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The line

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The line

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of the Master of Fine Arts in Film

and Animation

The School of Film and Animation

The College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology

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- committee approval -

Peter Murphey date

Chief Committee Advisor / Dissertation (Thesis) Mentor

Tom Gasek date

Committee Member / Thesis Advisor

Dave Sluberski date

Committee Member / Sound Advisor

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- acknowledgements -

I would be remiss if I did not start by thanking my committee advisor, Professor Peter Murphey, who was my lighthouse in this most turbulent of journeys. From the very first semester of school I knew that, whatever film I ended up doing for my thesis, I wanted him standing right next to me as a mentor and supporter, and it was the best decision I made. He was constantly figuring out ways to ease my workload and my mind whenever I felt discouraged; and did so with good humor and positivity.

My committee chairs, Tom Gasek and Dave Sluberski, who helped in their own specific and special ways. Tom was a great counselor with keen ideas for smoothing out my story. And Dave was an indispensable asset when it came to sound; without his expertise in choosing the right recording equipment and sound designer, my film would be subpar at best. I was spoiled with a powerhouse team between these three professors.

I must thank Justin Levine and Creighton Yanchar for contributing their time in creating the sound of "The Line". Their harmonious collaboration created the unique and distinct sound that I was striving for. Justin composed a score rich with the serene nostalgia of my younger days growing up near the beach. And to Creighton I would like to express my gratitude for keeping his composure with me until the last second, and for creating a soundscape both in stereo and surround sound. I cannot express my thanks enough to him.

Later additions, but no less appreciated, are the undergrads (freshmen, sophomores and juniors alike) who during these past few months provided not only technical support but emotional and moral as well. And lastly, the graduate class of 2019. Thank you for being my home away from home for the past three years.

- dedication -

To my mother - Roxana Rodríguez - for not only being my mother but for taking action during my lowest point in this process. A mother's love knows no bounds, but this one certainly is infinite.

- abstract –

The Line is a fairy tale for adults, meant to ask the age-old question of "who am I?" through the lens of its main character, Espe, a child born with skin made of mirror. As Espe anxiously tries to get through a party hosted by his parents, every adult gives the child unsolicited advice based on themselves, as all everyone can see is their own reflection on Espe's reflective body. Yet who we are is determined by a multiplicity of things that boil down to perception, not only of others, but of ourselves.

With this thesis, I wanted to delve deeper into my understanding of the themes of <u>individuality,</u> <u>freedom of thought,</u> <u>fragility of ego</u> and the <u>unreliability of 'truth',</u> as seen through the eyes of a child. The idea for this story was simple enough: What would happen if somebody was born made out of mirror? And what if that mirror were to look at itself? Though Espe's situation was quite special, it was not too far removed from our current reality. In essence, all humans carry metaphorical mirrors inside of themselves. Often times when we talk to each other, we give our opinions based on our own experiences, not taking into consideration the other person's feelings or situation at all. We create mirrors out of them, seeing only ourselves. This is common occurrence I often see with peers who receive advice from colleagues, friends and family. However well-intentioned those comments may be, they seldom remember that each person is their own unique world with their own personal goals and aspirations. We have to find a balance between being true to ourselves and heeding other's advice. Ultimately, your life is your own, and only *you* can answer for yourself this question.

- inspiration, context & ideation -

     The Line is a 2D-animated exploration of "who we are" and how that is determined by a multiplicity of things that boil down to perception - not only of others, but of ourselves - and can be summed up in one word: infinity. We are all ripe with infinite potential and possibility, but we must be brave enough to look inside of ourselves and reach for it, without letting other people's opinions affect those choices. And with the technology of 2D-animation and computer-generated graphics, I wanted to create a story that speaks to younger and older audiences alike about being yourself, in a poetic and visual format.

The story revolves around Espe, a child born with skin made out of mirror. With the despairingly-sweet naiveté of a child, Espe yearns for a world beyond his own enclosed home in a coastal village, past the vast horizon line where the ocean meets the sky. Unfortunately, every person around Espe has a different idea about what the child should aspire to in life; a side effect of being able to only see their own reflections when they look upon the mirror child.

Using my own personal memories as a young girl growing up in a small Caribbean island, and interviews to children around Espe's age (7 to 11 years old), I found connective experiences to write a script that is simple in story but rich in familiarity. Its format is closer to that of a fragmented fable coming to life, inspired heavily

by great writers like Antoine de Saint-Exuspery (*The Little Prince*) and Paulo Coehlo (*The Alchemist*). I often find that heavy subjects are made lighter when depicted as fairy tales, and no one is ever too old for those.

After extensive research on animation techniques, I decided on a combination of traditional mediums mixed with digital compositing and editing. My plan was to rely heavily on the use of watercolor washes and pencil shading to create textures that would be overlaid on digitally-drawn animation for a nostalgic and whimsical feeling similar to that of children's books. The animation itself would be completed utilizing TV Paint Pro and After Effects for purposes of time.

My film would also have closed captions, for two very important reasons that often get overlooked during development of films in the Film & Animation Department at RIT. First, as a Latino woman born and raised in Puerto Rico, it was my responsibility as a filmmaker to represent my culture in media. Therefore, all of the dialogue in *The Line* was recorded in Spanish. I hired Hispanic actors to provide the voices for my film, in a continuous attempt to normalize Hispanic roles in entertainment and to give voices (pardon the pun) to all these talented individuals that often get overlooked.

The second reason; despite boasting on their main website that RIT is "the 1st college of it's kind, with NTID being the first and largest technological college in the world for deaf-and-hard of hearing students (NTID)", most of SOFA films don't caption their projects, excluding more than 1,100 deaf students (NTID) from enjoying student-made films. To put it in perspective, out of 80 films screened last 2018 Fall semester, only one animated film had subtitles. Closed captioning is a way to bring the entire campus closer by allowing non-English speakers and deaf individuals, two marginalized communities, to enjoy what we at SOFA are so proud to present every year.

- research & resources -
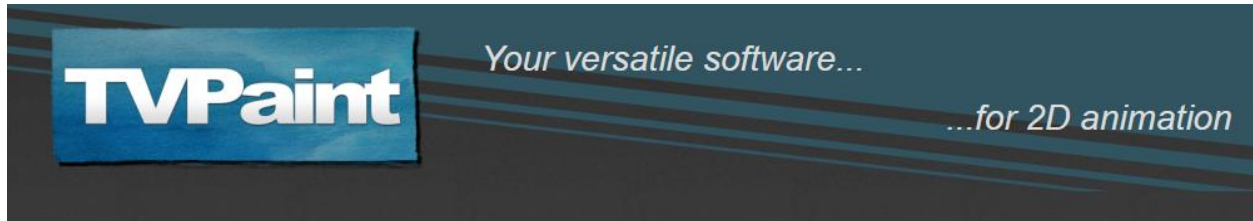
Research was the most enjoyable aspect of this entire process, mainly because it entailed gathering inspiration via various "Movie Nights". I compiled a list of animated films with the following requirements: the point of view of the film was via a child character; there were extended shots of the ocean or large bodies of water; a focus on style reminiscent to graphic design or motion graphics. Among the many films that I viewed during the Fall semester, the most prominent ones in shaping the style for my film were: Cartoon Saloon's entire feature film collection (*The Secret of Kells*, *The Song of the Sea* and *The Breadwinner*); the 2015 film adaptation of *The Little Prince*; Daniel Sousa's short film, *Feral*; and finally, Eusong Lee's, *My Moon*, which debuted during the *2018 Animation Show of Shows,* to much fanfare (Matelonek).

(fig.1 Eusong Lee's *My Moon*.) (fig.2 2015 animated adaptation of *The Little Prince*.) (fig.3 Cartoon Saloon's, *Sonf of the Sea*.)

I also had to take into consideration what resources I would need to work efficiently, not only at school but at home as well. This meant having to upgrade my home set up. I updated my animation software by purchasing TVPaint Pro 11, acquired two new hard drives to keep multiple copies of my project in case I lost my files and needed backups, replaced my faulty Wacom bamboo tablet with a new XP-Pen Drawing Tablet, and bought a Zoom Kit for audio recording. Other resources included Lynda.com for learning After Effects, the university Cintiqs and the Adobe Creative Cloud Suite (more specifically, Photoshop, After Effects, Premiere and Media Encoder).
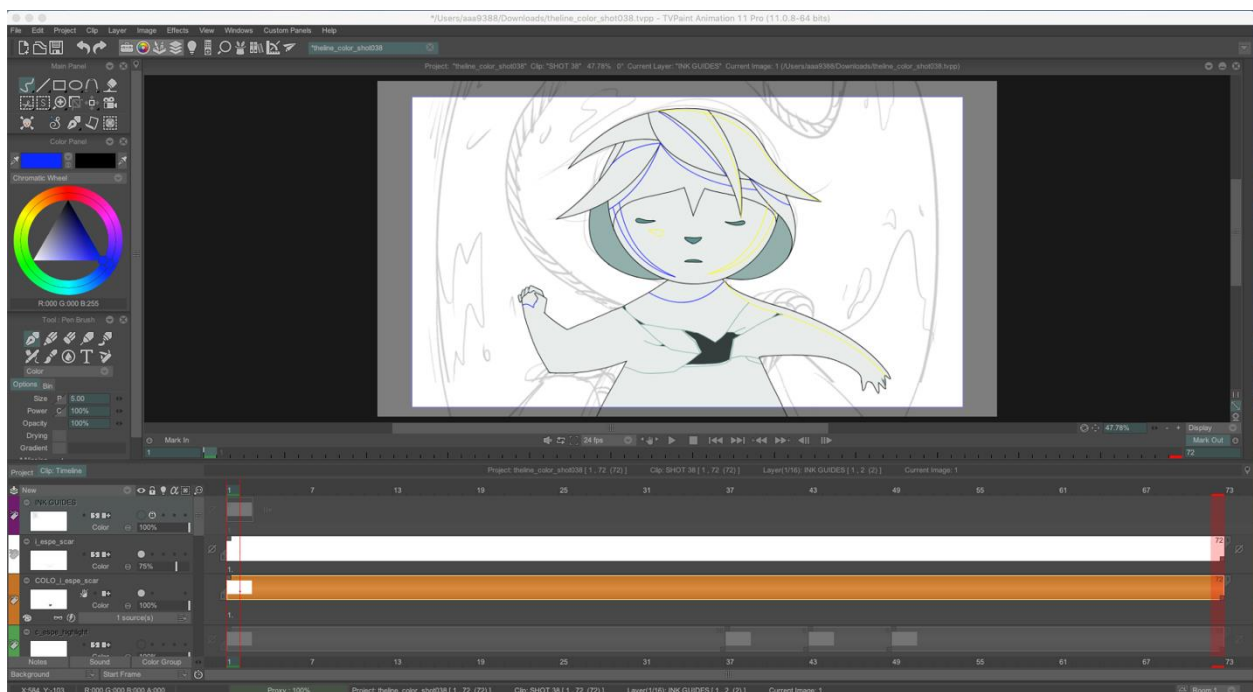
- pre-production -

During the fall, I focused heavily on script and storyboarding. The script in itself was a major undertaking for me, as writing dialogues is not my forte, but something I really wanted to improve. I dedicated the entire month of September to that, creating an animatic in tandem so the visuals could complement the narration. Working with script writer and adjunct professor Daniel LaTourette from the SOFA faculty really helped narrow down the essence of what I was trying to say, although I still struggled to find Espe's voice and tone for the film. He was helpful enough to lead me to an online page with transcripts of animated works, and it was during this research that I finally found the exact tone I was looking for. Cartoon Saloon's *The Breadwinner* had an opening that efficiently set up the main character's world, from reality to the fantastical, with the following exchange:

> BABA. Now, what can you tell me about the Silk Road?
>
> PARVANA. The Silk Road…Baba, I can't remember about the Silk Road.
>
> BABA. Maybe if we think about it like a story, huh? Stories remain in our hearts, even when all else is gone. (The Breadwinner, 25)

It was with this small excerpt that I found myself gearing my script and therefore my film into a more fanciful fairytale, as opposed to getting bogged down by the logistics of my character and their world.

THESIS - THE LINE (BY ANGELICA AGELVIZ) | FALL SCHEDULE												
MONTHS	SEPTEMBER				OCTOBER					NOVEMBER		
WEEKS	W01	W02	W03	W04	W05	W06	W07	W08	W09	W10	W11	W12
PREPRODUCTION												
SCRIPT - Edit down and compress story to a 3:40-4:00 minute film. - Write a version with no dialogue and dialogue.	■	■	■									
CONCEPT DESIGN - Exploration of themes, style and aesthetics for final looks.					■	■	■	■	■			
CHARACTER DESIGN - Design variations for Espe. - Designs for cast (parents, extras).						■	■	■	■			
LAYOUT CONCEPT - Exploration of world. - Design for both 2D animation and Stopmotion Animation.							■	■	■	■	■	■
STORYBOARD THUMBS - Rough pencil thumbs (minimal details).	■	■	■	■	■	■						
COLOR SCRIPT - Rough color keys of mood throughout the film. - Color explorations for specific and important scenes (Exposition, Climax, Resolution).							■	■	■	■	■	■
ANIMATION TEST - One scene in 2D (3 seconds). - Same scene in Stopmo (3 seconds). - Gauge how long each process took, and the pros and cons of each.										■	■	■

(fig.4 Fall Schedule for thesis pre-production)

As October rolled around, the grad students of my year had a private "Animatic Night" screening, with some faculty professors and students of the department present to see our thesis progress and give constructive critique. For the most part, I received positive feedback on my animatic, with some minor notes on length of shots and style choices. But otherwise, I was ready to move on to concept art and character design, as I felt comfortable with the state of my story. My concept studies were loose and exploratory, as I didn't want to put too much pressure on achieving "perfection" or "screen ready" artwork. I even managed an animated turnaround of my main character, Espe, carefully crafting the style of the film and as such the pipeline that would be necessitated to get it to fruition as a whole.
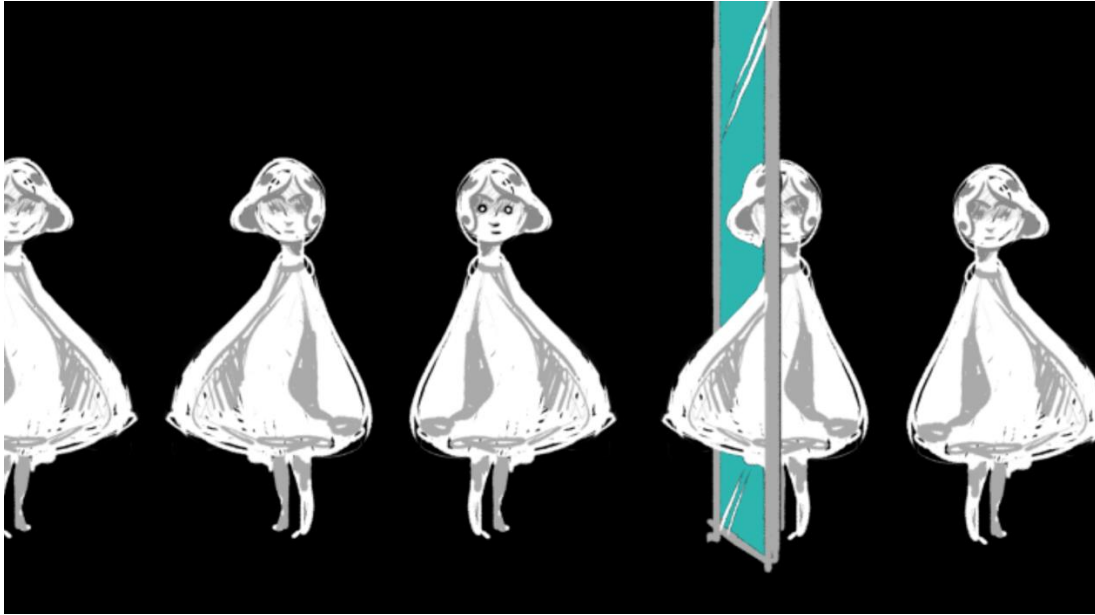
(fig.5 Exploratory concept art for the final sequence of the film, 'infinity'.)

If script was not my forte, backgrounds were my Achilles' Heel. Like a coward, I avoided them until the very end of the Spring Semester, when pre-production was way over and the deadline was weeks away. It left me little time to focus on animating my shots, as instead I was stuck attempting to figure out the style and coloring for the layouts that my character would be acting in. Not only that, but a lot of these backgrounds were animated too. Out of all my decisions in this filmmaking process, I think this one was certainly one that hurt me the most.

- storyboards & animatic -

Generally, storyboards and animatic are worked independently from one another, but due to the nature of this particular project and the tight turnaround time, I found it more productive to work both at the same time. I did some very rough pencil thumbnails, to try and capture the essence of the style I was primarily going for.
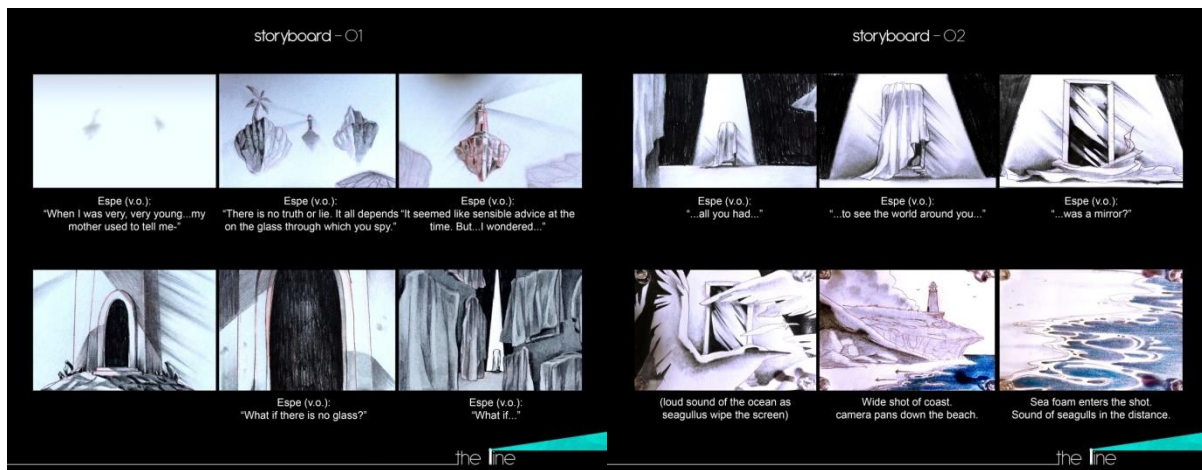
(fig.6 Earlier explorations for the opening sequence, done in pencil and scanned into TVPaint Pro.)

I quickly found that working directly from TVPaint Pro allowed for quicker edits and ease of exploration with color and style for my boards, without worrying about quality. TVPaint Pro made the process more streamlined as the program allowed for "timed" storyboards, which was essentially an animatic in end product. I was fortunate in that I had a very clear idea about how I wanted my story to begin and end; but I went through dozens of revisions for the middle. Even though storyboarding was the most enjoyable part of my thesis process, it was also the most difficult. As someone once told me, just because something is simple, doesn't mean it's easy. Despite the many iterations that I did to reach the current story, I wasn't (and still am not) satisfied with my choices for the middle sections. Shots had to be cut in order to shorten my workload, and at the time I was not skilled enough in efficient storyboarding to tell my story as economically as possible. With those extra shots, the film was too long; but without them, too confusing. Unfortunately, tight deadlines forced me to move past my own reservations to complete a working animatic and on to production.

- character design –

I was always keen on the idea of Espe, the main character of the film, being as androgynous as possible, and my earlier versions depicted the non-binary nature of the design. My reasoning for this was for their persona to be a blank slate, where the audience would not put any preconceived notions of gender roles or expectations on the character. Essentially, I wanted to find a design that - while balancing both "female and male" natures - focused on the youth of the character (as a coming of age story) and their story arc. Non-binary characters are not often represented in media, even less so in animation; by and large, most characters are still explicitly gendered, limiting the options for non-binary identities to flourish. (Flores) With that being said, in a post-*Steven Universe* world, this perspective is slowly shifting, but there are still more opportunities for creators to explore these characters in their personal films.


(fig.7 Character explorations for main character, "Espe")

Another external inspiration for the design, in terms of aesthetics and mood, was Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *"Le Petit Prince"*. The eponymous Little Prince from the books had a simple, almost childish scrawl to his design, particularly in the simplicity of his face. (Popova) I figured if the facial design was as minimal as I could get away with, it would therefore force my performance and acting to the forefront of the audience's perception. In my previous films, I relied too heavily on my facial expressions to tell the story, rather than through character acting, so this was both a set limitation for myself and a challenge.

An additional aspect I wanted to explore about Espe's character design was movement. Specifically, how would someone made out of mirror move in this "real" world they inhabited, and how would the rules of physics apply to them. I opted for a very stiff tunic for the clothing – to give away Espe's mirror-like nature – which would remain rigid when Espe was uncomfortable and fluid when they were more relaxed.
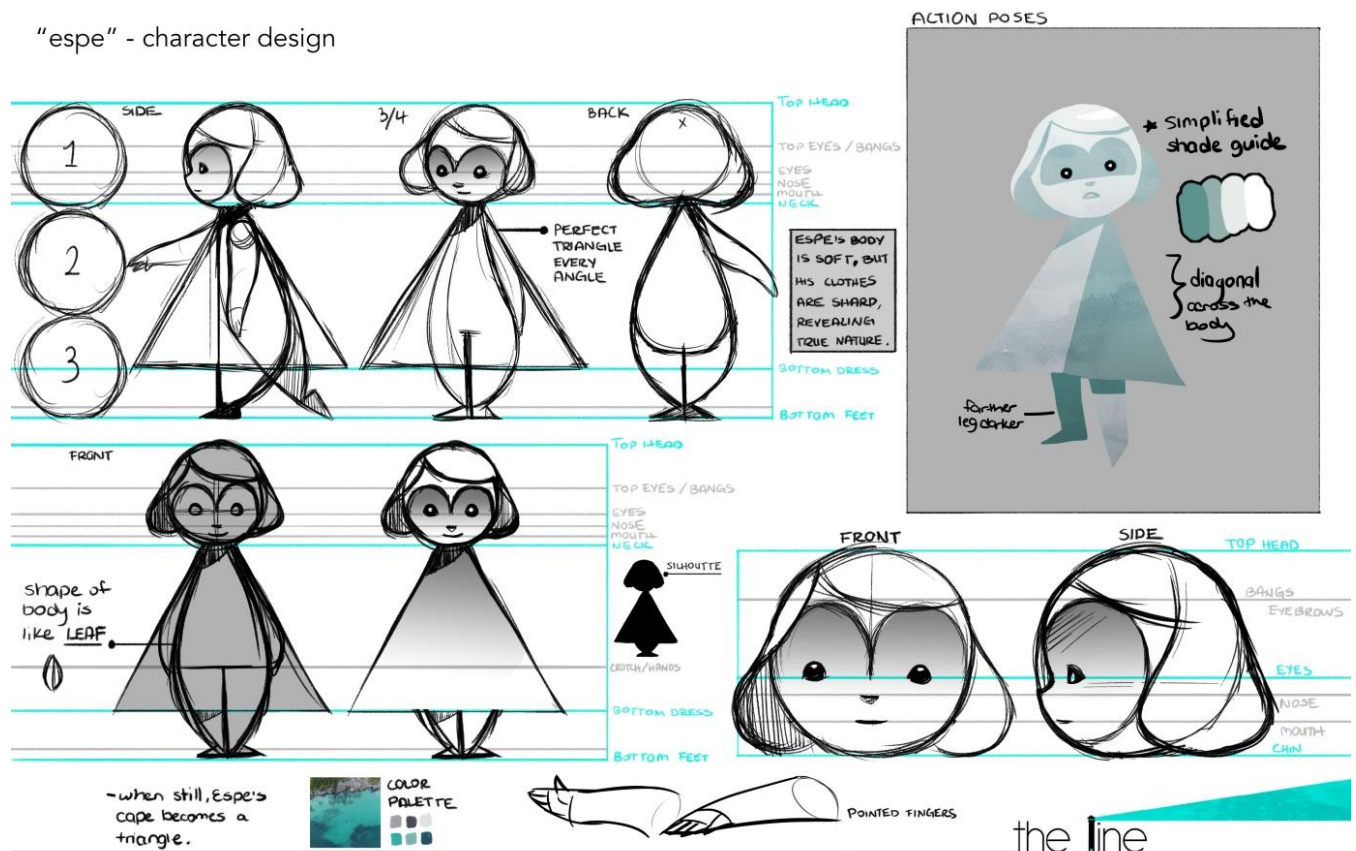
(fig.8 Character sheet for the main character, "Espe".)
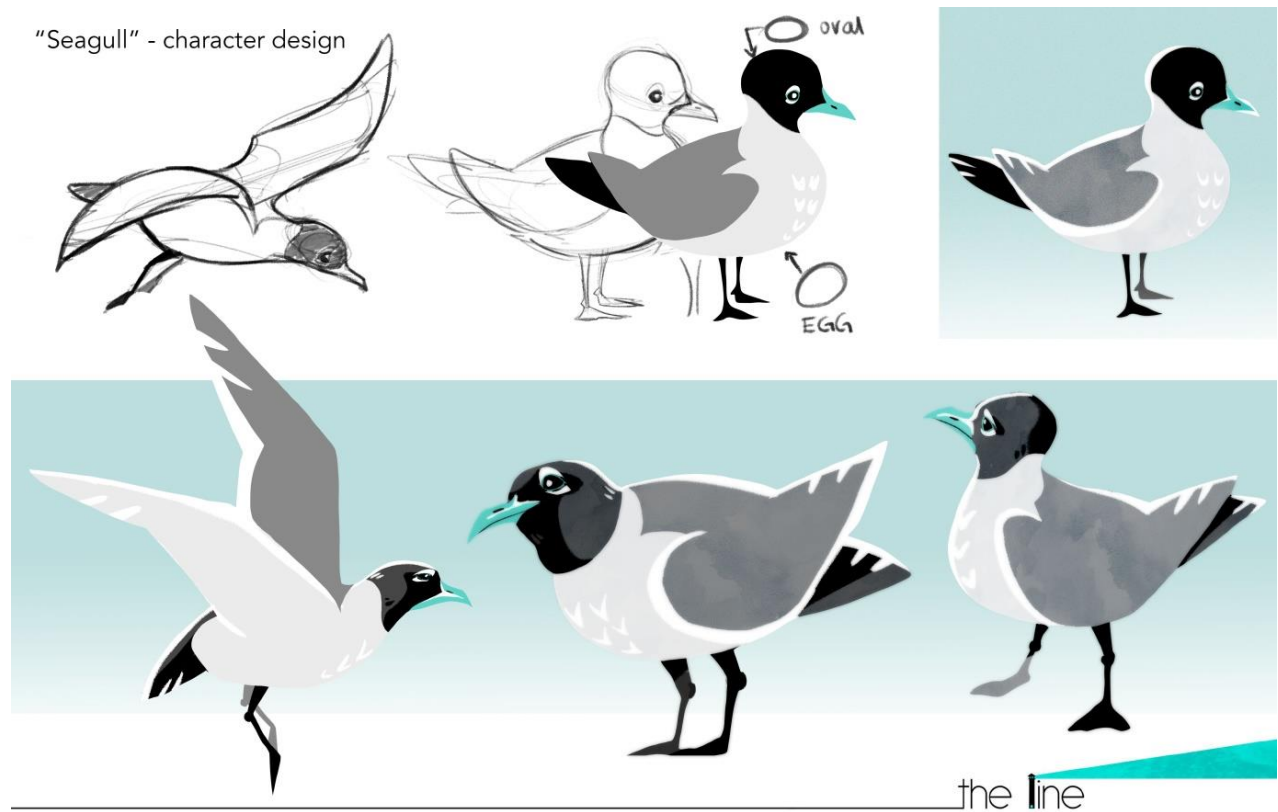
(fig.9 Character sheet for the seagull.)

Based on the "Laughing Gull", native to the Caribbean and my home country of Puerto Rico (Sibley), the seagull was meant to represent Espe's desire for autonomy and the ability to speak out (which is why I used the film's iconic turquoise color for the gull's beak, to focus on the idea of being outspoken.)

The original script had a fish be Espe's "guide" towards self-realization, but I settled on the seagull due to the strong metaphorical meanings it held in my culture. Because seagulls have the ability to soar above the ground, they get a more expansive perspective about their world. They epitomize freedom, independence, a spirit of exploration and ultimate enlightenment. Definitely a fitting sidekick to our young, lost hero.

The design for the seagull was fairly streamlined, going for an almost "motion graphic" look to it so as not to draw attention away from Espe's already minimalistic design. A gamut of greys was used to keep it in theme with the film's color palette, but with that hint of turquoise to tie it back to the sea.
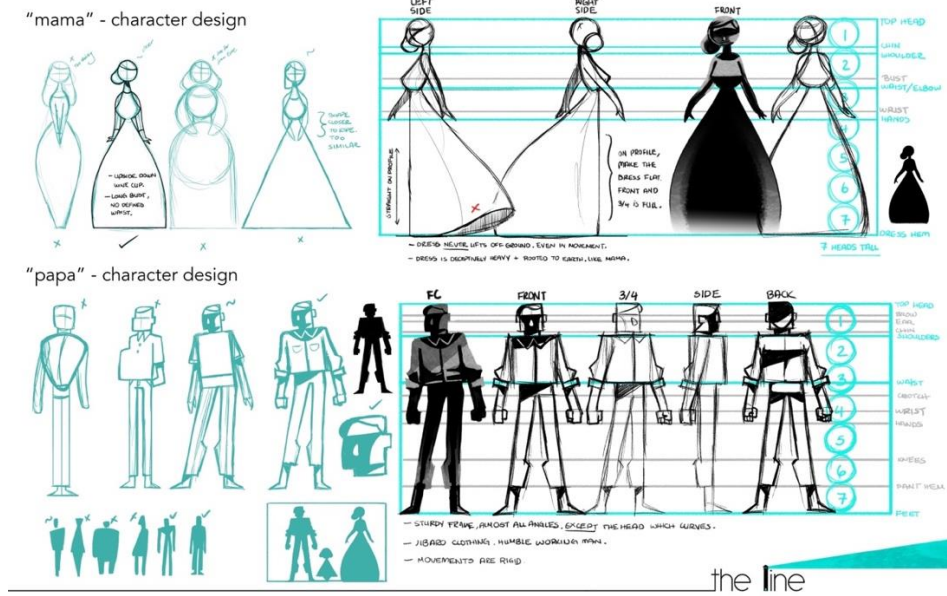
(fig.10 Character sheets for "mama" & "papa".)
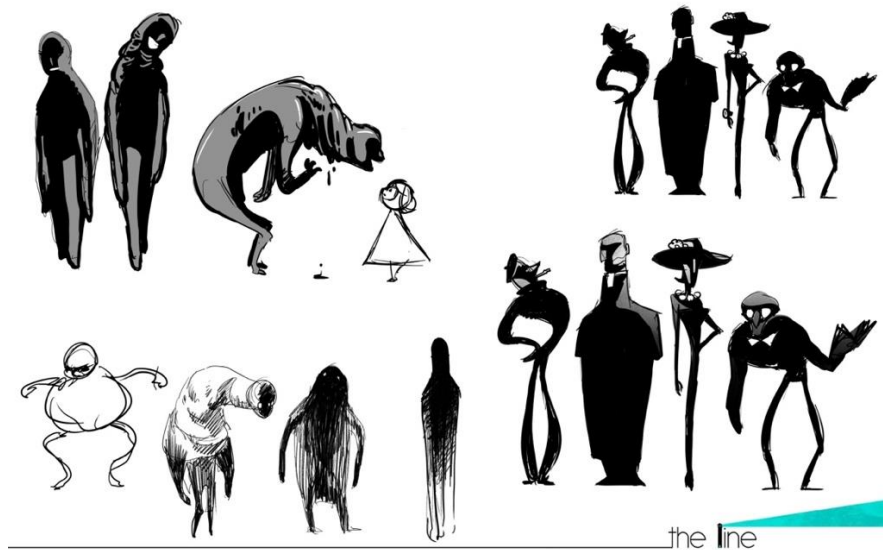
(fig.11 Character explorations for adults.)

While Espe was all bright reflective glass, the adults in the world were dark silhouettes; almost like shadows of their former selves. The grey world they inhabit had slowly dulled or completely blackened their identities. I chose this view because, as children, we don't really perceive adults as individuals but rather as their roles or professions in our lives: parent, teacher, religious guide, doctor and so on. Any adult that can't immediately be

put into a convenient box is unknown and confusing, which is why I went for completely blacked-out images

for a lot for the adults in the party.

- environment design -

The ocean - or more specifically, the horizon where the ocean meets the sky – was to be the focal point of my film. It should almost feel like a character in and of itself with how much special attention I was willing to grant it throughout the film. Therefore, most of my compositions and environments would be centered around it.

Due to the length of my film (6 minutes) and the limited amount of time I had to work on its production (four months), I realized early on that my layouts would have to be a limited color palette, lest I risk the possibility of biting off more than I could chew. For that reason, I focused on emphasizing the ocean with the bright turquoise color that was prevalent throughout the film, and leave everything else in a grey monochromatic. This was not only a time-saving technique but also a way to affect the mood of my film and give it the whimsical look of black and white films, with a modern twist. At the same time, I got to work on my values and compositions; something that I found was one of my weaker areas of design.
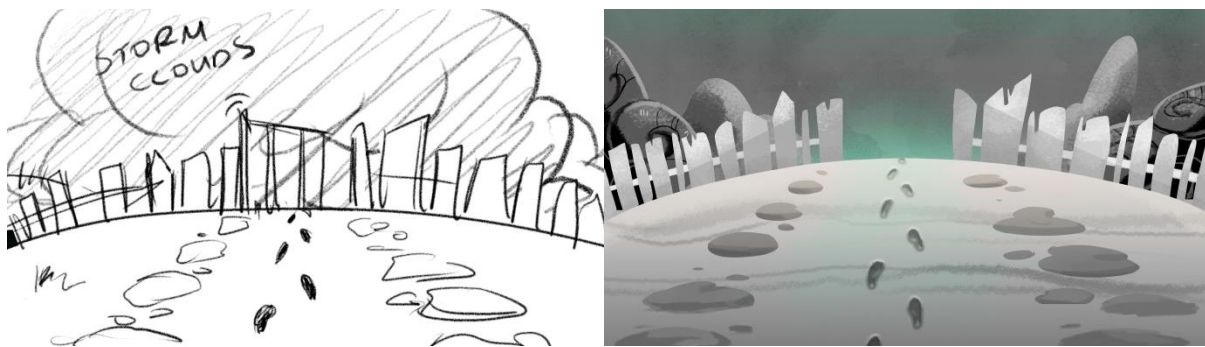
(fig.12 Sketch to Final look for a background)

I looked to a lot of 80s synth-wave artwork, 90s children's book illustrations and early 20s graphic design for inspiration. Films like Cartoon Saloon's "Song of the Sea" and Hayao Miyazaki's "Ponyo" were also instrumental in my design choices – again for the simplicity with which they portrayed the ocean - and it all came together to create the final aesthetic of the film.

More tactile inspirations were glass sculptures done by my mother in my early youth. They were seashell islands on top of quartz oceans, topped off with metal miniatures of lighthouses and palm trees. Our house was scattered with such tiny treasures and I was adamant about including them in my film somehow, even if the reference resonated only with myself.
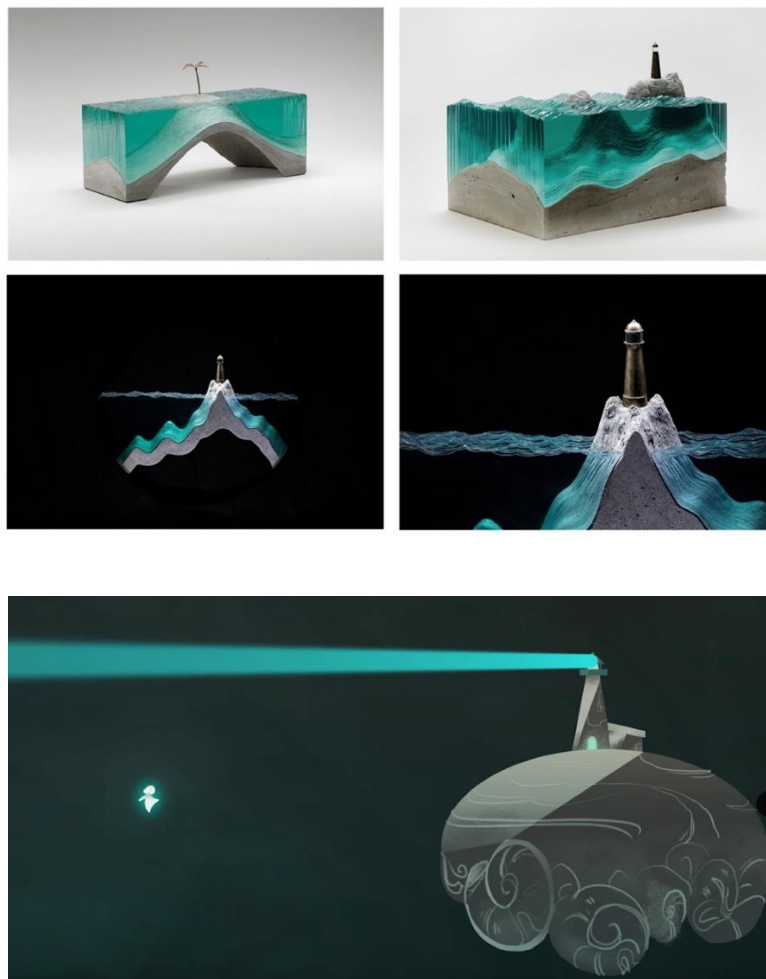
(fig. 13 Above, glass sculptures by Ben Young reminiscent to my mother's work; below, my final rendering and interpretation of them for the film.)

I decided to create rich watercolor textures to overlay across my film in strategic ways, be it as the overlay to put over Espe as reference to his reflective qualities, or as background washes to give that 'fine art' quality to my film, much like Daniel Sousa did for his film in "*Feral*"(Sarto). I did manage to do some of the paintings myself, but the majority were created by my own mother, who had a background in Fine Arts and was a painter herself. Many of her textures served as background elements and transitions; others were meant to be place holders for more complex backgrounds that unfortunately never came to be due to time restrictions, and as such were left permanently. I was excited that I got to collaborate so intimately with my mother and include her in the animation process. She not only held a deeper understanding of the complexity of the medium now, but higher respect for it (which was already fairly high as she had been a great fan of animation. My brother and I teased that the only reason she had children in the first place was so that she could watch cartoons all day long, with no judgement from other adults).

(fig 14. Above, watercolor washes by my mother, Roxana Rodriguez. Below, how they were implemented in the film itself. Color correction was added in post, but were otherwise unedited.)
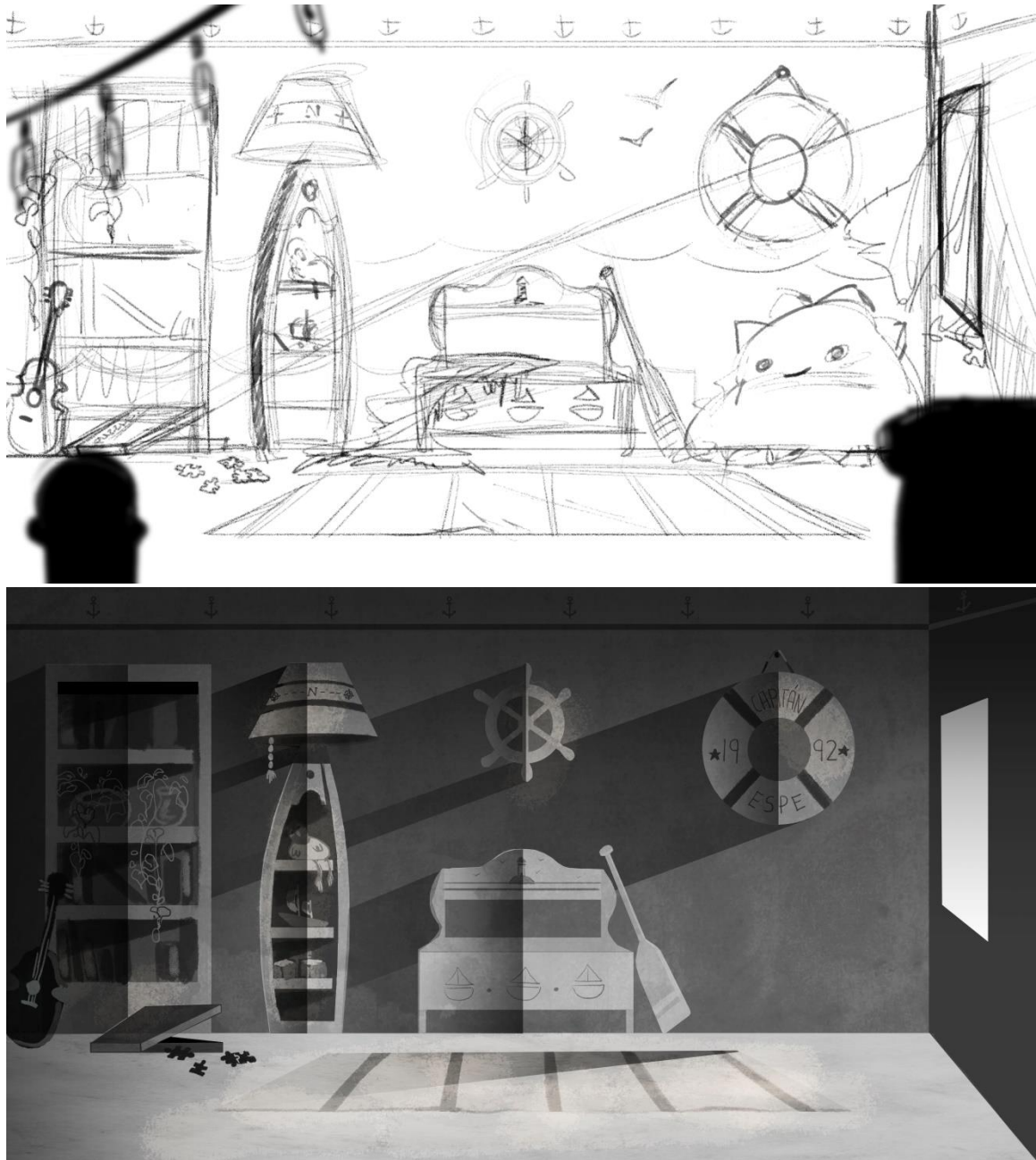
(fig. 15. Above, comparison of my sketch layouts to the final render for the film. My graphic design background was fairly prevalent in the "crispness" of the shading and the lineart-less aesthetic.

(fig. 15 Below, one of the pan backgrounds for the film, created on different layers so they could be easily manipulated in After Effects.)

- file management -

Having an organization system was key for this production. I needed it to be accessible and thorough, in the instance that if somebody ever needed to access my files, they could navigate it easily enough without my assistance.

I began by dividing the project in the traditional way the industry does and how I was taught in school; in Pre-production, Production and Post-production. From there, my "organization tree" would grow to encompass the necessities of each of these three branches.

I also had a back-up system of multiple platforms. I confess to not being the best at this in my previous two films, which cost me many hours and lost files. I was determined to not have the same occur with my thesis. I made sure to back-up at the end of each "work day" into multiple "cloud" systems online (RIT Network, Google Drive – both RIT and my own – and Dropbox), as well as two separate external hard drives. This made for the saving process to be a long and arduous one (sometimes 3-4 hours), but worth it, as I always had the peace of mind that my work was safe and accessible from various systems.

I referenced my file-naming conventions and brackets from my previous freelance work with a studio. I found the way they organized their work was easy enough for any layman to understand and figure out. For example, when working on a shot, it would be named "theline_keys_shot001_v001", and I would version up every time I worked on it. Once the animation was roughed out and ready for inking, I would change the name to "theline_ink_shot001_v001", and proceed in a similar manner to the rough phase. After inking was

done, change once more to "theline_color_shot001_v001". It might seem like a lot of unnecessary versioning up, but what I found with this method used by [adult swim] was that files didn't get accidentally replaced or deleted because there was always a new version or a backup to work with. By also separating them into different phases (namely: keys, ink and color), it helped me keep a consistent workflow with my own work, where I could do many shots and rename them to visibly know what stage they were currently in. It is a similar idea to Dailies or Weeklies, another common formatting used in the studio for smaller projects (think 30-second ad bumpers).

| 📁 KEYS | 📁 INK | 📁 COLOR |

theline_keys_shot001_v001.tvpp
theline_keys_shot001_v002.tvpp
theline_keys_shot002.tvpp
theline_keys_shot003.tvpp
theline_keys_shot004.tvpp
theline_keys_shot005.tvpp
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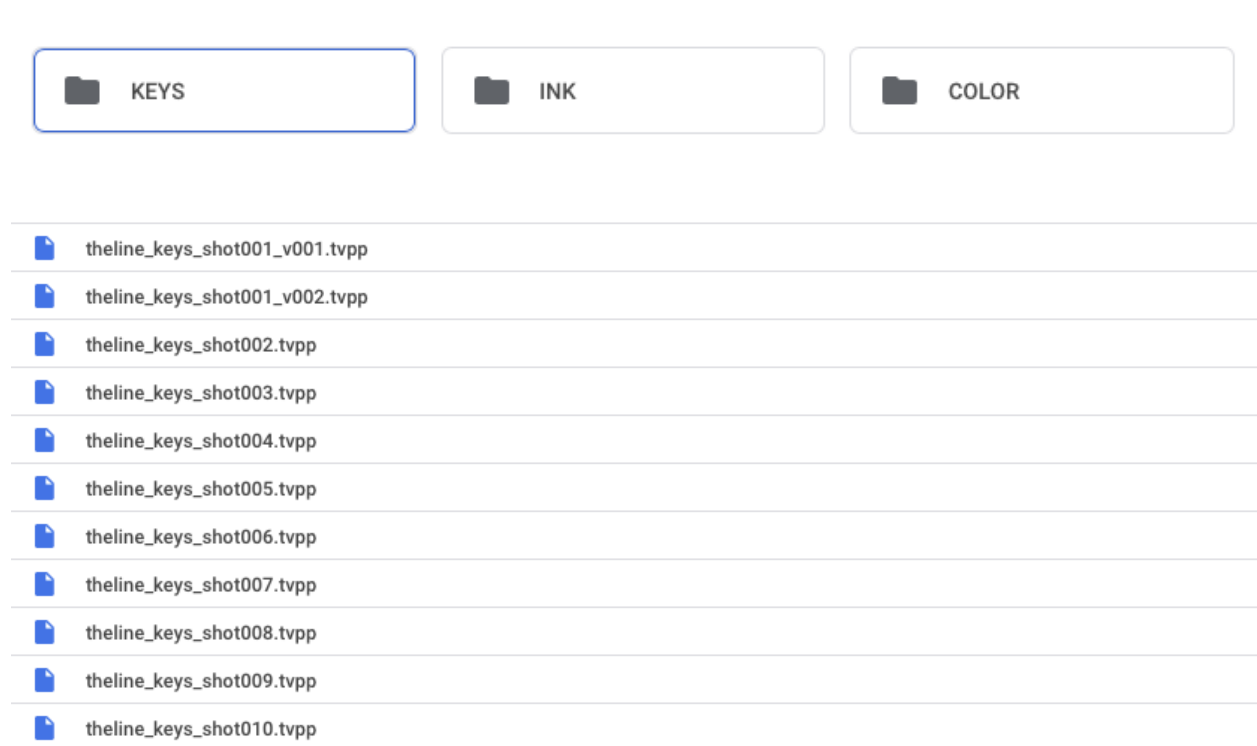
(fig.16 My main production folders and how they were set up.)

I was never certain of how many people I would have on my crew and who would have to access these files, but I wanted ease to be the operative word. I found that in that sense I was rather successful, as even my own mother could figure it out (and she was not the most tech-savvy individual).

- animation -
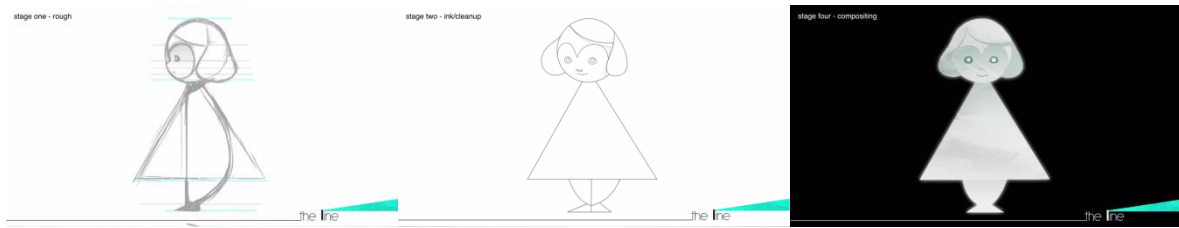
The line was meant to be a challenge for myself in the realm of character animation and being able to convey personality through subtle acting. I had always considered myself a rather good key animator (and I had my background in newspaper comics to thank for that), but producing work that was subdued and not extreme, and fleshing out in-betweens that were subtle, was never my area of expertise or preference.

I chose TVPaint Pro as my primary means of animation, as I was already familiarized with the program and had done the entirety of the animatic in it. That made the conversion from animatic to animation all the easier.

Now here was where expectation clashed most fatally with reality and become a distant fantasy. My goal of smooth animation on twos quickly bared its fangs, and I cowered under the strain of the amount of work it would entail. Hastily, I changed my keys and timing to fit a limited animation based on 3s, 4s and, shamefully sometimes, on 6s. I thought to myself "If anime does it and gets a passing grade, so can I, dammit!" Not the best mindset to have, truthfully, but one tells oneself what one must in order to finish a project at all costs. The road to hell is paved with good intentions, or what not.

Because this was my first animation with dialogue, it was also the first time I would have to tackle lip-synching. Espe had several close-up shots where the performance was dependent on how they delivered the lines, and the accompanying acting with it. Espe had to always believably act like a child, which meant also capturing the idiosyncrasies of how they speak. For the most part though, it went rather well.

Another notable challenge was my first foray into After Effects animation. I had previously used the Adobe program for compositing, lighting and texturing in my past films – but I had no knowledge whatsoever on how one uses it for actual animation. And there I was, about to do an entire credit sequence fully in After Effects. But as years of job hunting had shown me, AE was a must in any animator's tool-kit. I felt it was my responsibility to force myself to learn this program, even if that put me at terrible risk in my production. I chose the credits as my area of focus for this, as they were fairly short (30 seconds exactly), and had minimal transition animation. A safe enough dip into the vast and deep ocean that was motion graphic animation, surely. Or so I thought. It took exactly a combined 17 hours' worth of youtube research and animation to complete my credits, which unfortunately still had their fair share of mistakes due to the nature of my being self-taught.

- post-production -

While the bulk of the character animation was created in TVPaint, there was still the matter of compositing. My characters needed a stage in which to perform, and After Effects was my theater of choice. Not only was the program to be my main compositing tool, I would also be doing secondary animation (for example, the 3D camera for my background shots), color correction, shading, lighting and lastly, captioning.

A fellow classmate, Luke Polito, taught me the basics of the 3D camera so that I could create a sense of depth to my world, despite the flatness in which it was rendered. Much like Walt Disney's MultiPlane Camera, After Effects allowed me to slice my background elements into different layers and move them at varying speeds and distances. This parallax camera gave the scenes the illusion of depth perception, and as such, a more cinematic appeal to the frame. This was particularly important for me, as the opening 30 seconds of the film would require heavy use of this technique, zooming out from the lighthouse and into Espe's room (or more specifically, Espe themselves). Without the 3D camera, I would have had to animate the entire sequence in TVPaint; something that, with my skill level and time constraint, was not possible.

The next steps were fairly easy, seeing as I was well used to adding color correction and light/shadow rendering (having done it for my previous two films as well). For the color correction, I applied an overlay gradient of turquoise and yellow, to create a consistent mood throughout the piece and to liven up the overwhelming dullness of the greys. This required me to do it individually by shot though, as it allowed for greater control lest I overexpose or darken any one shot by applying the same treatment to the entire film indiscriminately.

As for shading and lighting, minimal amounts of it were done in post, as I had taken it upon myself to do as much of both in my actual production pipeline. Still, for some shots that required more dramatic lighting, I added some shading and lighting in After Effects using masking tools to track my animation, and added a rough shade finish to give it that airbrushed 80s synth-wave look (Eisley) I had mentioned before.
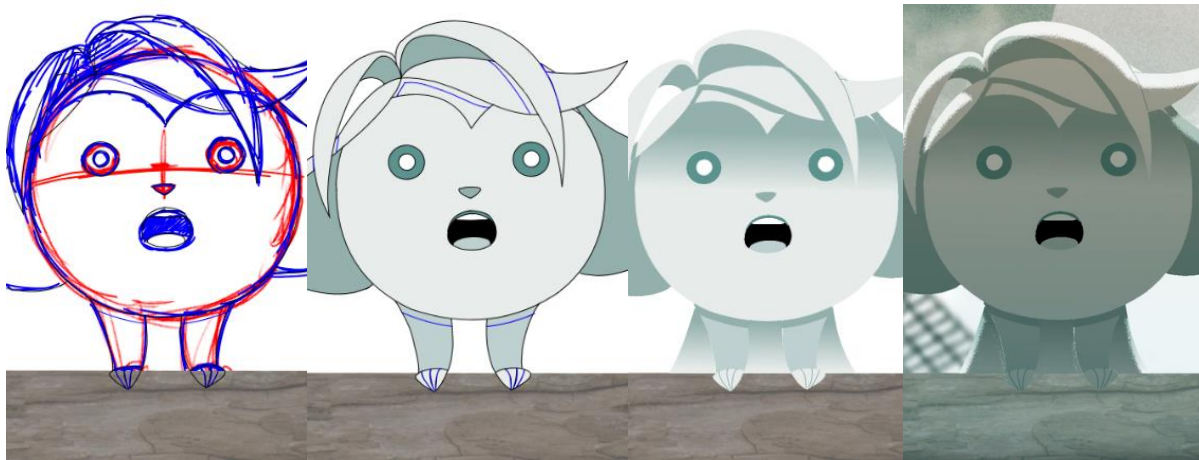
(fig.17 From rough animation, ink & color, shade & lighting, and final compositing.)

The last step was to add closed captioning to my finished film. I had already included subtitles in my animatic, since the film was dubbed in Spanish and therefore my peers and advisor needed to know what was being said in each scene. But I wanted to go the extra step and add closed captioning for the deaf community on campus. Although it certainly took time to provide accurate captioning to the film, I don't regret including it into my pipeline. Providing visual aids for audiences that either do not speak the language, are hard of hearing, or simply need text descriptions of what they would otherwise be hearing due to their condition was something that I was very passionate about. To take that facet of my film out of my schedule for the sake of making my life "easier" in order to pay more attention to other aspects was non-negotiable. Short films, even student-produced, should be enjoyed by everyone after all.

Espe: Grownups always ask weird stuff...
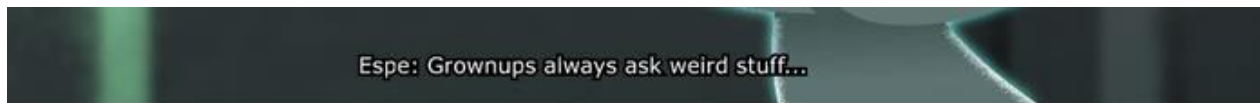
- music & sound design -

Early in the fall semester, I attended the "Artist Call Meeting" – an event organized and graciously hosted by our own SOFA Professor, Stephanie Maxwell. Students from RIT's music department, Eastman School of Music and other notable music schools came to the SOFA department in hopes of collaborating with animators or live-action directors, to create scores their respective films. I presented a rough animatic of my film with some visual development illustrations and was fortunately approached by several composers. After watching their presentations, I narrowed them down to three candidates, exchanged contact information and listened again to their reels.
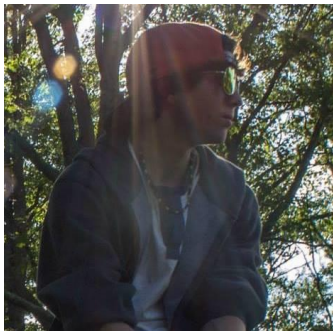
I was impressed by one student in particular from RIT, Justin Levine. Justin seemed enthusiastic about the project and had worked previously with animation and video games. He was also familiar with the particular instrument I was in search of, the *marimba*, which is a percussion instrument consisting of a set of wooden bars struck with yarn or rubber mallets to produce musical tones. The resonation from this instrument creates an airy and whimsical sound, the likes of wind chimes. As luck would have it, he had actually been in a marimba band!

We spoke at length about the use of marimba and other percussion instruments to create an atmospheric experience, a sort of lullaby that would set the tone for the entirety of the film. He mentioned Joe Hisaishi, famed Ghibli composer, as one of his main inspirations; my second sign.

It turned out that Justin was the mentee of esteemed RIT professor, Thomas Davis, who had done the scores for my two previous films, and I understood that the gods were on my side. We were in business. As Justin was graduating that December, we would be communicating online to continue our collaboration into the Spring semester. He would compose over winter break and come back to me with a score by February. This would give me ample time to focus on the next task: finding and recording voice actors for my film.

Dave Sluberski, who was in my committee, gave me a couple of key recommendations for recording equipment I would need. Most of my audio could be found online, but I strove for authenticity above all, and wanted sounds that were iconic to my memories of my home. That meant that I would need to travel overseas and back to the Caribbean, and would need compact equipment to aid me in my amateur recording. The acquisition of a *Zoom Kit* was pivotal for this, as it was an easy handheld device that I could bring with me anywhere. I traveled during December, when tourist season was low and I would be able to get the crispest sound with as little human interruption as possible.
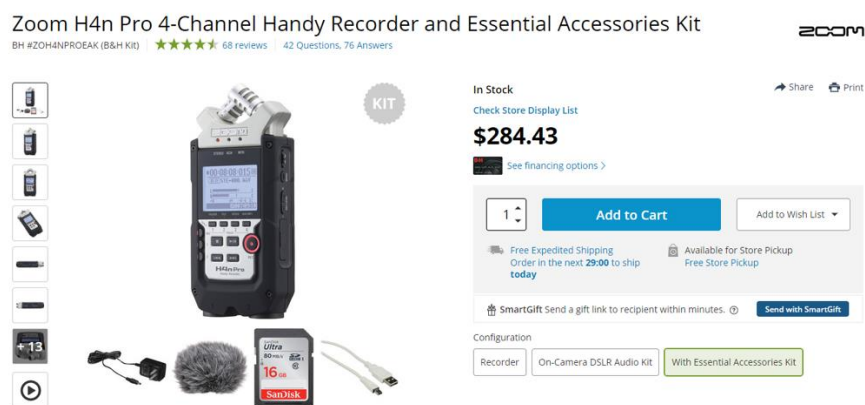
(fig.18 Zoom H-4 kit.)

Back home in Puerto Rico, I used the Zoom H-4 to record foley and ambience sounds. This included the beach, the rainforest, the wildlife (seagulls, mainly) and spanish conversations from locals. Everything was within a walking distance from my home, and made my week-long recording an easy and soothing endeavor.

(fig. 19 Recording audio with the Zoom H-4 in Coco Beach, Rio Grande, PR.)

Prior to that though, in November I did some voice acting sessions in RIT's narration and ADR rooms with my voice actors. There were some Hispanic locals in Rochester who were willing to do a line or two for my film, mainly as crowd voices. I also had my parents visiting and, since they also spoke Spanish, they were more than eager to provide the voices for Espe's parental figures. Including my family as much as possible into the production of my film was something important for me. Not only did they experience the various facets of animation, but they could also see me working in my own turf, dispelling any mystique or doubts they might harbor about the industry their daughter was entering.

(fig.20 Roxana Rodriguez and Alfredo Agelviz doing ADR in the Narration Room at RIT.)
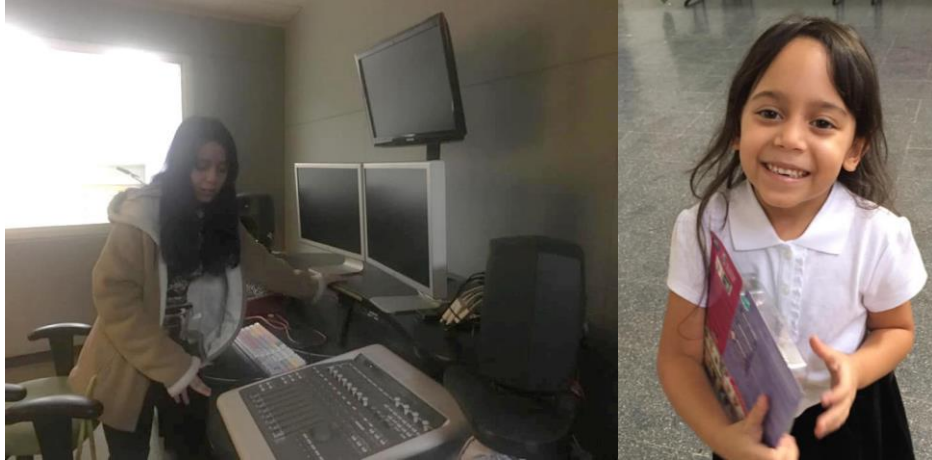
(fig. 21 Left, setting up the audio room for voice recording. Right, Espe's voice actress, Ambar.)

Voice acting sessions continued all the way into the spring with my young voice-actress, Ambar, who would be bringing Espe to life with her vocal talent. At 7 years old, she had little acting training; but her voice held the clear and childlike quality that I was searching for - neither too girlish nor too boyish. I had managed to do some sessions with her during my December trip to Puerto Rico, but some lines changed with my script and as such I had an extra session with her during the Spring Break.

What I later dubbed as the "Spring Semester Scramble and the search for a sound designer" was in high gear during this time of my thesis. Justin had finished the musical score in early March, but was not available to do the sound design as he had expected, which left me hanging dry and desperate. Most of the sound designers in RIT were naturally working in other film projects, and it seemed like I would be doing the sound design myself. Not an impossible feat, but certainly something else on my already heavy plate that I didn't really need.

Cue Creighton to the rescue. An MPS student, Creighton Yanchar was already involved as the sound designer of several other animated films in the department, but was highly recommended by Professor Dave Sluberski as being a general sound wizard. I contacted him several times with my plight, and he eventually took pity and agreed to take on my project. Much rejoicing ensued, particularly because he wanted to try Surround Sound application to my film, which was far and beyond what I was expecting.

- technical issues & troubleshooting -

When I first proposed this idea, I had originally wished for the film to be done traditionally, in watercolor and pencil. Hilarious, I know. My mentor, Peter, humored my whimsy with the wisdom of a man who had seen many a foolish animator come through his door with outlandish ideas, and while he gently advised me against my 'traditional animation' mentality, he was very supportive. It was then that he turned me to the work of Daniel Sousa, who uses a combination of traditional textures composited on top of digital animation (Sarto). It made the process more streamlined while still retaining the fanciful look of 'hand-drawn' animation. A wise man, indeed, that Peter. As the deadline approached, I quickly realized my folly and jumped on-board to the mixed media approach, shelving my dream of traditional animation for another less pressing project (one that I would do for fun and would not have a deadline). First technical issue tackled and disposed of. But like a mythical Hydra, more problems reared their ugly heads and took its place.

As mentioned previously, I had recorded a large amount of my script over the Fall Semester with some local talent and my own parents. Unfortunately, due to my own carelessness, these voice-acting sessions were lost. This meant that I would need to re-record all of the dialogue with the adults a second time. I wasn't overly concerned about it, as I would be travelling over to Puerto Rico during the winter and would have ample talent from which to choose from. An annoyance to be sure, but certainly a manageable bump in my journey.

Once back home - with all of my dialogues recorded and a new sound designer collaborating with me – I anticipated smooth sailings moving forward. I gave Creighton my audio tracks and awaited his appraisal of my recording prowess. His response: "You need to record everything again". A milder, more charitable version of Dave's "This is crap". The good thing about living in a tropical island is being constantly surrounded by nature. The bad thing about it: the audio recorders catch all of nature. The wind, the waves, the local fauna – nothing escaped my little Zoom H-4's microphone. And while there were several audio lines that could be used, a lot of it – mainly Ambar's lines – were unusable. I had done my best to set up a recording-ready room in her house, using blankets to cover the windows, mattress padding for the doors and even turning off all fans and electricity in the room to avoid humming (do you know how hard it is to record in a dark, stuffy room when it's 90F outside?). Despite that, the beautiful songbirds of my country still managed to permeate the little bubble I had created, and as such, corrupted all clear audio files.

Luckily, I was familiar with her family and they were fine with recording the audio once more in my place. I sent very specific instructions on how to audio-proof the room (detailed by Creighton himself) and delivered the Zoom H-4 Kit by mail so they could do the session. Again, precious time was lost. Eventually the audio came back, much clearer than before (luckily all the birds go up to the mountains during Spring time), and I had audio that Creighton could more comfortably work with.

Although most of my troubles came from the post-production and audio aspect of the process, there was no shortage of animation issues. Namely, my film had water as a central focus for the majority of its duration (it opened and closed with water) and while I tried to animate it by hand, I wasn't getting results as fast as I would hope. Not only that, but my lack of animating knowledge for elements and special effects was painfully clear. Deciding not to waste any more time, water animation became one of those things that had to be sacrificed in order to finish my film in time for screenings. This was certainly a lesson of how you should never leave your opening and closing shots for last, even if you do have good credits.

- critiques & feedback –

My film screened on May 6th of 2019, at the Wegman's Theater in Magic Spell Studios. It was one of the three last films for Screening's week showing that day, and I certainly felt the pressure. Sitting with the audience, I felt that people were for the most part engaged, reacting appropriately to specific moments in the film. The lights turned on, and the following applause was reassuring, easing me into my thesis presentation and earning a couple of chuckles along the way. The following feedback received was mixed – as I expected – and generally insightful.

I got compliments on Espe itself, with people remarking that I had created a main character that immediately endeared itself to the audience within seconds of the film, and therefore made them care about its journey. Other positive feedback came from faculty itself, with comments like "I have watched you grow exponentially and for this to be your last RIT film is perfect". Other people commented on my color treatment as being something not often seen in RIT animated films, and creating a consistent mood of eeriness and fantasy with my color palette. Finally, multiple people mentioned the use of animated credits, remarking that it made the film feel like a more complete cinematic experience.

There was no shortage of constructive critiques, though. I got, appropriately, called out for the rushed nature of my ending, leaving the audience more confused than thoughtful. Not only that, but some of the elements used (like the seagull or the lighthouse) skewed the story into more abstract storytelling as opposed to what was mostly a linear narrative. And although my thesis speech did help clear up some of the confusion, placing my film as more of a metaphorical piece as opposed to a character-driven story, it needed to be made clearer within the context of the film itself. These were all points that I was in complete agreeance with, and ones that I would keep in mind when creating future projects.

Despite the many faults that I saw in my film, from animation to story, I was surprised to see that *The Line* made it into the honorable mentions of the RIT Honors Show. Perhaps it earned it's spot for sheer effort and ambition alone, if not for the final execution of it. I was certainly very honored by it, as I was in very deserving company with many amazing student films.

- reflections -

"There is no truth or lie, it all depends on the glass through which you spy." This was a common proverb that I heard many times growing up in my native home of Puerto Rico. One of many actually, as my friends and classmates would be quick to tell you that I communicate almost exclusively in proverbs. In a way, Puertoricans are basically Yoda from Star Wars: kind of wise and two feet tall. I'm only half-joking, too.

Going back to the proverb, this particular one always stuck with me, as it reinforced a virtue that I valued in my personal life and storytelling: empathy. To understand that other humans exist as individuals with their own thoughts apart from our own identities and realities. The truth, whatever that may be, was often a subjective experience. I'd always been fascinated with the idea of giving life to proverbs in thought-provoking ways and this was my attempt to do so: by imagining how a child made of mirror would navigate the world. Even in our own reality, where our body isn't made of glass, people are quick to cast their own reflections on you. The film also served as an homage to my own country, taking subtle visual cues from my own upbringing as an island native, in a way that was palatable and universal. I wanted to push myself with dialogue and lip-sycning, which I had never done before in animation, and character animation, which has never been my strength. And for the most part, I was pleased with what I learned and achieved these past eight months.

After much reflection, pardon the pun, on my mirror character and how I chose to tell their story, I found myself torn. I'll be candid with you; this wasn't the film I set out to do. Much like my main character, Espe, I

found myself overwhelmed by my own world at the time of development for this film, and quickly became lost and full of fear. The result was a finished film with an incomplete story that I was not as proud of as I would like to be. But rather than dwelling on the mistakes, glaring as they may be, I instead wanted to focus on a rather poignant moment for me in this journey.

Late in the production, I showed the in-progress film to my seven-year-old actress, with no little amount of fear because…kids are brutal. They'll tell you that you smell like Play-Doh and it will stay with you for the rest of your life. So, after the screening, I gathered my courage and bracing myself asked her: "Did you like it?" With more tact than any child – or even some adults – she replied: "Yes, I did like it. But…was Espe happy?" I was struck dumb. Never during the production of my film had I once thought about my character's happiness. Their emotional outcome had become secondary, and in turn I had become as vapid and self-centered as the adults in the film, who only cared about trivial things like "growing up", "deadlines" and "being perfect". My character's happiness, much like my own, had become irrelevant in the pursuit of reaching that finish line called "graduation". I had set out to do this movie as a celebration of all the things that brought me joy as a child in the Caribbean: waking up to seagull nests in my window, going to sleep to the sound of the waves and windchimes in my backyard, fieldtrips to the local lighthouse, and the comforting yet eerie green of the ocean that surrounds my home from all sides – a green both beautiful and haunting and full of secrets.

"Was Espe happy?" I repaid my voice actress' curiosity with honesty. I said: "I don't know. What do you think?" and she replied: "I hope so".

The Line was a fairytale for adults, inspired by great stories like "The Little Prince", that was meant to be a reminder that who we are now is just one of a million possibilities of who we can be, and that our potential is as infinite as the line where the ocean meets the sky. To those who needed to hear this, I wanted to express that, whether you're passing through trials and tribulations of personal trauma in your life right now, or you have finally found the person that you were always meant to be, I hope - from the bottom of my heart - that you are happy. *Thank you.*

- thesis proposal -

The Line

2D Animation

Angélica A. Agélviz R.

Thesis Proposal

For MFA in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

March, 20. 2018

Approved for Submission by:

Peter Murphey, Thesis Chair,

TBA, Thesis Adviser

TBA, Thesis Adviser

Treatment:

"There is no truth or lie; it all depends on the glass through which you spy."

But what if there is no glass? What if all you had to see the world around you… was a mirror?

The window to a hospital room is open, and we can hear the soft and gentle crying of a newborn baby. Inside the cramped room, a nurse looks worriedly at the doctor, who nods her head grimly in return. With a frown on her face, the doctor turns to the happy couple – the mother tired, but glowing; the father anxious, but relieved – as they both eagerly await to see their child. Cautiously passing the child to the mother's outstretched hands with exaggerated care, the doctor comments that the baby is alright…except for one small thing. Confused, the mother blinks down at the bundle in her arms and her smile disappears, replaced by shock. Looking back at her is her own alarmed expression, quite literally. For you see, the baby's skin is completely made out of mirror.

The strange baby, Espe as his parents name him, grows to a strange child. Espe plays with a little boy, throwing rocks in an open field. Espe throws them at a patch of shallow grass; the boy throws them at birds maliciously. With a pout, the boy complains about his teachers being unfairly hard on him. Espe comments that the reason the boy is doing badly at school is because he is insecure about his own intelligence and instead of studying spends his time bullying others. The boy gets offended, asking Espe: "Do you think I'm stupid?" Espe says: "I don't think anything." As a mirror, Espe only sees reality as it is, and so cannot lie. Outraged by the frankness, the boy grabs a rock and throws it at Espe, cracking his mirror skin.

The field dissolves to a dark room, and the sound of gentle sniffling is heard as Espe's mother attempts to fix him. Gently, she explains that sometimes the truth is not the kindest thing to say. Espe says it's strange that adults believe it is kinder to lie. His mother shakes her head but says nothing. Espe asks if he should be more like the boy in the field, throwing rocks at birds and complaining about others. Espe's mother tells Espe that he should be himself. But Espe doesn't know who that is yet.

Espe develops to a young adult. The crack remains, a reminder to the dangers of truth. Espe grows up to flatter others, to appeal to their vanity, to mimic them. Espe stands before beautiful people and compliments them. The girls pout, the men frown, and both accuse Espe of lying – for they can see their imperfections: acne, scars, stretchmarks; all their physical and mental faults amplified in Espe's perfectly reflective skin. Espe is confused, and asks what he should say then, what he should show, to please others.

"Don't be fake. Just be yourself." But Espe doesn't know who that is yet.

Espe leaves his home with his parents' blessing to travel the country and find out who he is. Espe meets many people on his travels: a priest, who tells Espe to be a man of faith; an artist, who tells Espe to be realistic; a wealthy business man, who tells Espe to be rich. None of these help him. Espe writes to his mother and father, asking who they think their child should be. The father replies, "be remembered." The mother writes, "be loved."

Overwhelmed by all these voices and opinions that only confuse him, Espe runs without really seeing where he is going until he falls pitifully. Catching sight of the crack on his skin, he grabs a rock and begins to smash away at it. "If I don't know who I am, then I must be nobody!" He continues to hurt himself between tears of frustration, until finally flinging the rock aside. He is panting on all fours, when he hears a strange sound where the rock falls. Almost liquid. Standing on shaky legs and holding his cracked wound, he follows the

sound. Soon enough, Espe reaches the edge of a large body of water. And Espe, who has never seen so much water in his life, wonders out loud, "What is this?"

"The ocean." A tiny voice pipes up. Espe looks down to see a fish popping its head out of the water. Espe wonders in his mind (narration) 'why is a fish is talking? but then again, he himself is made of mirrors and not skin.' So instead he asks: "What is the ocean?"

The fish explains it is the upside-down sky, and that Espe actually reminds the fish of a walking ocean. Espe gently corrects the fish by telling her that Espe is not an ocean, but a mirror. The fish laughs and says that the ocean must be the biggest mirror in the world then, because it reflects everything too.

Espe's curiosity is piqued; until then Espe has never been able to see his own reflection in a mirror, but perhaps with the world's largest mirror, he could finally see himself as he is, without outside interference.

Eagerly, Espe peeks into the shore, but only sees sand. "The ocean is broken." Espe remarks, upset. "I cannot see myself." "*This* isn't the ocean, silly. This is the shore! It's too shallow to see yourself properly. That- "The fish points to the far horizon. "Is where you want to go; to the line where the ocean meets the sky." Espe squints at where the fish is pointing, and with a sinking heart notes that it is very far away.

But the answers we seek are rarely easy to get to, so determined to find the answers to who he is, Espe rents a boat and begins his voyage.

It is a magnificent but turbulent journey; with fantastic and fearful creatures that swim below and fly above Espe's little boat, to a merciless storm that almost drowns him. When all seems lost, and he feels he will not survive the night, Espe holds on tighter to his determination. He may not know who he is. But more than being loved or remembered, more than rich, or realistic or full of faith; he knows that he wants to be *alive*. Grabbing a broken shard from his cracked skin, he cuts the rope from the sails that rock his boat like a toy, and wraps it around himself, tying himself tightly to the vessel.

And finally, just as quickly as it started, the storm ends.

Espe finds himself in an eerily empty place; there is nothing but heavens and water as far as the eye can see, and if it weren't for Espe's boat it would be hard to know what is up and what is down. The line.

Espe hesitantly leans forward into the water and nervously looks down. What will he see?

Espe is quiet, a sense of confusion , joy and awe in their stance as they take in the reflection that the audience cannot view. A sharp intake of breath.

The world around Espe dissolves, and it is just Espe repeated a million times in a space that seems to go on forever. It is large, expansive, overpowering; but not frightening. The abstract space fills Espe with hope, as he clasps his hands over his chest and, for the first time in the film, he smiles.

What we see with Espe is… infinity.

Logline:

Espe struggles to figure out who he is in life, a task that is exceptionally difficult when you're born as a mirror.

Rationale:

The story is about Espe, a person who is born with skin that is made out of mirror. Espe goes through life asking what they should do and who they should be. Every person gives Espe a response based on themselves, as all everyone can see is their own reflection and not Espe.

The Line is an exploration of the age-old question: who am I? And the answer to that is as endless as time itself. Who we are is determined by a multiplicity of things that boil down to perception, not only of others but of ourselves, and can be summed up in one word: Infinity. We are all ripe with infinite potential and possibility, but we must be brave enough to look inside of ourselves and reach for it, without letting other people's opinions affect those choices.

I wanted to delve deeper into my understanding of the themes of individuality, freedom of thought, fragility of ego and the unreliability of 'truth'. The idea for this story was a simple enough one: what would happen if somebody was born made out of mirror? And what would happen if that mirror were to look at itself? As I continued developing the story I quickly realized that, while Espe's situation was quite special, it was not too far removed from reality. All humans carry mirrors inside of ourselves, some are just better guarded. Often times when we talk to each other, we give our opinions based on our own experiences, not taking into consideration the other person's feelings or situation at all. We create mirrors out of them and see only ourselves. This is a situation I often see with others who receive advice from colleagues, friends and family and, however well-intentioned those comments may be, they seldom take into consideration that person's specific situation.

We have to find a balance between being true to ourselves and heeding other's advice. Ultimately, your life is your own, and only *you* can give meaning to your own life.

I wanted to try my hand at a story that, while narrative, was more fragmented; like a fable coming to life and seen through slivers of stained glass. I have always been drawn to stories that seem to show one thing but mean something else entirely. Works like Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince" and Paulo Coehlo's "The Alchemist" have always been great influences in my storytelling, and I wanted to show how deceptively simple and childish stories could be brought to life through the medium of animation.

Vision:

I hope to use mix-media, combining both traditional mediums with digital compositing and editing. That is to say, I will rely heavily on the use of watercolor washes and pencil shading to create textures that will be overlaid on digitally-drawn animation for a nostalgic and whimsical feeling. Though there are certain brushes and tools that can help mimic this traditional aesthetic on digital programs, I would like to stay true to the traditional medium that I have most affinity to as a fine-arts student, and experiment with those techniques now as an animator.

I'm not opposed to dabbling in experimental animation to create a certain mood. Films like "Feral" by Daniel Sousa and "The Blue Sweater" by Dhaneesh Kooliyath are good examples of the use of transdigital animation and mixed media that I strive for.

The animation itself will be completed utilizing TV Paint for purposes of time. Characters will be simplistic, all mostly silhouette and negative space, with Espe being the most complex in design and rendering due to his ever-changing reflective quality. Using line-art and vague color washes for the background layouts to imply a sense of space will be considered, as the world that Espe habituates should be minimalistic in nature so that he can stand out. While most of the characters will be simple in design, they will be emotionally expressive in both pose and acting.

Over the summer, I want to study the possibility of using some 3D elements such as camera moves and compositing for transitions and the final shot of "infinity".
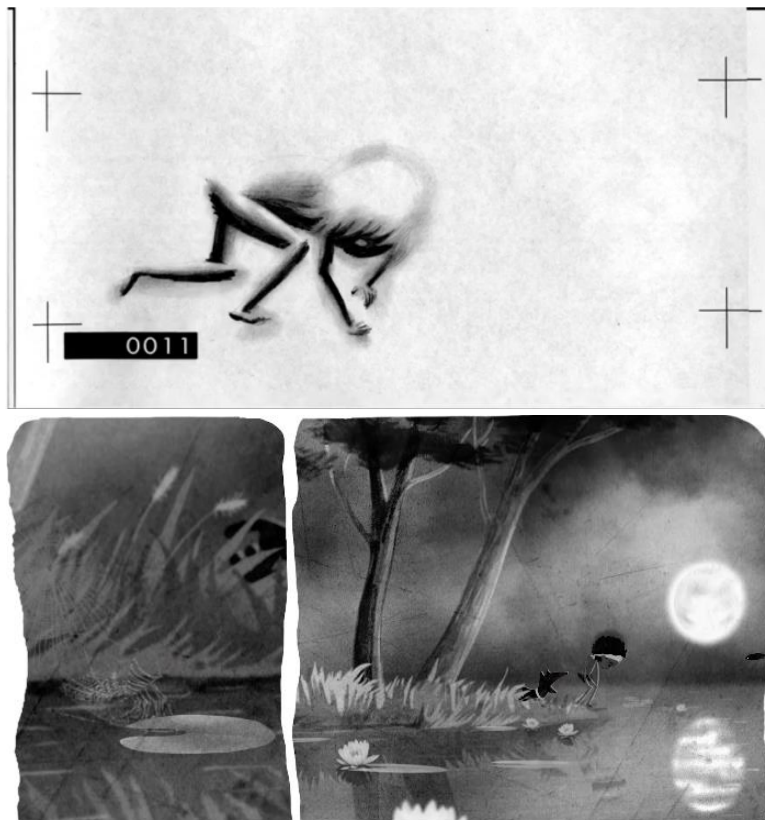
Visuals:
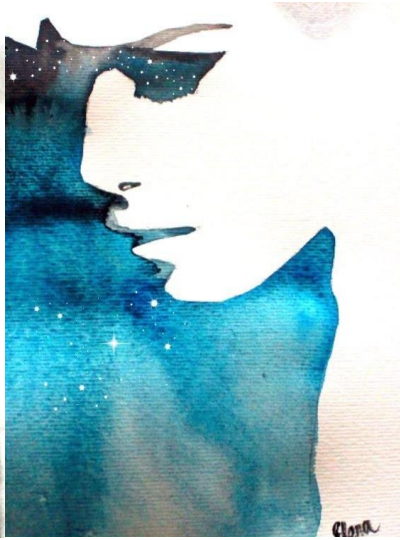
Thesis Production Budget

	Cost:
Work Station:	
Scanner	$150
Drawing Supplies (pencils, watercolor paper, watercolors, brushes)	$400
Drawing Tablet	$ 100
Software:	
TV Paint	$400
Creative Cloud Adobe Programs (use on own computer):	$20/month for 12 months
Sound:	
Composer's Compensation	$300
Voice talent:	$200
Release	
Festival Fees	$300
Print for Promotional (Posters, cards, character drawings, etc.)	$200
Total:	$2,170

2018-FALL

		20-Aug	27-Aug	3-Sep	10-Sep	17-Sep	24-Sep	1-Oct	8-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	5-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	3-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	24-Dec
Development	Story Script	█	█																	
	Model sheets	█	█	█																
	Concept Designs		█	█	█	█														
Pre-production	Storyboard			█	█	█	█													
	Color Script						█	█	█	█										
	Animatic						█	█	█	█										
	Shot list										█									
Production	Keys											█	█	█	█	█				
	Inbetweens													█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	Background															█	█	█	█	█
	Proof of Concept																			
	Inking																			
	Coloring																			
Post production	Composite																			
	Effects																			
	Render																			
Sound Design	Composer Search			█	█	█	█													
	Music(rough)								█	█	█	█	█	█	█					
	Music(Final)															█	█	█	█	█
	SFX												█	█	█	█	█	█	█	█
	Mixing																			

		2019-SPRING																
		7-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	4-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	4-Mar	11-Mar	18-Mar	25-Mar	1-Apr	8-Apr	15-Apr	22-Apr	29-Apr
Development	Story Script																	
	Model sheets																	
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	Color Script																	
	Animatic																	
	Shot list																	
Production	Keys																	
	Inbetweens																	
	Background																	
	Proof of Concept	X																
	Inking			X	X													
	Coloring							X	X									
Post production	Composite											X	X					
	Effects											X	X	X	X			
	Render																	X
Sound Design	Composer Search																	
	Music(rough)																	
	Music(Final)	X																
	SFX																	
	Mixing												X	X	X	X	X	

49

- script -

WHITE.

SOUNDS echoing: small, light objects dropping; the ocean waves breaking; sea gulls in the distance. They resonate in a low, distorted and far away rumble.

> ESPE (V.O.)
> When I was very, very young…

WHITE DISSOLVES…

Wide shot of a beach, the waves crashing softly. In the great distance, the blurred but proud shape of a lighthouse stands tall. CAMERA ZOOMS OUT VERY GENTLY.

> ESPE (V.O.)
> …my mother used to tell me, "There is no truth or lie. It all depends on the glass through which you spy."

As the camera zooms out, it is revealed that the landscape is actually being seen from a window, as the panes and curtains come into the screen.

CAMERA CONTINUES ZOOM OUT.

> ESPE (V.O.)
> …What if there is no glass?

INT. ROOM

A seagull lands on the window sill, obscuring the lighthouse. It cleans its feathers distractedly.

> ESPE (V.O.)
> What if all you had to understand the world around you-

CAMERA CONTINUES ZOOM OUT. The seagull looks up, staring directly at the camera. A light shimmer crosses the screen, and slowly it is revealed that the window is actually a reflection. The reflective surface is suspiciously human-like.

> ESPE (V.O.)
> -was a mirror?

CAMERA STOPS ZOOM. The reflection is revealed to be a CHILD. The CHILD smiles at the seagull.

ESPE runs away from the party, without really seeing where he is going. His FATHER's shouts follow him, growing fainter as ESPE runs farther down to the beach.

BEACH

ESPE runs until he falls pitifully. Breathing heavily, he gasps, catching sight of the crack on his skin, which has expanded.

ESPE panics, trying to plug the hole of his crack unsuccessfully. Desperately, he crawls about trying to find sand, shells, *anything*, until he crashes into the shore, and even then he tries to fill himself with water only to leak.

SEA SHORE - SAND

ESPE stops, momentarily out of energy, panting on all fours and half submerged in the water. After a moment, ESPE notices his silhouette on the water's surface. It is too shallow for a perfect reflection though. Standing on shaky legs and holding his cracked wound, ESPE looks up at the ocean. Far in the horizon, expanding infinitely from one side to the other, is the line between the ocean and the sky.

ESPE staggers into the ocean, but winces, his form still cracking. It would be too difficult to swim in his state.

ESPE hears a familiar cry whizz above and past him. ESPE follows the sound and sees the SEAGULL land atop a small boat resting on the shore. Espe stares at it thoughtfully, then moves towards it.

SEA SHORE - WATER

ESPE pushes the boat to the water and begins to row.

As he rows further into the ocean, the sky begins to darken. Almost out of nowhere, a merciless storm brews.

ESPE holds tight to the boat. Grabbing a broken shard from his cracked skin, he cuts the rope from the sails that rock his boat like a toy, and wraps the rope around his body, tying himself tightly to the vessel. A tremendous wave engulfs his boat.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE TO WHITE.

OCEAN - OPEN WATERS

ESPE blinks up blearily at the brightness. ESPE finds himself in an mysteriously empty place. There is nothing but heavens and water as far as the eye can see, reflected perfectly into forever. If it weren't for ESPE'S boat it would be hard to know what is up and what is down. The world is reduced to nothing but a line.

ESPE leans forward into the water and looks down. Nothing. ESPE
lowers his face to the water ever so slowly, squinting, and
touches the surface. A bright aqua light emits where his skin
touches the water. ESPE gasps and pulls his hand out.

Feeling braver, he stands at the front of his bow, and leaps
into the water.

As ESPE drops gracefully headfirst into the dark waters, the
surface breaks – literally. The line becomes shards, like glass,
and the world tips on its axis, engulfing ESPE in darkness.

UNDERWATER

The black realm that surrounds him is a stark contrast to the
white world above. ESPE'S eyes adjust to the gloom and an aqua
light shines on him momentarily. ESPE recognizes a familiar
silhouette in the distance. The lighthouse - or a floating
replica of it, at least. ESPE swims towards it.

INT. LIGHTHOUSE

Inside, there is no water and ESPE finds it is filled with
mirrors. ESPE walks toward them, but something catches his eye.
At the end of the room, there is one mirror that is covered with
a white cloth. ESPE walks toward it instead.

                         ESPE (V.O.)
  When I was very, very young, my mother used to tell me: "There
   is no truth or lie… It all depends on the glass through which
                you spy." There is more than one reality.

ESPE passes the uncovered mirrors, but surprisingly they don't
have his reflections. ESPE reaches the covered object at the end
of the room.

                         ESPE (V.O.)
     But even if you cannot be any of those things, it's OK.

ESPE tears off the cloth. It falls to the grounds noiselessly.

                         ESPE (V.O.)
 When it seems that all is gone, look close. All that remains is-

ESPE looks to the mirror, and he inhales softly.

The world around him is a multiplicity of ESPE'S that stretches
as far as the eye can see. CUT TO BLACK.

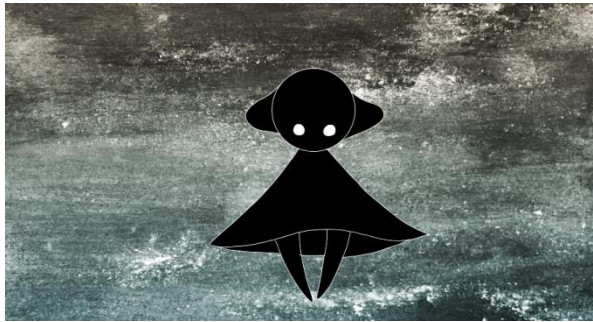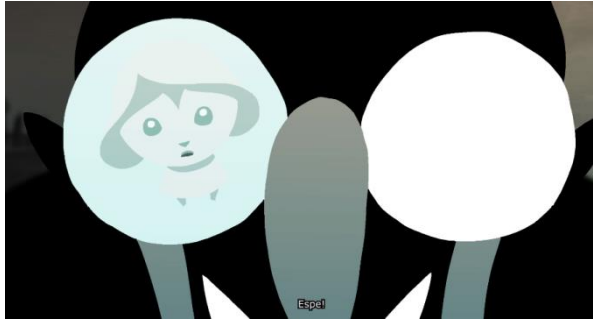   ESPE (V.O.)
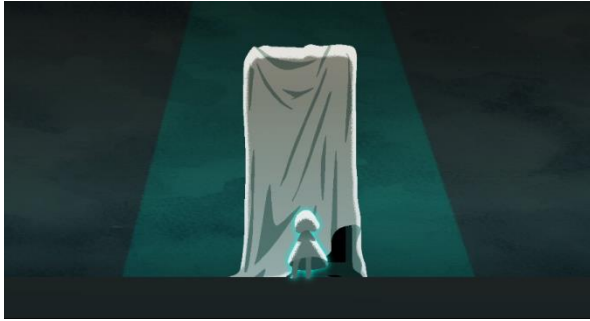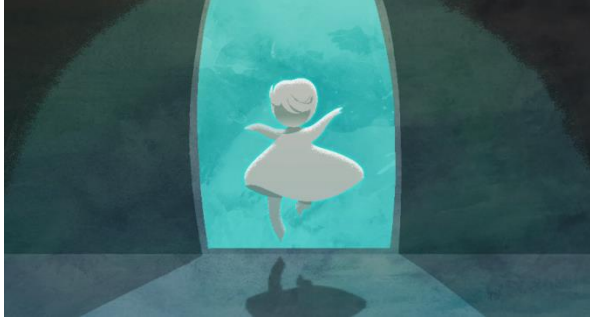   - infinity.

- film stills -

[door clicks open]

[seagull squawks]

[seagull cry grows faint]

[female voice] Espe!

Stop looking at the boats and hurry up!

Mom: That's not very nice.

Espe: Grownups always ask weird stuff...

Mom: Don't mind them.
Just be yourself.

[people talking indistinctly]

[people talking indistinctly]

[drip, drip]

[wind chime]

- the truth is invisible to the eye.

- credits -

a film by
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FAMILY & FRIENDS
BRANDON FLOWERS
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DEEMA ALI
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JIJO SENGUPTA
YINGYING TANG
BINGJIE XIAO
GUOXIANG ZHAO
MY SONS, CARL & MIKE

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