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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

The Joker Is Wild

By

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Date: 2/12/87

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CONTENTS

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Origin | 2 |
| Story Outline | 5 |
| Technical Encounters | 9 |
| Conclusion | 12 |
| Illustrations | 14 |
| Bibliography | 18 |

INTRODUCTION

I created three computer animations on the Genigraphics 100C, 100D+, and 100V, and this is my written retrospective for my thesis requirements. All three of my animations are entitled, "The Joker Is Wild." The difference between the animations occurred after I completed the first. The second and third animations derived from the first; the difference came from adding and subtracting certain scenes.

My main goals were to gain a broader understanding of computer animation, viewer perception, editing, audio, and the Genigraphics systems.

ORIGIN

As time progressed to my thesis proposal deadline, I realized I wanted to do some sort of computer-generated images that could be set into motion. Creating an animation on the Genigraphics with animation software seemed best for my diverse needs. During this time, I was already using the system to create an animation called, "The Blues." In this animation, I wrote a story which was used as a foundation and reference for the visuals which came after the text. From "The Blues" animation, I felt as though I were creating something innovative, if only for myself. From this, I decided I wanted to tell a story although it didn't necessarily need text as a reference.

The concept of my thesis came from my spending a good deal of time in the painting studio because my minor was painting. I got to meet and converse with painting and printing majors. I was also able to see a multitude of works in and around the studio.

A painting caught my eye one day as I walked by it, but I did not dwell on it for very long. I came back another day and studied the painting in more depth. A jester was in the foreground in a vertical format. The paint application was underplayed with little saturation of color. It was the space which intrigued me, not so much the jester, although the juxtaposition of this character and the space made me inquisitive. The space and interior that encompassed the jester is hard edged and geometrical. The geometrical surrounding looked contemporary and computer translatable. My visits to this painting became ingrained, and from those references a concept developed.

The birth of my thesis came from a title that emerged from my mind, called "The Joker Is Wild." From this title, my thoughts explored various themes. Usually, when people say the phrase "The Joker Is Wild," they refer to playing cards. Games are created where the Joker has a predetermined value before the start of a game. The Joker then becomes a favorable card to be dealt. There are only two Jokers in a standard deck of cards. The odds of being dealt one depends on the game you play.

From the title, I decided to make the Joker a promiscuous playing card who becomes

surrounded by the Queens of the deck. I then decided to use Greek and Roman architecture as a backdrop. As the Joker's character builds with the Queens, I incorporated a King to heighten the drama with a jealously raged chase scene. I decided to let the Joker and the Queen transform out of their confined borders into whimsical human form, thus breaking out of the order and restraints of their confined existence. I then proceeded to let the anguished King view this sight which leads him to take his own life out of anger and jealousy.

I created a story board with these events and presented them to my thesis committee. Upon reviewing the story boards and asking related questions, they brought to my attention weaknesses within my story boards. We discussed the overall scenes and decided it needed a stronger impact of communication. After the meeting, I felt relieved because I manifested a lot of pressure on myself to have a finished product. This was a bad preconception. The meeting strengthened my story and made me feel better about future meetings. My thesis committee gave related responses which came together. From this, my thoughts expanded and I recreated my story board.

The development started at my thesis committee meeting. From this came the task of organizing and finding needed references. The story board was the foundation and the references became the building blocks. One of my first major decisions was to select a deck I intended to use. I gathered and bought decks to have a greater selection. I also checked out A History of Playing Cards by Catherine Perry Hargrave, Playing Cards by Gurney Benham, Playing Cards: Their Story by George Beal, and The Playing Card: An Illustrated History by Detelf Hoffmann from the R.I.T. library. From these books, I learned the origins of playing cards, their evolution and social significance to societies.

The major evolution of cards as we know them occurred in the Middle Ages. Preceding this time, cards took on many forms of significance. Nobility became a theme which evolved into modern day playing cards. After reading and studying these books, I had a decision to make. Was I

to use an older looking deck or a more contemporary one? I decided to use a more contemporary deck because of its quick readability and distinctive graphics which, through the ages, became more geometric in complex simplicity (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4).

After deciding on my deck, I decided to elaborate on my story boards. One suggestion from my thesis committee was to make my thesis backdrop more consistent with the Medieval time setting. This led me to pursue the Medieval time setting during which playing cards heightened in popularity and social significance. I then tried to recreate a Medieval setting, so the viewer could get a sense of place and time. This task was long and hard. The kind of references that I needed were hard to come by. I was very fortunate to find a book called, Castles In Spain with photographs by Reinhart Wolf and text by Fernando Chueca Goitia.

I've never seen anything so stunning, romantic, or beautiful in regard to photographic castles. This book is truly a gem and inspiration. This book gave me many castles to choose from, but the one that suited my needs best was Penafiel. Penafiel (Valladolid) "is one of the most important fortresses of medieval Castile. The ridge between the Duero and the Duraton rivers must have always been fortified. Count Sandra Garcia conquered the site in the eleventh century, and later Alfonso tenth left it to his brother, Don Juan Manuel, who undertook important construction in 1307. The principal tower was rebuilt during the reign of John second."^{#1}

^{#1} Reinhart Wolf, Castles In Spain (New York: Abbeville Press, Printed and bound in Spain, 1983), p. 108.

STORY OUTLINE

My animation starts by zooming out, which allows the viewer to perceive numerous letters. I hold the letters in place for a few seconds. The letters transform into a title "The Joker Is Wild." Then the title fades into the background. I wanted to emphasize the black and white qualities of the space. I also wanted to convey to the viewer a sense of playfulness from the text.

After the title disappears into the background, four suits appear. The spade, diamond, club, and heart appear as we zoom into the screen's center. The zoom was used because I like the graphic representation of the suits played against the format of the screen. I also used the zoom to counterbalance the frame out that occurs in the next scene.

I reconstructed Penafiel to my own liking, then scaled it into a new format and perspective. After we encounter Penafiel, we zoom into the castle through the drawbridge door. As we enter the castle, we encounter the Joker and Queen. Now that an exterior stage was set, I decided to introduce my characters to the viewer. They enter the screen from the left and then heighten our curiosity by the introductory zooms (Figs. 5, 6).

From these zooms, we get a sense of their characters. Then we witness their close relationship through the winking of the Joker and the Queen's smile. We also witness it by the Queen's subtle movement behind the Joker, and the whimsical staff of the Joker bobbing up and down in delight. The Joker and Queen hurriedly exit to the left to escape from my next character. The King enters from the right of the screen in hot pursuit of the Joker and the disobedient Queen. The King enters with a sword raised high as if to strike and kill. As I zoom into his stern face, the viewer can infer his search for the Queen and Joker by the back and forth movement in his eyes. Then he exits to the left in a rage to pursue the Joker and Queen.

I introduce my characters in the castle, but there is no interior to refer to. It is dark and ambiguous. I begin to establish an environment through the use of playing cards. Two playing cards emanate from the bottom of the screen and then transform into columns. Once this is established, I

pan to the left.

Inspiration for the preceding scenes came from the interior Mosque at Cordoba located in Spain. Comparing the two scenes, one would probably wonder about the lack of authenticity. As one can see, my columns are more simplified and less frequent than the Mosque at Cordoba. This simplification was due to several factors: the clarity of multiple complex columns would have absorbed a lot of computer space, which would have hindered my upcoming scenes.

I proceeded a pan to the left until we come upon the Joker behind the columns. Then a zoom was implemented to focus attention on the Joker. I repeated the up-and-down movement of the Joker's staff for recognition and a sense of excitement. When the Joker moves to the right, we see the Queen who is behind the Joker, creating his pleasure. The Queen follows the Joker to the left, again hurriedly escaping the King's wrath. This time, I made the timing of the King's movement faster, thus gaining ground on the Joker and Queen. I always chose to have the Joker leave first, in an attempt to communicate to the viewer the severity of the danger and also show the loyalty of the Queen to the Joker. Instead of following the chase scene, which moves to the right, I continue to pan to the left.

Then I confront the viewer with a shrine of columns that set the stage for the upcoming scene. I recreated Medieval statues in the hopes of reinforcing the time period and establishing a haunted environment. The figures move across the screen, and I used an inhibit function to get the effects of figures appearing and disappearing. After the statues leave the screen, we enter into a more structural foundation. As we pan to the left, we discover the Joker and Queen lurking in the hall. Zooming into the cards, we perceive the close relationship that exists. As they move to the right, the frame follows and then we see multiple corridors.

This scene came from a book called Castles of the Crusaders, by Wolfgang Muller Wiener with photographs by A.F. Kersting (Fig. 7). This book presented me with black and white

photographs of interior and exterior views. This book helped me experience the formal structure and ambiance of Medieval castles. The interior photographs gave me a good sense of castle structures and designs. Although the book didn't help me with decorative objects, it did present me with several lintels. "The marble lintel bears the arms of the Lusignan family (left), the Kingdom of Jerusalem (center), and the Kingdom of Cyprus (right).^{#2} I chose to use the center lintel because of its multiple parts and looks reminiscent of the crusades.

As we move through the corridor, we pan to the left where we see the Joker and Queen suspended in a picturesque window. I wanted the viewer to question the scene, and wonder if, in fact, these were the cards or actual pictures on the wall. This idea emanated from several theater movies I've seen. Haunted houses, old mansions, and mystery movies employ such devices to create intrigue and suspense. The King in his raging haste passes the Queen and Joker. He then returns and we witness the backside of his card. From this, another chase scene emanates. The Joker moves first, followed by the Queen. The King pursues the two but has a hard time keeping up with them and falters in his attempt.

After the Joker and Queen leave the screen, I zoom into a stone structure which changes into a long corridor. We move through the corridor and witness geometrical patterns. This begins a surreal scene which transforms into new visuals, but still relates because of the jack-in-the-box which springs from its enclosure. I then created a scene that establishes the transformation of the Joker and Queen into humanistic forms seated on the King's throne (Fig. 8). The King views the scene which breaks his heart. He then cries a tear which drips down his face. I heighten this scene by showing the King commit suicide with his sword. Then blood emanates from his sword. The King exits the scene which brings the animation to an end.

My second animation derived from my first animation. I added and subtracted certain scenes. In the second animation, I deleted the zoom through the suits of the playing cards. The

^{#2} Wolfgang Muller Wiener, *Castles of the Crusaders*, (New York, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Printed in West Germany, 1966), p. 105.

transistion from title to the castle seemed more appropriate. The suits scene didn't enhance the story.

As the animation comes to the stone brick hallway, we witness the formation of the ball and chain. The ball rolls into view from the right, and then ascends to the handle and chain. The spikes transform from out of the boundaries of the screen to the ball. As the ball and chain form, the axe and handle quickly move into place. By adding more movement, I hoped to increase the viewer's interest.

After we zoom into the Joker's and Queen's faces, we pan to the right. We view the lintel which then transforms off the wall. This scene also reflects my intent of adding viewer interest through the use of multiple movements. Instead of having objects transform from the boundaries, I had tranformations moving towards the viewer. Instead of panning to the right and then zooming through the corridor, we immediately go to the King, who is searching for the Joker and Queen.

As the chase scene ends, we zoom into the stone brick wall. I eliminated the surreal jack-in-the-box scene because I wanted to proceed immediately to the ending with the Joker and Queen sitting on the King's throne. The difference between this ending and my first animation ending comes when we zoom to the Joker and Queen on the throne. One of the Queen's gems from her crown expands over her face. We still see some of her facial features. The Joker does the same but with one of his bells. When his bell expands over his face, all we see are his two eyes. The animation then continues on like the first one.

My third animation also derived from my first animation. In my third animation, I used repetition of the title to emphasize the Joker's promiscuous behavior. I repeated the title after each chase scene.

TECHNICAL ENCOUNTERS

One of my first technical encounters was working with new Genigraphics extended software. The new software was set up with three separate pages. Artwork could be created on each page and then combined as one image. Although I could create more artwork on the computer, I was still limited in creating certain scenes.

Creating my thesis was a give-and-take process. I simplified my Queen and King in order to have them each on their own page. Keeping each card on one page made my work less complicated. It would have been difficult to keep alignment of objects on separate pages, as they moved across the screen. The Genigraphics animation software does not allow for multiple-page capture.

After spending long hours creating my cards, I later learned I could not shrink or enlarge my cards. I exceeded the capacity of the computer's capabilities to calculate and plot. This unforeseen limitation made me re-evaluate my story outline. One option was to further simplify my cards so I could enlarge and shrink them. Another option was to change certain scenes. After viewing the final output, I believe I made the right decision, due to the low resolution of the monitors' output. The low resolution of the monitors made it difficult to perceive the detail on the cards. As my thesis progressed, I became more familiar with the page system and the limitations of the computer.

My animations are made up of separate files. These files are linked together from end files to starting files. This gives the viewer the appearance of connectedness. I often used panning in my animations. At times, it became difficult to line the end of one scene to the start of another scene.

When panning or zooming, I used an object as a reference, or I affixed a piece of tape to the viewing monitor. I found the most accurate way to align one scene to the next was to use a reference object. By using a reference object, I was able to align the frame or scene to the reference object, making the transition from one scene to the next believable. The smoother the alignment, the more the viewer could connect one scene to the next. This turned out to be a critical part of my thesis.

The timing was another critical factor in my animations. I had several questions to answer.

How long was a scene going to last? How much time does a viewer need to visually read an object or scene and understand the communication being presented?

As I was creating my animations, I could only try to answer these questions from past experience, preview function, and by looking at the final output. The preview function allows the creator to see reference rectangles of objects move in real time. The creator does not need to see the actual object to understand its timing, but if this option were available, it would save a lot of time.

After recording my animation on video, I could then view it to see what needed correcting. I viewed segments and then the whole animation. I found my past experiences proved to be valuable, especially with my timing. There were only slight modifications to be made. The most difficult scene to change was the Joker and Queen suspended in the picturesque window. My timing of this scene was wrong. I needed the Joker and Queen to be visible through the window as I panned to the right. I needed to calculate the time panning relative to the time of movement of the cards. Trial and error became the tool for accomplishing this goal.

Video output requires thirty frames per second. So, for each second of animation time, thirty regenerations of scene have occurred. The scenes were regenerated and then were recorded to video. The time of regeneration depended on the complexity of the scene and the amount of animation input.

Some of my most frustrating experiences occurred during editing and syncing the audio to the video. I ended up using two different editors to do these jobs. The selection unfortunately was based on their charge per hour and not on experience or their editing devices. I was soon to learn that their expertise was not proficient. One of the difficulties the editors had was catching single frames and then aligning them with the beginning of the next sequence. This procedure takes time and patience which neither editor seemed to have. Unfortunately, they were working on my thesis with this lackadaisical attitude. One difference in a frame can change the transition from one scene to the next. When viewed, this would appear as a jerky glitch because of the lack of alignment.

My animations have three distinctly different soundtracks. My first inclination was to use Medieval music. After listening to several pieces, I concluded the music was too slow for the movement in the animation. I then searched through contemporary music that I thought would be more upbeat in tempo. After selecting the music came the task of syncing it with the video.

Since the music was not made for my videos, I tried to find climaxes in the music and then sync them with exciting parts of my animation. This also was a trial and error process. Some scenes worked well with the music and other scenes did not. I began to sense that the soundtracks added a new dimension to my animations. The music made me feel emotions that the video lacked. It made the animations come alive.

CONCLUSION

I am pleased with the results of my animations. I feel I've gained a broader understanding of viewer perceptions, editing, audio tracks, and computer animation.

Viewer perception varied, but they all seemed to understand the plot. The majority of people I questioned preferred my first animation. Maybe this was due to the order in which I showed them. Viewers got bored with the second and third animations because of their close similarity to the first. Changing the plot and adding new scenes would have helped. I found viewers got visually excited by computer graphics. I believe a lot of the excitement comes from the creative level of the graphics, as well as the audio that may accompany it.

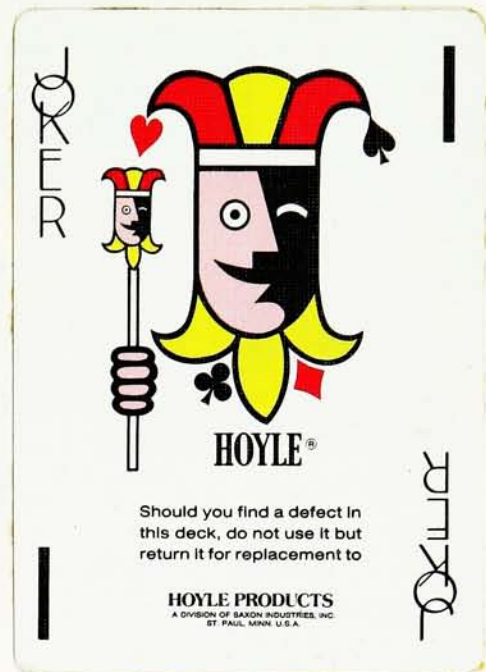
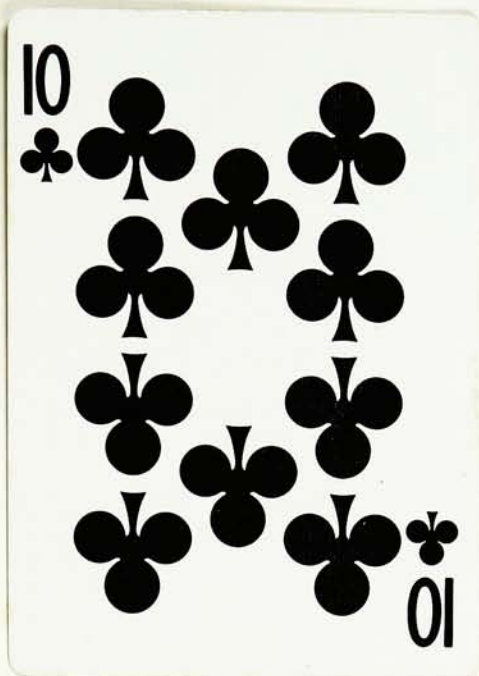
I feel soundtracks are a very important part of computer animations. They can enhance emotional feelings or be used as a communication tool. The most important part of the audio is its timing relationship to the video. Unfortunately, my soundtracks did not enhance or communicate in every sense. This was due to the fact that I did not write the music. Having written the music, I would have had more control over its effect to each scene. I feel my most successful soundtrack was on the third animation. The repetitious drum beat conjured up feelings of war and tragedy, which synced best through traumatic chase scenes. My first and second soundtracks had their moments of enhancing certain scenes, but for the most part, did not communicate a specific emotion. When this lack of effectiveness occurs, the audio subjugates the video to perform on a higher level.

I feel one of the most successful parts of my animations came from translating my roughs into computer-generated images. Most of my roughs were very detailed and closely related to the computer image. Having a complete story board of roughs took the guess work out of my computer work. Although there were parts of my animation that were created spontaneously, most of the spontaneity occurred when inputting the movement of objects.

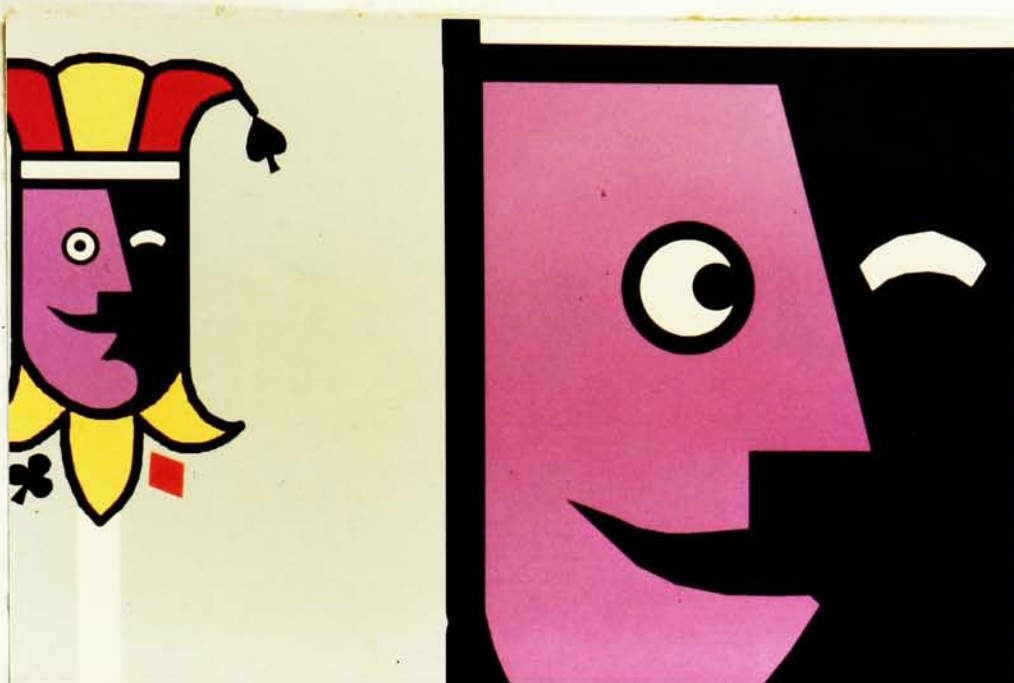
I feel the weakest parts of my animations occurred during the transitions from different scenes. I feel I should have spent more time on resolving how I was going to leave one scene and

enter another. The soundtracks could have also had a better effect. More time could have been spent syncing the audio to the videos.

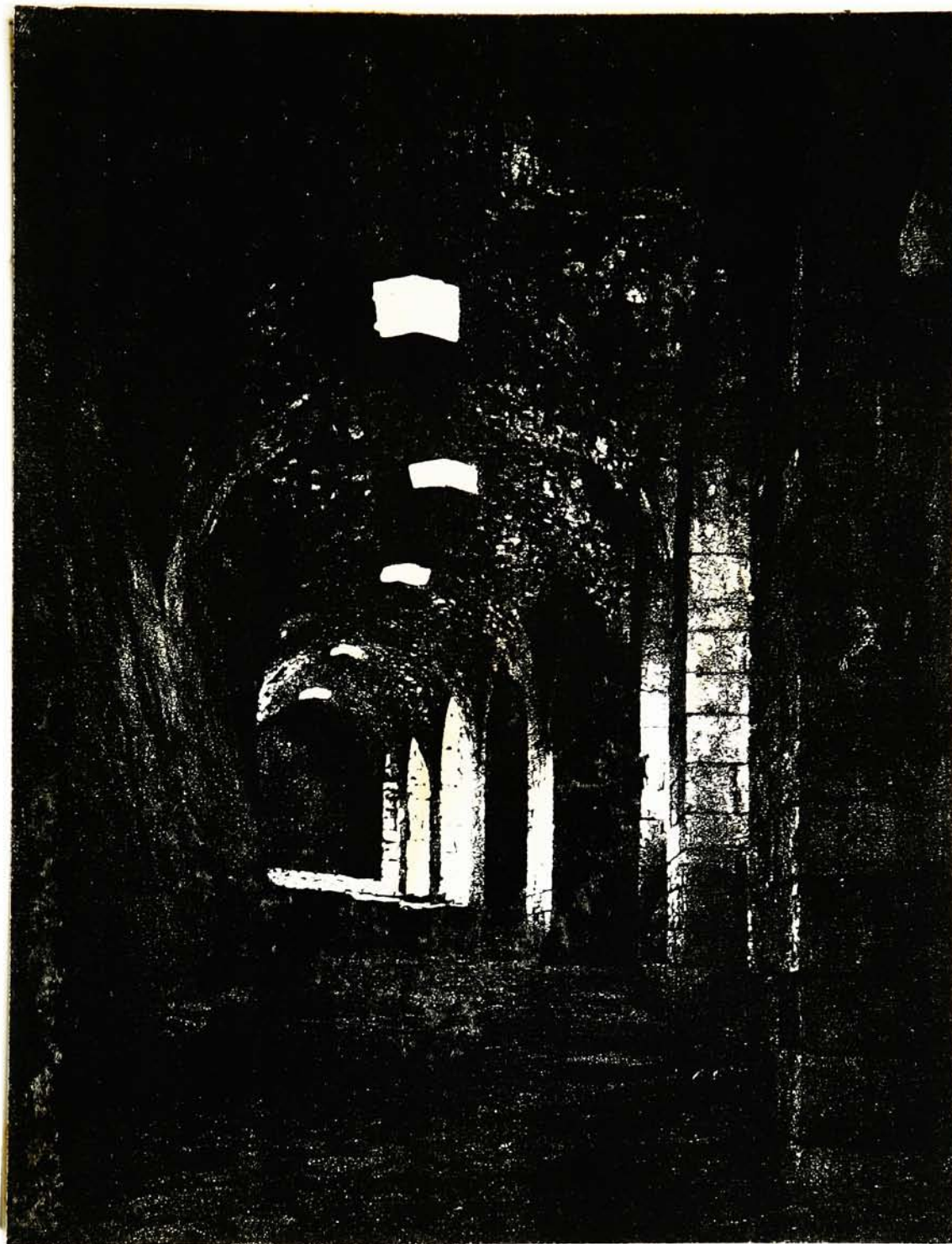
Creating my animations was a constant learning activity. As problems arose, I tried to find the best way to solve them. After creating one animation and then recording it, I then began to get the most pleasure from my work. I thoroughly enjoyed being able to view and recreate the animation. Editing the animations was an exciting learning experience. Fitting the pieces together to make a whole video helped me understand video editing. Watching the transformation of development was a very rewarding experience.



(Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4)



(Figs. 5, 6)



(Fig. 7)



(Fig. 8)

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