

Samuel Densmore

Thesis Proposal & Annotated Bibliography

Concept

This project is titled “The Pumpkinland Serial Killings,” it will be a three to six minute animated pilot following two detectives as they investigate a suspicious death. My interest in the murder mystery genre stems mostly from a writing standpoint. I've always enjoyed the narrative complexity and sense of serious consequence that comes with the topic of murder. Some of my favorite animated series and inspirations for this project would be Detective Conan, Steven Universe, and Danganronpa, each revolving around death and the relationships that are formed around their odd circumstances in very different ways. These stories, like mine, turn into explorations of death, loss, and grief, and even more so explore the often complicated reason for committing the crime of murder. Outside of just writing an interesting narrative, for me this project is an opportunity to create a body of work that shows my abilities across a spectrum. With this I want to not only create something that I will be proud of, but also will benefit my portfolio. As an individual, outside of a career, art and animation is something that I want to do because I enjoy making beautiful and engaging work, not only so I can profit. So while this is an opportunity to create a body of work I can use going forward, I am more so doing it to create something I am happy I can show to others.

Creative Context and Context of Ideas

For years now my personal goal has been to become a showrunner. Shows like Pendleton Ward's *Adventure Time*, who's humor resonates with children and adults alike, Rebecca Sugar's *Steven Universe*, with its complex storytelling and multifaceted characters, and Patrick McHale's

Over the Garden Wall, with its excellently paced and executed story in just 10 short episodes, have inspired me to create and engage with art and storytelling in ways other mediums can't. The position of showrunner is more than just director or producer, it's a role which allows you to participate in nearly all aspects of the creation of a larger work, usually one far more complex than that of a feature because of its episodic nature. A couple of books that I've been reading through to further help me understand how to work with others with animation would be *Adventure Time: The Art of Ooo* and *Steven Universe: End of an Era* which both dive deeply into the production of these shows. From another standpoint I've also been consulting *The Animator's Survival Kit* as well for more formal inspiration in my artistic practice. Outside of production research I've been looking into a lot of detective dramas to understand how I want to shape my characters. The buddy detective dynamic takes many shapes from the more comedic *Psych* to the more serious *Bones* or the abstract detective and animal pairing with a show like *Baretta*. More solo oriented shows like *Monk* and *Columbo* crafted the attitude of my main character to a certain degree as well.

Process- Media, Materials, Aesthetics

With this project, and with many projects that came before it, creating a system to follow as I work has been essential, this is with spreadsheets that assign deadlines for the project's development. I primarily work digitally out of convenience and personal preference but also so that anything I create can be collected, organized, and viewed easily. I don't generally create physical work or sketches mostly because it's more work to collect and organize, but regardless most of my work on this project begins as physical sketches which I then redraw later digitally. These sketches consist of characters, props, backgrounds, scenes, motions, etc... My first focus as far as finished materials go has always been characters, creating character models for

consistency later is generally always my first priority. Following this is creating finished models for any props handled by the characters. After these designs are solidified I can make thumbnails for the project. This influences a rough storyboard and scratch track which after being turned into an animatic will then be revised and created into a cleaned animatic. I feel that focusing on having finished backgrounds is easily the most important aspect for an animation before moving into animation so that the characters fit within their world properly. Finally rough animation, cleaned animation, coloring, and lighting/shading will be implemented last and in that order before a final edit of the project is finished with sound. These last few steps of finishing the cleaned animation, coloring, and lighting/shading will also be done in collaboration with my friends and peers Maya Katz and Piper Haswell. Collaboration is one of my favorite aspects of creating an animated work and was originally the basis behind my thesis in the hopes of working on a larger team to create it, giving me more opportunities to direct and produce an animated short.

Project Description

The project will consist of a complete three to six minute digital animation with sound in 1920x1080 resolution. Animation for this project will be completed through TVPaint while background art and painting will be done in Adobe Photoshop. Effects and clip editing will be done in Adobe After Effects while audio will be edited and adjusted within Adobe Premier. This project requires rough and revised storyboarding, character illustration, prop illustration, character animation, background illustration, background painting, and both video and audio editing. The work will be posted on video viewing platforms such as Vimeo and Youtube for selective viewing while it's being submitted to short film festivals and then potentially later to Instagram and TikTok for general viewing. For its first viewing it will be shown in the

mediatheque of the PNCA building for thesis attendees in Fall of 2024. In summary, “The Pumpkin Land Serial Killings,” is an animated pilot in the genre of murder mystery which explores death, loss, grief, and the act of murder which I’m also creating as an opportunity to expand my portfolio and gain further experience working with others in a group setting.

Bibliography

McDonnell, Chris. *Adventure Time: The Art of Ooo*. London: Titan Books, 2014.

This book is a thorough look into the production of the first five seasons of the animated tv show *Adventure Time*. The book focuses primarily on visual development and writing for the show.

Moore, Mandy. *Future Visions: Queer Utopia in Steven Universe*, 2019.
https://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1069_context=rdyl.

This article investigates the animated television show *Steven Universe* in the way the show represents queer identities and relationships as well as how it depicts characters which reflect people of color.

Pitre, Jacob. *I Think We Made Something Entirely New: Steven Universe, Tumblr Fandom and Queer Fluidity*, 2018.
https://curve.carleton.ca/system/files/etd/4466f807-fd52-401e-a3fa-1b82008e36a3/etd_pdf/cf84f8a1ec9f2615eb86b5a588f7933a/pitre-ithinkwemadesomethingentirelynewstevenuniverse.pdf.

This thesis is an inspection into the animated television show *Steven Universe* and the way its internet fanbase, specifically on the website Tumblr, affected the viewer's relationship with the show as well as the internet communities that were created because of it.

Steven Universe: End of an Era. Harry N. Abrams, 2020.

This book is a thorough look into the production of the final season of the animated tv show *Steven Universe* and its epilogue series *Steven Universe Future*. It is a collection of production material, reports from the staff on working on the show, visual development graphics, and both older versions of developed concepts as well as concepts that never made it into the show.

Williams, Richard. *The Animator's Survival Kit*. London: Faber, 2001.

This book is a broad guide on animation principles across a spectrum of difficulties and materials.

Future Bibliography

“Columbo.” NBC, 1968.

“Psych.” USA Network, 2006.

“Bones.” Fox, 2005.

“Baretta.” ABC, 1975.

“Dragnet.” 1949.

“Monk.” USA Network, 2002.

Artist Statement

I enjoy working in almost all aspects of the animation process, storyboarding, cleanup work, coloring, animating, background design and painting, character design, etc... Ultimately, though, I'm aiming to be a showrunner who's directing their very own animated TV show. I specifically use photoshop and TVPaint for the majority of my work but I've worked with stop motion animation practices quite a lot as well, I'm primarily a digital artist but this doesn't keep me away from other mediums.

My goal is to make animation to entertain and inspire viewers, specifically for younger audiences between the ages of 10-17 but also work that can be enjoyed by anyone above that margin as well. I want to create artwork that will leave young adults saying "Wow, I wish I could do that," the same way I did as a teenager. I aim to create complex stories that can only exist within the form of animation that speaks to reflect my own life and experiences in fantastical ways.

Thesis Abstract/ Project Statement

In creating my thesis project I've been able to explore almost every aspect of the animation pipeline, this includes but is not limited to, script writing, thumbnailing, storyboarding, creating animatics, character designing, color scripting, prop illustrating, background illustration and painting, voice acting, rough animating, animation clean-up, compositing, 3D modeling, and directing. Not only is "The Pumpkin Land Serial Killings," a finished animated pilot, but also the culmination of all that goes into creating one. As the director I've had the opportunity to orchestrate working with voice actors, 3D modelers, and animation assistants throughout the process of this project. To summarize, "The Pumpkin Land Serial Killings," is an animated pilot in the genre of murder mystery which explores death, loss, and grief. Working on this has given me the chance to expand my portfolio and gain further experience engaging with my peers in a professional group setting.

Writing for the Oral Presentation

Plan of Attack

1. Let people browse installed works
2. Show film
3. Oral Defense
4. Show film again
5. Talk with the Panel
6. Let people back in to sign things

Slide 1, Intro

Slide 2, About Me

INTRODUCTION OF YOURSELF AND YOUR PROJECT

Hi! My name is Samuel Densmore, I'm a 2D Digital Animation major with a minor in stop motion animation and today I'm here to present to you all my thesis film, an animated mini pilot to a show called, The Pumpkinland Serial Killings.

FORMAL DESCRIPTION OF WORKS

DESCRIBE THE SHIFTS THAT HAVE OCCURRED FOR YOU FROM THE TIME YOU WROTE THE PROPOSAL TO THE ACTUAL WORK ON VIEW

While the overall goal of this project was meant to be a finished animated pilot, even more so it was designed to be an opportunity to work in as many aspects of the animation pipeline as I could, this includes but is not limited to script writing, thumbnailing, storyboarding, creating animatics, character designing, color scripting, prop illustrating, background illustration and painting, voice acting, rough animating, animation clean-up, compositing, 3D modeling, and directing. As a director I was able to work with my friends Piper Haswell and Mya Katz who helped with rough animation, say hello you two, Sydney Haswell who did 3D modeling for the main characters which was a massive help for some of the more confusing shots, say hi Sydney, and finally, many people including friends, family, and my partner, all acted as voice actors at many points in the animatic production as well as the final animation, if you were a voice actor please wave to the crowd, thank you again everyone. Now when I first proposed my thesis I had already begun working through many of these aspects of the pipeline, all the way up to having a fully finished animatic with sound. I was told by many peers and teachers after my proposal that they would have believed me if that was my defense even, which I found to be very flattering and reassuring. Since then, the majority of my summer and this fall term back at PNCA has almost exclusively been spent on the latter half of the backgrounds, the rough and cleaned animation, and the final voice acting and sound design.

Slide 3, Script Writing

The extra 17 slides that I did will go here lol

1. He's bullying him

2. He's a closet case, how much more toxic can your highschool romance get?
3. They're a happy family
4. He's an alcoholic, uh oh!
5. It's Halloween 1960
6. He comes to pick him up
7. He's tired of it, he cuts HIS break line
8. It's a dark and stormy night and he drives off a cliff, swerving out of the way of a deer
9. He dies, he lives
10. He thinks it's all his fault
11. They both change their identity to run away from their reality and leave everyone else behind
12. They're both detectives now, and secretly they're both still obsessing about that night
13. Ms. Smiley is getting a little too close to knowing things she shouldn't
14. 10 days before Halloween, 1970, almost the 10 year anniversary of his death
15. He kills her
16. He shows up, ready to be like, "Hey boo thing, I ain't dead, wanna catch up?" He finds her dead
17. He makes an anonymous report to the police so he can work the case and find out who killed his wife
18. Game of cat and mouse ensues, the two partner detectives neither knowing who they are now or who they once were, he's killing people and trying to clean up the evidence and he's trying to solve the mystery of his wife and son's death

Slide 4, Character Designing

Slide 5, Prop Illustrating

Slide 6, Thumbnailing

Slide 7, Storyboarding and Animatic

Slide 8, Background Illustration and Painting

Slide 9, Rough Animating and Animation Clean-Up

Slide 10, Directing

INTENT

YOUR ROLE

The purpose of this exploration for me was to give me the opportunity to not only generate a diverse portfolio of work but also to give me another opportunity to formally direct a project. This is the third project I've worked on as a director at PNCA and the more I do it the more I see the titles of "director" and "showrunner" calling my name for future careers. Working in all fields of the animation pipeline also helps me to learn where best to prioritize time.

Slide 11, Graphic

This slide behind me is a graph that shows the time that I personally spent involved in this project, while it isn't exactly a representation down to the minute, it still does a good job reflecting how I work and where my time was most spent. I believe that in order to be the best director I can, I need to be able to account for how best to use my time and how I can best support those that I'm working with to reach our collective goals.

Slide 12, Everything All at Once

SELF CRITIQUE/LEVELS OF MEANING/INTERPRETATION

Like creating any animated project, there was a monumental amount of change, cuts, and additions though the pilot's production. From the very beginning I had even planned to make an 11 minute film which would act as a full pilot which I could have theoretically used to pitch to animation studios, and while 5 and a half minutes isn't bad, there was a lot of content and ideas that I had to cut. Since the start of fall term, and as I've been working with my mentor Lori Damiano, she's seen first hand just how ambitious my goals have been and keeping a tight schedule the entire way through both this term, and last, has been monumental in getting to where I ended up, and despite the revisions I've had to make as I've went I don't think I could be any happier with where I've landed.

OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL AND AESTHETIC AREAS OF INQUIRY

CITE AND ANALYZE

PHYSICAL CONTEXT OF WORK

PUT YOUR WORK IN CONTEXT

AUDIENCE

Much like the many directors and showrunners I myself look up to, people such as Pendleton Ward, Rebecca Sugar, and Patrick McHale, creators of shows like Adventure Time, Steven Universe, and Over the Garden Wall, the goal for this work would be to one day continue on as a serialized television show.

Slide 13, Inspirations

Ideally it would be on a platform such as HBO Max being produced under a studio such as Adult Swim which caters to young adults as well as older audiences. The concept of the murder mystery was inspired by video game series like Danganronpa and the manga/anime Detective Conan as well as the many police/detective dramas I grew up with like Psych, Bones, and Monk which all had their own quirky and funny characters with shocking and frightening killers, when I was a kid, and I mean kid like I was 10 years old, I LOVED these shows and I would have just ate up an animated show that took these kinds of dark, scary, themes and put them somewhere in the silly bizarre world of cartoons. The film that I present to you today is just as much for that little kid in me that wanted to see this but also for all of the kids that could still grow up with it today, or potentially one day soon in the future.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS/QUESTIONS

Now with all that having been said, I plan to continue this project in one way or another and still have grand ideas to follow, most likely taking the project back to its comic roots for the time being and completing it so that I can one day be translated into a more fully fleshed show. While that's still a work in progress, I'll at least be submitting this to a number of festivals and within the next year and I plan to have it posted in full to my Instagram page and YouTube channel at some point next October.

Slide 14, Thank You!

Now with all of that out of the way let's watch the film one more time!