

Revisiting

AJANTA

Animated Film-Life of buddha

Abstract

Ajanta, an UNESCO world heritage site has inspired whole generations of painters and sculptors, had a great a great impact on modern painting. But the past few centuries it fell from grace, the Revisiting ajanta project is helping in restoring it.

The project aims on producing an animated film on the life of Buddha, staying true to the paintings by using techniques viz, OHp acrylic puppetry and Paint on glass animation.

Although Paint on glass and Ohp Acrylic puppetry presents it's own set of obstacles,they also have paved way to various exploratory road and the results of this interesting and vibrant.

Although the exploratory road seems obscure and vague at the begining but it sparks crazy ideas and astounding results, if persevered. This is what i take away from this project.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my heartily gratefulness to those who have been a part of my design journey at The Revisiting Ajanta Project.

IDC, to give me an opportunity to work with them and be a part of their ongoing project.

Prof. Shilpa Ranade, to give encouragement and guidance to do my project-1 in animation design and for sharing her experience and deep knowledge in Animation design.

Kshitij Verma, for aiding me in my learning and understanding of the Paint on glass animation and to give his valuable feedback on my work.

IDC, and all the faculty, for cultivating a holistic design sensibility within.

& My parents and my friends.

Completion Letter

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**Life is an experiment in which you may fail or
succeed. Explore more, expect less.**

—Santosh Kalwar

About Revisiting Ajanta

As a part of the project Revisiting Ajanta, Prof. Shilpa Ranade is directing animation short films based on Gautam Buddha. It will guide us through the life of these Buddha.

Although the events happened in the lifetime of Gautam Buddha was in a linear fashion, the Ajanta paintings have taken the exploratory road of non-linear narrative style of storytelling. The interweaving of stories through juxtaposing the images is both visual and intellectual treat.

The film seeks to explore this marvellous medium of storytelling and also staying close to the original style of painting with some creative deviations to enhance the experience of Ajanta paintings and thus hoping to bring it to life.

This attempt to understand Buddhism is at a far more personal level than it has ever been attempted before.



Dr. Rajesh Kumar Singh
Courtesy of Archaeological Survey of India

image courtesy: www.ajantacaves.org

Introduction

The Ajanta Caves in Aurangabad district of Maharashtra in India are about 30 rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments which date from the 2nd century BCE to about 480 or 650 CE. The caves include paintings and sculptures, which are masterpieces of Buddhist religious art, with figures of the Buddha and depictions of the Jataka tales. The caves were built in two phases starting around the 2nd century BCE, with the second group of caves built around 400–650 CE according to older accounts, or all in a brief period of 460 to 480 according to the recent proposals of Walter M. Spink. The site is a protected monument in the care of the Archaeological Survey of India, and since 1983, the Ajanta Caves have been a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The caves form the largest corpus of early Indian wall-painting; other survivals from the area of modern India are very few, though they are related to 5th-century paintings at Sigiriya in Sri Lanka. The elaborate architectural carving in many caves is also very rare, and the style of the many figure sculptures is highly local, found only at a few nearby contemporary sites, although the

Ajanta tradition can be related to the later Hindu Ellora Caves and other sites.

Painting

Mural paintings survive from both the earlier and later groups of caves. Several fragments of murals preserved from the earlier caves (Caves 9 and 11) are effectively unique survivals of court-led painting in India from this period, and “show that by Sātavāhana times, if not earlier, the Indian painter had mastered an easy and fluent naturalistic style, dealing with large groups of people in a manner comparable to the reliefs of the Sāñcī toraṇa crossbars”.

Four of the later caves have large and relatively well-preserved mural paintings which “have come to represent Indian mural painting to the non-specialist”, and fall into two stylistic groups, with the most famous in Caves 16 and 17, and apparently later paintings in Caves 1 and 2. The latter group were thought to be a century or more later than the others, but the revised chronology proposed by Spink would place them much closer to the earlier group, perhaps contemporary with it in a more progressive style, or one reflecting a team from a different region. The paintings are in “dry fresco”, painted on top of a dry plaster surface rather than into wet plaster.

Unlike much Indian painting, compositions are not laid out in horizontal compartments like a frieze, but show large scenes spreading in all directions from a single figure or group at the centre. The ceilings are also painted with sophisticated and elaborate decorative motifs, many derived from sculpture.

Copies

The paintings have deteriorated significantly since they were rediscovered, and a number of 19th century copies and drawings are important for a complete understanding of the works. However, the earliest projects to copy the paintings were plagued by bad fortune.



((@) Rajesh Kumar Singh
Courtesy of Archaeological Survey of India



(@) Rajesh Kumar Singh
Courtesy of Archaeological Survey of India

Impact on modern Indian paintings

The Ajanta paintings, or more likely the general style they come from, influenced painting in Tibet and Sri Lanka.

The rediscovery of ancient Indian paintings at Ajanta provided Indian artists examples from ancient India to follow.. Nandalal Bose experimented with techniques to follow the ancient style which allowed him to develop his unique style. Abanindranath Tagore and Syed Thajudeen also used the Ajanta paintings for inspiration.



**All beings tremble before violence, all fear death,
all love life. See yourself in others. Then whom
can you hurt? What harm can you do?**

—Buddha

Revisiting Ajanta

Brief:Dhanapala

This is a story of the revered master, when he was residing in a monastery outside Rajgriha. It is an account which took place, in Buddha's life when he was invited by a resident of Rajgriha at his place for meals, and Devadutta, Buddha's cousin tried to kill him by designing a conspiracy along with the King Ajatshatru.

Sinister eyes winked, the devious cousin breathed with content when King Ajatshatru, a Haryankan king nodded with consent. A plot was designed inside the Rajgriha palace walls, where the air itself had become a stench polluted by the breathing greed for power.

It was greed of a brother, Devadutta, desiring to take over the control of the monastic order, and succeed Buddha. But Buddha denied, and Devadutta was left insulted to take an oath of revenge.

It was the conspiracy that unleashed the beast in me. I Nalagiri, known to others by that name. Just that name sent shivers down to everyone's spine, and my presence sent tremors to those shivering spine. My feet were unbounded from the iron chains. With the force that no one could stop, I

charged. Palace gates opened and on the streets of Rajgriha I was set free. Crushing anyone coming in my way. I descended ferociously through the crowded street making my way. Trumpeting aloud I moved ahead, I saw the ghastly eyes glued at balconies and trees, staring at me.

As I crushed a head of a distressed soul under my feet, a group of shaved heads appeared at a distant end of the street (at a distant sight). A man with a beautiful gait, like that of a King Elephant led them through the street. My furious soul sounding a trumpet blast charged over those vulnerable souls, scattering them in the nooks and corners of the street.

Admired the cloud of a feary dust I saw a shadow standing silently to calmly welcome me. He was fearless as I Descended upon him. He raised his right hand, and opened his palm. Miraculously producing 5 blazing lion from his palm, which then transformed into the mighty blaze of fire all over the air except at his feet. He manifested the moment of almighty.

I found myself kneeling down at his feet. He absorbed my anger in his heart, and sent a great wave of compassion washing of the fear from the shore of a mighty heart. He placed his palm over me, and named me Dhanapala that day.

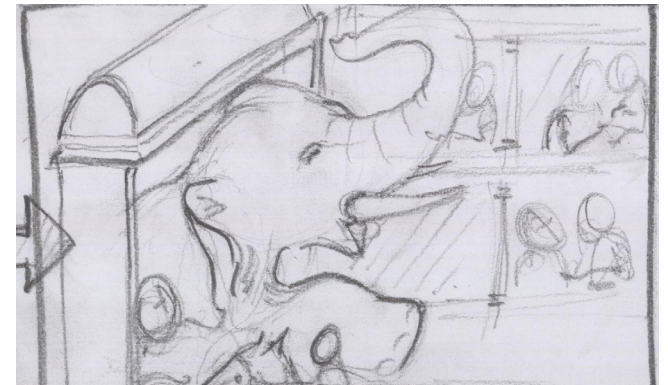
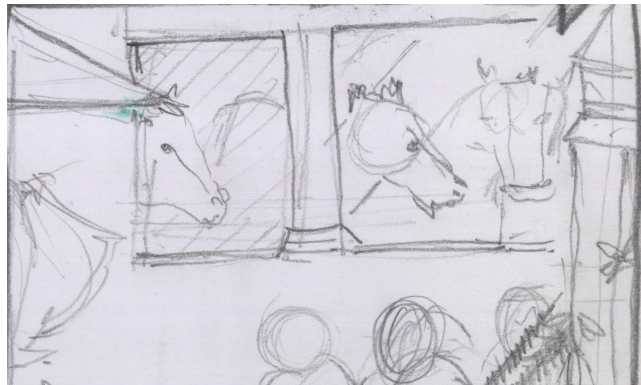


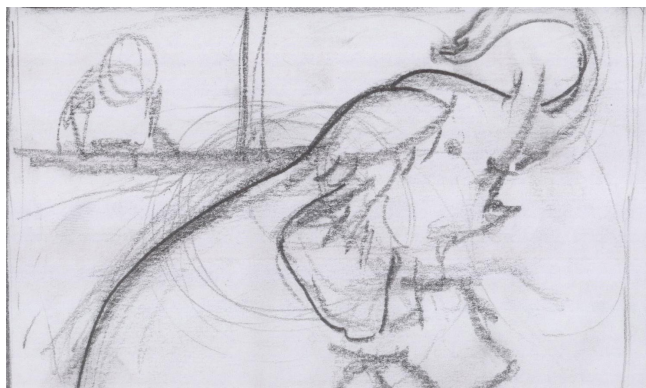
Pre-production

The Pre-production of the Dhanapala sequence involved storyboarding, Animatic, Backgrounds and creations of puppets for a selective set of characters which will be discussed in detail in the Maravijaya exploration section. I was assigned to the task of storyboarding and animatic.

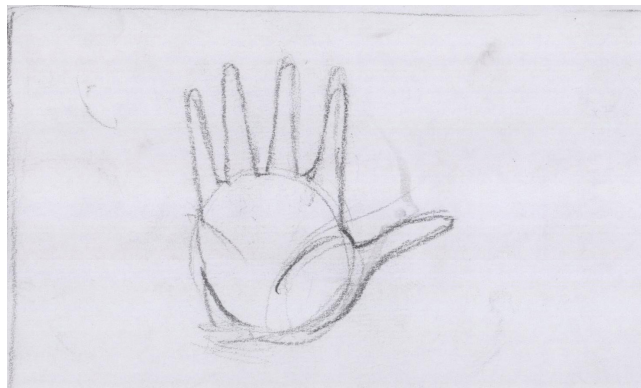
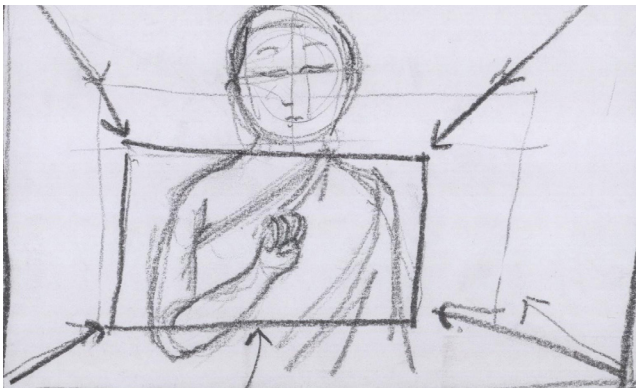
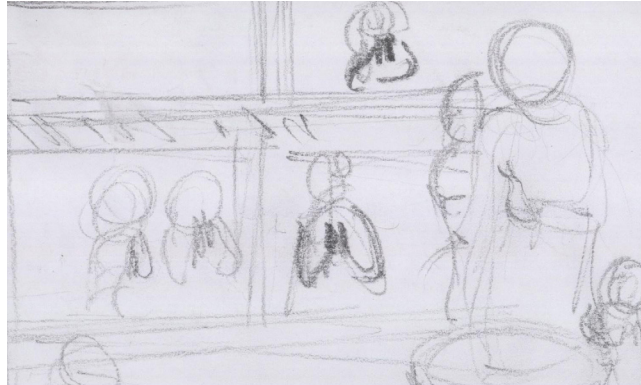


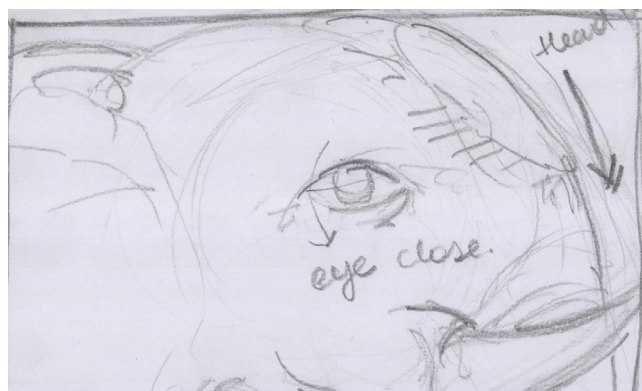
Storyboards





Storyboards





Revisiting Ajanta

Brief: Maravijaya

In the evening after Sujata's lovely meal, Gotama went to Gaya and looked for a suitable place to sit down and meditate. He found a banyan tree and sat on its east side, the side that was believed to be stable and free from trembles and quakes. After sitting cross-legged with his back towards the tree, he made this resolution: "Though my skin, my nerves and my bones shall waste away and my life blood go dry, I will not leave this seat until I have attained the highest wisdom, called supreme enlightenment, that leads to everlasting happiness."

He meditated on his breathing in and breathing out. It was the eve of the full moon. During the first part of the night many evil thoughts, described as being like the evil god Mara and his army, crept into his mind. Thoughts of desire, craving, fear and attachment arose, yet Gotama did not allow these thoughts to disturb his concentration. He sat more firm than ever. He began to feel calm and brave as he let these thoughts go and so, in the first part of the night, he found the power of seeing his own past lives.

In the second part of the night Gotama realised

the impermanence of life and how living beings die only to be reborn again. In the third part of the night he realised the cause of all evil and suffering and how to be released from it. He understood how to end sorrow, unhappiness, suffering, old age and death.

The Sun of Enlightenment Shines

The Buddha had withstood the worst attacks of Mara. Finally, the Evil One retreated and the terrible storm he had raised died away. Now the mind of the Blessed One relaxed into peace. The great darkness faded away and the full moon and stars reappeared again.

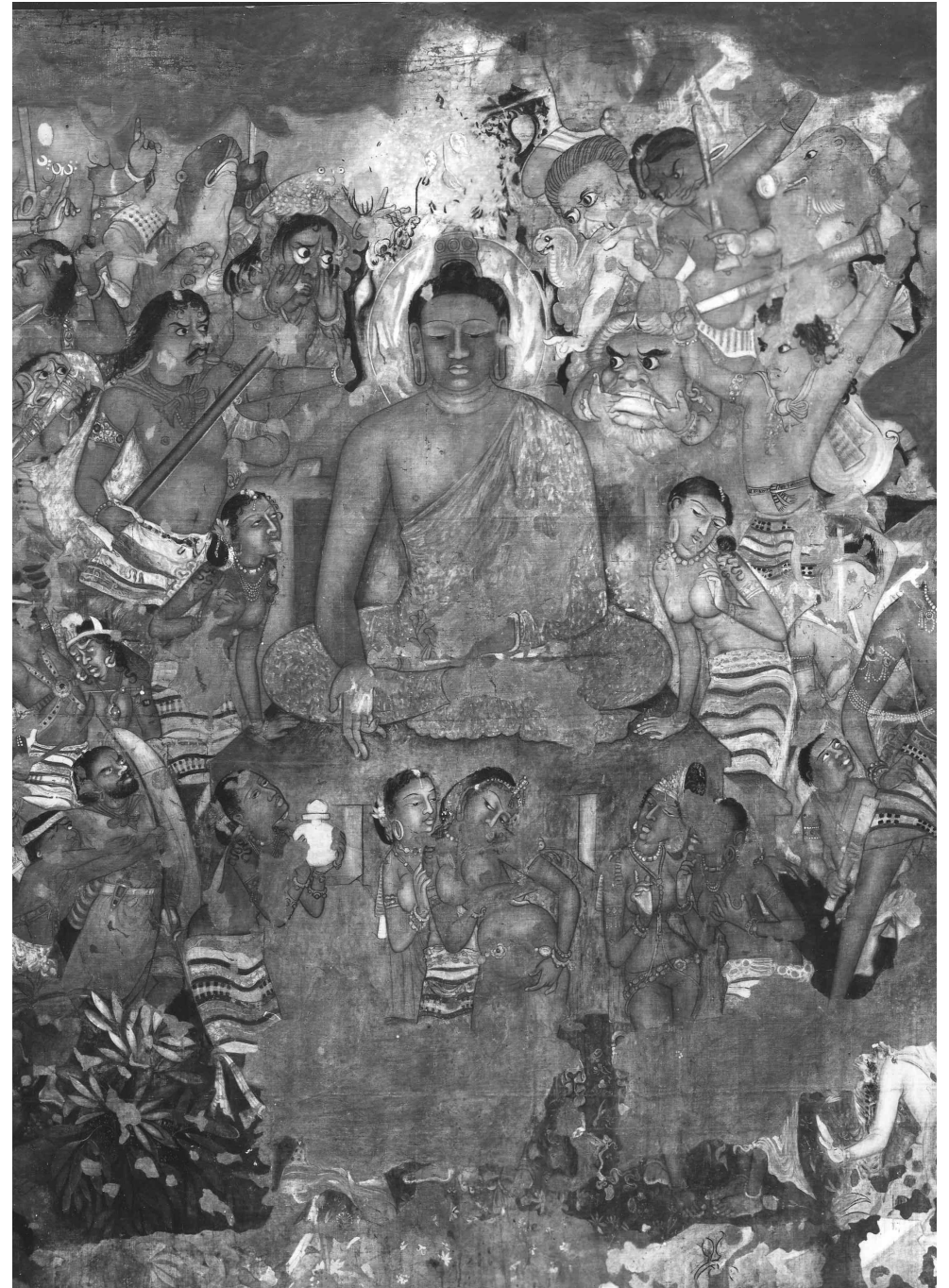
The Lord passed into a deep meditation, passing beyond the limits of ordinary human understanding, seeing the world as it is, He sat more firm than ever. He began to feel calm and brave as he let these thoughts go and so, in the first part of the night, he found the power of seeing his own past lives. In the second part of the night Gotama realised the impermanence of life and how living beings die only to be reborn again. In the third

part of the night he realised the cause of all evil and suffering and how to be released from it. He understood how to end sorrow, unhappiness, suffering, old age and death.

The Sun of Enlightenment Shines

The Buddha had withstood the worst attacks of Mara. Finally, the Evil One retreated and the terrible storm he had raised died away. Now the mind of the Blessed One relaxed into peace. The great darkness faded away and the full moon and stars reappeared again.

The Lord passed into a deep meditation, passing beyond the limits of ordinary human understanding, seeing the world as it is, and not as it appears to be. Like an eagle soaring effortlessly toward the sun, his mind moved swiftly onward and upward. He saw his past lives and all his former births, with their good and evil deeds, with their gains and losses. As his mind soared upwards he saw the round of birth and death of all mankind. He saw beings born repeatedly and dying according to their karma.



Exploration

The task that was bestowed upon me was to explore various style of creating puppets for the revisiting ajanta project through the characters present in the maravijaya painting which was discussed above and also to learn the art of puppet making in the process. The Revisiting Ajanta project had already worked out and developed a style of creating puppets using Overhead Projector (OHP) sheet painted with acrylic paints, the task at hand was to figure out and explore what are the other possible ways and styles of painting the OHP sheet with acrylic colours. The second task at hand was to explore the medium of paint on glass animation, and learn to control the medium.

Puppet and Background

The Shadow puppetry has always been a part of indian tradition and it's known in many names such as tholu bommalata in Andhra pradesh or Bommalatam in Tamil nadu etc. various parts all across india. Traditionally Shadow puppets are made with leather namely from Three types of skins to manufacture puppets – antelope, spotted deer and goat. Most puppets are made from a single skin, though some require more. At least four skins are necessary for Ravana –one for his body, one for his legs, and one to make each set of five arms.

In the Revisiting Ajanta project, Puppets are made from OHP sheets painted with acrylic colours. The project had a specific way of approaching the art of puppet making.



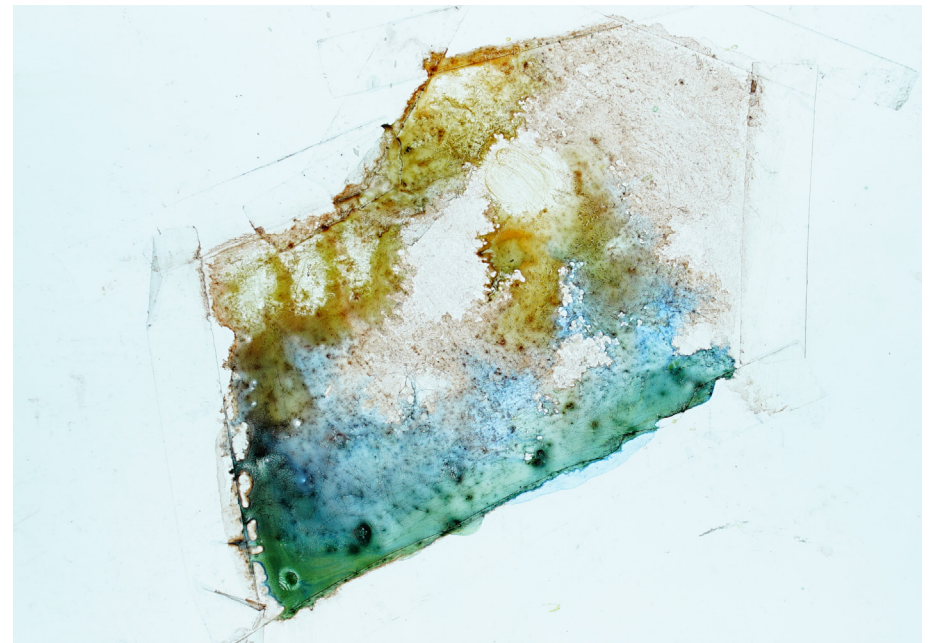
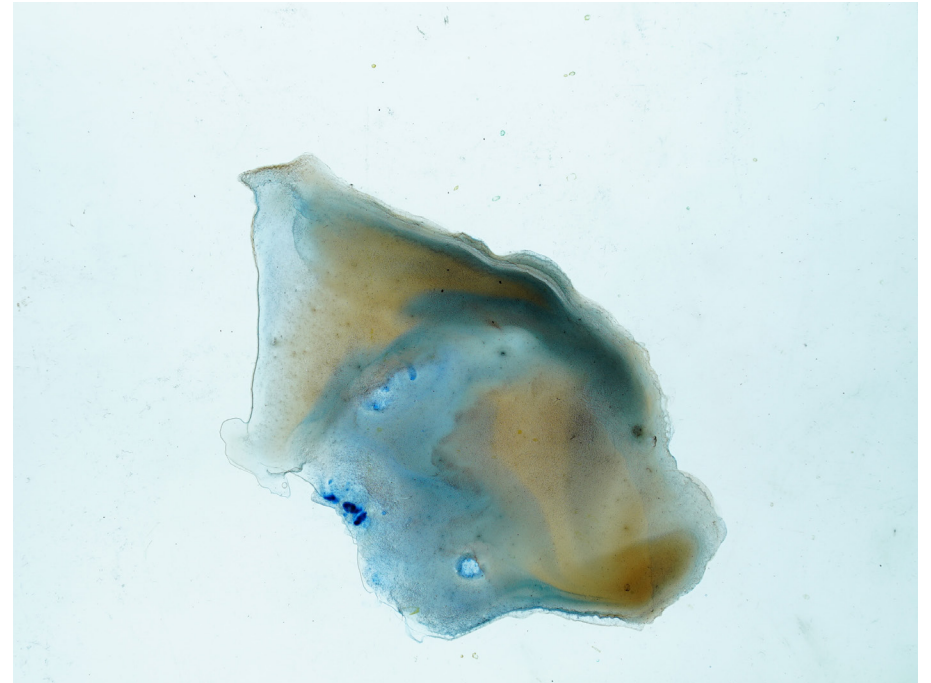
Attempt on Recreation

An attempt on the recreation of the existing puppet making style was tried out to understand the puppet making process. But unlike the original piece of puppet specimen, the replication used multiple thin coats of acrylic colour which stood in stark contrast from the original specimen due the high level of opacity, this created heavy contrast from light table below. The flipside of this style was the movement became ambiguous due lack of translucency. Soaking of dried acrylic paint with water and its effects on final look and feel and scratchability was observed.



Use of Colour free flow

The flow of colours and the interesting effect it creates was observed. This was done with acrylic mixed in high concentration until it was as thin as water colour solution, then these colours were left to flow and is manipulated. There were type of experimentation with this style, both gave interesting varied results. These were done namely on a smooth surface and a surface scratched with sandpaper. Inferences this may create interesting visuals but it moves away from the core concept of the film, i.e; staying close to the paintings in the ajanta cave.



Introduction of sand paper

It was during the final coat acrylic paint the fanatic idea of scratching of the puppet with sandpaper struck me. It involved scratching and repainting, and so on. This process helped me achieve a old plaster wall look and feel, which is by the way was inspired from the ajanta paintings which were painted on top of the dry frisco. The only flip-side to this technique is that over scratching may render small spots which compromises on the strength and durability of the puppet.

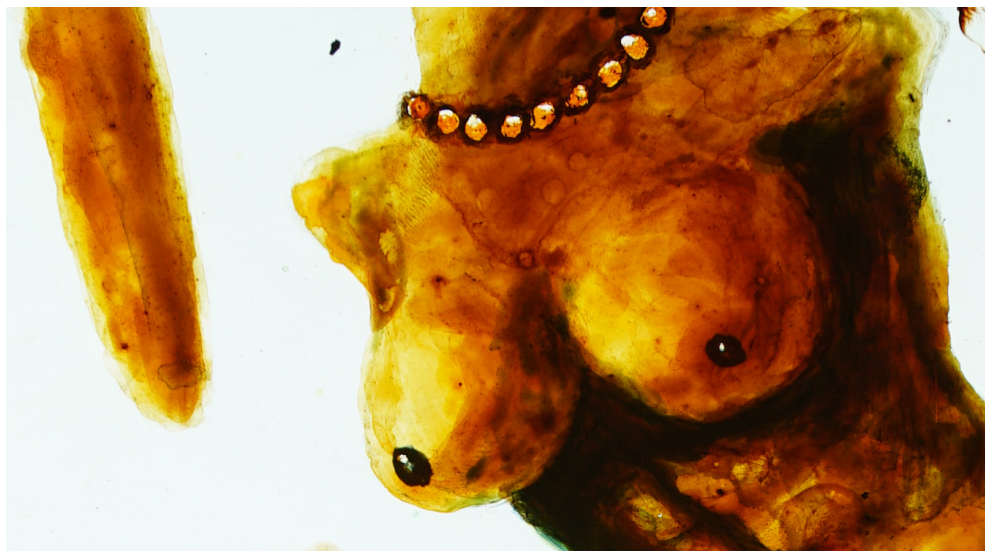




The Seductress

Three-dimensionality in puppet making style was experimented in this puppet. Radiant and vibrant base colour was used in this puppet and built upon layer by layer, the primary objective was to control the light outcome from the puppet by letting light pass through specific areas which were translucent and radiant with respect to its counterpart where the dark colour and increase in opacity is used.





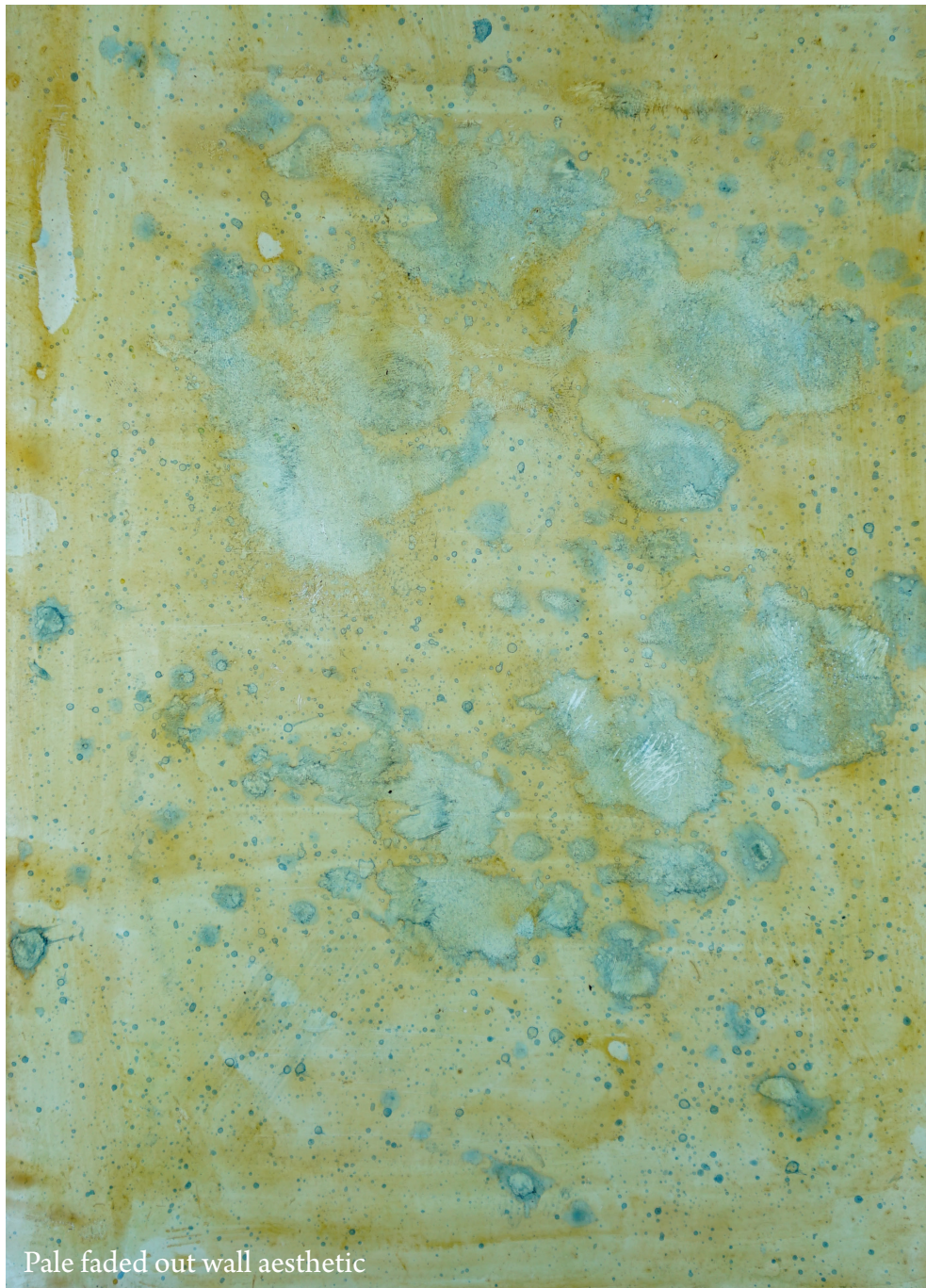
Background

The idea behind the exploration was to give background which was done previous a little more spark, and create a specific stepped process which could be taught and replicated multiple times without much deviation.

This was achieved by applying following simple steps, firstly applying base coat of similar colour of faded out plaster wall then once it dried paint over with much thicker and tonal version of the same colour, right when it's in a partially dry state drop few drops of blue(if the base colour is in the yellow colour range) or green, when the blue/green spots are partially dry state, the rest of background would be dry so gently remove the blue/green spots which would leave patches in the background with bleached central areas.

This pattern is similar to the growth of lichens on wall and plasters with time. Painting background and puppet on this textured background would give more character and dimension to the puppet and background. There were two visuals tried in two different tonal contrasts. Pale faded out wall

aesthetic and much more characteristic dark wall with textured plaster aesthetic (introduced with the help of sandpaper).



Pale faded out wall aesthetic



Dark wall with textured plaster aesthetic

Paint on Glass

The task which i was assigned to was get accustomed to the use of oil colour on glass as a medium for animation. The Paint-on-glass animation is a technique for making animated films by manipulating slow-drying oil paints on sheets of glass. Gouache mixed with glycerine is sometimes used instead. The best-known practitioner and my main inspiration for this technique is Russian animator Aleksandr Petrov; he has used it in seven films. Among which the old man and the sea will out of the rest.

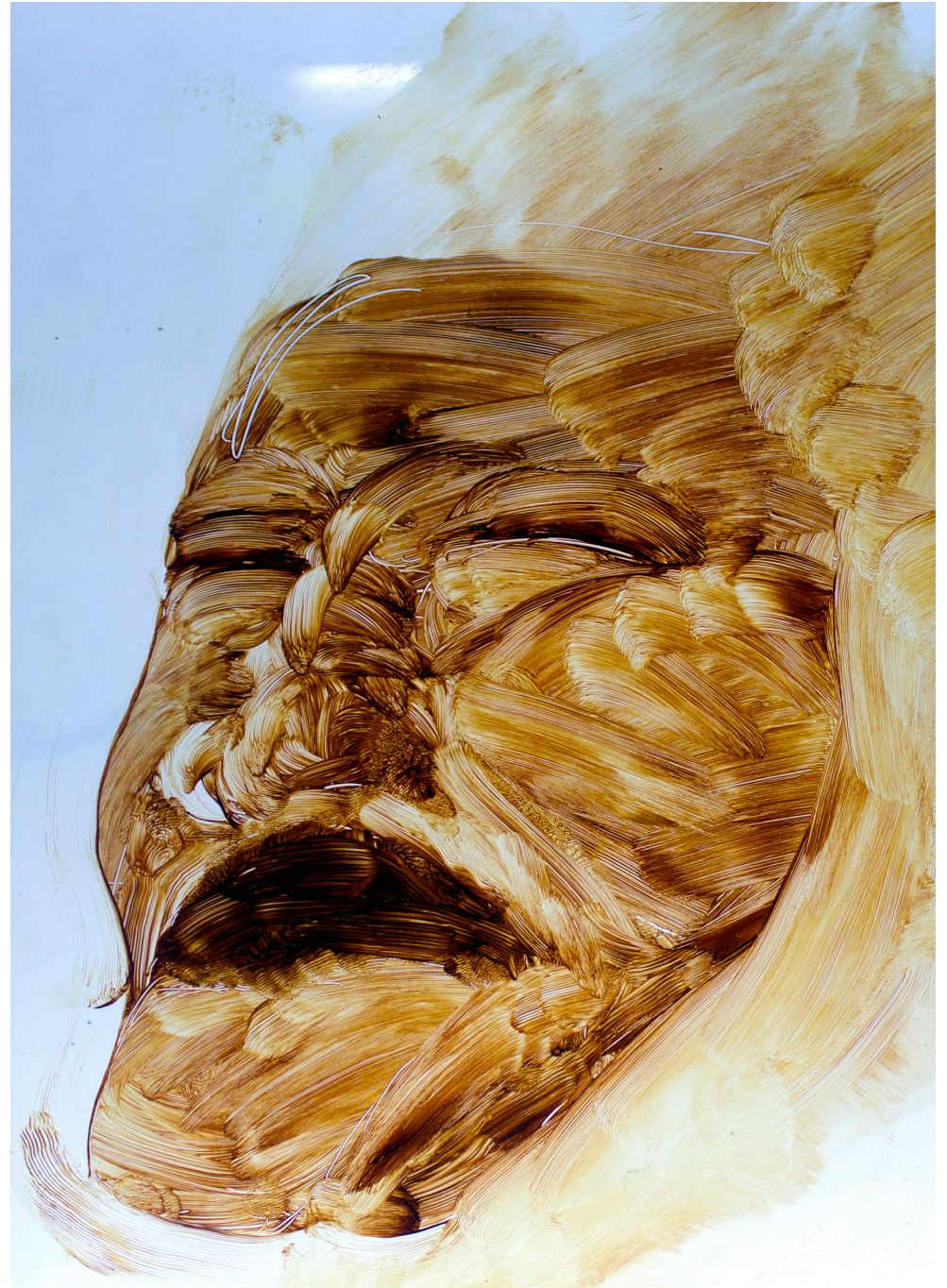
To explore complicated character and actions were not taken but two characters. Firstly a character with large head is taken and then secondly one of the seductress is chosen.

Large Head Demon

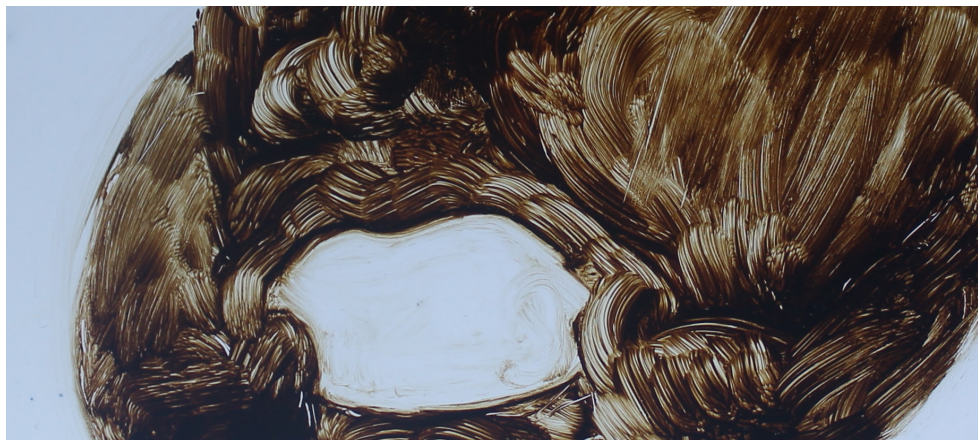
Attempt I



Attempt II



Attempt III



The Seductress

Attempt I



Attempt II



Conclusion

The paint on glass was the most challenging task of all, as it requires a tremendous amount of patience, as the paint would dry over period of a time by which the animation has to be done else the scraping of paint a tedious job and registering and re-creating of frame without continuity error is next to impossible task. The next and biggest challenge of all is getting used to the medium and acquiring command over it, it takes a vast amount of time and several trial and errors for getting used this medium for animation, but once control over the medium is reached, that is rewarding.