



A Perfect Date

A short clay animation film

By Girja Likhite

Guide: Sumant Rao

Animation Design, Degree Project 3
IDC, IIT Bombay

Approval Sheet

The project 3 titled "HUMOUR (a short animation film on 'Grass is greener on the other side')" by Girja Likhite is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirement for M.Des. Degree in Animation.

(Guide)

(External Examiner)

(Internal Examiner)

(Chairman)

Declaration

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Signature

Name of the student

Roll No.

Date

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my project guide,

Prof. Sumant Rao for his guidance and support throughout the project.

I am grateful to him for believing in me and for showing confidence in my ideas by giving me freedom to explore them in my own way. He has taken great efforts to make me understand and correct my mistakes during this project and has brought me on the right track whenever needed.

I would specially like to thank my mother for all the support and help she has given me during this project. I am truly grateful to her for all the efforts she has taken for me and my project. I thank my father, my brother and Anu for all the support.

I am truly thankful to R. V. Krishna for all the help, support and encouragement.

I am thankful to all the people at IDC, students and faculty who have helped me to fulfil the requirement for my project by lending their support and facilities every time I needed.

Abstract

'A Perfect Date' is a clay animated short film. I would rather call it material animation because claymation is a very specific term, and along with clay many other materials have been used to create characters and set of this film.

This film is based on a very simple phrase of life, "Grass is always greener on the other side of the fence". It is not only a phrase but it is a very part of human nature and it can not be denied.

A couple goes to a restaurant for dinner date. They start finding things served on the other table more desirable than what they are having and that is where the story starts. Due to this want they end up ruining their perfect date! But will they ever realize, grass is always greener where it is watered more? Will they ever realize the value of what they have?

After working on the concept and story-line, I wrote the script and developed the storyboard. Considering various situations and camera angles, concept art was developed. I thought of having a Japanese restaurant and accordingly I designed the set and built it using various materials. At the same time all the characters were developed based on the character designs. After the set and characters were ready, film was shot in the studio using stop motion technique with the help of a digital SLR camera. The shoot was then taken on computer and put it on the time-line in order to make it into a movie along with the sound recording.

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Objective

As somebody has said,

"It is very easy to make people cry but it is very difficult to make them laugh"

Creating humour is one of the most difficult parts of story telling.

While working on this project, my primary objective was to learn how to make the story interesting by adding humour to it. Creating humour that appeals to the audience, understanding psychology of the target audience and understanding the timing, situations and all other things that can create humour, were some of my goals while doing this project.

Second important objective was to learn clay animation.

Creating characters and sets using various materials, learning the art of stop-motion animation to perfection, studying lighting and handling the camera were main priorities and hence, I decided to do claymation film in this project.

Introduction

"Laughter is an instant vacation!" – Milton Berle

Humour is the ability of people, objects, situations or words to evoke feelings of amusement or happiness in people. It frequently involves a surprising way to look at familiar things. Laughter is the shortest distance between people as it has an ability to get people closer.

As Bennett Cerf has said, "The person who can bring the spirit of laughter into a room is indeed blessed" and therefore, I have tried to get the spirit of laughter in this film.

This film is based on a universally known misconception, 'the grass is always greener on the other side'. The phrase itself holds a humour element as it talks about an unspoken truth of human nature. Even though we very well know the fact that grass is equally green on either side of the fence, we keep comparing our life with other's. We are never satisfied with what we have and are always looking at what others have!

Through this film I intend to give a message that 'the grass is never, ever greener on the other side. You always think it, but as soon as you get across that fence the sprinklers cut on. So all we have to do is, to water our grass to make it greenest!'

Exploration- Humour

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HUMOUR

If we have a look at film as a whole, one cannot help but notice that it seems that over half of all films released are comedies and even serious films will often have comic relief.

I started my exploration by watching a lot of films in order to study why good humour can make a film successful and how does it work on people's psychology? What kind of comedies generally appeal to people and what is it that makes people laugh?

I explored and studied films from silent era to the modern era, including some of the serials and stand up comedies.

Silent Era Films:

The humour in this era was all a matter of gestures and because of this cannot be shared as jokes. The humour must be understood from the point of view of the main characters. Slapstick humour was a necessity or became the dominant form of comedy in the 'Silent Era'. For example, Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, early Disney films like 'Steamboat Willie'.

Comedians often had a partner, regardless of their gender. This partner is called the "The straight man" who is to respond to the comedian, be the butt of his/her joke and thus intensify the humorous actions.



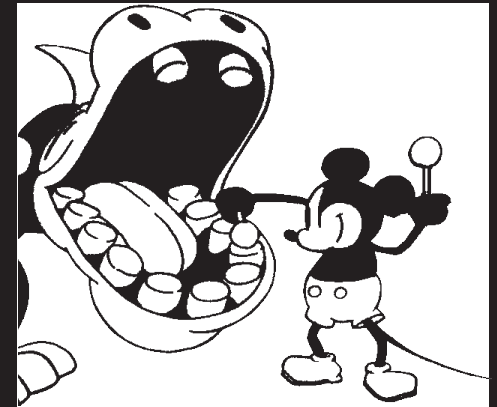
Laurel and Hardy



Charlie Chaplin



Buster Keaton



Micky Mouse in Steamboat Willie

Modern Era Films:



Tom & Jerry,
by Hanna and Barbera

'Tom and Jerry' is a series of animated theatrical shorts which is dominated by 'slapstick humour'. My observation is humour through animation makes it less offensive and more enjoyable as the graphics are very unrealistic and unlike live action we don't tend to identify with them so much and emotional involvement is also lesser as our conscious is aware of it being unreal.

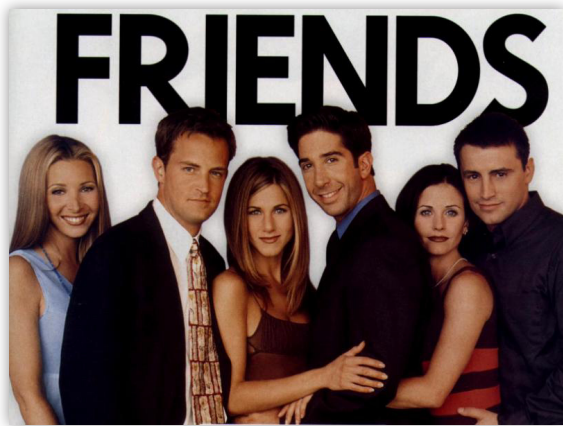


The Mask
staring Jim Carrey

Humour in this film is mainly dominated by 'exaggeration', which we get to see in the acting of the protagonist, his character design, his appearance and also in the story to an extend.

'Timing' and 'the unexpected' are two things which are beautifully used in this film to create humour. Incidentally, the humour and action of this film is also inspired by 'slapstick'.

Modern Era Films:



FRIENDS,
*by David Crane
& Marta Kauffman*

Here we get to see more character based humour. Timing and anticipation plays a major role as audience starts anticipating what each character will do at certain situation and when that happens, humour is created or instead something unexpected happens then also humour is created! A lot of situational humour is seen here.



Russell Peters
Stand up comedian

Russell Peter's stand up comedy can be categorized into offensive humour. Humour that could be offensive to a particular group of people, or culture is counted in this category. Offensive humour is most of the times repressed truth and hence, when it comes forward it can create humour. Comments on racism, sexism can fall in this category.

Modern Era Films:



Flintstones
by Hanna and Barbera

At times world itself can be funny!

For example, in Flintstones, as they belong to the stone age they have created an excellent imaginative world. Here we get to see how wonderfully they have used props like bones to make photo frame, Age old dinosaur instead of a crane, etc.



HUMOUR

What I learnt from this:

Humour can be of various types. After reading books and watching short films this how I roughly classified humour:

1. Slapstick
2. Offensive
3. Wordplay and Pun (Paradox and Irony)
4. The unexpected
5. Exaggeration

Factors that create humour:

There are various things that make humour happen. For example, certain things might not be funny usually, but if said at the right time can make a lot of difference. Following are the few factors according to me which need to be considered while making a humorous film:

Timing

Repetition

Anticipation

Unexpected

Embarrassment

Situational humour

Character Specific (clown)

Environment Specific (Flintstones)

I like experimenting and exploring new things in order to learn as much as possible. After doing 2D animation project in last semester, I wanted to explore a new medium of animation for this film.

CLAYMATION

Learning clay animation was one of the foremost objectives behind making this film. I have always been fascinated by all the films made by Nick Park and the Aardman people. After attending Vaibhav Kumaresh's claymation workshop I totally got inspired to make claymation film.

Books

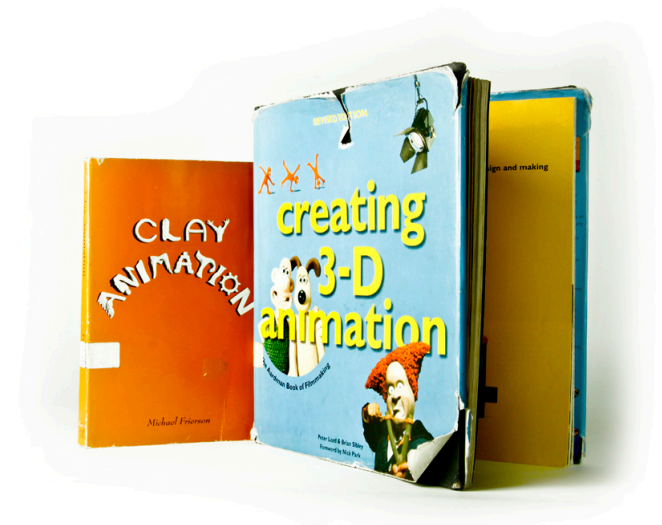
Following are some of the books that I referred while learning about this medium of animation.

- **Creating 3-D by Nick Park**

This book beautifully explains the entire process of clay animation step by step, right from the conceptualization, story development, set and character making to grabbing the images with the camera. Even though the method and material they have used is a bit different from here, this book helped me a lot throughout the project.

- **Clay animation by Michael Frierson**

This book mainly talks about the invention of clay animation and its development right from the beginning. Various techniques and tricks used by different people like Will Vinton, Willie Hopkins along with their style of claymation. This book gave me knowledge about different techniques of animation that I could use while making my film.



Films



PJs

by 'Will Vinton'

Will Vinton is one of the former Clay animators. PJs (1997-2001) was a clay animated television series. For me, the detailing done in the sets, props and in overall environment was quite inspiring.

I chose to use their technique of lip movement for my characters. Being new to this medium I was not too confident about making a hinged jaw, hence for lips I used the replacement technique like them.



Creature comforts

by Aardman

One of my most favorite clay animations and biggest inspiration. This film taught me about lip sync and character study. Character of every animal has come out beautifully just through their body language! Behavior of the characters in the background make it even more interesting.

Films

'Wallace and Gromit', 'Merry and Max', 'Coraline' are few other films I studied while working on this project.

Even though all three are clay animations, each film has used different technique. In Wallace and Gromit, Aardman has used classic claymation, where as the technique used in Coraline is much more advanced. Here instead of clay they have used silicon for making models which gives more realistic feel plus it does not deform like clay after a while.

With Coraline, Laika has become the first company to do a feature-length movie using replacement faces printed on a 3D printer. Coraline marks the first film where a stop-motion animation morphing sequence has ever been accomplished.

Merry and Max is again a typical claymation film. Sets and all the handmade props inspired me to make all my props by myself!



Coraline
by Henry Selick



Wallace and Gromit
by Aardman



Merry and Max
by Adam Elliot

Exploration– Medium

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Visit to Vaibhav Studios:

While exploring this medium, I visited Vaibhav Kumaresh's studio as he has done a lot of work in clay animation. There I got to see some of the armatures they had made for their projects, along with the working character models, pictures of sets and props. I got to learn a lot of tricks and tips about what materials use, what not to use and some of the guidelines one must keep in mind before starting claymation.

Clay animation that happens in India is much different than that in western countries because of the availability of the materials and specialised equipment. Due to which watching videos on you tube and reading about films by Aardman was not enough.

At Vaibhav Studios I learnt about techniques used here in India, to build an armature, create models out of them and most importantly to make them stand and walk on the base. Because here ready armatures are not available and secondly there animation happens on the magnetic board with characters having iron nuts on their feet, whereas here we use soft board and pins to fix them on the base.

Study of Pandu-Mangal:



Amaron battery commercial

by Vaibhav Kumaresh & Virender Singh Rathod

Exploration- Medium

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Study of Pandu-Mangal:

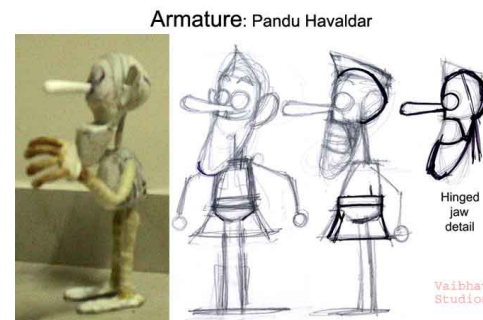
I did detailed study of the making of Amaron commercial, Pandu-Mangal clay animation done by Vaibhav Kumaresh and Virender Singh, which helped me understand the process right from the planning stage.^[1]



Storyboard



Character Design



Model Sheet



Model Making



Set making



Animation



Shoot



Thinking About a concept

Since I chose to make film on a serious topic for my previous project, this time I wanted to explore humour. Secondly, I wanted to do clay animation this time, due to which I wanted to take a short story so that I get enough time to work on the production.

Initial idea

Humorous take on an existing story- Earlier I decided to take one of the stories from our childhood days like Panchatantra and modifying it my way in order to create an interesting humorous film.

As I went on reading these short stories I realized these are all simple stories based on some moral, or phrases used in day today life. Then I thought why not have a completely original story! So I started developing a story based on one of these phrases. I chose following phrase as a topic for my film.

"Grass is always greener on the other side"

Meaning:

The things other people have or their situations always look better than your own, even when they are not really so.

“Grass is always greener on the other side”

Many of us have this tendency of not being happy with what we originally have, then it could be something materialistic or it could be something within us. Other people always seem to be in a better situation than us and hence we always want better in life. Something that others seem to have!

But why does this happen? Why do we always have the perception that other people's lives are better than ours? Why are we constantly trying to find something better? Why are we never satisfied with what we have? And why, oh why does the grass always seem greener on the other side??

The answer is simple. When we observe other people's lives, it is usually only for a little while. And in that little while, we will probably see these people acting on their best behaviors, and we immediately form a good impression of them. All we usually get is a tiny inkling of how they really are, and most of the times, we like it. But as we get to know that person, we realize even he has problems. We all have problems and no one's life is perfect!

Hence, it is very important to value what we have because, the grass is NEVER, EVER greener. We always think it, but as soon as we get across that fence the sprinklers cut on.

The grass is not, in fact, always greener on the other side of the fence. No, not at all. Fences have nothing to do with it. The grass is greenest where it is watered. When crossing over fences, carry water with you and tend the grass where ever you may be.^[4]

—Robert Fulghum

Various situations where we see

"Grass greener on the other side"

- **Kids**- Children don't hide their emotions. Many a times we come across a child who already has an ice-cream in hand but he also wants the candy his neighboring kid is having. My first story concept was based on these lines, where first person wants what second one has, second one wants what third one has, and the chain continuous but eventually it stops at first person. As the last person is eyeing on what first one has. In short, you might not value what you have and always run behind better looking things but there surely is some other person who is willing to have what you have!
- **Family life**- This story is about this middle aged man who keeps comparing his life with his neighbor's and wonders his life is so much better than his own! Wit created through how he becomes victim of all the bad things like fat wife yelling at him all the time, noisy children, dog that hates him, etc. Whereas, his neighbor always seems lucky and in much better situation by all means! But eventually it is revealed that neighbor is only pretentious and moreover his life is worse than that of our protagonist!
- **Relationships**- After a certain point some people find their relationship very drab and then they start looking for faults in each other by comparing them to others. This story is about a couple and a secret lover of the girl. This secret lover who has had enough of being single and badly wants to be in a relationship cleverly manages to throw the other boy out and catch hold of the girl. But soon he realizes her true colours and the naive, beautiful girl becomes monstrous for him. Now when his grass starts becoming pale for him, he wants to get back on the other side of the fence. Where other boy is already having fun!
- **Restaurant**- When one goes to a restaurant, a lot of times it so happens that whatever is served on the next table looks much more delicious and mouth watering than what he or she is having. This story is based on similar lines. It is a humorous story about a middle aged couple who goes to a fancy restaurant on a special occasion. They want everything to be perfect. But they keep wanting what others have in order to make their evening perfect without valuing what they have and due to which they end up ruining their evening.

"A Perfect Date"

A middle aged couple married couple goes on a dinner date on their anniversary to a fancy restaurant. As they enter they have a look at entire place deciding where to sit. Waiter welcomes them pointing at one of the tables. Everything seems just perfect!

As the couple settles down on the table, the flower in front of them falls off the vase! Ah.... what a beginning! But no worries, husband looks around and finds an old couple sitting right on the next table, engrossed eating their meal. He gives a wicked smile and quickly exchanges the flower!

Waiter comes with the most expensive bottle of wine. How perfect! As he starts pouring the wine, husband sees another waiter carrying a big and most elegant looking bottle of champagne to another table! He says 'Wait! I want that one!' Waiter confused, but says yes to keep them happy!

The beautiful champagne bottle appears on the table! Both are very happy and excited. Waiter comes to open the bottle, but husband insists on opening it. He tries harder and harder, wife is excited and watching him opening the champagne and finally pop opens the bottle! Pours the drink in his glass and as looks up asking for her glass, he does not find her on her seat! Ooops! There she is! On the floor with one eye swollen! Cork hits straight on her eye!

Angry lady sits back on the chair. As she is about to give that thundering look to her husband, waiter comes with the menu card. Sigh!!!

Never mind! Everything can still be perfect!

She goes through the menu card and stops at the most expensive dish ever on the card! Waiter comes smiling with the dish. Both are extremely hungry and excited see what he is getting for them. Waiter very charmingly

presents the most amazing dish in front of them. As they look at it, both their faces drop. It is the tiniest piece of food ever! Man has a close look at it and he gets furious at the waiter. He asks him to get something BIG!

Waiter is now confused, but he gets an idea to please his customers to make their date perfect!

Couple is very sad as things are not going the way they had expected. Bored, irritated they wait for the food to come! And here come the waiter with something very special this time! As the couple looks back at the waiter carrying the big tray this time they get happy and excited! Bang! Comes on the table... a huge, ugliest looking, fat pig with a red apple in his mouth right on the lady's face! She jumps back horrified screaming! She slowly looks at her husband in a shock, who is sitting stoned with a big red cherry in his mouth just like the pig in front of her! Ahhh!! She gets disgusted with the sight of it and yells at the waiter and asks him to take it back right away! Now waiter gets totally irritated! He picks it up and turns back in anger.

Now they see another waiter carrying a big delicious looking lobster to another table. Yes! This is it! Now they know what they want!

Waiter gets a couple of lobsters to their table to choose from. As always husband goes for the biggest one of all and taps its head with excitement! Right that moment, the giant lobster suddenly opens its eyes looking at him in fury and opens its gigantic, razor-sharp claws! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa... a big scream in the restaurant. Everyone stops eating looking at him in a shock! Waiter standing in the corner

and giggling looking at all the drama. Embarrassed wife looks here and there, clueless about what to do!

Now they get tired of trying hard to make their evening perfect. While they are sitting depressed and disappointed, another waiter comes with a nice, delicious, mouth-watering turkey on a trolley and stops next to their table. Both look at him amused, waiting for him to serve but alas! He goes to some other table! Their waiter sees this and immediately hides his face thinking they will ask for this now! But no... they get even more disappointed this time!

Waiter notices this and feels sorry for them. He gets an idea. He gets them a sweet little chocolate cake full of cherries with a cute candle on top. Finally they get happy. They look at each other and smile. Gently they blow the candle and as they look up, again they see a huge, prettiest looking triple decker strawberry cake passing by! Again their faces drop, waiter also gets disappointed looking at them sad. They look back at their tiny little not so great looking cake. They both stare at it for a second. It says 'Happy Anniversary!'

They immediately realize, what they have is special. They say no to the big cake and accept what they have as they realize that no external thing can make their evening perfect. They being happy together is enough to make it perfect! Grass might seem greener on the other side of the fence but when you get on the other side it might be even worse and you might want to get back! Best way to keep your grass is greener is by keeping it watered all the time!

Pre-Production: Story Board

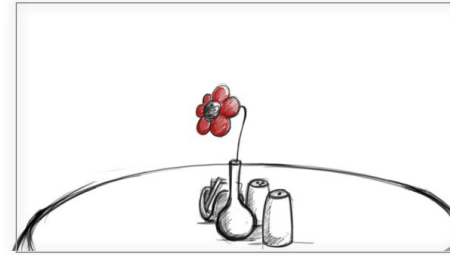
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Camera: Pan shot of the restaurant suggesting ones entry
Sound: Subtle ambient music



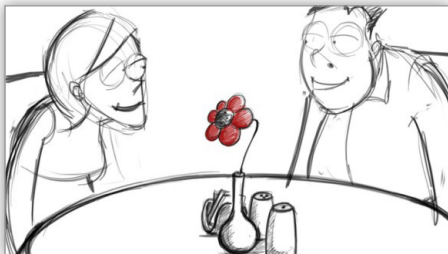
Camera: camera stops at this waiter welcoming and pointing at a table
Sound: Continues



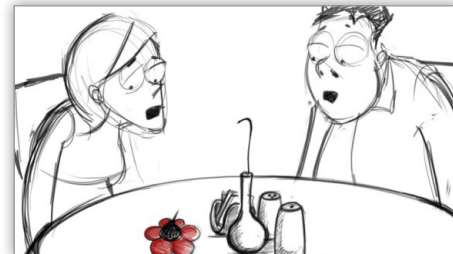
Camera: Shot of the table, focusing on the flower
Sound: Continues



Camera: Couple enters, settling on the table, focus on the shaky flower because of movement
Sound: tempo starts increasing



Camera: Movement continues and flower gets more and more shaky
Sound: Tempo keeps increasing



Camera: Finally they settle down and look at each other and POP! Flower topples down!
Sound: Silence



Camera: Both Sad. Man looks behind
Sound: music starts again



Camera: He looks at the old couple enjoying their meal
Sound: Music starts getting a bit mischievous



Camera: focus on the vase
Sound: Continues



Camera: focus on the vase
Sound: Continues



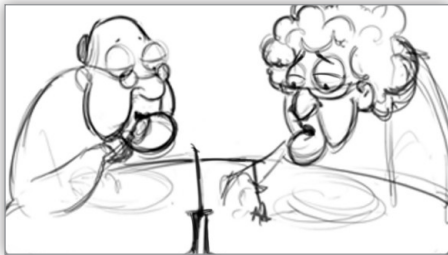
Camera: focus on the vase
Sound: Continues



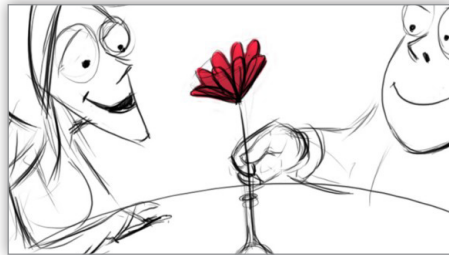
Camera: focus on the vase
Sound: Continues

Pre-Production: Story Board

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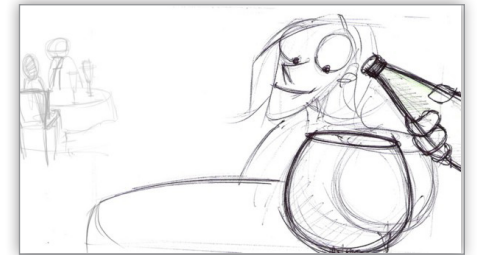
Camera: Focus shifts to old lady
Sound: Stops!



Camera: Close-up of thee couple
Sound: Happy music



Camera: waiter in focus
Sound: Continues



Camera: First wine bottle in focus, then focus changes to champagne passing behind the lady
Sound: Continues



Camera: Close up of mans expressions, then quick zoom out and focus of the big bottle
Sound: With zoom music becomes loud & stops



Camera: Focus on man
Sound: Tense



Camera: confused, nodding yes!
Sound: silence



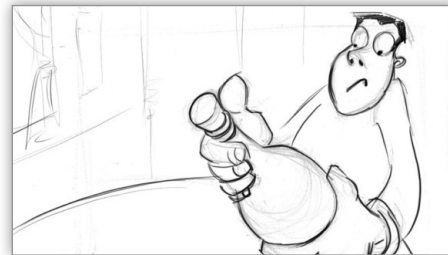
Camera: Focus on bottle then on their expressions
Sound: Happy music



Camera: Focus on the man
Sound: Tense



Camera: Focus on the man
Sound: tense



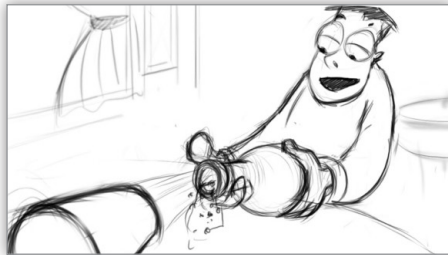
Camera: top angle shot
Sound: Struggling noises



Camera: Low angle shot
Sound: Struggling noises

Pre-Production: Story Board

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Camera: cork pops open, coming towards the camera
Sound: Popping sound of the cork with a sigh!



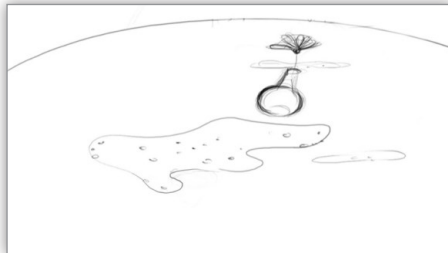
Camera: champagnes starts spilling out
Sound: happy music



Camera: man fills the glass and looks at the lady across the table
Sound: happy music



Camera: surprised
Sound: happy music and sudden silence



Camera: man's POV
Sound: funny suspicious sound



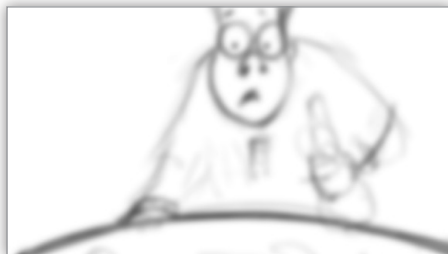
Camera: Panning as the man gets up and looks down
Sound: Continues



Camera: Close up, TA
Sound: Continues



Camera: Close up, TA
Sound: Continues



Camera: Lady's POV, LA
Sound: Continues



Camera: Lady's POV, LA
Sound: Continues



Camera: lady back on table
Sound: funny but tense



Camera: waiter comes with menu card
Sound: funny but tense

Pre-Production: Story Board

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Camera: Waiter's POV and pan through the card
Sound: happy track



Camera: from back of lady, turning back
Sound: increase in tempo, to increase excitement



Camera: mans POV
Sound: increase in tempo, to increase excitement



Camera: waiter keeping the plate in style
Sound: pooooow! Disappointed sound



Camera: focus on his hand
Sound: Funny tensed



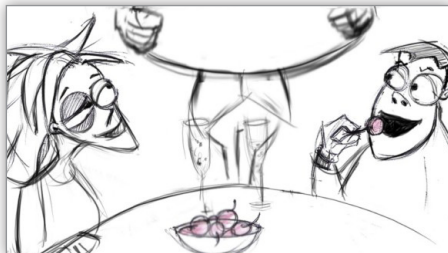
Camera: focus changes to his expressions
Sound: funny tensed



Camera: Asking for something 'BIG'
Sound: Finny tensed



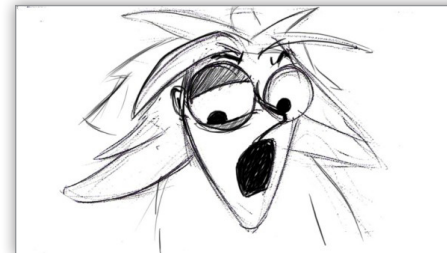
Camera:
Sound: dull music.. ambient



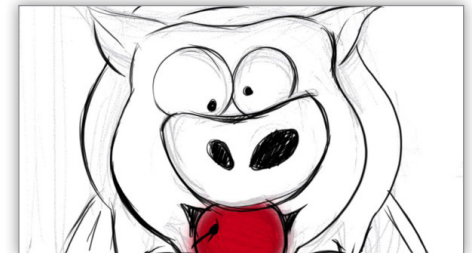
Camera:
Sound: get peppier as they get excited



Camera:
Sound: Dhurm! Silence....



Camera: tight close up
Sound: Lady screaming



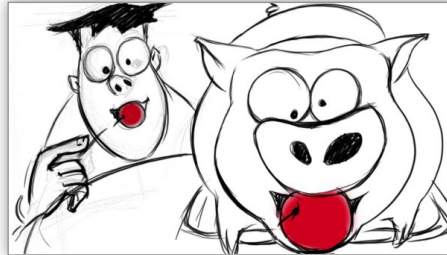
Camera: tight close up
Sound: Lady screaming

Pre-Production: Story Board

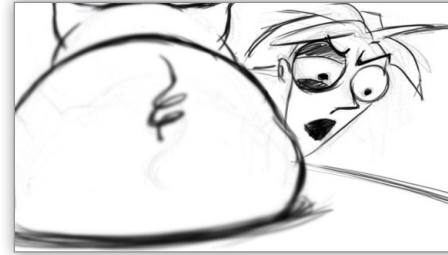
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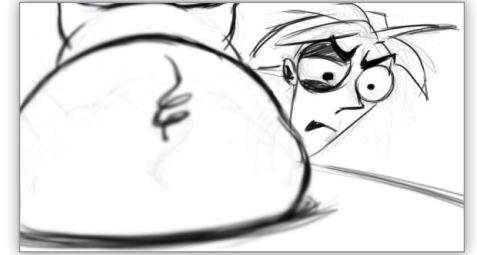
Camera: tight close up
Sound: Lady screaming



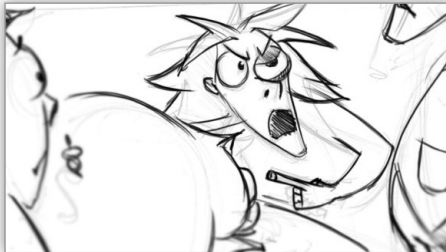
Camera: pan from pigs face to man's, focus shifts
Sound: scream stops



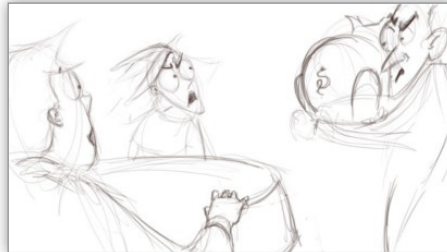
Camera: focus on lady's face
Sound: funny



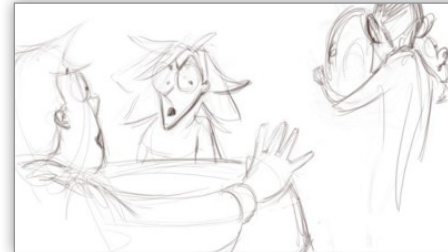
Camera: focus on lady's face
Sound: funny



Camera: focus on the lady
Sound: tense and yelling of the lady



Camera: focus on the waiter
Sound: Lady- huh!



Camera: focus on the waiter
Sound: waiter- huh!



Camera: trying to make him wait
Sound: noises from mouth



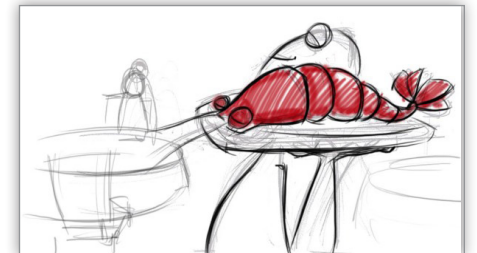
Camera: looks at the lady
Sound: mum



Camera: Pointing at the waiter passing by
Sound: Slowly getting happy again



Camera: looking at the waiter
Sound: tempo rising



Camera: couple's POV
Sound: Tempo rising

Pre-Production: Story Board

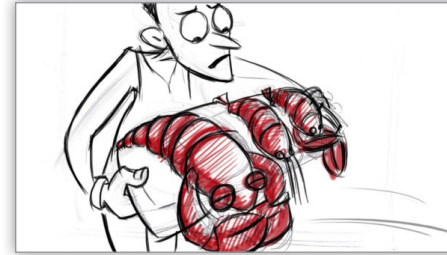
29



Camera: him looking at waiter
Sound: increased temp but mischievous



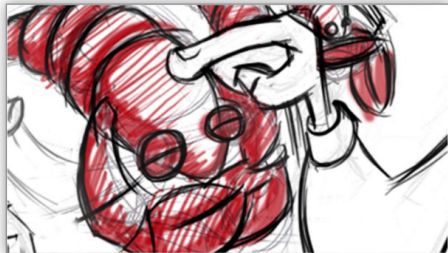
Camera: waiter looking at him
Sound: continuous



Camera: waiter's close up
Sound: happy



Camera:
Sound: tempo increasing



Camera: tapping on lobster's head
Sound: tuk tuk tuk



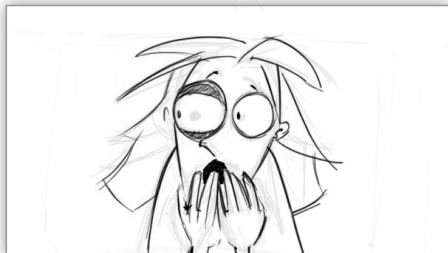
Camera: tight close up of lobster's face
Sound: silence!



Camera: Lady frightened
Sound: scream! aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.....



Camera: waiter giggling
Sound: aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa.....



Camera: embarrassed looking here and there
Sound: aaaaaaaaaa.....



Camera: lady's POV pan shot of the restaurant
Sound: aaaaaaaaaa.....



Camera: lady's POV pan shot of the restaurant
Sound: aaaaaaaaaa.....



Camera: lady's close up
Sound: scream coming to an end

Pre-Production: Story Board

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Camera: close up of mans hand tapping fingers on the table
Sound: dull, sad music



Camera: close up of mans hand tapping fingers on the table
Sound: tapping sound



Camera: zooms out
Sound: continues



Sound: Tempo rising to happy



Sound: Tempo rising to happy



Sound: tempo goes back down to sad



Camera: waiter hiding his face
Sound:



Sound: back to dull, sad music



Sound: back to dull, sad music



Camera: waiter feels sorry for them
Sound: ooh!



Camera: gets an idea



Camera:
Sound: Happy

Pre-Production: Story Board

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Sound: happy



Sound: happy



Sound: happy



Sound: happy



Sound: sound that breaks the music, tense but mischievous



Sound: sound that breaks the music, tense but mischievous



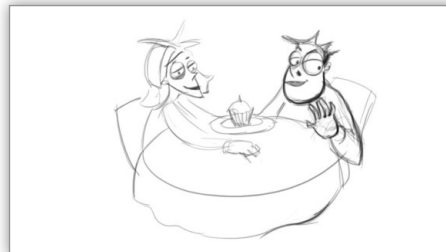
Camera: looking down at the cake
Sound: silence



Camera: couples POV
Sound: silence



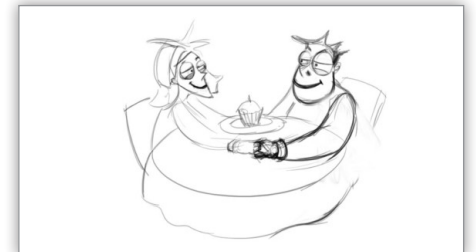
Camera: smiling looking at the cake
Sound: silence



Sound: Naaah!... music gets happy again!



Sound: Naaah!... music gets happy again!



Camera: subtle zoom out
Sound: Happy

Characters

Since its a restaurant scenario, there are number of characters in the film.

Main characters are three,

- **the lady, her husband** (main couple), and **the waiter**.

Plus there are few more characters in the background:

- **Another waiter,**
- **Old couple,**
- Family sitting on the next table- **husband, wife and a kid.**
- **Bartender**
- **Girl** sitting on the bar counter
- **Hunk** standing near the bar.
- So like this there are in total **twelve** characters.

Main Characters

The couple- It is a middle aged couple, very ordinary but trying hard to be perfect. So both of them are not good looking or in good shape but well dressed and trying to be at their best.

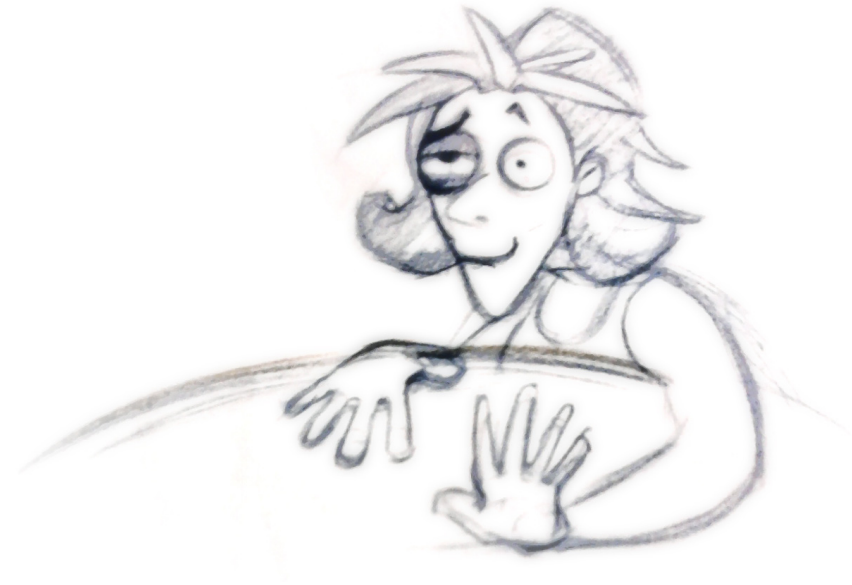
Husband

Initial Explorations



Lady

Initial Explorations



Waiter

Initial Explorations

- His characteristics are- quick, super flexible and always smiley. Eager to serve best to his customers in order to please them.



Pre-Production: Character Development



My process of making character models:

Required material:

- Thermocol, sandpaper, medical tape, fevicol, aluminium wires of different thickness, m-seal, foam sheets, rubber solution, cloth for making cloths, beads, acrylic paints, plasticine, l-clay and various tools required for clay modeling as well as set of pliers and wire cutter, etc.

Armature:

- In the beginning I drew the character on paper in exact proportions with required shapes of its head and torso.
- Then I carved out similar shaped out of a block of high density thermocol, and sanded it with a fine sand paper till its surface becomes smooth.
- After this I applied fevicol on these pieces to make the surface stronger as we need to fix wire over it. Fevicol also makes the surface better for the clay as clay does not stay directly on the thermocol.

- Next I wrapped a medical tape around the periphery of these pieces, on the areas where wire is going to be attached.
- Now I took a long aluminium wire (approximately. 2mm) and started making skeleton of the character as shown in the image below.



Sketch on paper



Head and torso
in thermocol



Wire armature on
thermocol pieces

Pre-Production: Character Development

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- To give strength to the armature, m-seal is used on the areas wherever we want to make bones and joint areas like knee and elbow are left open in order to make movement.
- After m-seal dries, foam strips are rolled around the armature to make muscles giving it some volume. This foam can be shaped very nicely if one wants to make biceps and triceps.
- Thinner wire is used to make fingers.
- I made two identical models of the main character out of which one has loops behind so that he can be fixed to the chair, whereas other one can be used for walking purpose.
- These models are around 8 to 10 inches in height.

Cloths:

- Now cloths were stitched out of fine fabric so that its texture size and print matches the proportion of the models.
- Stitching was done directly on the models hence, cloths are not removable.
- Thin wire is used on the lower border which helps in creating follow through while animating.
- Tiny buttons were made out of m-seal and painted white. Also made accessories like leather belt out of wrist band.



Pre-Production: Character Development

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Clay:

- Clay can be mixed to get desired colours.
- It is always better to use minimum clay, because more clay increases weight of the characters and then they start toppling down while animating.
- Very thin layer of clay is applied only on the exposed parts like head and hands. It is advisable to make more clay of particular shade because clay gets dirty very fast and then matching the right shade gets difficult.



Hair:

- I wanted hair to be in the perfect shape since I had to show difference in lady's hair, before she falls and after.
- I also wanted clay texture to hair as well so I used i-clay to make hair. It is light weight, can be shaped up easily and dries holding the desired shape.

Eyes:

- Eyes are made out of plastic beads. (Glass beads are better as they give a nice realistic shine)
- These beads were painted white and then I painted eyeball on top.





Couple after putting clay. I have used stockings for her arms to avoid excess use of clay.



Couple after putting hair and eyes

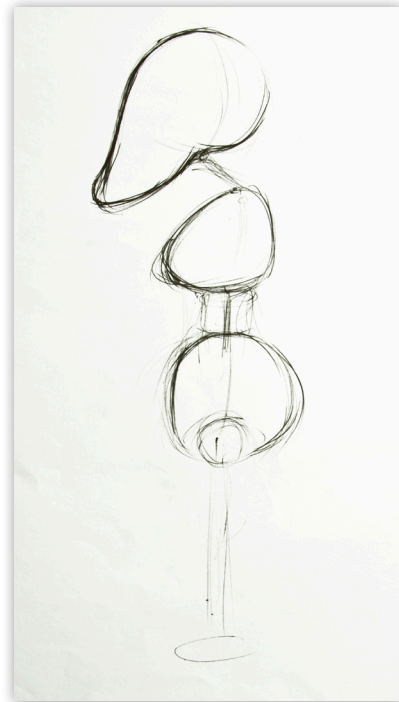
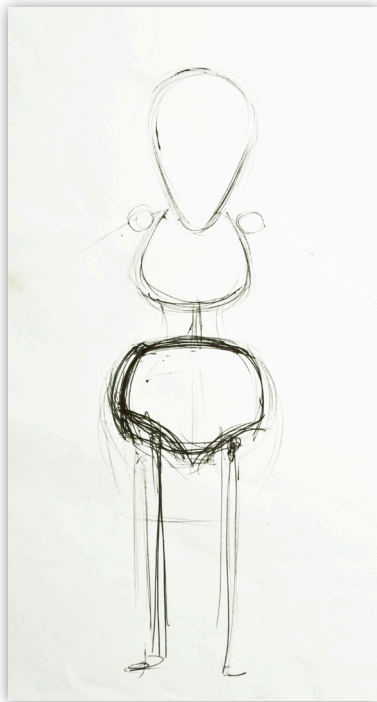


Pre-Production: Character Development

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Lady

Making of the model



Initial sketches before making the armature
for exact proportions



Basic armature of the lady at stage I- thermocol and
aluminium wire

Pre-Production: Character Development

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Lady

Making of the model



Armature with m-seal and foam



Almost ready! I made two models for the lady as well.
One before falling down & other after falling down.



Pre-Production: Character Development

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Waiter

Final Character Model



Armature



Before applying clay

Pre-Production: Character Development

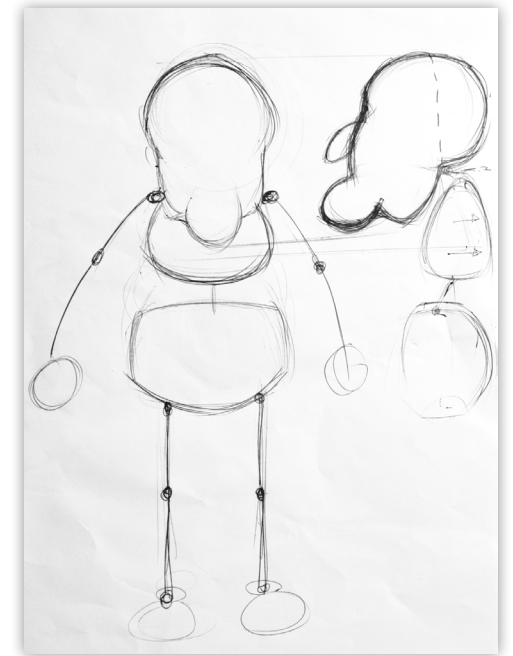
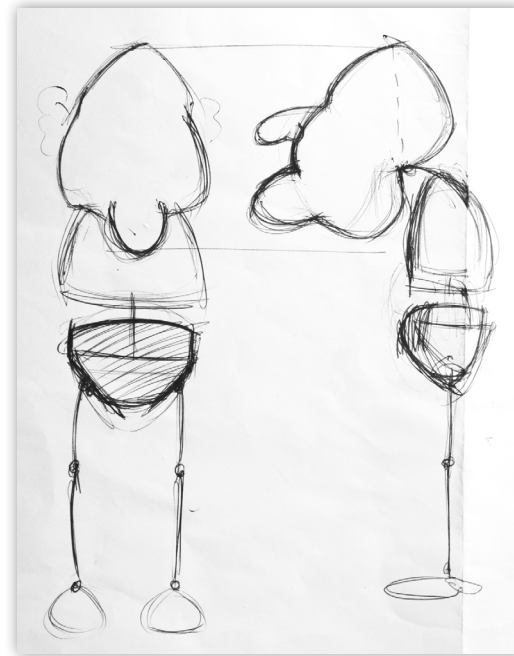
45

Waiter

Final Character Model



Old couple



Initial sketches before making the armature
for exact proportions

Old couple



Armature of the old lady



Old couple in making

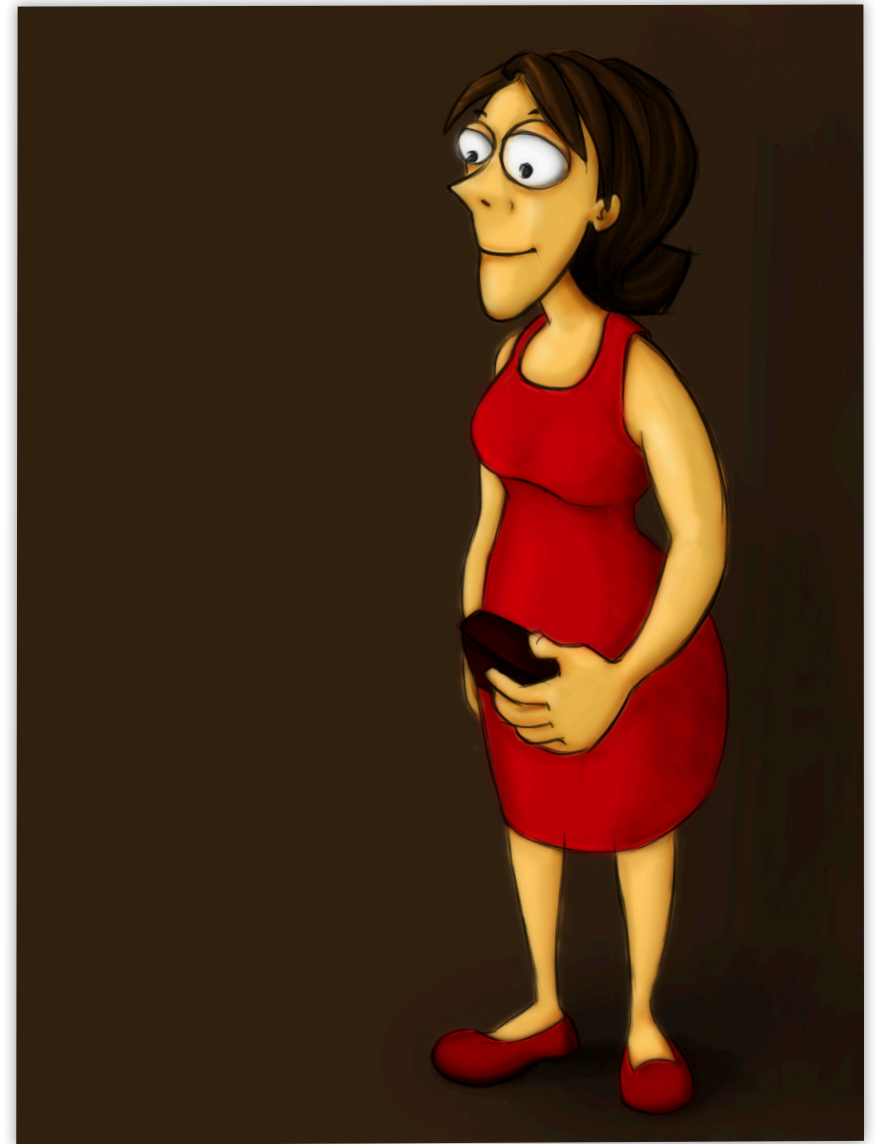




Husband and wife from the neighboring
table in making



Little boy from the neighboring table
in making



Pre-Production: Environment Development

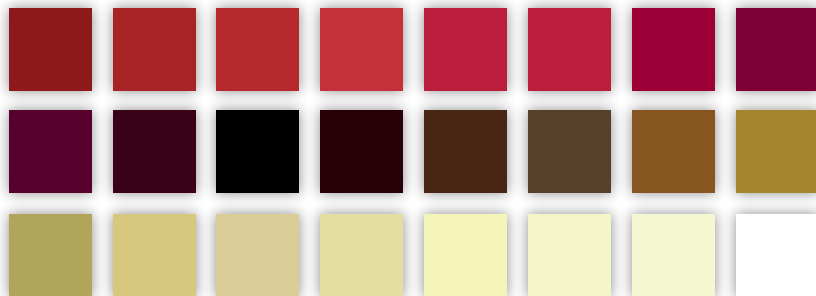
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Designing the restaurant

I wanted to show a beautiful, elegant restaurant where any couple would like to go on their special date to make it perfect. I decided to make it a Japanese restaurant as my characters always go for things other than their own. Hence, instead of going to an Indian restaurant they certainly choose Japanese cuisine.

Name of the restaurant is 'Red Buddha'. As its a Japanese restaurant, there is humour coming from the kind of cuisine they have. Once the theme was decided it was easier for me to design the ambience. I found few Buddha statues to the soul to the Japanese restaurant. I had a small black decorative metal tree, which I thought of keeping behind Buddha as a Bodhi tree. I tried to use bamboo wherever possible. Behind Buddha along with the wall I put bamboo sticks, which I picked up from one of the potpourri kit I found. Even the chandeliers are of bamboo, giving the restaurant a harmonious look. I have also tried to use silk wherever I could, specially for chairs and curtains in order to get that typical Asian look.

I went for following colour palate.



Pre-Production: Environment Development

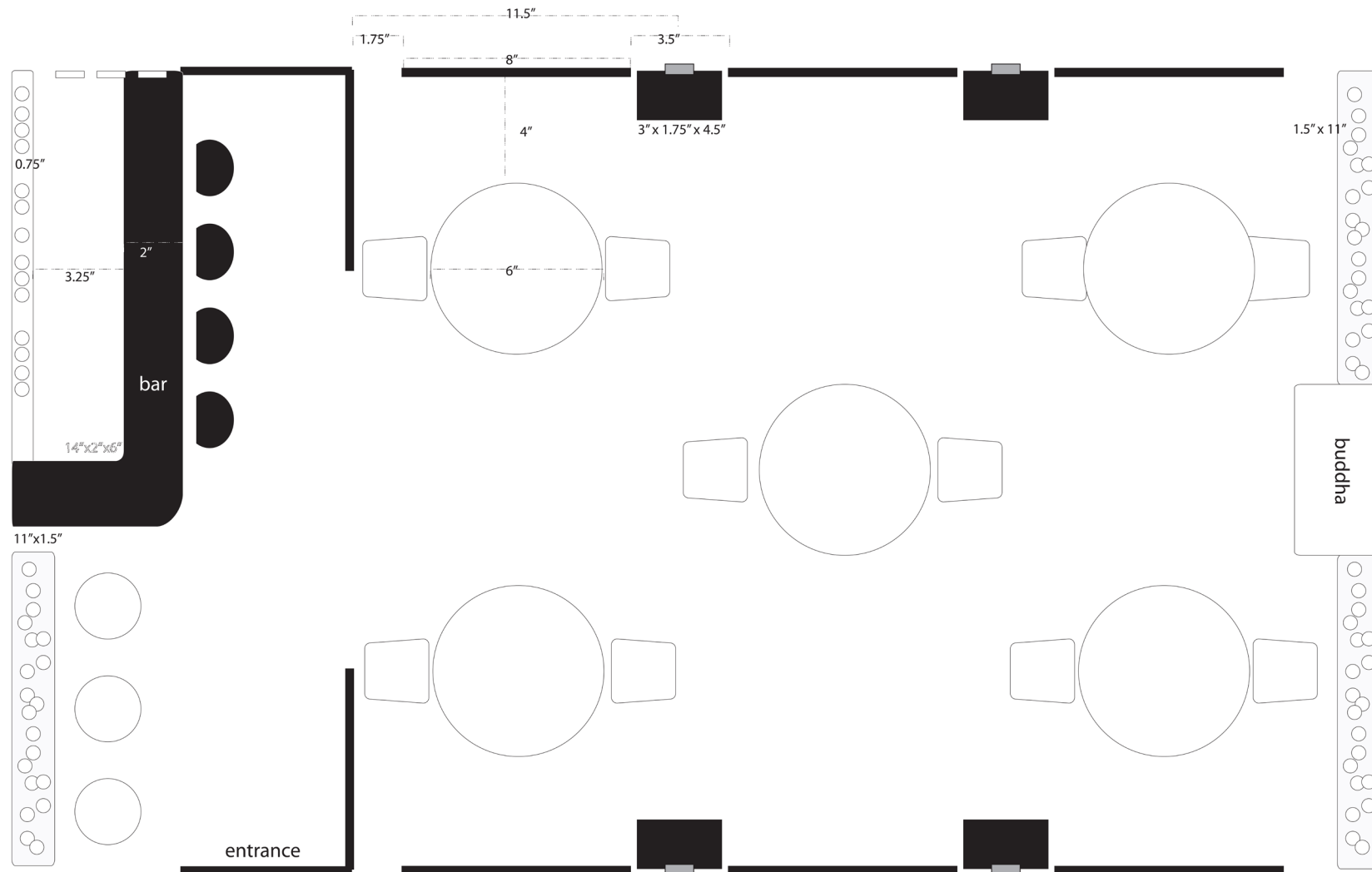
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Restaurant



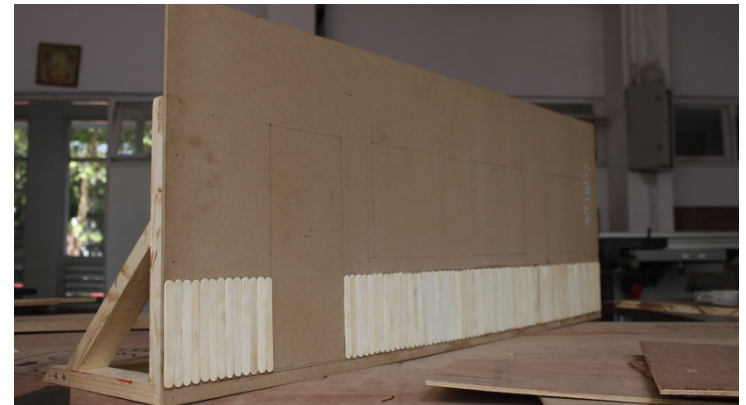
Restaurant



Plan of the Restaurant

Making of the Set

- I used a soft board as a base (48" x 28"). Then covered it with a thick cloth to make it look like a carpet.
- Walls were made out of MDF sheets as they are lighter than wood and strong enough. It does not bend like a ply.
- On walls I stuck candy sticks and polished them brown to make it look like wooden planks. On the upper side I stuck textured paper, like wallpaper.
- All four walls are detachable for ease of the camera movement.
- Made the bar out of black acrylic sheets.
- Chairs, tables, windows, cupboards are all made out of sun board.
- Used small LED lights to do internal lighting of the set.
- Lamp shades are made out of styrene and chandeliers out of diwali lights.
- My mother helped me with all the stitching work for curtains, chairs, pillows, cloths etc.
- All the tiny accessories and props are made out of m-seal and many other things.



Candy sticks on the MDF board



Polish on the candy sticks

Pre-Production: Environment Development

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Making of the Set



Pre-Production: Final Set

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Pre-Production: Final Set

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Images of the final set during the shoot

Food



Turkey



Pig



Cakes

- The Turkey and the pig are made up of i-clay as I did not want to animate them. There is thermocol inside in order to give it a firm shape. All the vegetables and leaves are also of clay. To give it a greasy look of the cooked meat I have put a coat of transparent nail paint on top of them.
- Both the cakes are also made up of i-clay. This particular clay, after drying up generally gives a mat and porous look to the object, which was perfect for the cake. Cherries and candle is also of the clay with a coat of glossy nail paint on it.

Food



Sushi

- Sushi is made up of i-clay again. Just on the black coating I have given glaze. The plate in which it is kept is of m-seal and painted with white acrylic paint.



Lobsters

- Lobsters are made up of m-seal. I used m-seal so as to get that strong shell look. Only the claws have a wire structure inside in order to make them move as needed. Just for eyelids clay is used.

Table Accessories



Salt & Pepper Holders, Spoon, Fork & Knife, Flower vase

- All the above table accessories are made up of m-seal and then painted with acrylic paint. The flower is of i-clay in order to give it a soft look.



Menu Cards

- Menu card was specially designed for the restaurant and printed in a specific size and then cut and bound.

Wine Bottles



Injection ampules



Bottles with wine tag



Champagne bottle



Cork



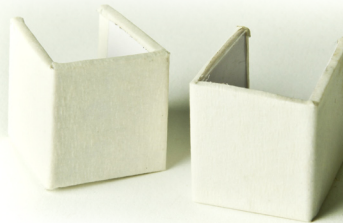
Sealed bottle with glasses

- Tiny wine and champagne bottles were made out of injection ampules. From chemist I got these glass injection ampules in different sizes and different shapes. After removing the tag, these bottles were coloured with stain glass colours. I also made lids out of m-seal on top of them which were then painted with acrylic paint. At the end tiny stickers were stuck on the bottles to make them look more real.
- In case of the champagne bottle, as I wanted the lid to pop open, I broke the upper portion of the bottle and made an opening. Then I got an actual cork and sanded it on the sander in order to make it small and to get the desired shape so that it perfectly fits in the opening of the bottle.

Lighting and other accessories



Chandeliers



Wall Lamp Shades



Frames



Bar stools

- I wanted to have really good internal lighting for the restaurant and hence from the beginning itself I had planned the lighting of the set. I got two circuits made out of LED lights, one for the focus lights to be put on walls and other for the chandeliers to be put above each table.
- These chandeliers are basically balls made out of bamboo sticks. I found these on Diwali fairy lights in the market, which I then cut off and used as chandeliers for my restaurant.
- Wall lamp shades are nothing but three square pieces of styrene stuck together in a C-shape, on which an off-white masking tape is stuck

- neatly. I left the upper part and lower part of these shades open so that when mounted on the walls, beautiful light falls on the frames below it.
- Paintings are made by me. I printed them in a small size and put them inside these tiny metal frames I found in one of the show pieces at home.
- Bar chairs are actually small egg shaped plastic bowls below which I have stuck thin plastic rod. Also got made tiny pillows to keep on them to make it look more interesting and elegant.

Tables



Dining table



Table with table cloth



Dining table set up with chairs

- Table top is of sun board cut in a round shape. Base is of card board roll that is found inside the toilet paper roll.
- On the lower end of the table cloth I have put a thin wire in order to give it firm creases.

- Dining chairs are also made up of sun board, on which a thin layer of foam sheet is stuck. On top of that silk cloth is wrapped. Legs are thin plastic rods.

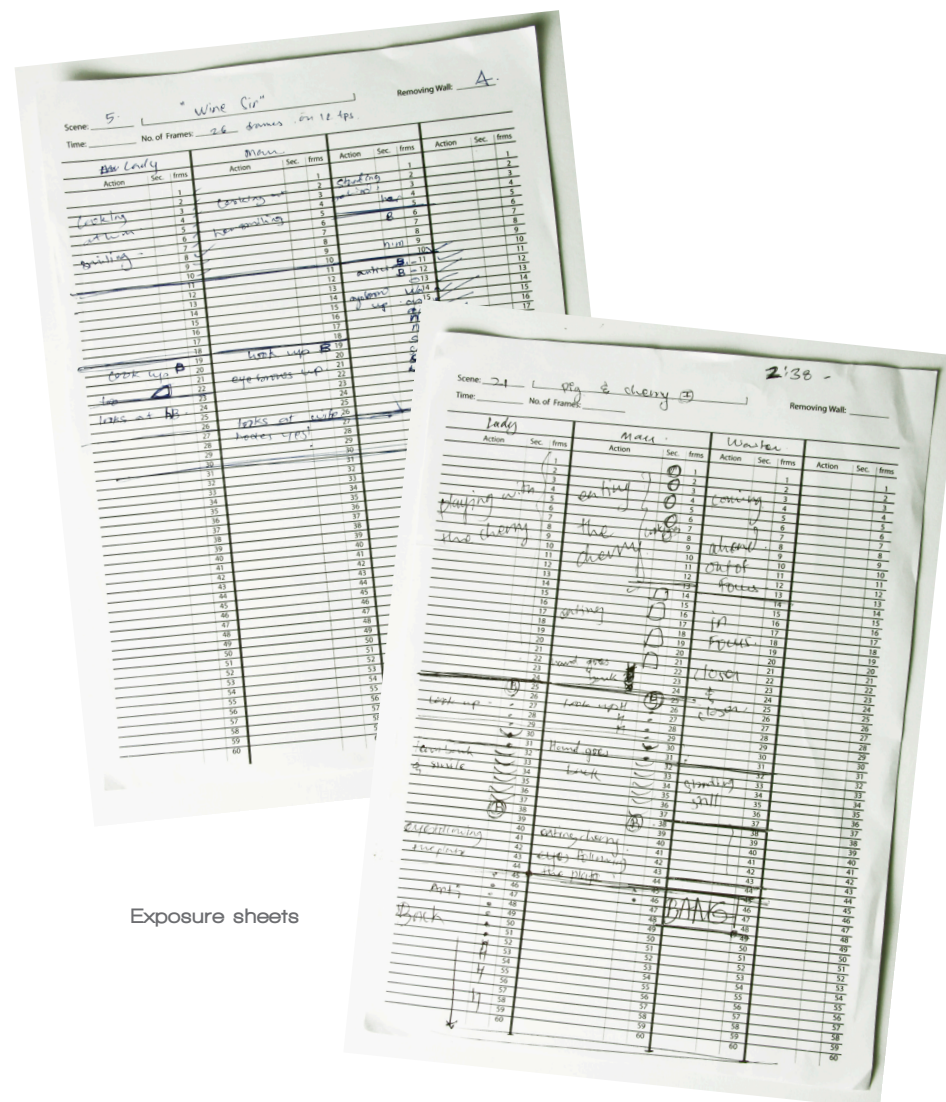
Production & Post Production:

Animation & Techniques

Stop motion was captured using Canon EOS Digital SLR T1i Camera. The set was arranged in a photo studio where entire shoot took place. Four and a half minutes of animation took around one full month. Simultaneously I was working on the compositing part as well.

A good animatics with correct timing is very important while shooting a clay animation film. Before animating I would enact every scene myself to make animation as close as possible. After enacting I would calculate the seconds of each action and fill necessary information in the exposure sheets, in a code language that I could easily understand while animating.

After each shot I would cancel the frame number on the exposure sheet. This was a very important stage so throughout I had to be focused and keep a track of every single frame. It would get even complex when there were more characters in the background and simultaneously I had to make each one of them animate in every single frame.



Exposure sheets

Camera & Capturing

As I said, stop motion was done using Canon EOS Digital SLR T1i Camera. Animation was captured by Remote Capturing with the help of a software that came along with the camera.

Camera was fixed on the tripod and it was connected to my laptop with an USB cable. Through this software I could see the display window of the camera on my screen and without touching the camera I could capture images through my laptop which reduced the possibility of having jerky images.

Lenses

For most of the shots I used 17mm-85mm Macro lens. This lens gave me amazing variety in depth of field. Since the set and the characters are much smaller in size, I needed a lens that can give me a good depth of field in order to exaggerate distance between two characters, or foreground and background.

For certain shots where I did not want so much depth to be seen, where frames were kind of flat, I used basic 18mm-55mm lens.

Change in Focus

In many a shots I wanted to have focus shift from foreground to background or vice versa. For example, in one of the shots, which basically is man's point of view, focus is on the wine bottle in the foreground and everything else in the frame is out of focus. While he is looking at the wine bottle far in the background a big champagne bottle is being carried. Here his focus immediately shifts from foreground to background.

For such shots I had to do proper planning considering number of frames required for shift in focus. Plus it should be smooth to the eye and most importantly focus shift must happen at the exact time to convey intended meaning.

Zooming

In some of the shots zoom in and zoom out was done while animating, that is during production instead of post production. Now this was a difficult task as this could not have been mechanical, while zooming out I also had to animate the camera by giving ease-in and ease-out so that zooming does not look jerky or sudden.

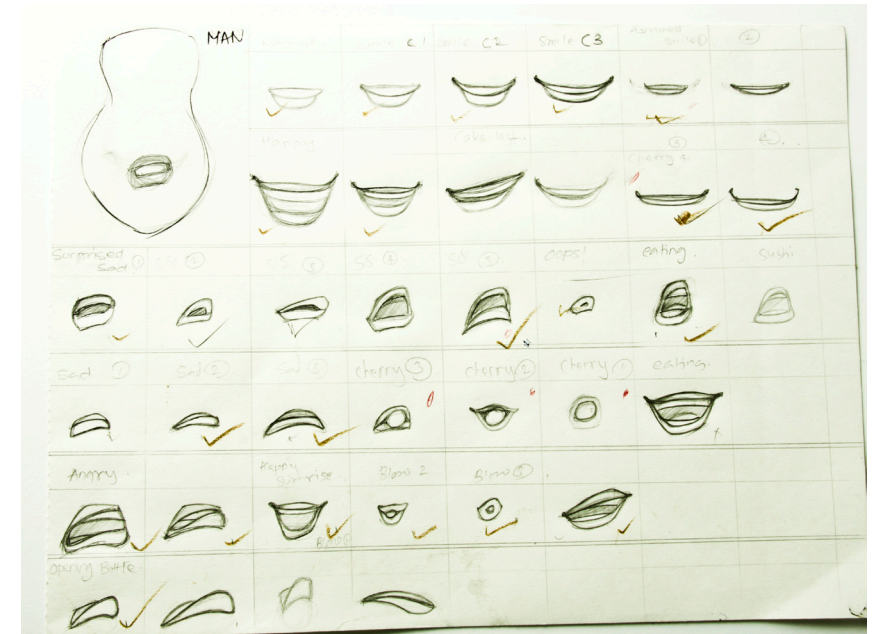
Production: Expressions

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Mouth or lip movement was done by replacement technique. I made a number of replaceable mouth shapes for each character. Different mouth shape communicating specific emotion or expression. For main characters there were approximately 20-30 mouth pieces.

These shapes were drawn on a paper first, then I put clay on them in whatever shape I wanted. This piece of paper was attached to a pin which was inserted on the face of the character at a specific position.

Initially I made an expression chart of each character. Keeping shape and size of their head, I drew various mouth shapes on the chart. There were around 10 different types of smiles and happy mouth expressions, around 10 different types of sad and irritated mouth expressions, few surprised, few for eating, some for talking, etc.



Mouth expression chart of the main guy

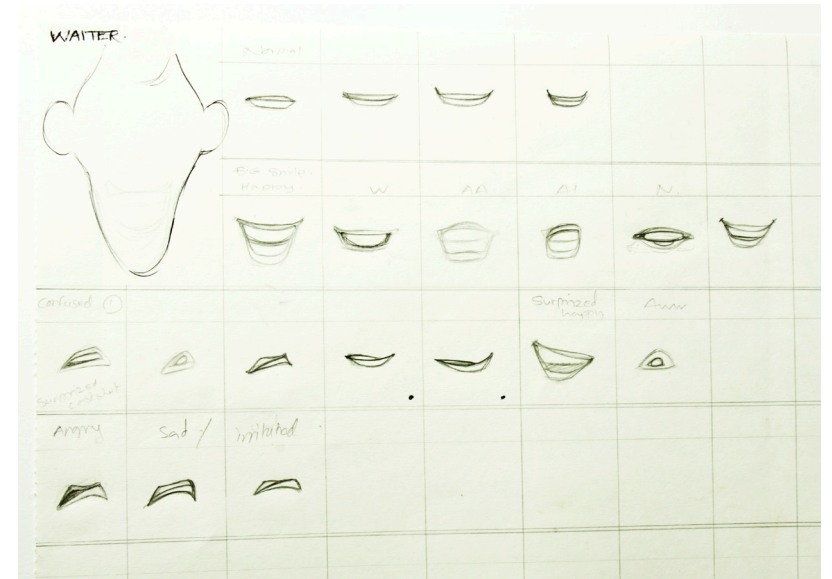


Production: Expressions

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Mouth expression chart of the main lady



Mouth expression chart of the main waiter



Mouth shapes for the main lady

Lip sync

Even though there are hardly any dialogues in the film, I tried to explore lip sync in a couple of shots. I studied the lip movement for those specific words and made those mouth shapes.

Then I calculated the time frame for each mouth shape and noted it on the dopesheet. Then it was simple! Just the way dopesheet says I had to replace the parts for those specific frames.

Below is one of the examples of lip sync I did.

Lip Sync for waiter's dialogue- "Wine Sir?!"



Effects

I attended a small stop motion workshop conducted by animator Virender Singh Rathod. During which he discussed a lot of tricks and tips that can be used to create various effects in stop motion animation with me. This discussion gave birth to a lot of ideas in my head which I used while making the film effectively.



Flame: To make the flame flicker I made 5-6 different shaped flames out of coloured (yellow, red, blue) gelatin paper. In each frame I kept replacing the piece stuck on top of the candle. When all the frames were played together it gave flickering effect, very close to actual flame.

Cork popping out: There is a shot in the film in which the protagonist opens the champagne bottle and the cork pops open with a jerk and flies towards the camera. Now doing this shot in stop motion was quite challenging! What I did was, put a thin wire through the cork and I suspended the cork from top in such a way that it looks as if it is coming out of the bottle. This way I shot all the frames one by one with the cork taking it's next position. But, since it was in air it was very much difficult to get the right position after every shot as there could not be any markings, so it was very much based on visual judgement. Since it was supposed to be an extremely quick action, I only had to shoot five to six frames to show the popping out of the cork and hence it wasn't too much of a trouble and went quite well. While shooting I could not avoid the wire that was seen in the frame, but eventually it was removed in post-production by masking it in Adobe After Effects.



Production & Post Production:

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Champagne: For champagne I used light yellow coloured transparent hair gel. As gel is slightly more solid than any liquid, it would stay in one shape at least until I could click that shot. I would add little gel on the bottle for every shot in order to give that flowing effect. Interestingly gel itself was flowing slowly on the bottle which gave even nicer effect of flowing champagne as he opens the cork. Secondly gel has these tiny bubbles in it which made it look even close to champagne in the film.

But this was one of the most difficult shots while shooting the film, as the champagne bottle had become very slimy and slippery because of the gel and after couple of captures it would slip out of the character's hand and for the next shot its position would change.



Motion Blur (lobster): There is this scene where a big lobster catches man's finger. Over here I wanted to show waiter's reaction while he is watching the man dancing around the place. In this particular frame, focus is on the waiter's face, but you also see the lobster going up and down along with the man's hand on the other side of the scene. Since, the movement of his hand was supposed to be really fast, motion blur was required. But at the same time waiter was also in the same frame and he was very much steady, due to which speeding up the shot in post was not so feasible. So I thought of shooting the lobster while it was moving. For every shot I kept moving the lobster up and down with one hand to get that desired motion blur effect. But again it was quite difficult to capture the exact position of the subsequent frame while it was moving as it had to be in an arc that too with proper ease-in and ease-out as it reaches upper end and the lower end! Here also I had to do a lot of trial and error until I got the right shot.



Compositing and editing

Editing of images was done in Adobe Photoshop and After Effects. Most of the compositing happened in Adobe After Effects. Finally audio and visual sequence was put together on Adobe Premiere Pro.

After shooting every scene I would import all the images to Adobe After Effects, where I would work a bit on the timing of the sequence and do some colour correction if necessary, because how much ever precaution we might take light changes in every shot depending upon the camera angle and various other factors.

After compositing each sequence was saved as a tiff sequence, which was then imported to Adobe Premiere Pro, where final editing was done along with the sound.

Sound

Since it is a Japanese restaurant, I wanted to have an ambience music that has Japanese or at least Asian touch. Multiple layers of various ambience sounds were put. For example, People talking in the background (like in a restaurant), Subtle sounds of cutlery and glasses along with people eating food, Sounds of chairs and doors closing and opening, etc. Some of these sounds were recorded in an actual restaurant.

We also recorded a lot of other sounds in the studio like, sound of the moving trolley, tapping of man's fingers on the table and on the lobster, etc.

All the dialogues were recorded beforehand because while animating I needed them in order to get the timing right and also for the lip sync. Some of the dialogues were rerecorded and dubbed after the shoot.

Since it is a humorous film, I chose to use guitar for background music because it gives a nice peppy feel to the film.

Sound track was put in such a way that whenever they are happy and everything is perfect, there is perfect music going on in the background, but whenever something goes wrong in the film, music just stops! As soon as they get back on the track, music also starts alongside.

Conclusion:

What I learnt?

I find stop motion fun because its a straight ahead animation. It defiantly needs planning but at the same time its very much spontaneous and the result always surprises you in some or the other way and mostly its positive and that's what gives one that kick to do the next shot with even more enthusiasm.

This project taught me a lot of things. While working on this for last 4 months every single day I got an opportunity to learn something new. I worked on every single smallest part of this film as I was working alone on this project. Due to which this project gave me immense confidence in myself.

Most importantly this project improved my patience. This project being a very big project for one person to manage, I had to plan smallest of things before hand. My management skills have improved drastically. I have started organizing things much better than before and I think that is the most essential things of all!

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