

Hello everyone, thank you so much for coming to my Thesis Defense and the premiere of ANUNUGBA. Are you ready to watch the film?

play film

INTRO

My name is Alexa Rose, though many of you know me as “Lex.” I’m an animation major here at PNCA with a primary interest in storyboarding and character design!

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ANUNUGBA is a 2-minute animated film production that I conceptualized last semester and directed over the course of the past couple of months. As you just saw, the film shows Celene, the main character, and her past blending into her everyday life in a dream-like sequence, as she comes to terms with her regrets about spending so much time away from her loved ones.

Her experience of working abroad in order to provide for her family back home is common amongst Pinoys in the same situation. In order to provide financial stability, they sacrifice their relationships with their loved ones. Because of this, I thought using a moth to represent Celene would be fitting - it symbolizes how she is working towards a goal that ultimately harms her, “like a moth to a flame.” That’s why I’ve titled my film “ANUNUGBA” - the Visayan word for moth - to represent the experiences of overseas Filipino workers.

DRINK WATER

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BACKGROUND / WORK INTO CONTEXT

- Explain who I am and my identity with Pinoy culture-being Fil-Am
 - Why I wanted to make this film with this subject matter (Representation of pinoy features and OFWs, “*walang utang kabubut-un*”
 - *Put audience here!! Other pinoy!!!*

Being bi-racial and primarily raised by my mother in a majority-white town, my identity with being Pinoy has always felt very complicated. Similar to the experience of many other children born to immigrants, with either sides of my identity I’ve always felt othered in the spaces I’ve inhabited.

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When I was younger, in the Philippines I’ve always been gawked at and constantly pointed at as an “Americana”, and in the US, not a lot of people could even point to the Philippines on a map-so I felt pretty alienated. I’ve always felt like I couldn’t be wholly accepted into each community- I was some weird “third thing.” All the while, on my filipino side, my more Eurocentric features were frequently commented on and I was often told “You could be on ‘Going Bulilit!’ - which was a filipino kids show that more often the not favored mestizas. I felt very guilty about this beauty standard growing up, because I’ve heard my loved ones and peers talk negatively about their skin tones as well.

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Regardless of these feelings, I’ve still felt immense Pinoy pride for the resiliency, collectivism, and family values that I was raised with. All my life

I've watched my mom, the sole breadwinner in our household, send remittance back home to help out our family abroad. And I know many family-friends who do the same. There's so many Pinoys who work abroad to send money back home, actually, 2 million, that they have a title- Overseas Filipino Workers- or OFWs.

While there are more tangible factors into why people do this, like job insecurity that hasn't been fixed due to corruption in the Philippine government, the main factor is the result of a Filipino cultural trait: Utang Kabubut-un, or in Tagalog- Utang na Loob. Which roughly translates to "Debt of Gratitude" or "debt of One's self." It's an obligation to give back to people who have done you a favor, but in a familial context-a lot of the time what's considered appropriate to give back is hard to quantify. Because-they've supported you your whole life!

- Put screencap from film in speech*

I picked this topic as my mother, many people in my family, and family-friends are overseas Filipino Workers themselves. I've also observed how working long hours, financial abuse, and missing out on life milestones has put a strain on relationships with family abroad. I think the Philippines' collectivist mindset is a source of pride in our community, but I think it's also been used to the extreme to push people past their limits in an unhealthy way.

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Additionally, despite being the 3rd largest Asian ethnic group in the US, I've seen little-to-no representation of the Filipino community in mainstream media. Despite being a large part of the other migrants in this country working as nurses, caregivers, domestic helpers, other underappreciated jobs. The few Asian characters I've seen in media have always been East Asian or have more Eurocentric features, so it was important to me to depict Pinoy features that aren't as celebrated.

DRINK WATER

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Before my thesis, I've had the opportunity to create four films throughout my time at PNCA. The two biggest ones being my Junior year film, *Seal in the City*, and *Alien YU-RI*, the Animation Collab film that I got to direct last year.

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Seal in the City taught me about everything that goes into an animated film production- that being the Animation Pipeline! I speed ran through writing, storyboarding, timing the storyboard into an animatic, animation, backgrounds, and compositing all in one semester.

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Alien YU-RI on the other hand, was a huge insight into leading a team to make a short-film. It was the first project where I not only got to collaborate with other animators, but lead as a director and get to share my input in all aspects of the production. And due to circumstances, I also found myself working as the production assistant as well. I underestimated this role at first, but I soon understood why having a separate person working as a PA was so important. Given the length of our film, we were actually really behind in production, and I didn't realize this until Za sat down with me and helped me make the schedule. (Thank you Za.)

So with Za's help I made a system where I would give rough animators, the clean-up team, and the backgrounds artists an assignment each week. This helped us stay on track and through some miracle, even though it was very last minute, we completed the film! I learned a lot from

Alien YU-RI about giving and taking feedback and managing the teams' time.

drink WATER

INITIAL IDEAS FOR THE FILM

When I proposed my film last spring, my original concept was the same as it is now, focusing on OFWs and the hurt that can come from that, but the themes at first were more so around exploitation and the “unattainability of the American dream from a Filipino lens.” I also promised initially a 4-minute film. Which... was a lot. I started planning my thesis 3 days after the inauguration so I had a *lot* of feelings around the exploitation of the working class and immigrants, and I really wanted my work to comment on those issues in a thoughtful way.

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INFLUENCES / OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL AND AESTHETIC AREAS OF INQUIRY (Process)

- Other student films
- Cabaret
- Severance

SHIFTS IN PRODUCTION:

- Initial ideas for film
 - Sketches, initial character designs, Animation test
- Erm I wasn't where I wanted to be over the summer/Overthinking my story

- *initial character design slides*

Celene:

From the very start, I wanted to incorporate a moth silhouette to her character design, but at the same time make her read as a regular person. It was also important to me that Celene reflected Filipino features that aren't as celebrated in mainstream media.

-*first moth form turnaround*

For the first iteration of the film, Celene was initially going to be turning into this "moth form" at the end. She was extremely overworked and was in denial of the situation that she was in. She had convinced herself that her stagnant career was a result of her own efforts, so by pushing herself to the edge, she'd surely get promoted. But instead, she ends up laid-off and her habit of overworking ends up being her detriment. Here's a test of that initial character:

-*animation test*

- *story scribbles in sketchbook*

After proposing, I wasn't in love with this idea. Because while I didn't want to make a character that was supposedly representing all Filipinos ever, I still wanted the story to be informed by Filipino experiences. I felt that the story didn't reflect the topics I wanted to touch on in a meaningful way in the short amount of time I had.

I put a lot of pressure on myself for this project. I initially planned for a 4-minute film and I really wanted to deliver a quality product. Especially with the subject matter of the film, I really felt obligated to use this film as a "thank you" to my family who's been supporting me all these years. So, logically, I holed myself up in my room for weeks at a time and didn't socialize with anyone so that I could be satisfied with the story. Because that's how you're supposed to go about completing projects, right?

- *moth discord message* *turning into thesis character*

3 months (and an ADHD diagnosis) later, I still had hardly made a dent in the progress I'd made throughout spring semester, what a shocker! I was massively behind and still discontented with my initial story, so I met with my mentor and I started over.

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With just a semester left to work on this project, my mentor helped me make a plan to finalize a story that would work as a 2-minute film. I ultimately went with a more abstract story that still uses the moth analogy I had set up, but was able to be told in a shorter timeframe.

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I speed ran making an animatic, which I was kind of sad about because storyboarding is the area I ultimately want to go down, but I was satisfied enough with what I had so that I could move onto the animatic.

Using the thumbnails I drew, I also created a colorscript to set the tone for the whole film. I utilized a lot of greens and blues to make Celene's office a more sickly and unbearable setting.

My initial character designs really **bugged** me (haha)

So I really quickly made a new character turnaround for Celene to push her shapes for a more appealing character design. For her moth version, I made a reference because I was the only one who was going to be animating her, and I wanted to make the reference to Filipino traditional clothing more obvious. I put her in a Kimona shirt and Alampay, and tweaked the colors and her silhouette to look even more moth-like, but still human.

- Celene character designs, backstory
- Animatic
- Backgrounds (how the colors and space are meant to make audience disoriented and have a sick feeling)
- SELF CRITIQUE / SELF REFLECTION ON PROCESS

YOUR ROLE:

Director / Producer / Lead Animator / Lead Designer / Storyboard artist
I needed help director time!!!

- Show Shot lists, rough animation guide, clean-up guide, discord!!

I was simultaneously making the color script, the animatic, rough animation, and the cleaned and colored versions of the animations as well. Even though I cut down my film length significantly, I knew that I wouldn't be able to work on this project, have classes, an internship, and a job at the same time. I needed a team!

By the good graces of my friends I was lucky enough to accrue the assistance of *19 people* to help with the production of ANUNUGBA. My army, if you will. My BTS army.

To organize the different shots that we had, I made a shot list and color coded everyone's parts so that they could view at a glance which animation shots they'd be receiving.

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I also would send messages in our production Discord each week, which was graciously set up by my roommate Oz because I had a million things to do. This was great because people could send messages to ask questions about the assignments they were given, as not everyone who helped on the project was in school anymore. We could send our work-in-progresses in the server to show that we were working on these assignments and to ask for feedback on how to make it better.

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Also to help keep things consistent and answer any questions for people initially brought onto the project, I created a Rough Animation Guide, a Clean-up Animation and Color Guide, and a Background guide as well.

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ANUNUGBA's production was kind of difficult compared to Alien YU-RI, because this time around we didn't have weekly in-person meetings to go over our work. Everyone had different schedules. I also take a long time to type of replies to people, which would take time away from me doing my own work. There was also no class for my thesis, so everyone on the team worked on the project solely out of their own will. Despite it being harder, my team was incredibly patient with me and tried their best to communicate where they were at in production, and I'm really proud of how much work they've done for this project.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR ANUNUGBA?

I plan on submitting ANUNUGBA to a variety of film festivals on Film Freeway. After its festival run, I want to upload it onto YouTube so that it'll be accessible for anyone to watch!

As for me, I plan on taking a very long nap and bringing whimsy back into my life and actually hanging out with my friends. 😊

CLOSING

I want to say thank you to my family for showing up-it means the world to me that you're able to see me complete this point of my life stage and support. Thank you mom for delivering food to me so I don't starve. And to my cousin back home that helped me with the translations- daghang salamat po! I want to say thanks to my mentor, who helped me organize my project and get me back on track.

Lastly, can everyone in this room who worked on Alien YU-RI come up here? You guys put so many hours into this project and I want to thank you for all the hard work you did. You did an amazing job.

Would we want to watch the film again?

play film again