I decided to use minimal conversation, and instead let the actions in the film relay the intended message.

During the course of production, I engaged other team members, who provided various ideas on how to refine the film. One of the changes I made was to use more music to convey the different moods of the film. At the young age of the main character, children infrequently speak against the authoritative figures in their lives, even though they may know their own interests and talents. I also wanted to show that children are able to make some independent decisions from a tender age, by including the fish that would be released into the pond by

Maryam in the story. I thought of an action that would show that children are able to discern what their interests and dreams are and decided to use the symbolism of a fish. I also decided that the climax of the film would be Maryam's decision to release it into the pool and allow it the freedom to move. The essay delves into the steps I took during the pre-production, production and post production, to create the film, *Goldfish*.

About My Inspiration

My film is based on a poem called *Ali koochike (Little Ali)* by Forough Farrokhzad who was an influential Iranian poet. Farrokhzad was a controversial, modernist poet whose writing had iconoclastic perspectives from a feminine viewpoint. Farrokhzad's poetry sparked controversy due to her strong feminist voice that became a focus of public outrage, negative publicity and open disapproval. During a nine-month stay in Europe in 1958, Farrokhzad met the filmmaker and writer, Ebrahim Golestan, who reinforced her inclinations to freely express herself and to live independently. She subsequently published two more volumes: *The Wall* and *The Rebellion*, before traveling to Tabriz to make a film about Iranians affected by leprosy. The 1962 documentary film, *The House is Black*, won several international awards. During the twelve-day period in which the film was shot, Farrokhzad became attached to Hossein Mansouri, a child of two lepers. She adopted Mansouri and brought him to live at her mother's house.

Forough Farrokhzad was born into a middle-class family in Tehran, in 1935. She was educated in public schools, and later studied painting and dressmaking at Kamalolmolk Technical School. She was married at sixteen years to her cousin Parviz Shapour, and the union was blessed with one child, a son. After her separation from her husband, in 1954, she relinquished her custody of her son to the family of her ex-husband, and pursued poetry. In the 1950s, Farrokhzad's works, such as *The Captive*, *Call to Arms*, *The Wedding Band*, and *To My*

Sister, reflected her feminist perspectives on cultural perspectives regarding marriage, the conventional lifestyle expected of women and the female experience within the Persian culture.

Farrokhzad's first collection, *Asir (The Captive)*, was published in 1955, and was comprised of forty-four poems. Farrokhzad is a revered poet, whose works were internationally acclaimed. In 1963, for instance, UNESCO created a movie about her. The poet had an unconventional lifestyle, within the Persian context, and she explored her choices in her literary works. From works such as *The Sin*, the poet's inclination to express her autonomous and independent perspective as an Iranian woman, was evident. However, Farrokhzad met an untimely demise in 1967, through an accident in which she sustained fatal head injuries, at only thirty-two years. Farrokhzad had been hailed as being the Iranian Sylvia Plath (Dehghan, Saeed Kamali; *The Guardian* n.p). Sinarium (n.p) notes that the prominence of Farrokhzad is due to her extensive achievements in both film and poetry during her short life, thereby giving her both a legendary and enigmatic status in Iran. Farrokhzad also stands out for being a strong female intellectual in a male-dominated culture, at the time.

Ali koochike (Little Ali) is one of Farrokhzad's symbolic poems. The central character in the poem, Ali, is a young boy who wants to follow his dream, despite the external barriers he faces, such as tradition and culture. In his vivid dream, Ali sees a fish, which is a symbol of his aspirations.

My decision to make a film about Forough Farrokhzad's poem was instigated by my personal interpretation and vision of the message in it. I was particularly inspired by the poem, due to the barriers I have faced in my life, in an attempt to achieve my dreams, and as such, I felt compelled to tell a simple and short story of my own life, through the allegory in Farrokhzad's poem.

Apart from the poem, my film was also inspired by two animation films. One of them was *Persepolis (Satrapi)*. The film addressed the experience of a young Iranian girl who attempts to navigate the Persian culture and achieve her dreams. The animation film was set up in the Persian culture and captured the essence of the political, social and cultural challenges experienced by the girl Marji. I also drew inspiration from the film, since it was an animation and I could therefore analyze it to understand how techniques and symbols were applied to improve the storytelling. The film was also based on a true story of a precocious young girl and although the film was much longer than the film I intended to make, it was a source of inspiration for me. I also found inspiration in the animation film, *Brave*. The film was recently made, in contrast to *Persepolis*, and includes contemporary techniques of puppet design and animating. The story was also similar to mine, since its background was in a past time and entailed a story of a female character who defies social norms to forge her own path.

The Additional Challenges of Making it Personal

To fully understand the reasoning behind my decision to make this specific film, as well as the production process I went through, it is important for me to explain my personal struggles, especially the cultural restrictions and personal challenges I have experienced while following my dreams. Due to my upbringing in the Persian culture, I have often found it a challenge to go against my parents' wishes on the major life decisions I have made, such as the choice of a career. As a young child, I respected my parents and understood that they loved me, and their guidance was a show of affection, which was meant to help me become the best version of myself. However, there were instances where I had different interests from those my parents had envisioned for me. Consequently, I faced a challenge in developing an autonomous and independent voice, especially regarding the things I was passionate about, such as art.

The film reflected the experience I had as a child, where I often feared that my parents were too strict, and would not let me follow my dreams, when in reality, their guidance was only due to their love, and their understanding of the stands I took.

The Struggle of Developing the Story

At the onset of developing the film, I wanted to visualize the poem, Little Ali, and have the poem narrated on the film. In my first meeting with my adviser, he helped me to create my film, based on my own interpretation of the poem since it was too long. After reviewing the new script with my advisor, I started to make the animatic based on the new ideas and myself as the main character, to see the flow of the story. The version had five characters (mom, Dad, Maryam, fish and brother) and many repetitive shots. The fish was also in the pond from the beginning as in the poem, and when Maryam sees the fish, it invites her to jump in the pond to help her to follow her dreams. Maryam's parents prevented her from going to the pond as they were worried about her safety. In the end, she jumps in the pond and turns into a fish herself. When I showed my story on the animatic night, at RIT, the feedback I received showed that the story of the film was unclear, as many people wondered whether actions such as jumping into a pond and turning into a fish relayed the intended message. The audience opined that the action amounted to being trapped in a magical world underwater.

I developed a second version, where I removed some of the repetitive shots and characters, including Maryam's brother, who were not crucial for the story. I also addressed the comments I had received on animatic night by making Maryam's aspirations and obstructions clearer. I also created a better solution for the ending, by making the underwater more appealing and magical. However, when I showed the second version of the story to my committee members at the end of the first semester of my thesis, they decided that the intended

message of the animatic was still unclear. This version had an extra shot in school where the teacher also stops Maryam from painting. My committee's feedback included suggestions on the solutions to improve my story and since I had already rigged my characters, I still had some time to implement these changes.

I decided to eliminate the school shot since everyone believed that it did not add anything to my story. I also show the fish in a fish bowl from the beginning of the film, which was a reflection of Maryam's character.

Time and place

The film I made is centered on the 8-9-year-old version of myself. The setting of the film is in the 90s, in my hometown in Iran. I illustrated my home at the time, which was a type of traditional Persian house. The Persian houses have distinct features and characteristics that make them different from the houses in Western countries, and as such, I had to show the surroundings before beginning my story. Furthermore, my choice of a traditional Persian house was critical, due to the features of such homes, which include a pond that was a key element in my film. The pond is considered the heart of traditional Iranian architecture.

The Persian pond is an important feature in Iranian homes, since it is used for ablution, decoration, and the water in it is used for domestic purposes (Saadatrent.com n.p.). The Iranian pond is traditionally decorated with potted plants and flowers, which are used to create a positive ambience at home. The ambience reflects the supportive atmosphere that was included in my film. The ponds are also designed in Persian courtyards and have fish, which inspired my inclusion of the character in the film. According to *Iran Daily* (6), traditional Persian homes, which were constructed after the architecture of the Achaemenid period, often entailed two or more separate living quarters in two-story, rectangular structures. The exterior of the homes

entailed landscaped courtyards, with rose gardens, ponds and fountains. In the film, the Persian pond first appears in the second scene, where Maryam sits on the porch steps of the house, painting the pond that is before her. The outside structure of the house reflects Persian architecture, which can be discerned from the patterns on the handles of the steps. The pond in the courtyard is, however, the main indication in the scene, that the place in which the film is set, is in Iran. The colorful flowers that surround the pond also correspond to the existing knowledge that the ponds in Persian homes were often decorated with flowers and plants (Saadatrent.com n.p.) (Iran Daily, 6).



Fig. 1. "Persian House." *Twitter*, @Iran_Style, 16 Apr. 2017,

twitter.com/iran_style/status/853511799865569282.



Fig. 2. "Persian House." *Ferdowsi International Grand Hotel,*

www.ferdowsihotel.com/Blog/PostDetails/36/One-day-tour-to-remember-the-old-house-in-Tehran-beside-all-the-beauties-of-the-Iran-art.



Fig.3."Persian House." *Pinterest, 15 May 2019,*

in.pinterest.com/pin/537898749239665012/?lp=true.

Persian culture

Iran has a rich cultural heritage that has developed for more than 2500 years. The family is the basic unit of the social structure in the country. In Iran, the family, is more private than in many other cultures. Female relatives are particularly shielded from external influences, and are protected and cared for at all times. In the Iranian culture, it is inappropriate to ask questions about another's wife or female relatives, for instance. Iranians take their responsibility to protect and care for their families very seriously. Most families in the country are small, with an average

of two children. However, extended family members are quite close. The family provides a support system for every individual, as it is the social network that provides primary assistance in times of need. Elderly relatives, for instance, are cared for at home, as opposed to being placed in nursing homes. Loyalty to the family supersedes other social relationships, including business. Nepotism is, therefore, positively valued, since it implies that a business is built from trust, with well-known relatives, who can be depended on to promote family interests.

The role of parents in shaping the lives of their children is a crucial element in Persian culture. Iranian parents prioritize their children, in some instances, over the marital bond (Price n.p). Parents are involved in the decision-making processes for their children, such as their choice of profession and spouse. The lack of parental approval for future spouses complicates decisions on matrimony, and the arrangement of marriages is a common feature in the Persian culture (Cultural Atlas). Furthermore, parents also provide the financial support required to conduct elaborate weddings and pay dowry. Children, therefore, heavily rely on their parents, who in turn exercise more control on them. The Persian culture further places the primary responsibility on parents to instill religious, cultural and other moral values that are upheld in the country. Although parents sometimes exercise strict control over their children, parental affection is common, thereby making most Iranian children comply with the rules, standards and values espoused by their parents (Price n.p).

The film reflects the cultural attributes of the Persian culture, with a special focus on the relationship between a child and the parent. Maryam's mother shows her role in shaping Maryam's life by guiding her on decision-making processes such as reminding her that she should do her homework when she is seated on the porch, painting the pond. Maryam's mother also appears in the scene where Maryam goes to release the goldfish in the water, albeit she allows Maryam to proceed. The film is, therefore, indicative of the strong bond between children

and parents in the Persian culture. The film also shows that parents in Iran provide a balance to children by helping guide them, albeit they also allow the kids to make some pertinent decisions. Moreover, from the film, it is evident that Maryam knows that her mother would support her in her decision to release the fish into the pond, thereby symbolizing that in the Persian culture, children are aware of their parents' love for them, and that they have strong social support to make independent decisions.

Visual Development and Influences

Visual development refers to the style adopted in creating visual art, which entails the determination of the graphic design, animation, illustration, and concept art (Beach 4). Visual development is a creative role that requires versatile knowledge of various media formats that are applicable in the production of a film. Having worked on several films prior to this one, I have developed some distinctive techniques that make my work unique. My films, for instance, entail the use of rich color palettes, which reflect the Persian culture. The colors are captured in the background of the first scene, where many paintings by Maryam are stuck on the wall. The role of an artist who specializes in visual development is to create the mood, determine the appropriate color palette for a film and choose a tone that reflects the imaginary world that is envisioned (Beach 4). In the film, I achieved this by influencing the perception of the audience on the events occurring in each scene through the use of several techniques, including the use of music and the dramatic and distinctive lack of color in the scene where Maryam feels restricted from enjoying her passion and following her dreams, after her colors are taken away, thereby preventing her from painting.

The work of a visual development artist extends to all spheres that are required to create the features of the film, which may include designing clothes, props, sets and lighting, that is used as the background of a film (Hurbis-Cherrier 13). I took a hands-on approach to the production of the film and was engaged in every decision made on aspects such as choice of lighting for each scene and the colors used on the clothes of the characters. A visual development artist must have a keen eye for detail, since even the slightest change in a character is crucial to the effects perceived by an audience, and determines whether the film generates mass appeal. The animation, painting, drawing, design and illustrative skills of a development artist are used to bring the vision of the film into fruition (Hurbis-Cherrier 7). Consequently, I oversaw the entire process of producing the film, and ensured that all the techniques used corresponded to my vision of the film.

Film style refers to the techniques adopted by filmmakers to make their works recognizable and distinguishable amongst their peers, which creates a different value of their creations. The film style, according to Beach (46), is similar to the handwriting of a director, which does not often mirror other directors. Since there are numerous techniques that can be applied to a single film, which can be applied in different measures, there are no two films that have completely similar styles. Lighting, camera movements, backgrounds and type of costumes are all features that can be variedly applied to create a distinct style for a director. The underlying rule in film style is to produce the story without bringing the audience's attention to the camera or editing (Reinhard and Olson 28).

Color

Although I knew that I wanted the setting and the characters to reflect the Persian environment, style and atmosphere, I had to determine how the Iranian culture would be presented in the visuals of the film. The first step in my quest to create the best Persian visuals for the film was to research and determine the appropriate color pallet. Prior to beginning my research, I had a broad idea that I preferred to use highly saturated colors albeit I had to utilize them meaningfully. The general rule that guided my preference was the use of fully saturated colors to show happiness and delight in a character. Conversely, dull and muted colors would be used to signify loss of hope. Moreover, the use of saturated colors also had to be purposeful, to make the main elements of the story, such as my character and the fish, distinguishable in every shot and to bring more attention to their parts in the film.

Through my research, I developed a small mood board of various Persian-styled houses, clothes and food. The Persian style is colorful and extremely saturated. I therefore had to balance between the need to convey meaning without losing my audience's attention, and the reflection of the colorful pallet in Persian culture. I faced a challenge in determining the number and types of colors to use in the film. However, after consulting with my background designer, we decided to narrow down the focus of viewer on certain areas of different shots by intentional use of light, reflections, and shadows while keeping the saturated color scheme, preserving the authenticity of the color palette.

Symbols

The poem that inspired my film, *Ali koochike*, contains myriad symbols. This section will address the symbolism in contemporary Persian poetry before delving into the symbols I used in my film and their meaning.

Contemporary Persian Poetry

In the Persian society, external and internal constraints are placed on a poet to avoid ambiguity, when using symbolism in literary works. The symbolic approach in contemporary poems can be traced to the political and social poets of the era of the Shah of Iran. The symbolism was developed due to repetitive usage, especially in reference to natural phenomena, which resulted in identical messages in many poets' works during the period. Nevertheless, to explore their innovative abilities and their creative prowess, poets adopted a novel approach, which entailed the usage of exclusive and unique symbols to local words. Although the symbolism used within local contexts was not replicated in later years, the most revered poets of the contemporary era were those whose use of symbolism featured elements of defamiliarization. Farrokhzad's use of symbolism mainly reflected her personal life, and she hardly ever used political meanings. The mood of her poems was sad, full of despair and dissatisfaction: Sparrow (simplicity, frank and friendship);

Symbols I Used

-Fish

I used the fish as a symbol for an autonomous stand or dream in my personal life, such as a decision on a career. The fish, when constrained to the bowl, showed the stifling nature of the social and cultural forces that constrained my individual choice. The fish was a resounding

force, and struggled to achieve freedom, as observed from the third and last scene, where it jumps in the bowl, attempting to convince Maryam to let it be free. Maryam ultimately understands the need for autonomy in decision making, after she suffers a similar fate when her crayons are taken away. Consequently, she understands how important it is to exploit her full potential and achieve her dreams, which causes her to release the goldfish into the pond.

-Pond

The pond represented the freedom to choose and make decisions, since it was the place where the goldfish could move freely. The pond was also a symbol for autonomy and independence, since the fish was given more leeway to move in the pond, than in the fish bowl. The pond was also a central feature in the Persian home, thereby symbolizing the ideal and value of free expression and independent decision making in the culture. The pond was a place where the fish could freely move, and Maryam seems happiest as she paints near the pond, thereby symbolizing that freedom, independence and autonomy are values that are upheld in Persian homes.



Fig.4. "Persian Pond." *Pinterest*,

www.pinterest.it/pin/747316131886492026/?autologin=true.

-Mother

The mother was a symbol for the Persian parents, and the influence that children get from the extended family members in the home setting. Although such influence is aimed at promoting the wellbeing of all members of the family, it constrains individuality and personal decision making. However, from the scene where Maryam's mother observes her going to release the fish into the pond and does not chastise her, it is evident that parents in the Persian culture are only strict when offering guidance, that they are understanding and supportive when children make independent decisions that adhere to the values that they are taught in the home setting.

Technique

I determined my preferred technique for my film from the early stages of the film-making process. The film is a 2.5D, Digital Cut-Out animated in Adobe After Effects, utilizing multiple plugins for rigging and animation. Most of my previous films were created in the traditional cut-out style, and for my thesis film, I aimed to improve my technique in cut-out by adding another dimension, that is, rigging my characters with new plugins, which replicate the 3rd dimension in 2D cut out style.

The 'Cut-Out Animation' Technique

Cut-out is a type of animation that utilizes stop-motion, or stop-action, which are used to shoot under the camera, as the camera points down at the images (Kahraman 1). The technique requires the camera to be held steady on a copy stand or a tripod that is angled down. To execute the technique, one must create hinged puppet characters and use replacement animation for certain moves. The technique produces the best front and side shots of the characters, albeit it is difficult to create 3/4 view of the characters in cut-out (Kahraman 1). However, due to technological advances, it is much easier to produce different shots of characters. Cut-out animation is effectively used to produce silhouettes, collages, stylized designs, fully-colored hinged puppets or a combination of these styles (Kahraman 1).

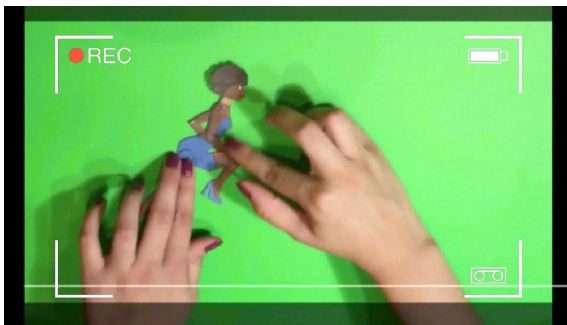


Fig.5. Revolvly, LLC. "Cutout Animation' on

Revolvly.com." *Revolvly*, www.revolvly.com/page/Cutout-animation.

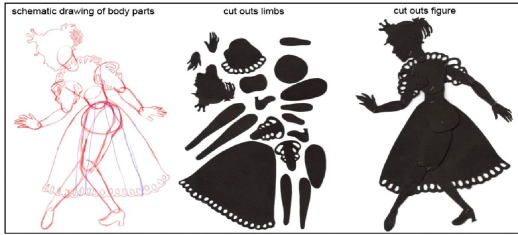


Figure 2- Sketch, cut-out limbs and figure

Fig.6. Yuan, Ning. “ Sketch, Cut-out Limbs and

Figure .” *Figure 2 from Production Design for Traditional Cut-out Animation: Digital Remediation of Genre-Specific Aesthetics | Semantic Scholar*, 1 Jan. 1970,

www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Production-design-for-traditional-cut-out-digital-Yuan/3b3f7d9887afda0ff08210be66a109ce49a46c02/figure/1.

How to Animate in ‘Cut-Out Animation Style

In the traditional Cut-out style, hinged characters, that is, cut-out 2-D puppets, are moved frame by frame under the camera. Some characters do not, however, require hinges: for instance, a fish that glides past a camera. The more hinges required, the more difficult it becomes to move a puppet. However, in the digital cut-out style, all characters are rigged in the software environment, which basically follows the same rule.

Software and Plug-ins

The use of software and plug-ins in filmmaking has developed efficiency in the productivity of filmmaking, since it saves resources, including time and finances, which can be spent to refine the details of the story (Shorr n.p.). The software and plugins have automated many functions in the process of film production, enabling different team members on a project to simultaneously work to produce the film in record time (Manovich 35). The software and plugins have also enhanced the overall effect in film by providing mechanisms for creating preferred effects in characters, especially through movements and rotations that make the animations more realistic (Creighton, Brugge and Angerer 6).

In the film, *Goldfish*, I used the latest version of Duik Bassel plugin to rig my characters. The plugin has been popular amongst cut-out style animators for a long time. The latest version of the software has innovative features, which are useful for enhancing a film beyond the traditional cut-out style animations, thereby making it more engaging to an audience. The new version of Duik is the largest script that has ever been developed for After Effects, enhancing the number of poses that can be created with layers. Additionally, the poses can be mixed, thereby making it easier to rig hands, eyes, mouths, or even create a set of poses for the entire body of a character. The software can also be used for motion graphics and abstract animation.

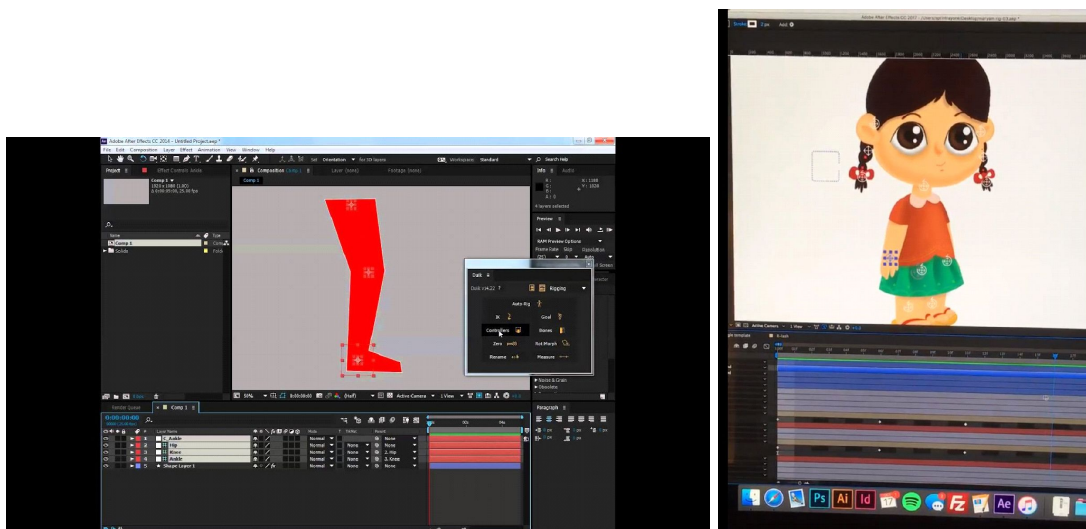


Fig.7. Maryam Farahzadi. “Duik rigging screenshot.” 2019. JPEG file.

Duik Bassel is the biggest script available for After Effects. In the process of learning how to use the new version of the plugin for my film, I realized that it is deserving of the name, the ‘tool set’ for After Effects. The software has an extensive list of features, since it incorporates many different scripts, which are packaged together to present novel mechanisms for creating animation in After Effects.

The plugin is also free as the developer believes that free and open source software improves the creative processes in the industry, thereby enhancing the quality of products in the market.

I also used another plugin, 'Joysticks N' Sliders'. Subtle movements are critical for enhancing animations into amazing films, and Joysticks N' Sliders helped me improve the quality of my animation film. Joysticks 'N Sliders creates a rotational dimension to movements and control them with one joystick. Using the software, the role of the creator is to set five consecutive keyframes with the Joystick tool to represent the origin, right, left, top, and bottom extremes, and once those layers are selected, a joystick controller is created and used on the stage to interpolate appropriately between extremes.

The Sliders tool has a similar setup to Joystick. Although sliders are more technical than joysticks, for controlling animation, they can be much more efficient. Unlike joysticks, there is no limit of the movements and extremes.

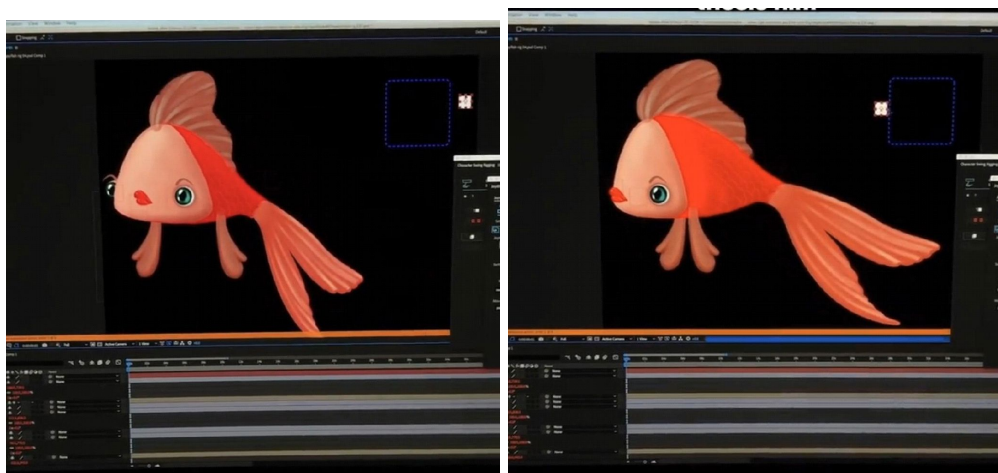


Fig.8. Maryam Farahzadi. "JoyStick N Sliders rigging screenshot." 2019. JPEG file.

Character Design

Character design is often challenging, since it requires creative thinking and imagination to create a character. Although many of the famous characters of cartoons, TV shows and movies may appear simple, a great deal of ability and skill is needed to successfully make them. A character plan requires clean lines and readability of characters' features. Moreover, there are other considerations for character design. In the character design classes that I attended at RIT, I learned the importance of exaggeration and playing down, for desired effect. I also learned that it was crucial to give a hint of background and depth, and to develop the personality of the character.

Like many other character designers, I began my character design with a sketch. After a couple of sketches, based on the pictures and references that I had collected beforehand, I started to capture the essence of the characters. Based on the first version of my story, I had 4 characters: 1-Fish 2-little girl 3-Mom 4-Dad. After rewriting my story, I removed the dad's character. To make the film more personal, I chose my persona as the main character of the film. The little girl is, therefore, the reflection of my own character. I consequently decided to use the pictures of myself, at a young age, as an inspiration for Maryam's character. I also wanted my character to have a specific characterization of innocence and intelligence.

I sketched several versions of the character and shared them with my advisor and committee members. Based on their advice, I finalized the character of Maryam. In my design, I had to consider that the characters had to be capable of being rigged in After Effects. Therefore, before I started the character design process, I conducted research on the new tools and the new version of Duik that I wanted to use for rigging my characters. The model sheet shows my cutout character design process and includes my initial characters: design, hand drawn on paper with pencil, pen and ink, the cutout body bits colored and textured in Photoshop and the

final character rig assembled in After Effects. I also included screen shots of the cutout character in Photoshop (with the live action character reference) and the rigged character in After Effects.

The main character of my film is a little girl with specific personality traits that I had to reflect in her character design. Her main traits are: innocence, smartness, timidness, artistic and happy. I had to visualize and incorporate these personalities in my character design. I chose large black eyes to depict the innocence of my character. I exaggerated the size of her head to show that she was smart.

Fish is another important character in my film. The fish was a symbol of love, power and truth. To visualize all of these characteristics, I used visual forms such as using a long forehead for my fish to emphasize intelligence and problem solving. I also used the shape of a triangle which is a known form for depicting wisdom and stability. To show how dreamy and fancy the fish was, I designed a long, smooth tail which was inspired by a bride's tail.



Fig.9. Maryam Farahzadi. "Character Design sketches" 2019. JPEG file.

Puppet Design

The first step of designing the puppet was to assemble it in separate pieces by making the actual artwork first, through drawing and coloring on paper with pencil crayons and watercolours or creating the elements using software like Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator. I left a transparent region around each puppet piece while designing the puppets. I was also careful in trimming the regions around the puppet pieces to ensure they were succinct. I also avoided the use of too many pixels outside the regions of the artwork to make it easier to move the objects. The next step was to save the pieces in separate files, as PSD or PNG with an alpha or matte channel; or TIF or TGA files with an alpha channel. JPGs were avoided, as they do not support matte channels. Image files were then named in an organized manner, to keep track of the pieces and to arrange them in ascending order. I used the view settings in the software and chose "by name" so that the files were listed in alphabetical order. For example:

- arm_far_lower.png
- arm_far_upper.png
- arm_near_lower.png
- Arm_near_upper.png
- etc...

Using After Effects arranging the puppet

I created an After Effects project, or new comp within an existing project, and made the dimensions large enough to contain the cut-out. In After Effects, I imported the puppet pieces. In the project window, I made a folder and organized the pieces / image files. In the timeline, I arranged the layers so they were grouped in natural clusters; that is, arm segments together

and near leg parts in a region. Furthermore, I began to layer them in a stacked hierarchy, where uppermost layers are on the top of the timeline stacking. For example:

- torso.png
- pelvis.png
- hat.png
- head.png
- arm_near_upper.png
- arm_near_lower.png
- hand_near.png
- arm_far_upper.png
- arm_far_lower.png
- hand_far.png
- leg_near_upper.png
- leg_near_lower.png...

Storyboard and Animatic

The creation of a storyboard is pertinent in planning a film, as it is a graphic representation of the approach and sequence in which the shots of the film will unfold. A storyboard is created using several squares, each of which entails pictures that illustrate the scenes of the film and a script of the dialogue within it. The storyboard is compared to a comic book, which relays a story through abstract figures and words. A storyboard is critical for sharing the vision of the film with other people who work on it, including the composer and the background designer. The visual aid in the storyboard makes for effective communication of the message of the film. The storyboard also makes production easier, as the plan entails the shots

required and how they will be integrated with the script. The storyboard is crucial for saving time in film production, since it utilizes a predefined plan, which effectively relays the whole story in a film. The storyboard is created through the following process: creating blank slides, which can be manual or computer assisted. Spaces should be left in each square for the scripts, which are subsequently added beneath the pictures. The last step is sketching each scene, for a rough visual of the story.

In my case, my story changed a lot during the early stages, due to the input of my committee members, who helped me develop my story. I changed my storyboard several times before I had the final version, which was after the animatic night. My animatic had an extra part, in the school, where Maryam's paintings were torn by the teacher, and she was pushed to concentrate on her assignment instead. The school was a symbol of the society, which had some oppressive values that Maryam was forced to adhere to. I, however, eliminated the part before the end of the semester after a meeting with my committee members. The chair of my committee was skeptical about the addition of new parts to my story, since he opined that it made sense and conveyed the message without any new additions. I therefore adopted the previous version of the storyboard to save time, which I could then use to produce the best version of the film.

Background Design

Background design comprises of two main roles: designing new backgrounds for each scene, and painting or drawing them for the final version of the animation (Liu 1). In instances where teams work on a film project, there may be distinct roles for background artists who make the final versions of backgrounds required for the film, and painters may be guided by art directors to make new locations in the film. The style adopted by background designers and

painters is based on the animation. The background designer has a duty to capture the uniqueness of each character and create places that blend in with their artistic style, and which can be perceived as realistic by an audience (Connellan and Harvey 186). The process of creating a new background begins with the determination of the location within which a scene is set. The design adopted is then incorporated in the storyboard and handed to a layout artist or background designer, whose role is to refine each background using the right tone and lines, before ultimately creating final painted versions of the backgrounds of each scene (Connellan and Harvey 186).

The design of the animation film incorporated different locations, including the interior of Maryam's home, inside Maryam's dream and in the courtyard. Background design entailed the determination of the locations of a character, based on the mood, in order to make the audience believe in the reality of the places. The background of the animation reflected the Persian culture, within which I was raised, through the use of different animation to show the Persian pond in the courtyard, for instance.

To save time, I asked my friend, Sara Rezaei to assist me in designing the background. She acted as my background designer after I shared my vision of the film with her. I shared pertinent information on the various locations that would be used in the film, which included references on Persian houses, a mood board, and a color palette that incorporated the different moods that I hoped to relay in the film. My research also entailed the collection of artworks that were similar to the one I intended to create. The process of designing the background then progressed to sketching a simple layout for all particular scenes, with the storyboard guiding the different backgrounds that would be incorporated in the film. I requested that my background designer separate the layers in the design of the background, that is, differentiating the background, middle ground and foreground. To ensure consistency throughout the film, I

completed my character designs and immediately shared them with my background designer so that her layout and backgrounds would be aligned to the characters. Furthermore, by sharing the character designs with her, she was able to determine the different scales to use for objects and the backgrounds, thereby making the design process easier. Apart from the characters, who were central to my film, the pond was an important feature of the story, so it took longer to design compared to the rest of the background. The pond is a central feature in the story, as it is used at the climax of the story to show Maryam's courage to transfer the fish, which was constrained in the bowl, to the larger pond where it could move more freely. The pond, therefore, had to be specially designed with specific colors to effectively convey the meaning in the symbolism to the audience. Decorative elements and the turquoise blue color were used to enhance the effect of the pond in the film. Sara and I worked together to develop the design for the background, although I had the final say on the type of layout of effects that would be conveyed in the background of the film. To be able to make it more realistic in terms of perspective and scale I created a very simple version of backgrounds layouts in Maya first and then asked Sara to design the final artworks based off of them.

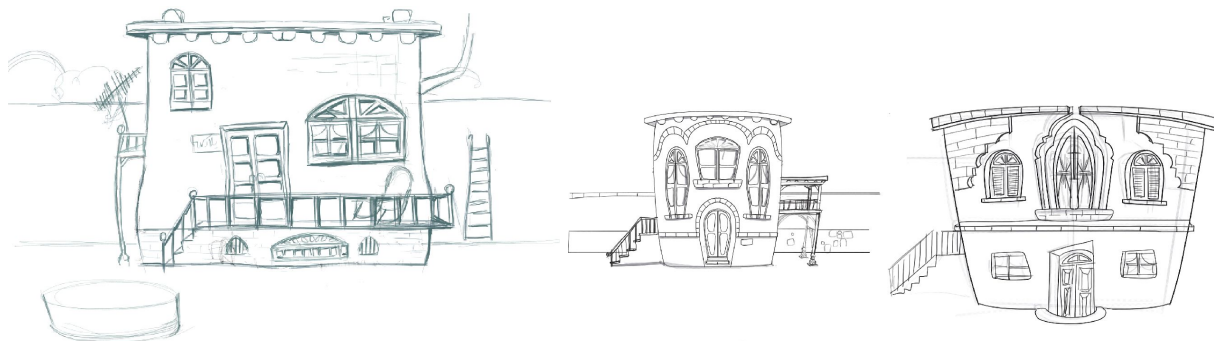


Fig.9. Sara Rezaei. "Persian Houses sketches" 2019. JPEG file.

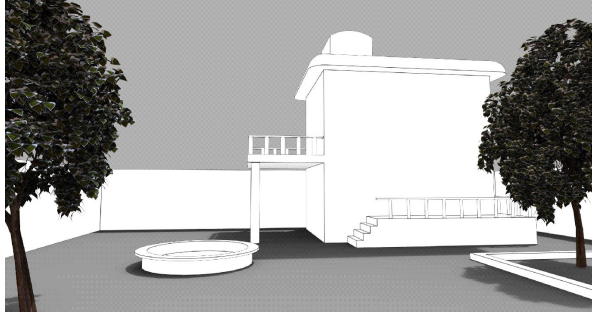


Fig.10. Maryam farahzadi. “3D layout for persian house” 2019. JPEG file



Fig.11.Sara Rezaei. “Persian Houses sketches” 2019. JPEG file.

Animation

The rules of animation guided the process in After Effects (Lesterbanks n.p.). Some of the basic principles applied to improve the animation experience from the film included the use of anticipation to give clues of the next action that would occur, for instance when Maryam meets her mother on her way to release the fish into the pond. The hesitation in her eyes is indicative of the action she is about to take, which she knows may be contrary to her mother’s wishes. However, from her facial expressions, the audience anticipates that she will get the

courage and take a bold step in freeing the fish from the bowl into the pond. Staging was also used to make the ideas presented clearly and to convey meaning to an audience. Through the use of colors, for instance, the ideas of freedom and independence were expressed, as an audience could discern that the dullness in the surroundings of Maryam was caused by her inability to freely express herself. When the color begins appearing on the screen again, the attention of the audience is drawn to each of the objects touched by the fish. The rules of animation were used to make actions and the characters appear more realistic.

However, the main difference between traditional animation and the mechanisms used to animate the puppets in this film was the separation of parts. Traditional animation entails the drawing of an entire figure for each frame, while for this instance, different body parts were separately animated. In my first try, I animated the whole film, using only the key frames, to set the timing of each scene and prepare a draft version that I could present to my composer for feedback. Using the timing, my composer was able to prepare the music that would be used in the film, while I worked on the fine details of the animation. Another key difference between the digital cut-out style of animation I utilized and traditional approaches was the saving of time from the technique, which generates the in-betweens in After Effects. As previously stated, I used the Joystick and sliders plugin to rotate the heads of my puppets and to exploit the 2.5D effect of my animation. The plugin helped in rigging the character of the fish and made it easier to create smooth and beautiful animation. I used a puppet pin tool to freely animate the tail of the fish. For the tail movements of Maryam's hair, I used the character swing plugin, which is effective for secondary animation. I also used character swing rigging to efficiently create fast, natural rotational and swinging motions for the puppet pins or layer(s). Furthermore, character swing rigging makes it easier to customize each part of the rotation or swings on an animation character.

Features of swing rigging tool

Character swing rigging is useful for creating secondary character animations for different parts of an animation character, such as the hair, ears and clothes (Van Horn 4). The tool used for character rigging improved the natural rotation of the different layers of the puppet pins. Wind is one of the effects that was used was added to all layers and pins to create realistic motion. In particular, the creation of a "wind null" to control wind for all rigs, has an impact on the layers of an animation character, as it determines whether there is a natural swing (Willet, Li and Popovic 98). The features of the swing rigging tool in Duik, which were used to improve the motion of characters were:

- The use of keyframe data to position natural movement
- The switch settings, which can be turned on and off
- The freedom to set a data layer as the target for movement or natural rotation
- Ability to control speed and power through the element of natural wind
- Ability to affect the movement of a rig through the use of different weights
- The rig's rotation can also be parented to other layers, to determine how it rotates
- Imposition of a rig to other layers, through parenting
- The new rigs can then be controlled as different or children layers
- There is more control over each of the pieces of the rig
- The effect of the wind element on each rig can also be controlled
- Use of pins and layers to enhance natural movement
- The feature of an effective bin
- The ability to influence movement from specified anchor points to a shape or mask

Music

Music plays an important role in film, since it is used to convey moods and relay the characters' feelings to the audience, thereby enhancing the overall impact of the film on the audience. Music is a critical element for conveying the message in a film, since it can be used to influence the cognitive perceptions of the audience and enhance their reaction to the story (Coleman and Tillman 32). The composer of my film was Payam Azadi. His role was particularly important to my film, which had very limited use of dialogue, instead utilizing the music and visuals to relay the story. The music that was used in the film had to correspond to the visuals in each scene. I conveyed my vision and story to the composer before we began collaborating on incorporating the right music into the film. We began working together from the early stages of making the film. To understand the inspiration and message of the film, I asked Payam Azadi to read the poem, *Little Ali*. I shared the animatic with Azadi albeit since the final timing of the film had not been fixed at the time, his initial role was to create theme music. I also collected similar pieces of artistic works, used to reflect the Persian culture, and gave them to my composer for direction. I also informed Azadi of my preferred musical instruments, which were the Harmonica and Piano. The piano relays soft emotions and heartbreak and was useful for scenes such as when Maryam's painting is torn up by her teacher. Challis (53), opines that piano music has 'leitmotif' like techniques that causes an audience to fall into the trance of the subtle emotions conveyed in the film. Piano music is also used to inculcate tender feelings in an audience as they watch a scene in a film. The piano is also useful in conveying happiness or mellow sadness (Challis 58). The harmonica has numerous whimsical sounds that are used to create a deep melancholic mood.

The music I wanted had to be simple and correspond to the style of the film. Payam had interesting ideas, which we reviewed together before making the final decision. For instance, my original intention was to use music in less than half of the duration of my film. However, Payam suggested that film music could be incorporated in each scene to make the different moods more discernible, since there was minimal dialogue in the film.. As such, the final decision led to the incorporation of music in nearly 80% of the film. The three main themes of music that were used in my film were:

- Happy music to show Maryam's enthusiasm and happiness when engaging in activities such as painting, or when she is ultimately allowed by her mother to free the fish into the pond and paint.
- Sad music was used in moments when Maryam was overwhelmed, felt constrained or inhibited, making her unhappy, such as when she is forced to read and when her drawing is torn up.
- I also wanted beautiful waltz music to be incorporated in the scene where Maryam dreams about the fish and all of the colors are brought back to her life and painting to show the dreamy and magical sense of the scene. My composer also suggested the use of music to inculcate a heroic theme to this scene, which I approved of after listening to it.

Post Production

After the animation of the characters of the film, it was pertinent to embark on compositing them with the final layered background elements in After Effects. Compositing entails the combination of visual elements that are acquired from various sources, into single images, thereby creating the illusion that all the characters were all present in the same scene. The process of compositing began with gathering all the pieces in After Effects and placing

them in a 3D frame, whereby I could utilize the program's lighting tools and camera. I put each of the asset layers at multiple distances from the camera to add depth to the field and the environment of the animation. I also used the plug-in to add some parallax effects¹, and achieve the 3D effect. The parallax effect was useful in making the characters of the film more aesthetically pleasing to viewers.

To fulfill the vision I had for the film, I decided to create a masterpiece for the project. I went the extra mile to use After Effects to incorporate beautiful lights and shadows in the film. I conducted a research on the best approaches for improving the lighting in a film and I discovered that the masking and lighting tools in After Effects could be used in the adjustment layers to create the desired impact. After Effects was very efficient as I was able to manually exclude some layers from being affected by the lighting tool so that each character was solely affected by the specific light or sequence that would result in the desired effect. The effects were especially effective in the introductory shot where Maryam is sitting in the yard and the audience observes the pond, the house, and Maryam, who sits on a step, painting the pond. I received very positive feedback from my professor, committee members and the audience, both prior and after the screening of my film, which I attribute to the outcome created from the use of lighting sequences in the introductory scene.

¹ Parallax effect refers to the use of design features or software plugins to move the background of a scene at a slower pace than the foreground, thereby giving a 2D or 3D effect due to the creation of the illusion of depth, which can be observed by viewers (WPEXPLORER).

Screening

I had to work on my thesis film remotely from Los Angeles, since I was also working part time. After completing the production of the film, I had to travel back to Rochester for the screening of the film and to also attend the graduation ceremony. I arrived at RIT two hours prior to the screening to meet my thesis advisor, Thomas Gasek, and seek his final word and feedback on the film. Mr. Gasek assured me that the film had met his expectations, and I thanked him for his guidance, leadership and supervision in the creation of the entire film. Mr. Gasek reiterated that he had enjoyed working with me on my thesis, and that he was highly satisfied with the outcome of the project. I was highly anticipating the first screening of my project, and the reaction of the familiar faces, who would watch it and relay feedback to me. I also looked forward to seeing my committee members and my classmates after a long duration outside the institution. I wondered if the audience would discern the message of the film and determine that it was based on my life, to a large extent.

The first screening of the film was conducted at RIT, in a new theater that was packed with students, teachers and supportive friends. My assessment of *Goldfish* shows that its genre was fantasy drama, although I left the interpretation of the category of the film to the audience. After the screening of the film and the applause that ensued, I walked over to the podium of the theatre, to give an artist statement and talk about my inspiration behind the story of *Goldfish*. My inspiration for the film, as stated in my written statement, emanated from the joy and self-fulfillment I had achieved through studying at RIT. The acceptance of my application to study at the institution, and my subsequent experiences, all made me believe that my dreams had been achieved. The extensive knowledge I acquired from RIT, and specifically, my teachers and colleagues all showed how nourishing and fulfilling my educational experience at the

institution had been. I had a difficult time saying goodbye and became a little emotional at that point.

After my speech to the audience, I invited comments and questions on the film. The feedback I got from the audience was largely positive, thereby making me more enthusiastic about my career. The people who watched the screening of the movie were especially impressed with the improved technique that I had utilized, as well as the music that was used in the film, and the manner in which it was incorporated into the different scenes. The people who gave their feedback also appreciated the music that had been used in the film. After receiving the feedback, the lights came back on the stage and I thanked every member of the audience for attending the screening of a movie. I was emboldened by the fact that most of the comments that were given by the audience about the film were positive. My teachers were also satisfied with the final version of my film, which they loved, and they congratulated me on the outcome and success of the project. A few weeks later, I learned that the film had been included in the RIT Honors Show for that year, and also selected for *The Fringe Film Festival* in Rochester.

Final Thoughts

My goal was to depict the visual aspect of the Persian culture as authentic as possible, hence the heavy usage of saturated color palette. However, using the visual themes as a part of the story was merely based on my personal experience. The story of this film however is based on a universal feeling: struggle to achieve dreams.

In regards to developing a compelling story, even though the story went through many revisions, I believe the final version was successful in displaying the core idea: encouraging people to pursue their dreams.

Throughout the process, I realized that I have developed a great sense for the production of my style of films, however the struggles I had with the story writing made me wonder if I should dedicate even more time to properly setup my story.

My hope was to connect with the audience through my life experience and lesser through the cultural differences. However, before showcasing this film in a number of festivals around the world I won't be able to know if I was successful in connecting with the audience or not. The ability to judge the success or failure of my film will be my next personal milestone, because to me filmmaking is a journey that has just started.

My objective is to continue my career after graduating from RIT as an independent filmmaker. I am, therefore, focused on my dream and I cannot be stopped at this point by any social or cultural pressure encountered. I have already begun my next film, which I intend to make a masterpiece by fundraising for the project to have the budget that is essential to make a more professional film. Although I have contributed to 80% of the work in the films I have made so far, I am aware that animation is often a team project. Working in teams improves expertise, the perspectives that can be used to develop a story, and leads to the development of great pieces, since each member is in charge of an aspect of the production process, which they specialize in. To work with teams, I need to have adequate funds to compensate them for their time and effort, and that is why I need to fundraise for my next project or find a producer.

I am proud of my filmmaking career, and especially the experience and skills that I have acquired with the creation of each film. Furthermore, the numerous awards I have received have emboldened me to continue using my talent and expertise in the creation of more films. My experience has shaped both my character and career, as I have become more professional,

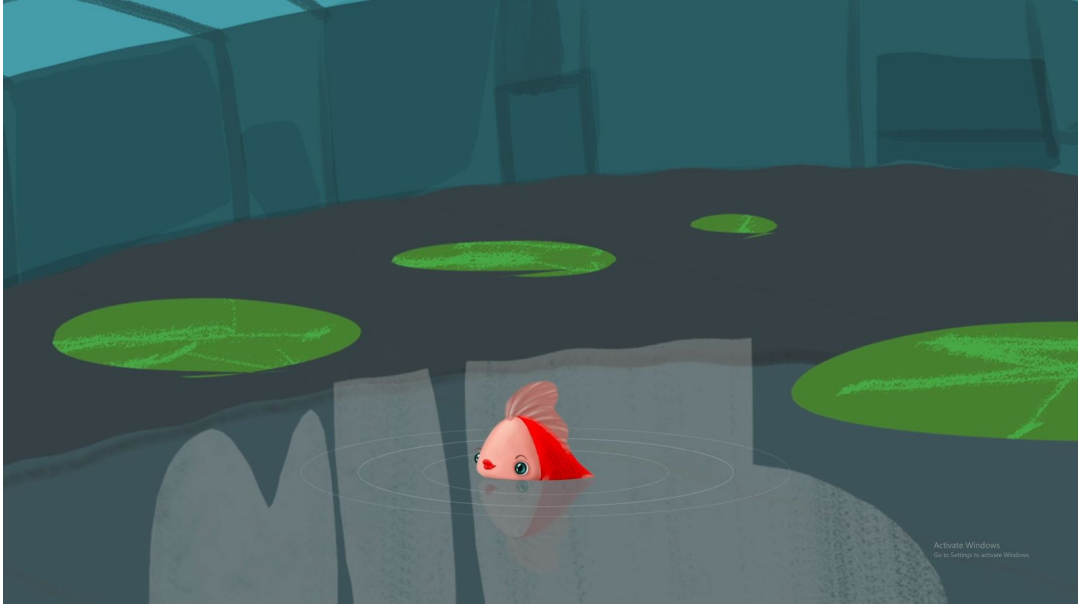
developed a strong work ethic, and I am committed to continually growing in the filmmaking sector.

There are so many subjects that I'm really interested in, such as, Human rights and women's rights, especially in my home country. Although there are many obstacles I face, such as the lack of funding for group projects that are required to make better films, I am convinced that I will be able to overcome them just as Maryam did in *Goldfish*.

Screenshots of "Goldfish"







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Appendix

Source of Inspiration:

Ali koochike (little Ali) Poem:

The little Ali,	stars to	golden crown,
The spoiled Ali,	both Ali's eyes.	It looked like divine visions
woke up suddenly-	And finally,	of Paradise.
At exact midnight.	she laid on surface	Whatever it was,
He rubbed his eyes with	with its tiny wings,	Whoever she was,
his little hands.	padding water's face.	Bewitched our Ali...
He yawned twice and	It smelled so good,	Yes, Little Ali- fell madly in
then he sat.	like washed, clean sheets,	Love with
What had happened?	like new notebooks,	that shiny fish.
What had he seen?	like presents' wrapped.	As soon as Ali, pulled his
***	It felt like warm nights on	small hands to
	the top of roof.	catch that piece of art,
He had a dream, about a	It felt like stars, like rain,	that rare beauty,
fish;	like a full moon.	Sky got mad, ranting and
A shiny, gilded fish,	It smelt like candy, like	raving;
soft, sleek, slick,	chocolate, jelly.	Storm started roaring and
light, bright, slight.	It was just- so pretty.	raging.
It was like sunshine-	It looked like a goddess,	Rain poured down like hell.
Across a navy pane,	bathing in heavenly lakes,	Then the soil tore off,
throwing sparkle and	It looked like a saint with a	and took up the fish.

Little Ali was left alone,
in his tiny bed, with no
dream,
with no shiny fish,
upset and in a daze!

The wind was blowing,
brutal, in the yard.
It was dragging tresses of
the trees.
It was flowing, under
covers and sheets.
The wind was blowing and
on the rope,
wet clothes and wears
were hung, fairly close,
they were playing, dancing
in the breeze.
Cheerful crickets were
nicely harping.
If the wind was mild, frogs
were singing.
Brief, that night was just

the same,
as all nights before.
Only Ali was different.
Little Ali was bewildered,
cast under the spell- of the
dreamy fish.

He wanted the fish of his
dream.

He couldn't stop- thinking
about it.

That shiny little Fish, from
then on,
possessed Ali's mind.

"Hey Little Ali,

Hey Little Ali,

Don't fidget so much!

Stay straight or you're
gonna fall!

If in your dream, it was a

fish in a blue lake,

It was not real.

Don't get confused: It was

a vision.

Don't spoil your day!"

"What is wrong with you?

What is your problem?

You are so healthy, you
are

so lucky,

Forget about that fish!"

"Listen to me!

Dreamy roads are not like

Reals with

sidewalks and signs,

with light and asphalt.

In the dreams, you may

get

lost,

You may get hurt...

In the dreams, in dreamy

Roads there

is no way back!"

"Look Little Ali!

You will grow up,

You will buy a car,

You will buy a house,

You may be a boss,	Fish is gonna die,	the fish, must go and get it!
You may be famous,	It's not worth a dime.	Whoever dreams about
You will be handsome,	Go back to your bed,	the
You will travel,	Try to sleep!	fish,
All will be lofty.”	And leave me alone.”	his days are filled up by
“Why don't you play?	***	billion stars.
Don't you have friends?		He won't see the sight,
Don't you like your toys?	Water was upset,	He won't need the light,
Why are you so sad?”	pretty tired.	He won't be able to sleep
“Hey Little Ali,	Water slowly was	the night...
You went crazy!	running off to	Hey Little Ali,
You lost your mind,	the roof of Sky:	Don't let me down!”
What the heck the fish!	“Hey Little Ali,	***
I don't understand...”	You disappointed me!	
“Hey Little Ali,	Not everybody can dream	A butterfly was getting
You are getting sick,	about a shiny fish!	drowned.
I am getting mad!	They dream about fries,	Little Ali was listening to
You are just spoiled.	chips and fish,	the water's words.
I will punish you,	They dream about youthful	It seemed that someone
No ice cream, no bike, no	ladies, wealthy gentlemen,	was calling Ali.
party.”	They dream about dress	It seemed that a hand, a
“What the heck the fish?	and necklace, about dogs	moist, smooth hand
Why do you need fish?	and cars.”	tapped
Fish is stinky,	“Whoever dreams about	on Ali's back:

“Hey Little Ali,
Do you hear me?
One, two, three,
Jump in the water!”
“Hey little Ali,
Don’t you want to come?
I am the Shiny Fish.
Believe me Ali!
I am right here,
under the water”
“Hey Little Ali,
I waited for you,
Now it's a long time!
I’ll take you to Sea,
It is not that far,
It is not so hard.
I will take you there:
To Garden of pearls,
To Crystal palace,
To Mountains of light,
We will play there.”

“Believe me Ali,
If you don’t see them
What is your life for?
If you don’t go there
What is your time for?”
“Hey Little Ali,
I am getting sick,
in this dirty pool!
Make up you mind:
Either jump inside-
Or then never mind,
I’ll leave you behind!”

Sky got mad,
Storm started.
Water coiled upward.
Then suddenly,
gulped down Ali.
Silvery circles over the
water’s face,

They turned and they
turned.
Then blue bubbles,
took their place.
And at the end,
On the water's face of
Little Ali- was left no
trace!

- Where is Ali?
- I don’t care!
- What is he doing?
- I don’t dare:
“If you want to know,
jump in the water!

Gold Fish

(Working Title)

2D Animation

Maryam Farahzadi

Thesis Proposal

For MFA in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

April, 2017

Approved for Submission by

Thomas Gasek, Thesis Chair

Synopsis:

This story is about a little girl falling in love with a fish, which is a symbol of her dreams. She has an internal battle between her predictable and comfortable life and the amazing world of imagination of the dreams that fish represents.

Story:

On a beautiful sunny day in a cozy Persian house two kids are playing in the backyard.

Their ball jumps into the pond. A little girl runs towards the pond to get the ball.

As soon as she gets close to the pond she notices a beautiful shiny, gilded fish in the pond, lying on the surface of the water with its tiny wings, padding the water surface.

As it swims it creates beautiful images looking like Maryam's drawing (which we will see later in her room)

Maryam is bewitched by the fish, and as she wants to touch the fish her mom calls her and warns her to stay away from the pond and go back to do her homework. Then she leaves the pond and goes back to do her homework reluctantly!

In her room where all of her drawings are hanging on the wall, she works on her math homework reluctantly and gets bored very soon and starts drawing. She draws a sky full of stars, She draws a beautiful house in the middle of the jungle, she draws mountains etc., and as soon as she draws a fish, she reminds about the alluring fish in the pond.

She goes back to the pond for the second time. She sees the fish is playing and dancing in the water. As it moves around, it brings beautiful images from the world of Maryam's drawings. Maryam is drawn to touch the fish as the fish swims in the pond.

(All of the images that are shown by the fish are the worlds that were made in Maryam's drawings which we have seen before mostly looks like kids drawings.)

Maryam turns back and looks around she sees her mom and dad and his brother and her grandma. She sees the house and her mom is working, her brother is studying hard, her grandma is sitting on a rocking chair and smiling at her and her dad who has just arrived home from work and he is very tired but he smiles at her as well.

She loves them, so as she intends to touch the fish she hesitates. She leaves the pond again and goes back inside the house.

At night she goes in her bed she closes her eyes and dreams about the fish. She sees that she has jumped into the pond and sees that there is a beautiful and large world under the water. The fish takes her to the most beautiful places sometimes under the sea and sometimes they are even swimming in the sky and collecting the stars. (She sees herself in a world very much like her own drawings)

In the morning, Maryam jumps out puts her flip flops on and goes across the pond. This time she touches the fish to follow her dreams.

As she touches the water, water coiled up, screen changed into white and dissolve into a scene of the calm pond and empty flip flop. Camera tilts up to the surface of water where a fish jumps out of water and another fish that bears similar visual characteristics of Maryam follows her and they jump and play together happily.

Rationale:

This story is attached to my own experience of following my dreams and get out of my comfort zone which is not necessarily bad!

Almost everybody has had this experience in his/her life that he/she has been in the situation that there was an internal battle between her/his practical and ambitious vision.

I have always wanted to show this in my own film and show that we are all on the same boat and have a common experience; some may stay in their comfort zone and some may follow their dreams although that might look like a risky decision or might be a hard situation.

So it is a universal idea, which I want to show through my own cultural vision and from my own point of view as a Persian girl who has followed her dreams.

The story is inspired by a poem by a very famous Iranian poet.

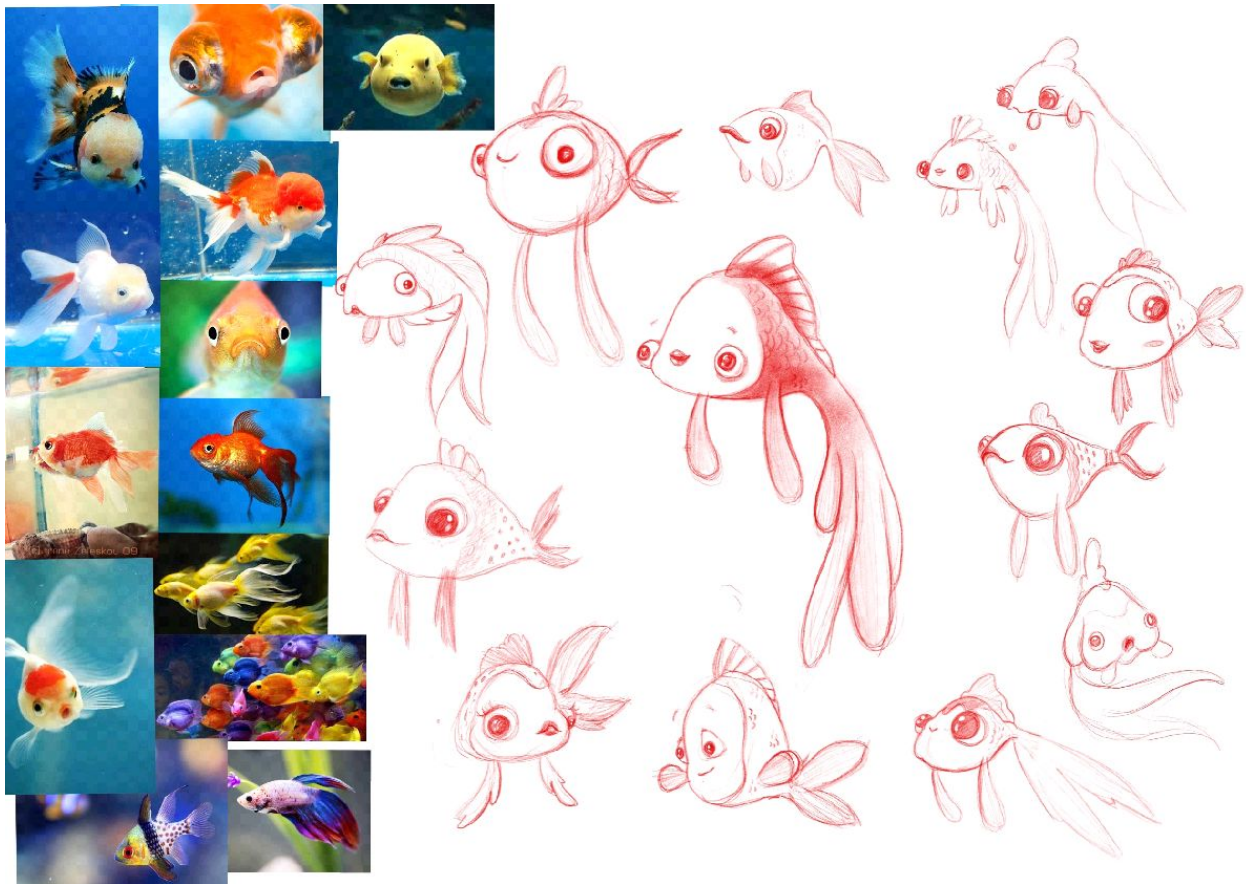
Style:

2D traditional or after effect puppet animation

Timeline:

	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	Apr	May
Story											
Character &											

Print promotional cards	\$100
Festival Fees	\$500
Travel expenses from LA to Rochester	\$1500
Total	\$5330



Concept art



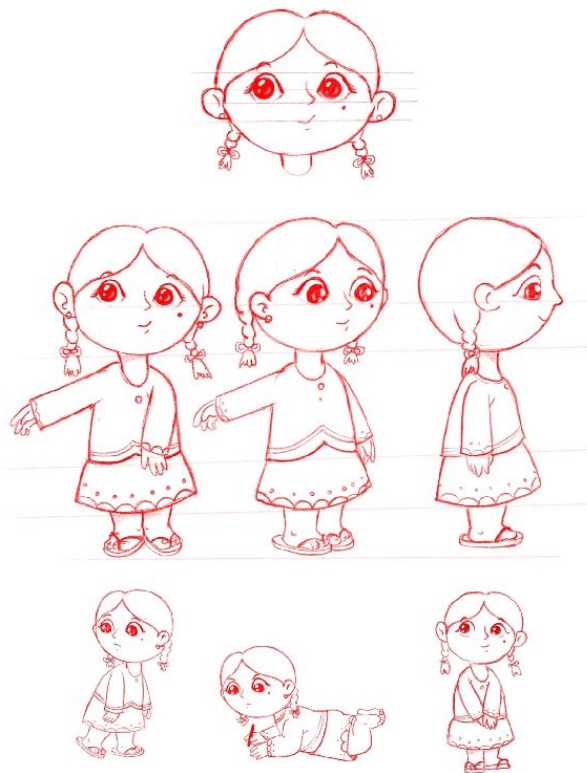
Model sheet



Gold Fish
Concept and Character Design

www.maryamfarahzadi.com

Maryam



Maryam

Character model sheet

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