



Stella

SHORT FILM PROJECT - PRODUCTION NOTES

WRITTEN, DESIGNED AND DIRECTED BY

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Stella is an animated short film that explores the very essence of human identity and self-continuity. For this reason, the movie focuses on some of the most vulnerable of us, refugees. Their life allegorically is portrayed through a navigation of their internal journey and identity construction and loss.

Synopsis

Stella and her mother are refugees from a war. Having escaped, they take shelter in a strange, empty sealed room. Exhausted and puzzled they observe running colour stains on its walls. Eventually they realise that by painting themselves with the pigment they can transition forward through rooms in the pursuit of an incrementally better life. Stella is more

adaptable to the new conditions and colours but her mother has difficulty painting herself brightly and thereby divesting herself of previously held cultural values. As they progress through increasingly better but more demanding rooms, their relationship deteriorates to the point that the mother refuses to paint herself anymore and turns back wanting to regain what she sees as her diminishing identity. However, in forsaking the painting process in bright colours she gets lost as she transitions back through rooms she has previously entered. She finds herself unable to remember facets of her identity.

Conversely, Stella adapts quickly to increasingly changing conditions and finally enters a new world that appears beautiful but entirely painted. Although she achieves a pleasant life here, it is fraught with bitter memories of losing her mother. She marries another refugee in this new world, but her child is born with a health issue and she eventually loses her ephemeral contentment. Finally, she decides to find her way back home where she hopes to reconnect with her mother. Negotiating her way back on the boat and through the same sea that is not rough anymore she gradually loses colour and becomes more and more real. In this process she sees that her child's health issue also begins to disappear.

When she eventually returns to the war zone, the battle is over and she locates her mother who has happily regained her identity.

BRIEF STORYBOARD

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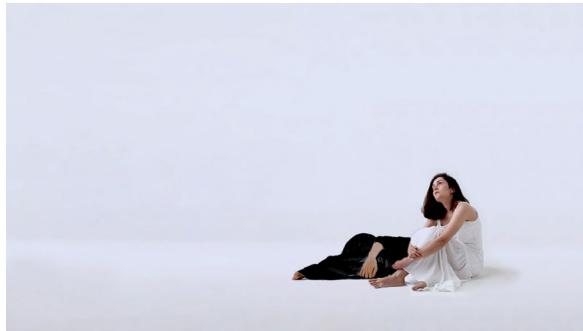
There is a war in a coastal city, people are rushing into boats to escape. Stella and her mother take the last boat.



The boat overturns and Stella is drowning, her mother saves her and they swim for a long time.



They finally reach to a silent beach and refuge in an abandoned building. They are exhausted so sleep.



When they wake up, see themselves in a sealed white room.



After a while, they see running colors appear and disappear on the walls.



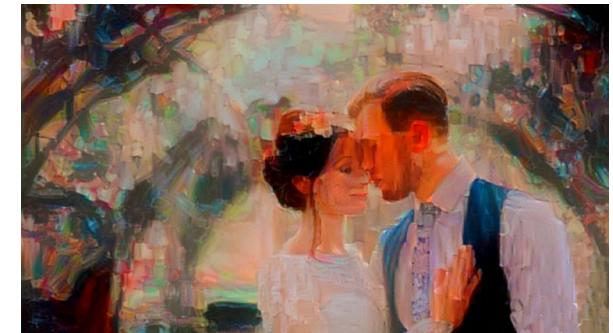
Stella realizes that there is a life in those colors and tries to communicate with them.



Then she realizes that if she paint herself with the colors, she can pass through the walls. Her mother tries to stop her but they have to as they are hungry.



By painting themselves, they incrementally get into better rooms that are warmer and has food and drink in them. But her mother can't stand anymore change.



In one of the rooms, Stella meets Tim and fall in love with him. The more she gets closer to Tim, the more gets further away from her mother.

BRIEF STORYBOARD

4



The mother who felt alienated from her former values decides to turn back, but she has forgotten how to construct her original identity.



Stella and Tim marry, then they find themselves in a beautiful (yet painterly) world. They live there happily.



The new painted world provides Tim and Stella everything they like.



Things are fine until Stella gives birth. The first child has a health issue and is on the verge of death.



The child cannot breathe well in this world. Everything becomes dull for Stella and she becomes depressed. Distraught, she gathers up her baby and leaves for her



She takes her child and paddles in a boat back to where they came from.



The sea she and her mother almost drowned in is no longer rough. As she rows across it the world become increasingly less painted (and real).



Surprisingly Stella realizes that her child has no health issue in this world anymore.



When she finally reaches her homeland she finds her mother in a world no longer ravaged by war. The small family is reunited.

The Process of Digitizing Actors and Performances

The performances of the actors will be recorded (or as technical language, will be captured) using advanced Motion Capture facilities located in AUT.

The actors will act in a traditional manner but they will don Motion Capture suits and markers. Sensors will record their movement and emotional performances. This data will be transferred onto CGI characters. Actors will have all the directorial support and guidance that they would receive in a standard filmmaking procedure.

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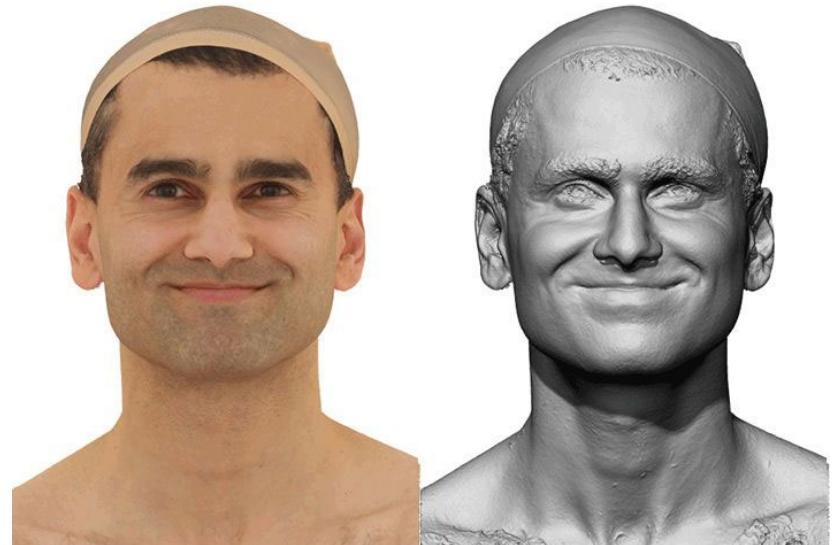


Then, using a Photogrammetry procedure, the facial features of the actors are recorded, then these are used to re-generate the 3D character in the digital world. The software packages that will be used for this process are:

- Motion Builder
- Maya
- Agisoft Photoscan
- Zbrush
- Mari

The generated 3D character can be transferred into Maya or Houdini for rigging and then applying the animation data on them.

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Director's Vision

Visually, the film adopts a painterly aesthetic as a metaphor of change. It not only creates beautiful imagery but also deepens the impact of the story. Even though this movie is an animation, but it heavily relies on the actual performances of its actors. The performances will be recorded using Motion Capture technology and the physical features of the actors will be digitised using Photogrammetry technology.

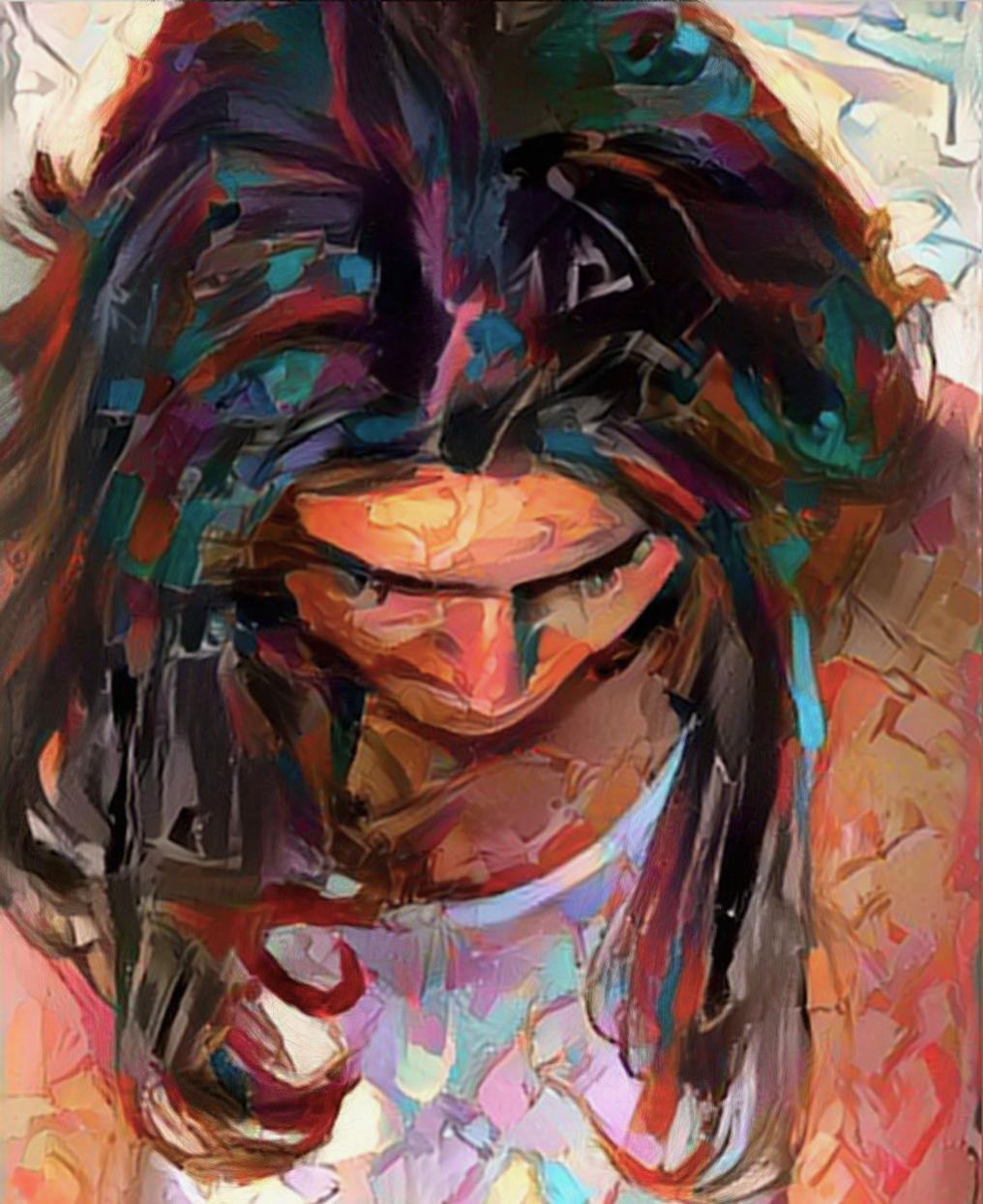
Sample Shots Image Construction

On the facing and subsequent pages are indicative experiments I have made that capture something of the visual style of the production. Elements in these images were shot in the studio then processed through post-production treatments similar to those I will be using in the film. The models in these images are not indicative of how Stella or her mother might eventually look.









Audience Engagement – New Zealand & International

Based on Stella's theme and envisioned quality, it has the potentials to be submitted to some of the credible well known festivals that value the visuals and the concept at the same time. Here is a list of festivals that Stella has the potential for attending:

Annecy Animated Film Festival

Animafest Zagreb

Bradford Animation Festival

Cordoba Animation Festival

London International Animation Festival

Stuttgart Festival of Animated Film

NZ Film Festival



About the Director

Hossein Najafi is a PhD researcher in Art and Design department of AUT university, working under supervision of Professor Welby Ings. He is a digital cinema expert and has worked with many large studios in Istanbul, London and Auckland. As an animation and visual effects artist, he has tried to bridge between his artistic achievements and academic studies through a series of interdisciplinary research projects about digital cinema, interactive media and digital storytelling. His current research project is a practice-led enquiry that seeks to bridge identity theories and narrative form. The short film Stella, is part of this project.