Ideas and reflections on the project

Bone Greet

(Working title)

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Introduction

I am working on a project that will result in a series of different works which make use of several different media. I will make an installation that will include sound and projection for my solo show at Galleri Mejan in November. The final result, however, will be a 12 minutes long stop motion animated film I plan to finish in 2013. The film will partly be abstract, partly depicting environments resembling reality, which is instead of only using the kind of puppets I usually use; I will work with shapes and patterns that will act in different rooms inside a building. The film will also take place outside the house and below ground. The ideas for the project are not based on any exciting text. Instead they come from drawings, sketches and different moods and environments. Some of these drawings and sketches are presented as my Master’s essay.
**Intuition and improvisation**

Working without a script in animation is a bit risky. Usually all editing occurs in the preparatory stage. You plan every scene with storyboards that are being put together into an animatic, that means having the storyboard put on a timeline and timed with most of the sound and even some rough animation. This type of planning minimizes the risk of producing a scene that you end up not using in the final film.

I feel that animation is a genre of art that really can be explored more. Surprisingly enough there are not many free, experimental, “personal” stop motion animations being made in the art world today. Animation is still a medium that most people associate with cartoons and commercials made for a wider audience. Also we are more and more relying on computer graphics and effects made with software and less on the style of filming, the actual use of the camera; and to my mind all special effects nowadays look the same. There is a loss of texture and the movements are too perfect being created by computers. Most important and interesting reason why I like to work with objects in front of camera instead of in the computer are all the random, small mistakes that happen along the way when you use your hands. Mistakes and error are a source of inspiration for me.

**The general idea**

It’s about how the nature comes in to different rooms. Things in the rooms have lost their weight and are drifting by themselves in the air. Trashed furniture mixed with objects that could be internal organs, bones or just abstractions. The film will in a surreal way deal with communication problems, incapability of reaching each other. It’s about how one can feel on the inside in stressful situations. Some of the ideas were born from scenes I was planning to make for my last
project Seven Days in the Woods. But they never made into the final film because of a tight time schedule. This new project can therefore in a way be viewed as a sequel to my last film.

**Work method and technique**

There must be something about the compressed time that make me so interested and inspired by stop motion animation. One can feel that it’s been taking a lot of time to produce a scene from an animated film, knowing that one second of film includes 25 frames. Stop motion (or stop frame) is an animation technique where something is placed in front of a camera having a single exposure taken between (often) very minimal movements of the object. Normally in animation you take two frames of the position before you move the object and take the next pictures. That’s because our eyes are slow, there is no need for a new position for each frame. In a let’s say 300 frames shoot (about 12 seconds) you only move your object 150 times but take 300 exposures and that will, usually, create a believable movement of what’s being animated. However, you can play around with the slowness of our eyes, showing more or less pictures each second. Because of the slowness our brain connects one picture with the next and makes us believe that what we just saw is connected with what is there now (if there isn't a indication of a new scene or a jump-cut). It is pretty easy to make it believable having pictures being showed after each other 24 frames/second. A lot of animations try to imitate real life, and because real life is something we are very familiar with it is very easy for us to tell the different from what’s animated and what’s “real”. Stop motion animation can often be precise as jerky or wobbly. In King Kong from 1933 by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack. The fur of the main character “Kong” moves around in a non natural way caused by the animators when they move the puppet between takes. That error is called magic wind.
In terms of implementation, I have developed a method that I feel comfortable with. The environments and the characters are based on sketches that I’ve been collecting during a longer time. There is always a curiosity and a challenge for me to work with animation consisting both to find the right materials and the technical issues, the basics of animation, to split up a movement in 24 individual positions. This could mean that there will be frames where the object has to leave the surface and stand still in the air for perhaps one frame. It can be solved with rigs, that are being taken away, erased, after in post production or/and it can be a green screen which allows you to expose an object after and create larger environments or multiply characters and so on.

- Replacement animation

My interest has recently been caught by a method called replacement animation. A series of similar object that are replacing each other instead of having a single piece of puppet (or whatever) that are being moved between the takes with help of a armature inside the puppet. The technique was invented by George Pal in the 1940’s and has been a popular way of animating ever since. For instance in Henry Selick´s Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) several heads of the characters where replacements, instead of letting the animators sculpting the facial expressions just replace a series that was planed out on a schedule. My interest of this technique lies more in the wobbly shaky feeling that appears. I use a series of similar objects but place them in front of the camera by chance instead of using a schedule. Bruce Brickford used replacements a lot in the 70´s and 80´s in his clay animated films when he collaborated with the musician Frank Zappa. Brickford´s way of making animation is more experimental and psychedelic. Things are growing, shrinking, melting. It feels like a fever dream.
-Strata cut

Strata cut is a method made out of clay where a lump of clay shaped like a bread loaf is cut in thin pieces, a picture is taken on what’s left. You plan the movement before you start shooting. Details like an pupil in a eye are in stead of being a small dot actually a long black pole. The different parts are pressed and rolled together in to the “loaf”. It takes a long time to prepare a scene, but on the other hand, the actual animation/cutting is a pretty fast process compared with other styles of animation. This way of animating is good for abstract scenes and is a fun way of playing with patterns and color combinations. The result usually looks very smeared and runny. I used this technique once to create an ocean in one of my films, having blue and white clay mashed together and piled off a little bit at the time and rotated the lump before having a picture taken. Strada cut was developed by the animator David Daniels in the 1980’s for music videos and commercials. However, the German animator Oscar Fischinger was experimenting with clay and wax in a similar way in already in the 1920’s.
Ideas for scenes
This are some ideas for scenes that I have in mind for my next film.

-A large room filled with faceless characters. As they walk around in the room and cross each others way, there shoulder bone pops out and hit the others shoulder bone. It’s almost as if they greet each other with the bones. A wooden click sound appears and creates a percussion music piece. The characters faces are without details and are constantly changing. They are dressed in black.

-It is below ground. We travel around among spinning diamonds and bugs.

-One room is filled with flying objects. It is almost like a person just exploded but is still alive. The different pieces are spinning around as if they were on strings.

-One character is walking in the woods. The backside of the figures head seems to be “stuck” at one point. As the character moves forward the head and one of its arms stretches and stays at the same position.

-There is a black pile on the floor, shaking.

-The nature comes into the room. Some branches and a big pile of dirt look thought the walls. There are a big amount of small pieces of wood, stuck in the air. On strings. Vibrating.

-A horse is galloping up a hill. It is at a distance. Its rider has a head that moves in a funny way.

-There is a house at night, surrounded by mountains and woods
The installation

During my stay in Vancouver, BC in Canada, I constructed a room, big as a moving box, at a sculpture class I took. The idea was to build the room upside down with things hanging from the floor in fishing wire to create confusion and an eerie feeling. A camera in one part of the room was sending a signal to a projector, which flipped the video image and was projected on the other wall. It was projected on a paper screen which had a window behind it, letting through parts of the projection back into the room. The view from the camera looking into the window created a feedback effect, endless continues rooms inside on the window. Now I am planning to go further with this idea for the solo show. I want to make six rooms, similar to the one I made in Canada, experimenting with projection, movements, light and sound. The rooms will stand on a wooden frame that has a back projection of an underground environment with bugs and spinning diamond shaped objects, coming from the inside of the wooden frame. Eight small sound speakers will be hidden around in the sculpture and send out short, quiet sounds of things that are torn apart, braking. I will also play with false perspective, flickering light and fans producing wind to make objects in the rooms move around.