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An Examination of Semiotics as a Facilitator
for Poetic Computer Generated Animation

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Animation Department
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

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Introduction

This thesis examines elements or factors that will influence the perception and construction of animated films. The purpose of this semiotic research is to serve the animation artist who is involved in the construction of narrative and pre-visualization development of animated film by recommending a methodology that can be applied to the construction of poetic animation.

Central to this study is an exploration of semiotic theory. The discourse aims to address the relationship between animation and other visual media, reveal the role of the audience, explore the construction of metaphors on multiple levels using the language(s) of art, and discuss the role of aesthetics. To enhance the exposition, a case study of the work of another animator is included. Likewise, preproduction for a short poetic animation along with a reflective report on the process is an integral part of this investigation.

Although there have been many studies on visual semiotics, there seems to be a dearth of research related to the application of semiotics within the animated sphere. There is a shortage of poetic animation in the mainstream media. However, this genre is prospering in the realm of experimental short films where it is more frequently found. This study, which consists of a theoretical discussion and a poetic animated piece, strives to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the hopes of aiding those involved in the development of animated film.

Literature Review

The study of semiotics is an enormous field of research. It cross-pollinates many different specialties. Large amounts of literature on the subject make researching it overwhelming. To avoid this, a focus on art related resources has been chosen. Even so, the literature still covers a large area of research. Not all of these resources are beneficial or pertinent. However, finding these materials has helped to shape and focus this study. A good example of this is the book Art and Emotion by Derek Matravers. This book consists of many different detailed theories and arguments, all aiming to define how art can possess emotion and its relationship to the viewer. While thought provoking, this is not an argument this study wants to address.

Although the research is concentrated on semiotics applied to the visual medium, some of the literature focuses on comparing visual language to linguistics and written language. This is because semiotics is rooted in linguistics[1] and therefore, is easier to discuss in this format. The most extensive of comparisons occur in The Semiotics of Visual Languages, by Catalina Bogdan, and Defining Visual Rhetorics, by Charles A. Hill and Marguerite Helmers.

Some of the resources discuss pictorial semiotics in a general way that can be applied to all visual mediums, while others are more specific. For example, some resources are specifically written for graphic designers. Others are especially written to address new media. Each of these resources is useful in its own way because this study aims to address both theory and practice. The resources that choose to discuss pictorial semiotics in a general way tend to focus more on theory than practice. Ones written for

[1] French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, pioneered semiotic study when he revolutionized the field of linguistics with a theory about all languages being subservient to an underlying structural semiotic system.

graphic designers are focused on application of semiotics in the work of the artist with

little on the theory behind the methodology. The resources that address new media help

one gain a better understanding of how semiotics has changed with the increase in

technology.

Other resources such as The Art of Pixar short Films, by Amid Amidi, feature the

preproduction work and methodology for the creation of select mainstream media. These

resources offer useful insider information from people such as John Lasseter, who

worked on the films. Likewise, the talks at SIGGRAPH 2009's Conference and

Computer Animation Festival are given by industry professionals. They include Chris

Landreth and Will Wright. Each of these resources provide a piece of the puzzle and

come together to help develop a semiotic theory and practice as applied to animation for

the purpose of creating visual poetry in motion.

Methodology

The exploration of this study has followed a precise plan. The plan has been kept simple and direct for the purpose of organization. The process began with mind mapping of general thoughts and ideas. This was a way of exploring topics for consideration of thesis study. Mind mapping is very useful for this purpose as one creates a diagram of thoughts that follow the stream of consciousness. After these explorative exercises, it became easier to begin organizing specific ideas in a linear fashion. Through this, basic thoughts and ideas emerged on which to create a thesis project. These were refined to specific themes with a list of key words to assist in finding resources. The key words are visual language, pictorial semiotics, visual communication, visual storytelling, preproduction methodology, visualization, visual development, and visual metaphor. Search for resources pertaining to each of the key words began with a search in the Savannah College of Art and Design's library catalogue. This proved to be a valuable place to look for resources. This catalogue consists of books and journals in two locations (Savannah, Georgia, and Atlanta, Georgia) as well as online books. From the catalogue, a list was created of potential resources. Each individual potential resource was investigated in order to determine whether or not it would benefit the study.

Utilization of an online search engine with the previously determined key words provided another search method for potential resources. Due to the fact that the Internet is vast and easily accessible as well as manufactured by every day people, it is important to focus the search on viable sources. One Internet source has proved to be particularly valuable. It is a page of links to many different potential online resources from many reliable sources.

Books and other physical resources have the potential to act in a similar manner. The difference, however, is that it is generally a slower process. As the investigation into resources progressed, new key words emerged from the text allowing for further research. Also, names of animated films and fine artists' work came to mind during the research process. This allowed a list of animators and artists as potential case studies to be created. The talks given at SIGGRAPH 2009 in New Orleans were also utilized as resources. The speakers at the Conference and Computer Animation Festival helped fill in some missing gaps in the research as well as illuminate other areas in need of further investigation.

Limitations

This thesis has practical constraints. There is a time constraint concerning the allotted time for completion as well as a limitation in time spent researching balanced by practical application. Availability of resources is another constraint. This thesis relies heavily on the scope of the SCAD library system, in particular the Jen Library. Although the library does offer an interlibrary loan system as well as access to many online books, the main body of literature comes from the Jen Library due to ease of accessibility. Other resources that are not practical for this study are interviewing or speaking with others who have done similar research or interviewing the artists specified for the case studies.

Background

Semiotics is commonly defined as the study of signs. The study was developed by the American philosopher, Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914), and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). This field of study covers a vast array of disciplines and has many sub genres. This is because semiotics centers on communication systems. Communication cannot occur without the use of codes and signs. And without the use of communication systems, societies would not be able to exist and function. Therefore, semiotics is of specific interest to a wide variety of people such as linguists, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, artists, and those who are involved in mass media.

Unlike today, the beginning of semiotics was primarily associated with linguistics, especially written language. It has been argued that this is because it "has been the most highly valued, the most frequently analyzed, the most prescriptively taught and the most meticulously policed mode in our society" (Kress and van Leeuwen 34). Visual art, as well as other forms of communication, have been in a constant battle with linguistics to gain significance. Today, the debate over whether or not pictorial semiotics should abandon its linguistic heritage continues. Roland Barthes argues in his essay, "Rhetoric of the Image" (1964) "that the meaning of images (and of other semiotic codes, like dress, food, ect.) is always related to and, in a sense, dependent on, verbal text" (Kress and van Leeuwen 18). However, a more recent argument is that "each medium has its own possibilities and limitations of meaning. Not everything that can be realized in language can also be realized by means of images, or vice versa" (Kress and leeuwen 19).

. Everyone could agree that the value of the visual image has increased monumentally with the rise of technology. Today, our society is saturated with visual messages in everything from advertising and mass media to illustration and fine art. The use of symbols is always culturally specific to the society in which they were formed. Mass globalization due to technology such as the Internet is bringing societies closer together and forming a shared cultural identity with a synthesis of symbolic systems. With this change in social structure and visual culture, the need for changes in semiotic theories and approaches becomes imperative.

Traditionally, semiotics has been used to develop a better understanding of how signs are constructed and their roles in society. Sausurre's legacy is Structuralism, which is an analytical approach of examining signs within the context of a language. His model for semiotics "is the *sign* made up of a *signifier* or sensory pattern, and a *signified*, the concept that is elicited in the mind by the signifier. Saussure emphasized that the signifier does not constitute a sign until it is interpreted" (Ryder). This has remained a key concept in the basic study of semiotics. The other founder of semiotics, Pierce, strove to examine semiosis (the process of sign interpretation). He believed that:

> the signifier elicits in the mind an interpretant which is not the final signified object, but a mediating thought that promotes understanding. In other words, a thought is a sign requiring interpretation by a subsequent thought in order to achieve meaning. This mediating thought might be a schema, a mental model, or a recollection of prior experience that enables the subject to move forward toward understanding. The interpretant itself becomes a sign that can elicit yet another

interpretant, leading the way toward an infinite series of unlimited semioses.

(Ryder)

His research was important in showing that signs are polysemic (having more than one meaning), and how signs are analyzed by both a Syntagmatic analysis (what happens, the manifest meaning) and by the Paradigmatic analysis (what a text is about, the latent meaning).

Another important semiologist, who was a follower of Saussure, was Roland Barthes (1915-1990). He focused his research on the roles that signs take in society to affect ideology. He is most famous for his work concerning myth. He "describes myth as a well formed, sophisticated system of communication that serves the ideological aims of a dominant class" (Ryder). He was highly critical of French journalism, particularly that which gave justification to war. Today, his research is taken further with the understanding that semiotics "rejects the possibility that we can represent the world in a neutral fashion"(Ryder). For the artist, this means that every work of art has a message, whether intended by the creator or not. One must also accept that there may be a difference between the intended message and the perceived message. A work of art may also change in its perception over time as ideologies of the culture change. For example, when Song of the South was first released in 1946 it was herald as a beloved classic and was even awarded an Oscar for one of its songs. The creators did not intend for the content to be offensive, but culture ideology has changed over time. In order not to offend the American public, the Walt Disney Company is currently withholding the film from distribution.

Not only does perception of art change over time, but also so does the reason for creating it. Before 1913 in America, fine artists, such as those of the Hudson River School and the Ashcan school, were concerned with representational art. They wished to portray humans in the world and strove to gain an accurate depiction of their subjects. However, the 1913 Armory Show in New York changed the reasons art was created and thusly changed what it depicted. The Armory Show would bring the work of European artists like Duchamp to America for the first time and open the door to Modern Art. Artists no longer strove for the literal, but instead created art as expression, and art that reflected itself such as the color field paintings of Mark Rothko. At the Siggraph Convention, Will Wright and Chris Landreth argued that today computer graphics is taking a path that parallels art. For many years, computer animated films have been created for the sole purpose of exploring technology. In 1984, the fledgling Pixar created its first short film, "The Adventures of Andre and Wally B.", that succeeded in creating a computer generated animated character. This film was a milestone that set the stage for pushing the boundaries of technology. The aspiration became to have the means of creating photo real characters that would be capable of replacing live actors. Now, twenty-six years later, computer graphics has matured, reaching the pinnacle of the technology, and causing a crisis point concerning the reason of creation. Animated film can no longer revolve around an exploration of technological research. It will be forced to turn inward, to examine the subconscious mind, and the messages that creators can send through their work.

Main Argument

Poetic Animation and Semiotic Theory

Poetry is an ancient, culturally diverse form of literature and consists of many different subdivisions and structures. Although, some forms of poetry are narrative while others simply express abstract feelings and emotions, most embrace the art of the metaphor, which is an attempt to organize reality by comparing it to other experiences. Robert Weiman explains: "metaphor is neither an autonomous nor an ornamental aspect of poetry but forms the very core and center of that poetic statement by which man as a social animal imaginatively comprehends his relation to time and space and, above all, to the world around him (Haley 3)." The power of the metaphor lies in its ability to communicate complex abstract feelings, thoughts, and ideas. However, interpretation is often ambiguous, with multiple layers of meaning due to signs being polysemic. Metaphors are also powerful for their emotional impact on an audience, which is important because "if a message does not move you emotionally-if it does not connect with you deeply-it is unlikely to result in action (Bonnici 40)." This emotional connection helps the audience to become immersed in a story and believe in its message. But metaphors are not simply about the end result. "Nor is a metaphor a riddle to be solved, a semantic obstacle to be leapt over, before the poems meaning can be discovered; it is itself a solution, a leap, a meaning, and a discovery" (Haley 3).

Although, non-narrative works can be quite powerful, it has been understood for generations that narrative stories are more easily passed down and remembered. "In the past, from the most ancient times until relatively recently, it was through the telling of tales (or rather, listening to tales being told) that human beings learned about their

society's ways, traditions, history, and beliefs" (Davis 9). Today, we still pass on stories,

but have put aside oral traditions to embrace media such as writing and film. Film

receives larger audiences than books in the fast paced culture of American society, and is

thusly superior in affecting the society's ideology.

The creator of media must recognize this responsibility to culture, and not

haphazardly construct a work. All created work is impregnated with intention. One

cannot get away from intention, no matter how abstract the created work may be, or how

random the creative process. We can see this more clearly by observing "natural signs,

such as clouds which indicate the possibility of rain, where intention is absent" (Jamieson

31). Although, intent is absent the clouds clearly can be seen as a signifier for rain.

Therefore, one could argue that everything in a text[2] is potentially a sign open for

interpretation, including, the medium itself that the creator has chosen.

Roland Barthes pointed out that the visual image is an ideal medium for poetic

metaphor, saying, "all images are polysemous- that is, they have more than one meaning.

An image is an 'open text'" (Baldwin and Roberts 34). Metaphoric images can be

effective because it allows the audience to grapple with hard themes that relate to their

personal lives. Charles Hill and Marguerite Helmers say it best, "We learn who we are as

private individuals and public citizens by transporting ourselves reflected in images, and

we learn who we can become by seeing ourselves into images" (Hill and Helmers 1). If

one combines narrative structure and metaphoric imagery, then poetic animation can be a

powerful tool for affecting a culture's ideology.

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[2] In the study of semiotics, visual, spoken, and written communication is all referred to as text.

Animation is a choice medium for such a use due to its synthesis of many other mediums, specifically that of sound and movement as well as fine art and illustration. This gives the creator a large amount of resources for metaphoric construction. One unique asset of animation is its ability to create the illusion of life, through the way in which something moves and/or changes over time. This phenomenon is based on the resemblance of animation to life, as neither can exist without time and movement.

Within the realm of animation there exists sub genres of mediums such as stop motion, 3D, 2D, and various other experimental types. Each of these sub genres has a history and stereotypes associated with it that will effect how an audience views the work. For example, Disney has been very influential for defining what 2D animation is, and it can sometimes be difficult for an audience to accept a 2D animated feature film that deviates from the Disney style and animation principles. Each sub category has different advantages and disadvantages that one must embrace in order to effectively communicate. For example, a certain type of movement is associated with stop motion animation due to the nature of its creation. If this type of movement is undesirable in the created work, it may be prudent for the creator to pursue a different type of animation versus fighting the medium. Jamieson comments on this saying, "the formation of images involves an interplay between tools and materials, irrespective of the skills of the artist, they make their own demands and cause outcomes specific to themselves (Jamieson 50)."

Animation overall has its own inherent weaknesses. Most of the time the process requires a vast amount of resources. The resources required are determined by the choice of subgenre. However, they all require many artists working in conjunction on the same

project. In order to make sure that the final work is coherent, extensive planning is

necessary prior to production in pre-visualization. The top three constraints for any film

project are always time, budget, and manpower. These constraints often affect each other

and must be balanced by the creator.

The creator has an even more important burden than the constraints of the

medium. He has the burden of externalizing his interior vision. In order to create poetic

animation, the creator must become a poet. It is believed that it is, "the poet's radical

extension (in degree) and compression (in time or space) of universal semiotic functions

which render the poetic imagination effectively extraordinary" (Haley 4). Although his

mind is praised as being extraordinary, this does not mean it is beyond the reach of the

average person. It is possible to train the mind to be open to the possibilities of semiotic

function.

Haley elaborates on Charles Sanders Pierce by saying:

'Everything in the universe is at least potentially a sign of something else' (CP

5.448n). I would suggest that the poets among us are those who are most sensitive

to this potentiality in general, and in particular to those possible sign/object

correspondences which are rarely noticed by the rest of us until after the poets

have uncovered or suggested them (Haley 4).

The training of the mind is a process that occurs over time with a lot of practice. The

final goal should be for poetic expression to become intrinsic. It should be similar to the

way a painter paints. "Painters develop a sensitivity to color so acute that they will see

greater range of color than most people can detect. Paul Klee said, 'Color possesses me.

I no longer have to pursue it. It will possess me always. I know it…color and I are one.

I am a painter'" (Hogbin 4). A good place to start training the mind is to understand

some of the basic questions with which every media practitioner interested in semiotics

must grapple. These include:

> Technical: How accurately can we communicate our message? What system
>
> should we use to 'encode' and 'decode' our message? Is that system universally
>
> compatible or does it require special equipment or knowledge?
>
> Semantic[3]: How precisely does our choice of language, symbols or codes convey
>
> the meaning we intend? How much of the message can be lost without the
>
> meaning being lost as well?
>
> Effectiveness: Does the message affect behavior the way we want it to? What can
>
> we do if the required effect fails to happen? (Baldwin and Roberts 23)

One may notice that many of these questions take into consideration the audience of the

message.

Semiotics focuses on the recipients of the message as they provide meaning to the

signs and symbols they perceive. "Common to all aspects of visual perception is its

dynamics, it is a continual process of structuring, of structures made in the first instance

from the resources of the sensory systems, and secondly from the mental frameworks

acquired from social/cultural conditioning"(Jamieson 18). An audience is a product of

their social, political, and economic environment, which creates an ideological filter by

which they interpret a text, but within this framework, there are those who are more

visually literate than others. Those who are visually literate generally have had some

form of art education and may be considered as an informed audience. This is sadly only

a very small part of the population. "Visual communication is either treated as the

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[3] A specific study in semiotics that focuses on the relationship between signs and what they represent.

domain of a very small elite of specialists, or disvalued as a possible form of expression

for articulate reasoned communication, seen as a 'childish' stage one grows out of"(Kress

and Leeuwen 17). The creator should take this into account when considering the target

audience for a created work. If the audience is to be mostly made up of a small, informed

audience, then the creator is free to use more complex visual imagery. The more visually

illiterate audience will need simpler imagery that is more common to their limited

understanding. Because signs are polysemic, it is possible to have layers of meaning that

provide understandable communication with an uninformed audience while still

providing the possibility for more stimulating interpretation by the visually literate

viewer.

Sometimes the target audience demographic for an animated film may change.

When this happens, one must often change the film to accommodate the new audience.

A good example of this is the short film by Pixar called "Knick Knack". The film

features a snowman trapped in a snow globe sitting on a shelf with other souvenirs from

various vacations. He struggles to free himself from his enclosure to join a lady souvenir

who sits on her tropical island. At the end of the film, he falls into a fish bowl where he

meets a pretty mermaid girl. When the film was first released, the two women were

depicted as having very large breasts.

In the fourteen years that separate the film's first release from its much wider

later release, the target audience had changed significantly. The original

SIGGRAPH and film-festival audience, comprising bearded hackers and

bespectacled film students, probably enjoyed the disproportionate proportions of

the two lovely lasses. However, by 2003, now under the imprimatur of Walt

Disney Pictures "Knick Knack" was to be seen by millions of parents and their

children.(Amidi 26).

It was agreed upon without hesitation that the two women would have to have breast

reductions for this second release.

Different audiences respond differently due to the connotations[4] of the signs and

symbols they see versus the denotation[5]. The process of paradigmatic analysis[6] by an

individual viewer is reliant upon the individual's memory. "The viewer has his or her

own repertoire of memories which can be scanned, figuratively speaking, to produce

infinite connotations from an image which is denoted"(Jamieson 43). Because this

mental schema is formed by information passed on by sensory systems, it allows the

viewer to experience that which they perceive. This phenomenon is known as

synaesthesia. A good example would be gazing at an image of a box of crayons

(Appendix C, figure 1). Just by looking at the image it is possible to conjure up the smell

of them, the feel and sound of the waxy tips moving across the surface of a piece of

paper, and probably many childhood memories. Jamieson refers to the experience as a

"pseudo reality" saying, "the body is physically present in the cinema or in front of a

television screen, able to transpose the artefactual visual images which it views into a felt

experience" (Jamieson, 21). Animation can only directly affect the senses of sight and

sound, but synaesthesia allows the other senses (smell, touch, and taste) to be affected as

well. This phenomenon is not limited to the audience, but can also aid the creator.

"Strongly felt and held images may help the creative person to recap a vision more

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[4] Suggestive or Associative meaning of a sign, which is interpreted by an individual receiver
[5] Literal association of sign to the signified such as it looks like a flower, it must be a flower
[6] Analysis of a text to derive its latent meaning

clearly. The artist can create highly charged appearances that are compressed, filled, charged with a latent energy, thus making the work less superficial"(Hgbin 11).

Practical Application: Film Construction

Preproduction is the place where the creative process occurs. It is where the work breathes its first breaths of life, where problems are solved, and where a strategy for production is formed. This stage of production helps to solve some of the limitations of animation as a medium. It solves the problem of having multiple artists working together during production by providing a cohesive body of imagery that act as a guide for all of the artists. Another problem in computer animation is the distance between the artist and the work of art due to the use of technology. Preproduction solves this problem by providing a creative process where the creator is free to use multiple mediums (digital and traditional) that allow him to explore design and style.

Throughout preproduction it is important to always keep the main goals in mind. Regardless of the project, the main goals should always be telling the story and delivering the message through multiple levels of semiotic function. This process requires perseverance as reworking is often required to maintain these goals. A good example of this is Pixar's short film, "For the Birds" directed by Ralph Eggleston.   "The effortlessness of the finished film belies two years of toil that Eggleston invested into it. The ending, in particular, was a challenge. 'I had to reboard the ending probably twenty or thirty times because it just wasn't funny,' recalled Eggleston" (Amidi 31).

Another main goal, especially in poetic animation, is to utilize the medium for the telling of the story instead of using dialogue (which is essentially a different form of

text). Recently, dialogue has been used as a crutch for those who do not know how to properly use cinematic storytelling. Hitchcock elaborates:

> In many of the films now being made, there is very little cinema. They are mostly what I call 'photographs of people talking…When we tell a story in cinema, we should resort to dialogue only when it's impossible to do otherwise. I always try first to tell a story in the cinematic way, through a succession of shots and bits of film in between…To me, one of the cardinal sins for a scriptwriter, when he runs into some difficulty, is to say, 'We can cover that by a line of dialogue.' Dialogue should simply be a sound among other sounds, just something that comes out of the mouths of people whose eyes tell the story in visual terms(Hauser 09).

 The Pixar crew learned this lesson while working on <u>WALL-E</u>, which had hardly any dialogue due the main characters being two robots in a post-apocalyptic society. The director of the film, Andrew Stanton said this concerning this revelation, "It's enlightening. It makes you realize that we actually lost more storytelling skills than we gained as a result of going to sound"(Hauser 09). Sound and dialogue can enhance an image, but "An image is at its strongest when it needs no words, but resonates with the viewer"(Hogbin 6).

The key to making a strong image is in the relationships between its different elements and its relationship to its context. No image exists in isolation. "To make, we put elements together. The way they are assembled influences our sense of unity and our ability to comprehend what the objects are…All objects have a relationship to their context, and where they are placed influences how we see them"(Hogbin 41). These relationships often define the language of the film along with stylistic choices.

Oftentimes, the "subject matter is mistakenly taken to be the main strength of the image and the visual language that underpins it is forgotten"(Bonnici 40).

Film languages can be as diverse as verbal languages, and one isn't necessarily better than another. The important thing is that the language of a film is clearly defined early in the process in order to guide preproduction in a cohesive straightforward direction. One of the directors of <u>Kung Fu Panda</u>, John Stevenson "was guided by one lesson from Bruce's Block's <u>The Visual Story</u>: 'If you don't define a language for your film, it will define one for itself, and you might not like it!'"(Miller-Zarneke 11). There are different ways of defining a language for a film. One can copy a language employed by another artist, or develop his own unique language. When developing a language "signs can be anchored to a particular meaning which has been selected by the producer of the text. Such anchoring attempts to fix meaning and to guide the audience towards accepting the meaning preferred by the maker of the text"(Downes and Miller 40). The best example of this occurs in Chris Landreth's "Ryan". The main character points out certain surrealistic visual representations and clearly, verbally defines them in the first moments of the film. This defines the language of the film to the audience and helps them to interpret other surrealistic visuals in the film[7].

Film language construction is often equivalent to visual semiotic construction. For this there are many resources such as composition, color, light, form, and others. These elements have a supportive role for the story metaphors and script, but are often essential to it. Director Andrew Stanton said, "the biggest thing I learned on <u>WALL-E</u> was that all the major elements that produce a film (design, music, dialogue, acting, camerawork, and editing) play a vital and unique role in telling the story"(Hauser 06).

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[7] see case study for further analysis of the film.

Each element must be decisively considered because, like quality, an out of place element can be distracting and disruptive. Jeremy Birn stated:

> the moment something unintended catches your eye-whether it's a strange flicker or artifact, a highlight where it doesn't belong, or a shadow that pops or changes suddenly, your eye has been pulled away from the action and worse than that, your attention has been pulled away from following the story(Birn 11).

To aid semiotic construction, the creator can take advantage of film conventions and codes. Conventions and codes are "The agreed, accepted or standard practice used when conveying particular types of information to an audience"(Cownes and Miller 48). They can be found for every element of the language of art. A good element to use as an example is perspective. Perspective helps an audience understand how an object relates to a surface and can influence the meaning of that object. In 3D animation, perspective is manipulated by changing the focal length and position (in 3D space) of the camera. Yildiz created a chart to aid the creator in his understanding of conventions and codes as it pertains to the camera (Appendix D, Table 1). The chart is broken down by shot types as signifiers and defines what is signified. These codes are a place for the creator to start, not necessarily an end point. Following Yildiz model, charts for other elements have been assembled for this thesis as a tool to aid in visual semiotic construction (Appendix D, Tables 2-4). In animation, some codes are stereotypes, such as character designs and personalities. For example, a stereotypical klutz would have long legs and arms, and a stereotypical dumb or indulgent character would be overweight.

One can create a more powerful metaphoric image by juxtaposing codes and stereotypes with one another. "Visual language isn't about a simple one-to–one

relationship between visual element and message. In combination, the various elements

can either magnify their individual qualities or conflict (creating a nagging feeling of

unease)"(Bonnici 76). The power of juxtaposition lies in its ability to create tension with

illicit thought. An example of this can be seen in the "Dance of the Hours" segment of

Fantasia. This segment features a hippo ballerina who dances and twirls and bats her

long eyelashes in a flirtatious way toward her alligator admirer (Appendix C, figure 2).

This creates two main juxtapositions. Not only are the creators taking a fat, stubby

legged character and making it do complex, graceful athletic moves; but they are also

taking an ugly hippo and changing her into something beautiful and alluring.   Hogbin

believes that "The primary visual contrast are size, shape, space, value and color"(Hogbin

27), but in this example we can see that there are more than that.

	With so many elements and combinations of possibilities it is all too easy to

create a cluttered image. Reducing the complexity of the image helps the viewer's

reading of the image, "for example when perceiving road traffic signs…the image is

generally reduced to those elements which are absolutely essential to its

intention"(Jamieson 50). In every preproduction process there comes a time when it is

necessary to purge the film of unnecessary elements and focus the rest of the film to

achieve the main goals and adhere to the vision of the visual language of the film. Some

things that may seem essential to the film can also be far more powerful if simply

implied. Amidi explains this by referencing one of Pixar's animation directors : "Like

other animation directors before him, he found that implying violence could be more

effective than actually showing it on screen. 'Maybe it's more brutal that way,' he

suggested"(Amidi 39).

After honing the metaphoric construction of an animation, it is important to consider aesthetics. In creating poetic animation, aesthetics provides the rhythm and flow of the work. "Its determining characteristics are those of pleasure and pain, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, cast in the primary territory of subjectivity, a place where the world of art and images is judged not by thought or reason, which are secondary attributes of knowing, but by the feelings they arouse"(Jamieson 79). Although this is true, aesthetics can be applied in a semiotic way to support the narrative. One can create something culturally ugly or disagreeable to communicate a hard distasteful theme, or create beauty to portray an ethereal quality. Regardless of the determined aesthetic, the key is audience satisfaction (even with the non-beautiful).

One of the most important things to consider in metaphoric image creation is the tacit dimension[8]. "To gain deeper insights it is necessary to let go of knowledge and allow the experiences of life to merge and dissolve into experience"(Hogbin 06). This process is accomplished through the right side of the brain instead of the analytical side of the brain. If one only creates art according to careful analytical thought it will be lacking the creative nuances that bring a work to life and resonate with the viewer. "The image-making aspect of visual communication is often regarded as a creative activity which owes as much to intuition as to directed conscious thought"(Jamieson 64). One reason for this is that the creator often does not posses the conscious knowledge of what he is portraying in the work of art; this is generally found in the subconscious and can often be a surprise for the creator. "A student of James Whistler claimed to paint what he saw. Whistler replied, "But the shock will come when you see what you paint"(Hogbin 107). In this way, poetic animation can act as both a way to organize reality and present

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[8] unexpressed, unspoken, understood without being openly expressed dimension

an opinion to an audience, as well as help the creator understand the way he views the

world.

Case Study: Chris Landreth

In 2004, Chris Landreth directed and produced a unique 3D animated film called Ryan, which won an Oscar for Best Animated Short. The film is a documentary animation approximately twenty minutes in length. It features an interview between Chris Landreth and Ryan Larkin. Felicity Fanjoy and Derek Lamb are also interviewed in the film. The film's stylization and aesthetic is non-orthodox. It is very textural with a grungy feel and highly stylized representations of the individuals who took part in the interviews. Margo Jefferson of the New York Times described the style of the film best saying, "The emotions are raw; so is the way Mr. Landreth draws the human mind. Ryan's head looks like a botched medical experiment. Multicolored strings cross and twist; red spikes strike his glasses when he gets angry. Green rays hang in empty space. Clear thought has burned away (Jefferson)."

Chris Landreth decided upon creating this film after he met Ryan Larkin at an Ottawa festival in 2000. Ryan Larkin is also a noteworthy animator, however his life took a few turns after his brother's death, as he battled cocaine and became an alcoholic. He now resides at the Old Brewery Mission in Montreal and can be found pan handling on the street during the day. For Chris Landreth and other Canadian animators Ryan Larkin has been the equivalent of the "boogieman". He is an example of what could happen. Therefore, Chris Landreth has a lot of very personal feelings concerning Ryan Larkin, which influenced the film and explain some of the choices he made concerning the visual stylization of the film.

The film opens on a very realistic looking Chris Landreth standing in a bathroom. However within seconds his character design changes into having highly colorful slashes

and growths on his head as well as missing areas in his head and hands (Appendix C,

figure 3). He briefly explains that it represents the hurts and pains from his experience as

a child. This use of semiotics occurs throughout the film to express the inner workings of

each character. Like the Rosetta Stone, Landreth uses this first scene in the film to

explain to the audience the meaning behind his visual stylization in order for the audience

to identify the signifiers throughout the rest of the film and understand the connotation.

The story is played out through the semiotic representation of the subconscious

mind, thus creating far more depth then a simple interview. Throughout the film, Ryan

has a thermos of alcohol sitting in front of him and occasionally small hands on wires pop

out of the thermos to beckon Ryan to drink (Appendix C, figure 4). Towards the end of

the film Landreth confronts Ryan about his alcoholism. As he speaks "hands of reason"

appear out of his forehead and a mechanical halo pops out of the back of his head and is

turned on like a light bulb (Appendix C, figure 5). This is a key point in the film. It is

not just about Ryan, it is about Chris Landreth confronting his own fear. In the segment

were Derek Lamb is interviewed, Derek mentions, "Now here is a guy who, you know, is

living out every artist's worst fear." There is this sense that if somehow Ryan could

return to being a successful animator again, then there would be less to fear. Ryan does

not take Landreth's words to heart, and in fact becomes infuriated by them with large red

spikes erupting out of his head (Appendix, figure 6). After all is said and done Chris's

halo breaks and the brightly colored twisty vines proceed to rap around his entire body

(Appendix C, figure 7). In this way the dialogue of the interview takes a backseat to the

visual storytelling rooted in semiotics.

In the film, the character of Chris is vital as he represents the audience. He stands in proxy by asking the questions for the audience and showing the audience how to respond. As he is the first character shown and by sharing his personal past traumas in the first scene, the audience quickly relates and attaches themselves to his character. He connects with a wide audience range because everyone has their own personal scars from life.

This audience can be broken down into two categories: those who have knowledge about Ryan Larkin prior to seeing the film, and those who have never heard of him. These two categories have a distinctly different experience of the film, but both are included in the target audience. If an audience member has never heard of Ryan Larkin, they will have a good understanding of who he was and his life's story by the end of the film. Chris Landreth even goes so far as to showcase some of Ryan's most noteworthy animation within the film. This audience must wait until the very end of the film to find out that Ryan is a panhandler, which they may find shocking. Unlike the ignorant audience, the knowledgeable audience (who most likely has some connection to the animation industry) is like Chris, facing their fearAt the end of the film, Chris is shown doing a bow toward Ryan from across a street. This scene shows Chris's acceptance and respect for Ryan and challenges the audience to do likewise. The film makes the audience aware of the unnerving possibility of their life going down a similar path in the future.

In order to communicate with his audience, Landreth uses an approach he refers to as "psychorealism". In an interview, Karan Singh, the Research and Development Director for Ryan who worked closely with Chris Landreth, said this to explain it:

Psychorealism is a term coined by Chris to refer to the glorious complexity of the

human psyche depicted through the visual medium of art and animation. The

transition is not a problem, psychorealism is stylistic, just a facet to the look and

feel of an animation. The challenges lies in the choice and execution of the

metaphorical imagery that the animator makes (MITACS Student Notes-SAC

Newsletter).

The different building blocks of an animated film such as color, composition,

surface quality, and acting style work in unison to promote the themes and messages of

the film.   A good example is the setting. It is most likely a representation of the Old

Brewery Mission, however one would most likely find a much more hospitable

environment in reality. In the film, entropy has taken its toll on the environment, causing

it to feel realistic, but an unpleasant space. The setting looks like an old cafeteria, with

many long tables and enough chairs to sit a hundred people. But there are very few

people in the setting, giving the feeling of isolation and loneliness. Like the main

characters, these character's appearances are shown to be incomplete, amputated, and

melting away. The palette of the film consists primarily of grays, lacking saturated color

everywhere except for the multicolored spikes and vines that represent the main

characters' emotional states. This color theory serves two purposes. Firstly, it draws the

viewers attention to what is important and secondly it enhances the overall mood of the

piece.

One of the most important building blocks to Landreth was the animation style.

In a talk at Siggraph 2009, he spoke about two approaches to character performance and

what he believes is right for his films. The first approach he referenced to Lorence Olivia

in the <u>Merchant of Venice</u>. His portrayal is a classical self-conscious methodology. It

has a pose-to-pose quality that he referred to as "gesture mapping". He doesn't believe

this is the right approach for his films because, in reality, humans are incapable of pose-

to-pose movement, which causes a realistic character to succumb to the uncanny valley[9].

Instead of this approach, he prefers a method based on knowing the character from the

inside out. He used Al Pochino in the <u>Merchant of Venice</u> as a comparison. His method

acting was life like, messy, and performed with complete abandon. In order to translate

this acting method to animation, it is necessary to have video reference of the scene

required. Landreth wants his character's to have a sense of impulsiveness and

imperfection to their movement that shows their inner thought processes. He studies

people's involuntary reflex-like movements such as saccade,[10] and uses them in his

animation to bring his characters to life. Choice in animation style supports the mood

and themes of his film by adding imperfection and realism.

Another key building block to the film is sound. The most important sound in the

film is obviously the dialogue between the characters. However the other sounds in the

film add to its richness by functioning semiotically. These sound effects and musical

score are carefully thought out and planned to add to the mood and guide the audience in

the narrative. The musical score has a retro, nostalgic feel that emphasizes the life that

has passed by. It is somewhat based upon the animation work that Ryan completed. The

sound effects in the film often coincide with the metaphoric visuals that take place in the

film. They add to the visual metaphor by adding an audio metaphor as well as

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[9] Discdovered by Masahiro Mori, the uncanny valley is a point on a graph that plots human emotional response to an ersatz human. When a human facsimile approaches nearly human but is not identical, the observer will find it to be eerie and disquieting much like a corpse.

[10] An involuntary twitching of the eyes that happens all the time.

progressing the narrative. For example the sound that opens the film is that of a toilet

flushing. This helps establish that the first scene is in a restroom. However, one could

argue that it is also a metaphor of what the film is about, emphasizing the dilapidated

state of the setting and characters, and a talent flushed away.

Each of these building blocks works in unison to support the overall message of

the film, its themes and Ryan's life's story. They were not accidents. They were

carefully planned and manufactured by the artist behind the film. This film acts as a

good example of how semiotics can be used by a computer graphics animation filmmaker

to communicate with a target audience using poetic animation.

Case Study: Personal Work

Overview/Methodology

The practical work for this thesis consists of preproduction material for an animated short film as an example of how to create computer generated poetic animation. In order to accomplish this task, a workflow developed that addressed general elements first, then more and more specific elements over time. This helped maintain a unity between the elements as well as clarity in metaphor construction. The workflow was as follows: project defining, topic development, story/narrative development, design development.

Beginning a Project

The easiest place to start a project such as this one is to start with what is already known about the project. The first step is writing down the goals and strategies, and creating a film treatment (Appendix E). The film treatment is as an organizational tool that uncovers limitations and potential problems. This tool acted as a guide through the development process, and was updated as the project evolved.

Deriving the basic concept of the film and the message to the audience was a trial. However, the process revealed that the simplest and most effective strategy is to draw from personal experience. Using personal experience gives the creator a way of expressing personal thoughts and emotions and helps one understand life and relate the experience to others. This self-reflection is also important because it creates honest animation. An audience should not be asked to believe something or be concerned about something that does not matter to the creator. Keeping that in mind, the process for

determing the film concept focused on developing a simple metaphoric phrase or sentence. Journaling thoughts and ideas as well as keeping a sketchbook were useful tools that aided in this process. The sentence formulated was "Life is a masquerade." This became the central metaphor for the entire film, and later transformed to construct the title, "Life's Masquerade".

The first phase of preproduction work involved research. This was primarily conducted using the Internet and consisted of searching for inspirational images that related to the metaphor. Although this research started immediately, it continued throughout the preproduction process as was needed. The images were collected in an organized file system on a computer and referred to only as much as necessary. As the project progressed, some files were deleted as they were unnecessary. Search criteria became more specific to address particular developmental problems such as types of column capitals. This research was invaluable to the preproduction process and helped maintain a sense of authenticity in the film.

Story/Narrative Development

Defining the story and narrative arrangement was the first task. The basic concept metaphor established that the film would constitute a simple two character structure consisting of a protagonist vs. antagonist. Narrative development proceeded by the creation of thumbnail exploratory sketches and a focus on determining the climax of the film (Appendix G, Illus. 1). This helped to define the main metaphors, the characters, and the plot. One character would be female, the other a cloaked man who uses different masks for his face. The climax would be the female pulling off the masked character's

robe, only to find nothing underneath. The masks then fall and break. Using this basic

plot structure, the rest of the film was then fleshed out in the storyboard/script.

Traditionally, the storyboard, "tells the story graphically, exactly as the camera's

eye will see it, and is also flexible. Changes in the storyboard can be made by merely

unpinning sketches and substituting others or even changing the sequence of the boards"

(Amidi 19). Walt Disney was the developer of the storyboard and explained, "at our

studio, we don't write our stories, we draw them"(Amidi 19). The main goal of my

storyboard was not to determine camera angles as much as the structure of the narrative.

It was important to draw the story and write the script concurrently because one of the

goals was to create visual metaphors. "Without artists participating in the writing process

[through storyboards], the development of animated ideas can be limited to those that are

more easily communicated through the world of words"(Amidi 20).

The storyboarding process began with thumbnails (Appendix G, Illus. 2)

concentrating on only several key story points, including the climax. The rest of the story

came together through brainstorming and connecting sequences together. One of the

story points the film needed concerned how the two characters would interact. In order

to fully understand this interplay, a generic character rig in Maya was used to explore

pose ideas (Appendix G, Illus. 2). The final storyboard panels were created on four by

six inch index cards and were inked and shaded with grayscale markers. The cards were

scanned into the computer and formatted alongside the script (Appendix H). This

became a tool to communicate the film idea quickly with other people.

Once the film concept was in place, some time was spent getting organized and

creating a checklist for the rest of the project. Documents for file folder organization

were created including file naming conventions for preproduction and production, and a shot list for the animatic. This shot list was revised during animatic creation (Appendix F). Staying organized helped create an efficient work environment. Constructing these documents was essential before starting work on the next phase, the 3D animatic, due to the number of files and folders the process generates.

The purpose of the 3D animatic was to refine the narrative through shot choices and camera moves, as well as to define the timing of each shot and the overall film length. Each shot was carefully considered and planned because the camera is the device through which the story is told. "Choices about positioning the camera are central to audience response because our perception of anything and anyone within the frame changes as the camera is positioned and re-positioned" (Downes and Miller 59). For example, "a scene shot from behind a person holding a gun, in which we are positioned to witness events from the assassin's point of view is less threatening to the audience than the same event shot from the point of view of the intended victim"(Downes and Miller 60). In this way, the camera is essentially the narrator in the story whose role it is "to tell the events which make up the story, to mediate the events for the audience, [and] to evaluate those events for the audience" (Downes and Miller 53).

The storyboard/script acted as an initiator for the process, but even so, it took a lot of time and had numerous revisions. A decision was made to have the camera tell the story from the female's (Penelope) viewpoint in order for the audience to relate to her and essentially feel what she is feeling. A good example of this is one shot where the camera moves 360 degrees. The purpose of this uncommon shot is to illicit confusion and disorientation of the audience thereby signifying the confusion and disorientation of

Penelope.   The camera also functioned by using codes and conventions to tell the story.

For example, the film utilizes a lot more medium and close up shots for the first half of

the film because they signify an intimate, personal relationship as seen in Yildiz's chart

(Appendix D, Table 1). Also, many of the shots were constructed to be at eyelevel or

below to create the feeling of the masked man being a threat and in control of the

situation. Overall, each shot was calculated to strengthen the narrative and relay a

particular point of view to the audience.

The animatic constitutes a 3D sketch of the film. Therefore, environment and

props for the animatic are crude as to meet the basic requirements. The masks are simple

flat ovals that were merely color coded in order to denote each mask. The ornate mask is

brown, the jester mask is blue and red checkers, the ominous mask is black, the moon

mask is light blue, the displeased mask is pink, and the sad mask is olive. Each of the

characters utilize a free character rig known as "Hogan" by the Academy of Art

University. In order to differentiate between the two characters, Penelope's color is

changed to light pink while the masked man remains gray and is overlaid with black

geometry to represent his cloaked form.

Ordinarily, sound would accompany the animatic. Since all aspects of the project

are completed by one person who is not a sound designer, sound is not a part of the final

animatic. However, the sound is an important aspect and general ideas about it have been

considered. The film begins with the masked man starting a phonograph, which

continues to play some type of opera (something similar to Caruso) throughout the entire

film. The voice should be male as the music is a method of control for the masked man.

At the end of the film the phonograph breaks with a terrible screeching noise as the

needle digs into the record.   The music needs to be carefully composed to reflect the moods and actions of the characters and create a synaesthetic experience for the audience.

After the 3D animatic was completed, the color and lighting for each shot was developed in the form of a color script. The color script is much like the storyboard as it illustrates the film in a sequential manner with the added ability to show how the color and lighting change from beginning to end. Bill Cone, who has worked at Pixar for fourteen years explains, "It's like a series of miniature postcards of the whole movie…you can line them up on a wall and see the entire sequence" (Price 62). By creating the color script after the animatic, the shot choices and camera angles are already defined and allow the artist to start by focusing on semiotic principals. " 'Initially, we're looking for concepts, themes and symbols,' Cone says. "How can everything in the visual world we create support the story being told?"(Price 64). Lighting and color have important roles in telling a story as they help set the overall mood and tone.

For this film, the overall mood and tone is relatively dark and theatrical. To create this, the film needs to have a cool color temperature and stage-type lighting. The cool color temperature, as seen in the lighting chart (Appendix D, Table 3), represents mystery and has an eerie effect on the audience. A quick abstract color study served to get initial ideas out quickly and acted as a road map for creating the color script (Appendix G, Illus. 4). The color transitions at precise points, mirroring story transitions. The lighting reflects the narrative by bathing the characters in light and shadow according to the mood of each shot. For example, at the beginning of the film, Penelope walks in and out of light and shadow as she investigates where she is and the music she hears. The lighting in this particular shot foreshadows the rest of the film. In the next shot

Penelope meets the masked man. He steps out of the darkness and into the light to address her. In this way, the color and lighting becomes a valuable story component.

Design Development

The different design elements of the film (characters, environments, and props) are correlative to the different parts of narrative development in that the primary goal is still to support the story being told with visual symbols. The narrative creates requirements for the design elements through defining characters as either antagonist or protagonist, restricting costume choices, limiting the environment, and requiring types of props. But things such as names, attributes, and backgrounds of the characters may still be added during the design phase to add richness to the narrative. Because the relationship between the characters is paramount to the film, their design began first. Being that it is a short film, codes and conventions are the most effective method for quick communication of character identities.

The character design process started with the female character, which is the protagonist of the story. Her name is Penelope, although it is never mentioned in the film. Giving her a name helped her become more of an individual. The name means "with a web over her face". This name both described her situation and her naivety. The masked man remained anonymous because of his role in the story as a mysterious antagonist with an unknown identity.

Several steps were used in order to achieve Penelope's design, including the creation of an initial sketch, exploratory silhouettes, a Bozzetti, and iterations of her clothing design. Some of the artwork from this process can be seen on her development sheet (Appendix G, Illus. 5). The initial design sketch represented initial thoughts that

included the overall look, clothing, and hair. Her design was explored by creating

silhouette sketches in order to determine body type, shape, and proportion. Oftentimes,

body types are seen as a stereotype for certain personalities. The silhouette of a character

can also determine whether or not an audience will sympathize with that character. For

example, an audience member would be unable to relate to a Penelope who is overweight

and had trouble getting around. Being grotesquely overweight would represent a

character flaw and make her more at fault for her situation rather than an innocent victim.

After determining her silhouette, iterations were used to focus on clothing design. Her

clothing design was based on Victorian underwear, which fit the time period and is

metaphorical of her vulnerability and innocence. However, iterations helped to

determine the level of authenticity required. The end result was a stricter interpretation

of the time period. In order to adequately explore her head and facial features a Bozzetti

bust was created out of plastaline clay. The clay is oil based and never dries allowing the

artist to sculpt and resculpt. Her hair, in particular went through many different

iterations. The Bozetti made it easier to design in the round and made problems quickly

apparent.

Her final design came together as a culmination of the decisions made through the

course of the different exploratory exercises. Her model sheets were then created based

on this design (Appendix J, Illus. 1 and Illus. 2). A small change was made between her

final design and her model sheets by adding a headband that helped to define her head

more aptly. Penelope has two model sheets. The first show the orthographic views in a

"t-pose" to be used primarily by the modeler, and the second is a color study with close

ups of details to be utilized primarily by the texture artist.

Everything about Penelope's final design was carefully considered. She wears white to signify her innocence. Her corset is tan to provide some contrast and create more appeal. The color also alludes to the Victorian time period by appearing as something that has aged. The details of pink satin ribbon and embroidery in her clothing symbolize her femininity. She has large blue eyes and small facial features that reiterate her innocence and naivety and help to establish her as the protagonist in the audience's mind.

The methodology for the masked man's development was very different than Penelope's. This is because he is cloaked from head to toe so as to hide any human being who would be underneath. The primary method of his development was to create iterations (Appendix G, Illus. 6). Some were explored with the same pose, while others were different poses. The process began with simple thumbnails and moved on to more developed sketches as ideas solidified. Like Penelope, the primary goal in his design exploration was to capture the character's qualities and role in the story. Oftentimes, robed characters are associated with clergy, the Grim Reaper, and sorcerers or magicians. His character needed to be more unique, except he is somewhat of a magician. Likewise, finding the right balance between creepy and alluring was difficult. The final design was an evolution and refinement of the iterations explored. The only change between it and the model sheet (Appendix J, Illus. 3 and Illus. 4) was the borders of the sleeves being changed from embroidered to black velvet, which was truer to the Victorian time period. Like Penelope's sheets, his model sheets were broken down into one showing the orthographic views and the other being a color study.

In the final design the masked man wears all black, which is not only a classic convention for identifying the antagonist, but is also symbolic of his unknown identity. His robe is mostly made out of a thick heavy cloth that has been pressed. The border of the sleeves, the pleats, and the lower border of the robe are black velvet. Underneath his robe is another garment that protrudes from the bottom of his robe. This garment is made out of a lighter weight fabric. It is gathered, tattered and stained from misuse over many years. This is symbolic of how he is seemingly charming with hidden corruption. He wears white gloves for several reasons. They function to cover his skin and are from the Victorian time period. More importantly, they are the primary means of communication and interaction with the other character. Being white, they create a dramatic contrast to the robe, drawing the viewer's attention to their delicate gestures. In order to balance out his white gloves, he has cords that hang symmetrically from his belt. At the bottom of each cord hangs a metal ornamentation. These add to the character's charm and alluring personality.

The masked man's design involved five masks to act as his face throughout the film. They are the ornate mask, the jester mask, the moon mask, the sad mask, and the ominous mask. Originally there was a sixth mask called the displeased mask. However, in the course of development this mask was determined to not be crucial on its own and the ominous mask was given the freedom of this expression. Each mask is uniquely constructed and designed to be quickly recognizable. The masks were not developed according to the order they appear on screen. Instead the design order was from easiest to most difficult to design

The first mask formulated was the jester mask. The design process began by creating exploratory sketches. None of these resembled anything like the final design, but creating them was a way to rule out different possibilities. After creating the sketches a basic understanding of what the mask was to look like was apparent but was then worked out in plastaline clay (Appendix G, Illus. 8). The clay was invaluable for working out ideas until the overall form was satisfactory. Iterations (Appendix G, Illus. 8) were used to determine color and ornamentation of the mask before reaching its final design that can be seen on its model sheet (Appendix J, Illus. 6). Unlike the characters, each of the masks' model sheets consist of one page that includes both the orthographic views and the color study.

The jester mask was designed to have multiple bright colors and patterns. It has a headpiece that moves and jingles with brass bells. The brass is repeated as dividers between color patterns on the face of the mask. All of these things work together to create a mask that is representative of a humorously entertaining personality.

The moon mask was developed in a very similar manner to the jester mask. A minimal amount of exploratory sketches were created, leaving the primary method of development accomplished in plastaline clay (Appendix G, Illus. 9). A reference image served as inspiration for the integument. Thusly, iterations were unnecessary and instead the final design and model sheet (Appendix J, Illus. 7) were directly fashioned after the clay sculpt. Minor changes in the curvature of the mask and well as finite refinement occurred on the final model sheet.

The moon mask represents dreams, reflection, and romance. Its shape is simple and straightforward being a crescent moon shape. The surface of the mask is light blue

with reflective shards concentrated in the area of the facial features. This adds to the feeling and mood that the mask exudes.

The ominous mask was the next mask produced due to its importance in the film. It is arguably the most important mask as it is the embodiment of the antagonist. Although some exploratory sketches (Appendix G, Illus. 10) were created, a clear vision of what the design would be appeared. More research transpired to find images that expressed the vision, then the final design was generated along with the model sheet (Appendix J, Illus. 9).

The ominous mask stands for the antagonist's unfavorable intentions that he generally keeps hidden. These intentions are kept purposefully ambiguous. The design is angular for masculinity and has aggressive eyes. The horns on the top of the mask are a classic symbol of evil, making the mask unmistakably clear. The metal is rusted and corroded. The teeth are broken and decaying. Unlike the other masks, this one is capable of producing different facial expressions. This makes it more of a threat to Penelope.

The ornate mask is the first mask seen in the film. It acts as something beautiful that draws in the protagonist. A few reference images (Appendix G, Illus. 7) inspired this mask. Possibilities were explored with sketches. The process revealed that it was unnecessary for this mask to have a mouth. The final design became clear and the model sheet (Appendix J, Illus. 5) was created. The mask is made out of a stately material (gold) that emphasizes it an object of beauty. It has elaborate delicate detailing and long strips of gold fabric that hang from it that give it a sense of aristocratic luxury.

The last mask conceived was the sad mask. A few sketches for this mask (Appendix G, Illus. 9) were created and then it evolved into its final design and model

sheet (Appendix J, Illus. 8). The most obvious symbol in the final design are the tears.

They are a reflective material to draw attention and appear watery. The rest of the face is

ceramic with a crackle glaze. The glaze mimics the shape of the mask as it has pieces

missing like they broke off. This represents the hurt feelings of the masked man when he

is wearing the mask. The face also droops like it is melting. The eyes have large sagging

dark bags under them and the overall color of the mask is desaturated, thus giving it a

gloomy countenance.

　　　　After designing the characters and masks, a maquette of each character was

created (Appendix K). Maquettes aid all who work on a film to better understand the

characters. Bill Cone commented on them saying, "We even have sculptors who model

sets and characters from clay, so we can walk around and study them, take them outside

and look at them in light and shadow- all before anything goes to computer"(Price 67).

The maquettes were also fashioned to reflect the size difference between the two

characters. This difference is also illustrated on the size comparison sheet (Appendix J,

Illus. 15).

　　　　Along with the characters, the environment and props were also designed. Their

supportive role in the story made it imperative that the primary objective of their designs

not distract from the film and that they integrate into the same universe as the characters.

　　　　The environment design started during the construction of the 3D animatic. The

design was much easier to explore and adjust in the 3D environment rather than a 2D

sketch. It was very similar to exploring some of the mask designs in clay. Also, by

creating it alongside the 3D animatic, one could preview what the set would look like

through the eyes of the camera and determine what needed adjusting. The model sheets

(Appendix J, Illus. 10 and Illus. 11) were constructed based on the 3D mock up.

The environment design was based on crypt architecture. However, the ceiling

heights made the space feel too open. To solve this problem chandeliers were added that

acted as a lower false ceiling and aided the lighting design. The environment is a place

where the masked man is in control and where Penelope cannot escape. It is not a

pleasant place to be. It is sterile, cold, and monotonous and confusing. This is a

reflection of the situation she is in. It is participatory in the narrative by aiding the

masked man in adding to Penelope's confusion and hopelessness.

The narrative necessitated three props: a phonograph, a flower, and a mirror. Of

the three, the phonograph was the simplest one. The design was not as important as the

other props, as it is never seen interacting with both characters and is only seen close up

from one angle. The final model (Appendix J, Illus. 12) of the phonograph does not even

need to be complete. Only the elements seen in the shot need to exist. The flower prop

took more consideration since many flowers are associated with certain meanings. In

order to avoid most of these connotations, research was done of different flowers and the

final design (Appendix J, Illus. 13) was not based on any particular flower. The flower

has a double set of petals to insure its importance in the shots in the film. Keeping with

the language of the film, each petal is rounded, but has a sharp point in the center and is

white with red tips. This duality relates to the masked man's duality of charm and hidden

corruption. Duality can also be seen in the final design of the mirror (Appendix J, Illus.

14). The primary shape of the mirror is heart shaped with horns on each side. This basic

shape was arrived at through exploratory sketches (Appendix G, Illus. 11.). The design

was then expounded upon in the final design to include the silver work that was typical of the time period.

Final Thoughts

The story of *Life's Masquerade* addresses the ideas of people's personas, relationships, and gender roles. The film is set during the Victorian time period because it was a time when people were very inhibited. They did not discuss anything sexual or male/female relationships, or even birth, but they did talk about death a lot, even with their children. Also, during this time, masquerades were still occasionally held. They were most prevalent during the medieval time period. However medieval settings are often associated with fairy tales, and dungeons and dragons; and are not as easily relatable to present day reality. In order to relate the idea of poetic animation to the audience the film is theatrical. It has stage type lighting and each character's movement is carefully choreographed. The audience should feel more like they are watching a play then watching a documentary. Once the audience understands this, they can start interpreting the imagery and looking for the deeper meanings.

Conclusion

Animated poetry is a powerful way for a creator to communicate abstract feelings, thoughts and ideas through visual metaphors based on semiotic theory. It can move an audience emotionally and affect cultural ideology. In order to create visual metaphors one must understand the target audience, understand codes and conventions of one's culture, and allow the tacit dimension to make new sign object correspondents.

This study has discussed the theory behind constructing animated poetry giving practical examples of application in the case study of Chris Landreth as well as in the creation of preproduction material specifically for this study. The methodology for practical application is outlined in depth in the personal work case study and is accompanied by supporting illustrations. It does not serve as a model to be exactly duplicated but rather as an example of an approach that applies semiotic theory successfully to create animated poetry.

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Appendix C: Figures

Fig 1. Box of crayons
(http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_t33mvngz6Kg/SU7XoVg97MI/AAAAAAAABUI/EDzgfwP
mozU/s400/crayon1.jpg)

Fig2. Dir. Norman Ferguson and T. Hee, *Fantasia* "Dance of the Hours", 1940,
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(http://www.tcj.com/www/htdocs/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/hippo_tutu.jpg)

Fig. 3. Chris Landreth, *Ryan*, 2004, animation
(screenshot, *Youtube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvfgLBMmtVs)

Fig. 4. Chris Landreth, *Ryan*, 2004, animation
(screenshot, *Youtube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvfgLBMmtVs)

Fig. 5. Chris Landreth, *Ryan*, 2004, animation
(screenshot, *Youtube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvfgLBMmtVs)

Fig. 6. Chris Landreth, *Ryan*, 2004, animation
(screenshot, *Youtube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvfgLBMmtVs)

Fig. 7. Chris Landreth, *Ryan*, 2004, animation
(screenshot, *Youtube*, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gvfgLBMmtVs)

Appendix D: Tables

Table 1
Yildiz's chart for camera and shot choices

Signifier (shot)	Definition	Signified
close-up	face only	intimacy
medium shot	most of the body	personal relationship
long shot	setting and characters	context, scope, public distance
full shot	Full body of person	social relationship
pan down	camera looks down	power, authority
pan up	camera looks up	smallness, weakness
zoom in	camera moves in	Observation, focus
fade in	image appears on blank screen	beginning
fade out	image screen goes blank	ending
cut	switch from one image to another	simultaneity, excitement
wipe	Image wiped off screen	Imposed conclusion

Table 2
Chart for color choices

Signifier (color)	Signified
red	Intensity, passion, bravery, danger, fire, romance, masculinity, power, blood, anger, "charged emotions", sense of drama
orange	Energy, heat, warmth, nourishment, playfulness, desire, caution, citris
yellow	Happiness, sunlight, joy, cheerful, optimism, hazards, energy (too much yellow, viewer become annoyed)
green	Nature/ecology, life, calm, natural, good luck, jealousy, renewal, growth, health,
blue	Calm, peaceful, cold, sky, sea, water, trust, truthfulness, clarity, "color of depth/distance"
violet/purple	Mysterious, magical, royalty, wisdom, honor, wealth, enlightenment/spirituality, harmony
white	light, reverence, purity, snow, peace, neutrality, innocence, cleanliness, winter
black	evil, sadness, death, absence, power, darkness, fear, seriousness, professionalism
gray, silver	old age, boredom, decay, dullness, pollution, balance, neutrality, conservative
gold	royalty, wealth, heaven, luxury, precious, glory
brown	soil, filth, poverty, disgust, roughness, earth, rustic, steadfast, wholesome
pink	Femininity, flirtation, spring, innocence, blush, childish, pure-love

Table 3
Chart for lighting choices

Signifier (light)	Definition	Signified
backlight	Light from behind the character, opposite of the camera.	Dramatic, can make a halo effect
Below light	Light from directly below the character, use is rare	Strange, horror
Natural light	Sun light	Playful, serene, connection to outdoors/environment
Indoor Light	Light from light fixture	Man-made,
High light levels	Bright light, strong shadows	Cheerful, alertness, activity
mid light levels	Shade, soft shadows	Relaxation, intimacy, rest
Low light levels	Dark, moon light/ night	Mysterious, ominous, romantic
Sunrise		Hope, a new day, the beginning
Sunset		The end, romantic, nostalgic
warm color temperature filter	Red, yellow, orange range	Sunlight, cozy, inviting, day
cool color temperature filter	Blue, green, violet range	cold, eerie, night, mystery
black and white film		Nostalgic, film noir

Table 4
Chart for shape and line choices

Signifier (shape/line)	Signified
circle	life, oneness, unity, female, infinity, cosmos
square	security, structure, masculine, order, conservative
triangle	illumination, magic, trinity, hierarchy, combination
spiral	expansion/contraction, creativity, journey
curves	Graceful, beauty, feminine
angular	harsh, aggressive, masculine
dot	alone, solitude, point
thick lines	important, dominant
thin lines	Detail, delicate

Appendix E: Film Goals and Treatment

Film Goals/Strategy

Mission: To explore semiotic theory and apply it to the animated medium and to develop a methodology for practical application in order to create animated poetry.

Short Film: The short film will support and enhance the written thesis by being an example of practical application of semiotic theory to create animated poetry.

Primary audience of film: Two primary audiences due to the film being an academic exercise. The first audience consists of those who are involved in the pre production process of animation and who view the film as a part of the thesis. The second primary audience will be peers and animation festivals. Therefore, the primary audience are those who are knowledgeable in the arts.

Audience Reaction to film: Those who view it as part of the thesis: gain a better understanding of the written portion. All: emotional response and connection to the visuals, the aesthetic experience. Overall enjoyment and communication.

Film Treatment

Title: Life's Masquerade

Producer and Director: Melody Waller

Concept: creating metaphorical animation that is reminiscent of poetry through application of semiotic theory.

Synopsis: Life is a masquerade

Format: 3D animation

Duration: 90 sec.

Summary: Penelope struggles to find the true identity of the masked character amidst the confusion. At the climax of the action Penelope pulls the cloak off the masked man. The masks crash to the floor, and there is nothing there.

Idea: Because this piece is metaphorical, it possesses some amount of ambiguity. Different people will have different interpretations of it. For me, however, this story stems from personal experience. It's about the different personas people have and how one may think they know someone and their intention, only to find out there are hidden ulterior motives.

Method: Multiple media used during Pre-production Process. Maya used to create 3D assets and Animation. Ncloth dynamics will also be utilized. After Effects and Premiere for Post Production. Sound effects and Music will be utilized, but dialogue will not be used.

The Look: Theatrical like, hard mood lighting, stylized

Influences: Kwoon, Brothers Quay, Hopper, Robert ParkeHarrison, Tim Burton, Firebird Suite, Chris Landreth

Appendix F: Organization Checklists

Table 1
Thesis folder organization

	Thesis folder organization
Research folder	images for developing look and feel
Environment subfolder	environment reference images
Lighting subfolder	lighting reference images
mask subfolder	mask reference images
mirror subfolder	mirror reference images
Penelope clothing subfolder	victorian underwear reference images
Robes subfolder	robe reference images
Phonograph subfolder	phonograph reference images
Preproduction folder	all previsualization files)
Characters subfolder	folder for each character
Colorscript subfolder	colorscript files
Environment subfolder	Environment design files
Layout subfolder	final deliverables
Maquettes subfolder	raw maquette photographs
Masks subfolder	folder for each mask
Props subfolder	folder for each prop
Sketches subfolder	sketches
Storyboard subfolder	raw storyboard scans
Production Organization folder	for checklist, and organization as well as correction management
Animatic Project folder	for creating animatic (maya standard organization)
Rendering folder	render folders for each scene file
Paper folder	For written portion of Thesis

Table 2

Animatic naming conventions and checklist

Animatic		
Scene file	Animated	Rendered
Sc1_sh1	Complete	Complete
Sc1_sh2	Complete	Complete
Sc1_sh3	Complete	Complete
Sc1_sh4	Complete	Complete
Sc2_sh1	Complete	Complete
Sc2_sh2	Complete	Complete
Sc2_sh3	Complete	Complete
Sc3_sh1	Complete	Complete
Sc3_sh2	Complete	Complete
Sc3_sh3	Complete	Complete
Sc4_sh1	Complete	Complete
Sc4_sh2	Complete	Complete
Sc4_sh3	Complete	Complete
Sc4_sh4	Complete	Complete
Sc5_sh1	Complete	Complete
Sc5_sh2	Complete	Complete
Sc5_sh3	Complete	Complete
Sc5_sh4	Complete	Complete
Sc5_sh5	Complete	Complete
Sc5_sh6	Complete	Complete
Sc6_sh1	Complete	Complete
Sc6_sh2	Complete	Complete
Sc6_sh3	Complete	Complete
Sc6_sh4	Complete	Complete
Sc6_sh5	Complete	Complete

Table 3

Animatic shot list

Animatic					
scene #	Shot #	shot description	camera/shot	frames	screen time (sec)
1	1	establishing shot	ls, zoom out	215	8.95
1	2	phonograph	mcs, still shot	120	5
1	3	Penelope looks around	ms, track	160	6.6
1	4	Penelope meets masked man	fs, still shot	153	6.375
2	1	masked man bows	mcs, still shot	158	6.58
2	2	jester mask	spin shot	170	7
2	3	masked man gives her flower	cu, still	80	3.33
3	1	first ominous mask reveal	ms, still shot	200	8.33
3	2	mirror	mcu, still shot	120	5
3	3	He turns Penelope's head	cu, pan	98	4
4	1	Hug	still shot	130	5.42
4	2	Penelope Hug	mcu, still shot	75	3.125
4	3	she pushes away	mcu, still shot	76	3.16
4	4	Penelope's reaction	cu, still shot	52	2.16
5	1	He reveals masks to her	still shot	130	5.42
5	2	Penelope runs	fs, pan	95	3.9
5	3	Penelope runs some more	fs, track	48	2
5	4	Penelope run ends	fs, pan	73	3
5	5	masks spin around her	ms, spin shot	190	7.9
5	6	masks charge Penelope	still shot	66	2.75
6	1	Penelope backs into masked man	ms, pan	80	3.3
6	2	Penelope's reaction	fs, still shot	48	2
6	3	above shot/ grabs cloth	still shot	37	1.5
6	4	Robe Pull/masks break	pan	96	4
6	5	Phonograph breaking	cu, still shot	120	5

Approximation of Final run time: 2 min (including credits)

Table 4

Preproduction file naming conventions and checklist

File List/naming conventions/checklist

Preproduction Folder

Characters Folder	
Penelope subfolder	
Penelope_Orthos	
Penelope_Color	
Masked Man subfolder	
maskedman_Orthos	
maskedman_Color	

Colorscript Folder	
Colorscript	

Environment Folder	
Environment_Orthos	

Layout Folder(camera ready)	
Final Model Sheets subfolder	
Penelope_Sheet	
Masked Man_Sheet	
Environment_Sheet	
Jestermask_Sheet	
Moonmask_Sheet	
Ominousmask_Sheet	
Ornatemask_Sheet	
Sadmask_Sheet	
Flower_Sheet	
Mirror_Sheet	
Phonograph_Sheet	
Sketch/Ref Sheet subfolder	
name_development	
thumbnailstoryboard	
Maquette Sheets subfolder	
Penelope_maquette	
Maskedman_maquette	

Maquettes Folder(raw photos)	
Penelope subfolder	
Masked Man subfolder	

Masks Folder	
Jester mask subfolder	
Jester_Orthos	
Jester_Color	
Moon mask subfolder	
Moon_Orthos	
Moon_Color	
Ominous mask subfolder	
Ominous_Orthos	
Ominous_Color	
Ornate mask subfolder	
Ornate_Orthos	
Ornate_Color	
Sad mask subfolder	
Sad_Orthos	
Sad_Color	

Props Folder	
Flower subfolder	
Flower_Orthos	
Flower_Color	
Mirror subfolder	
Mirror_Orthos	
Mirror_Color	
Phonograph subfolder	
Phonograph_Orthos	
Phonograph_Color	

Sketches Folder	

Storyboard Folder	
Storyboard/script	

Table 5

Production file naming conventions

 File List/naming conventions

production_project folder

Environment folder	Character folder
environment_model	
environment_uv	Penelope folder
environment_texture	Penelope_model
environment_light	Penelope_uv
	Penelope_texture
Props folder	Penelope_rig
flower folder	
flower_model	mask man folder
flower_uv	maskman_model
flower_texture	maskman_simple
flower_rig	maskman_uv
phonograph folder	maskman_texture
phonograph_model	maskman_rig
phonograph_uv	maskman_rig_cloth
phonograph_texture	
mirror folder	masks folder
mirror_model	jester_folder
mirror_uv	jester_model
mirror_texture	jester_uv
	jester_texture
	jester_rig
	moon folder
	moon_model
	moon_uv
	moon_texture
	ominous folder
	ominous_model
	ominous_uv
	ominous_texture
	ominous_rig
	ornate folder
	ornate_model
	ornate_uv
	ornate_testure
	sadmask folder
	sadmask_model
	sadmask_uv
	sadmask_texture

Appendix G: Brainstorming and Sketches
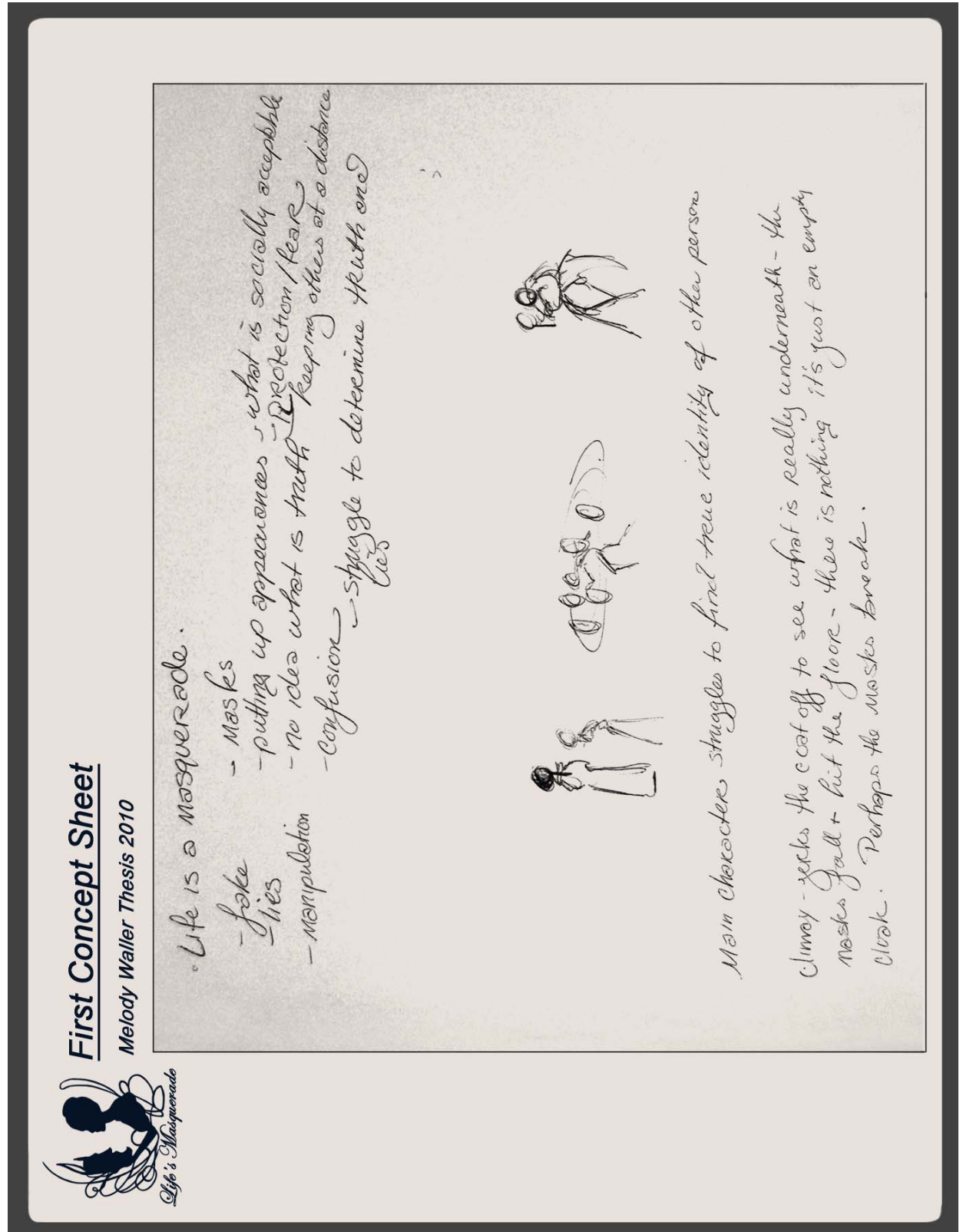
Illus. 1. First Concept Sheet
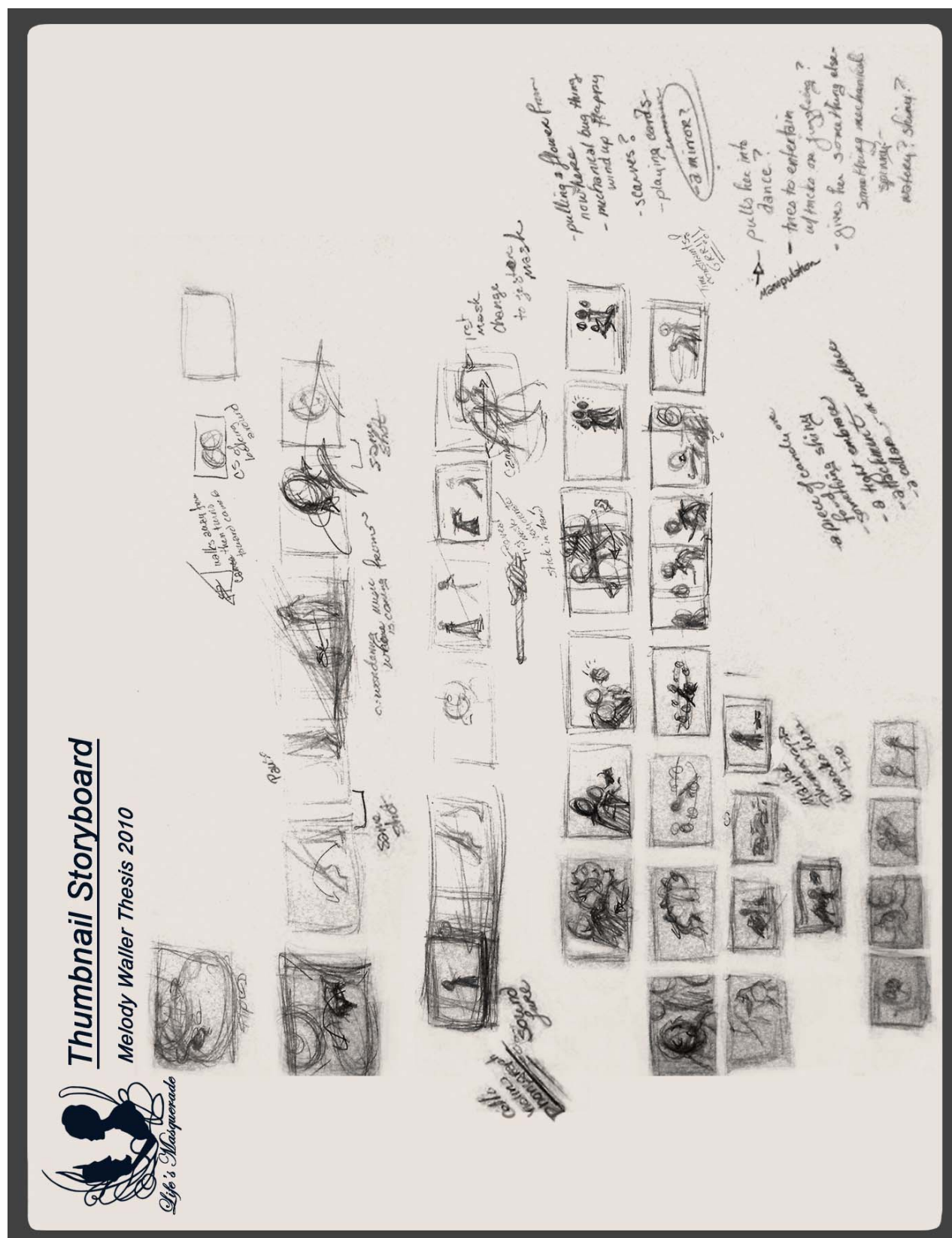
Illus. 2. Thumbnail Storyboard
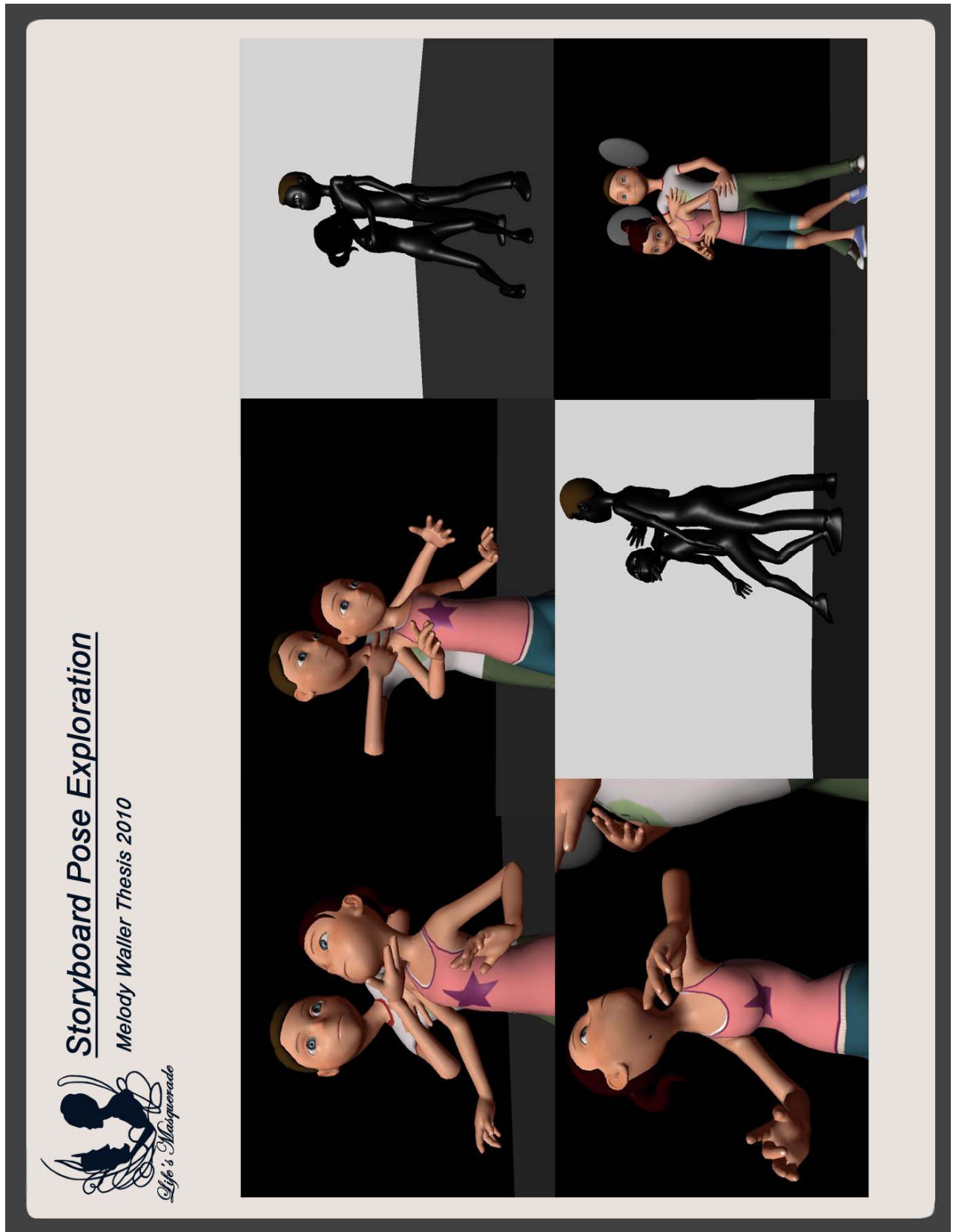
Illus. 3. Story Pose Exploration

Illus. 4. Color study for Color script
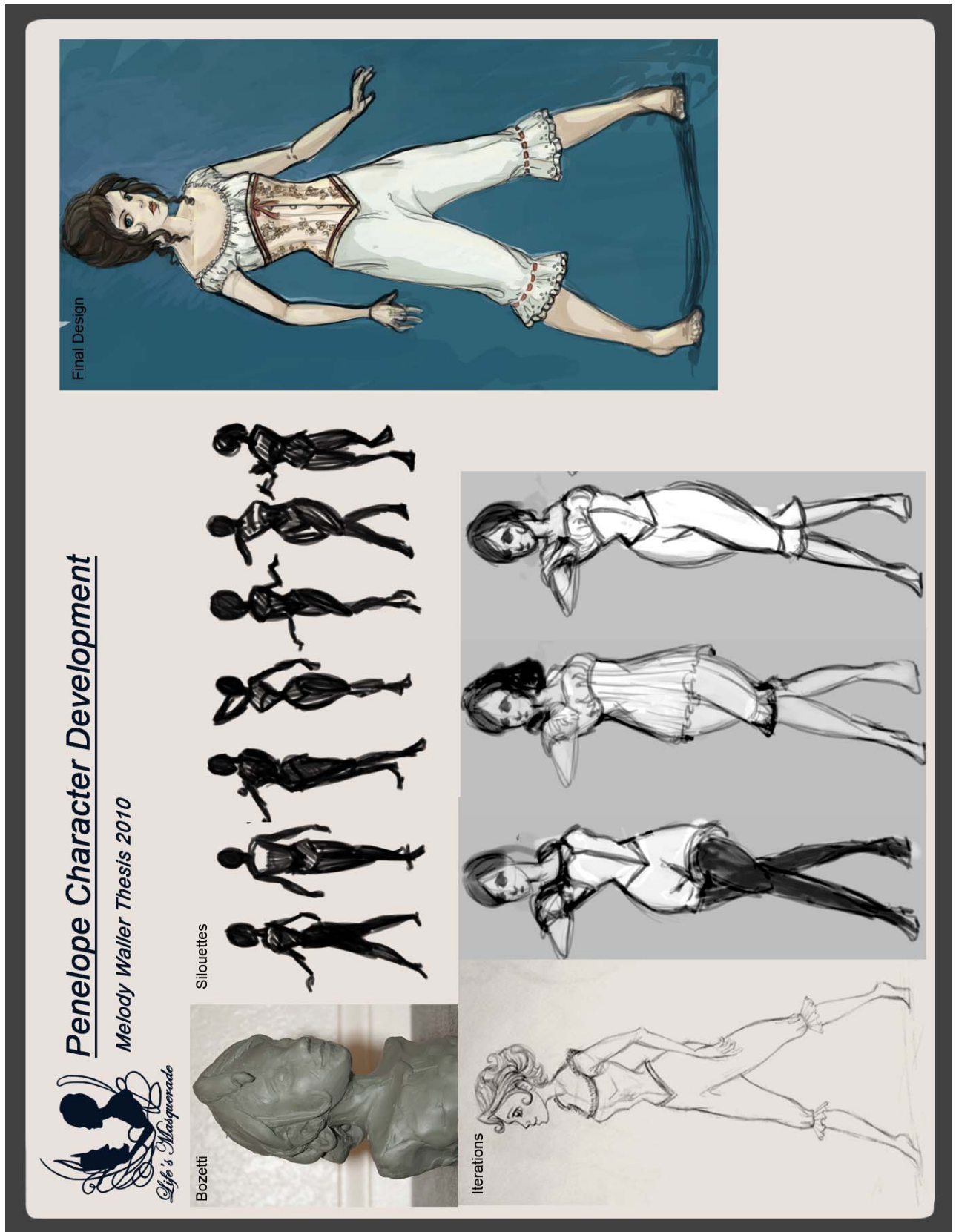
Illus. 5. Penelope Character Development
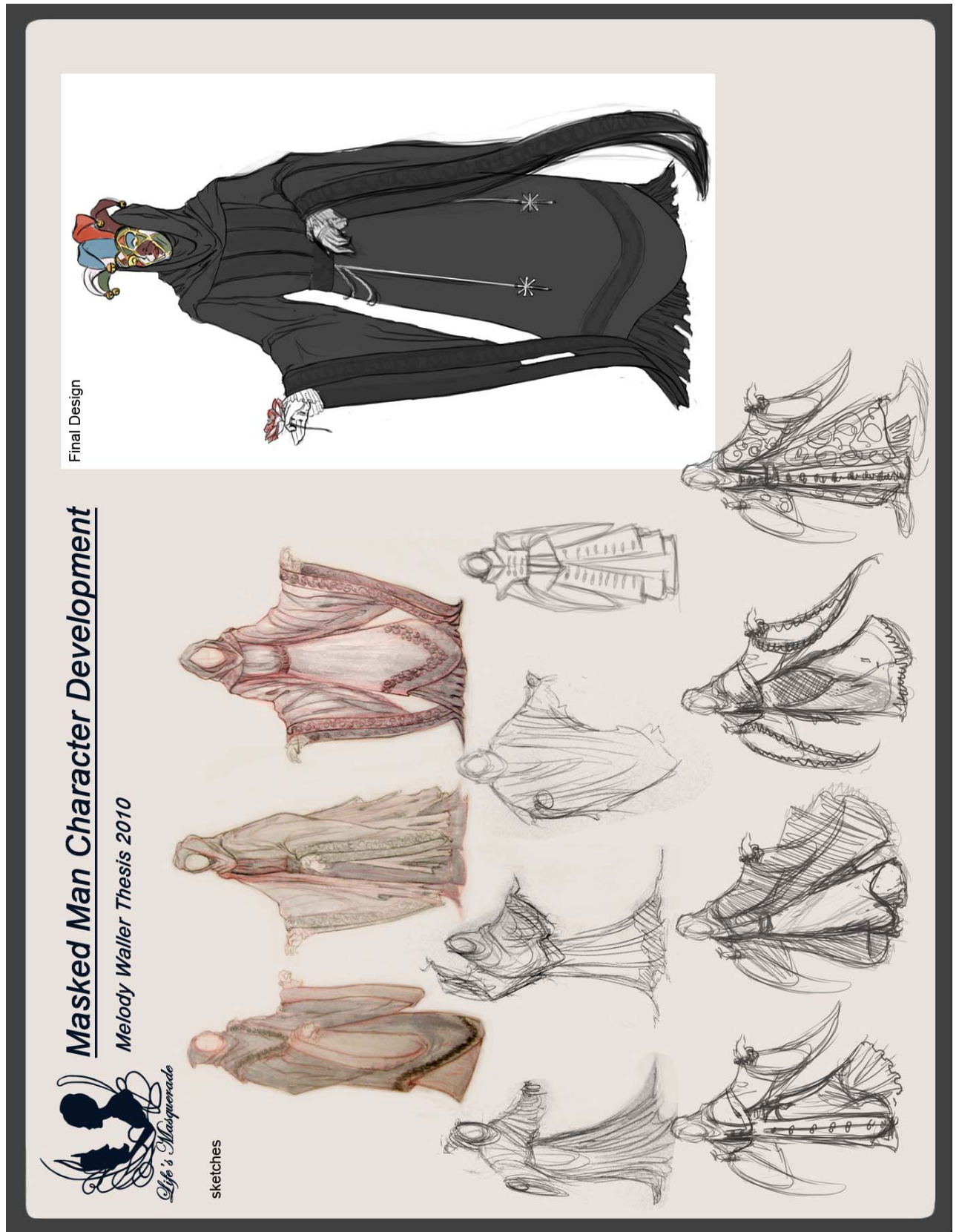
Illus. 6. Masked Man Character Development

Illus. 7. Ornate Mask Development

Illus. 8. Jester Mask Development
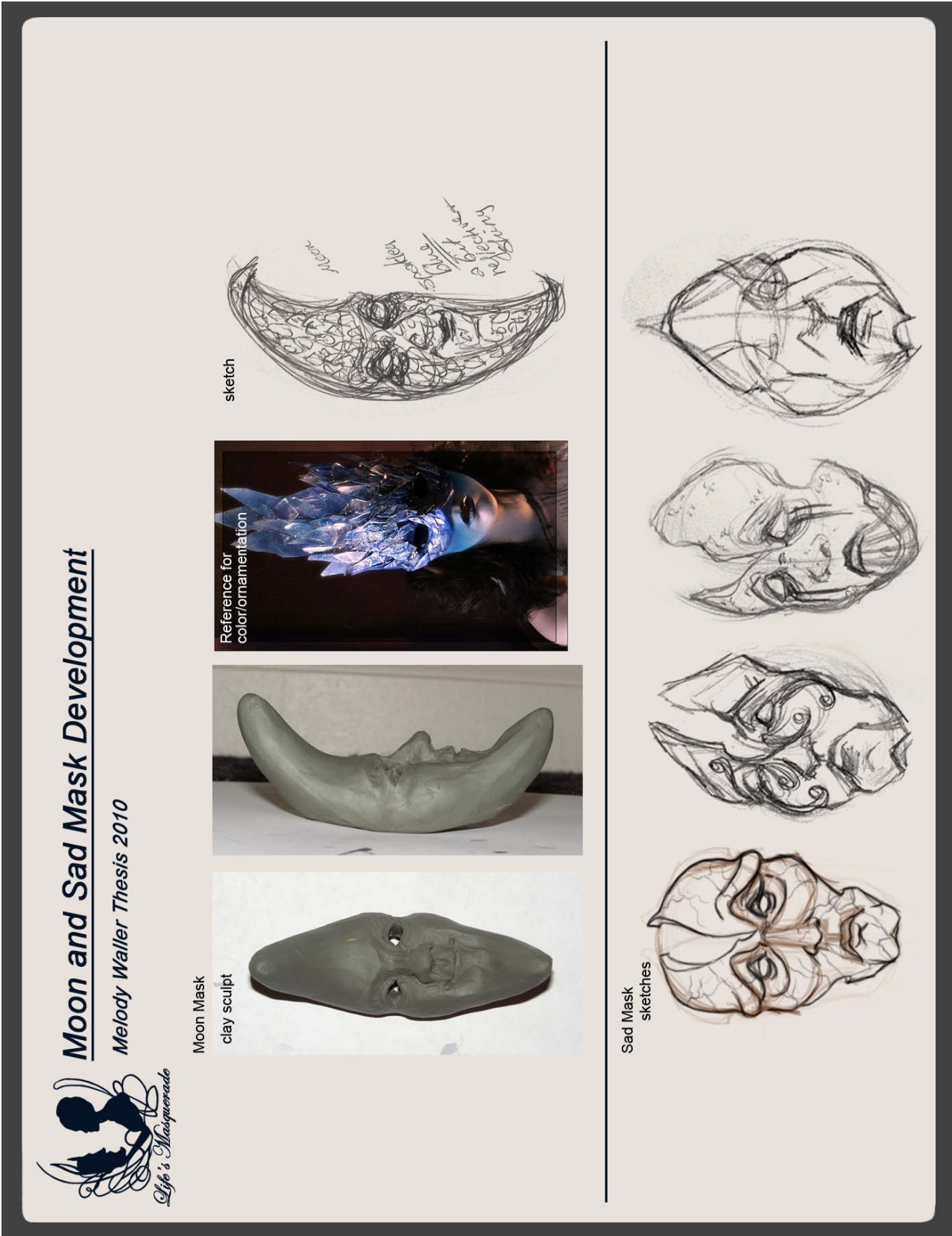
Illus. 9. Moon and Sad Mask Development

Illus. 10. Ominous Mask Development

Illus. 11. Mirror Development

Appendix H: Storyboard Script

Storyboard Script

Working title: Masquerade

Scene1 shot 1   C.U. of phonograph
A white gloved hand moves the needle into position and the phonograph starts to play.

Scene 1 shot 2   M.C.U. of Penelope
Entranced by the music, Penelope looks around in search of the source of the sound.

Scene 1 shot 3   F.S.
Penelope turns around to find the mysterious masked figure that makes a grandiose bow.

Scene 2 shot 1   M.S.
The masked man revolved around her while changing his ornate mask to a jester mask. The camera revolves in a concentric manner around her in the opposing direction.

Scene 2 shot 2   M.S.
The masked man pulls a flower
magically from behind Penelope's ear
and she is quite charmed by it.

Scene 2 shot 3   M.S.
Penelope revels in the flower. The
masked man changes masks behind her
back.

Scene 3 shot 1 M.C.U.
Penelope turns around, completely
charmed by the mask man. She never
sees the ominous mask but instead finds
him wearing a moon mask.
He pulls out a mirror to show her. He
motions for her to look into it.

Scene 3 shot 2   C.U. of mirror in the white gloved hand
An ominous mask flashes in the background behind Penelope and the masked man in the mirror and she catches sight of it. She turns around to see what it is. The mask changes to a displeased mask.

Scene 4 shot 1   M.C.U.
He turns her face back to his own. He is now wearing a sad, hurt mask.
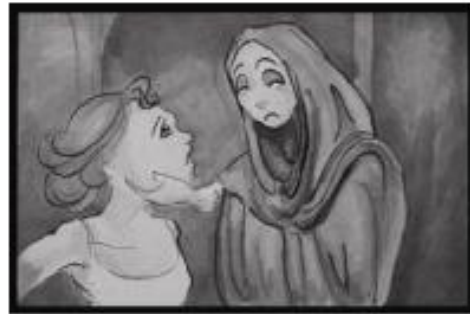
Scene 4 shot 2   M.S.
The masked man motions for her to give
him a hug. Forgetting about what she
might have seen in the mirror, they hug.

Scene 4 shot 3   C.S. of Penelope's face
as she hugs the masked man. After
hugging him Penelope finds that he will
not let her go.

Scene 4 shot 4 C.S. of masked man
Penelope continues to struggle to free
herself from his clutches. He has
changed back to the ominous mask.

Scene 5 shot 1   M.S.
The masked man takes off two masks
and sends them out from each hand as
Penelope cowers in terror.

Scene 5 shot 2   F.S.
Penelope runs and the masks chase her
trying to cut off her retreat.

Scene 5 shot 3   F.S.
The masks surround her and spin around
her confusingly.

Scene 5 shot 4   F.S. extreme low angle
The masks deviate from their circle and
come toward her

Scene 5 shot 5   M.S. dolly into Full
Shot for reveal
Penelope backs away in retreat and
surprisingly backs into the masked man.

Scene 6 shot 1 M.C.U.
Penelope grabs the masked man's robes

Scene 6 shot 2 F.S. extreme above
angle
She pulls off the robes to reveal nothing
underneath. The masks crash to the
floor and break.

Scene 6 shot 3   C.U. of masks lying
broken on the floor along with the white
gloves.

Scene 6 shot 4 C.U. of phonograph
The needle breaks and gouges into the
surface of the record as it slows to a stop.

Appendix I: Color Script
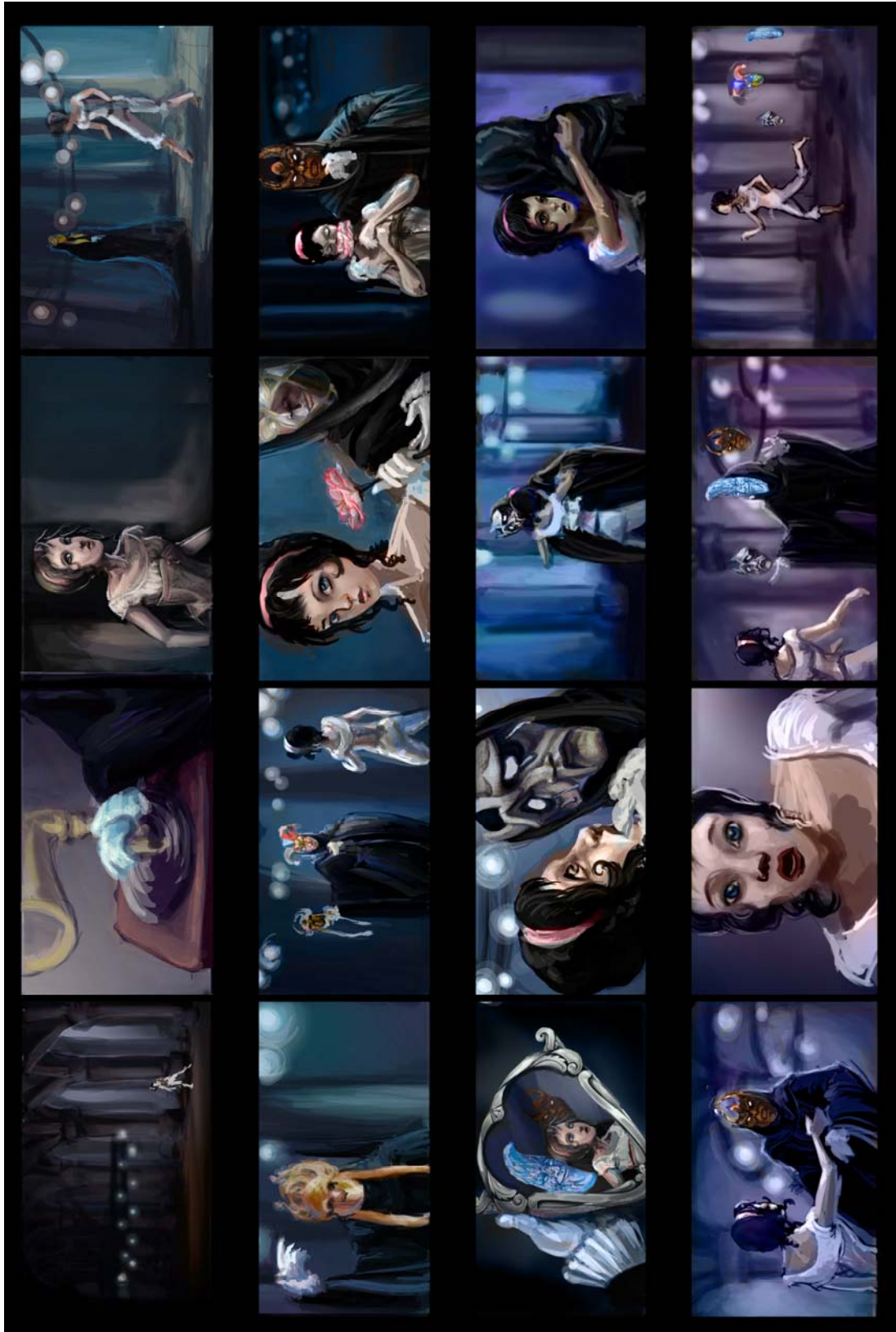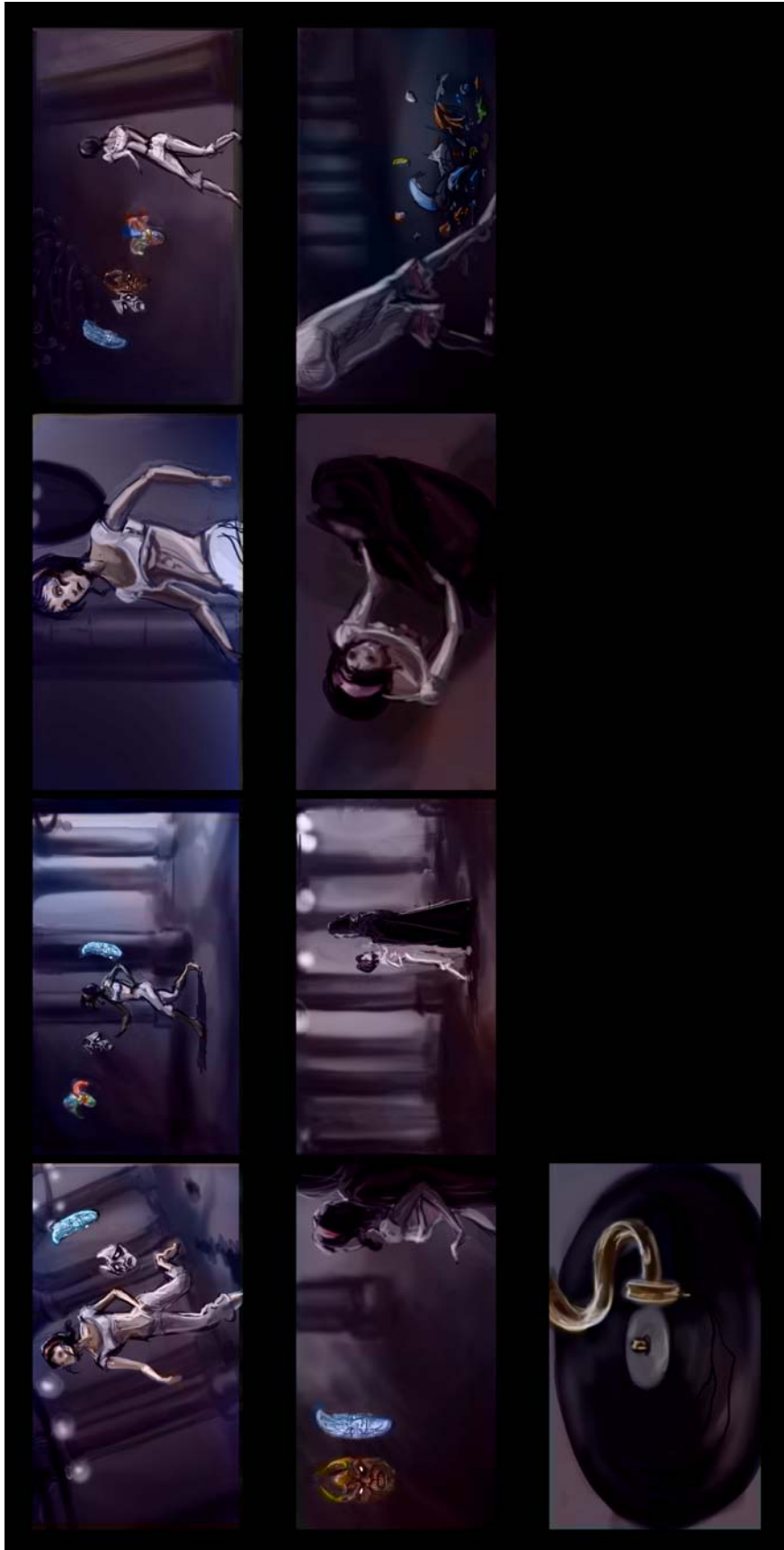
Appendix J: Model Sheets
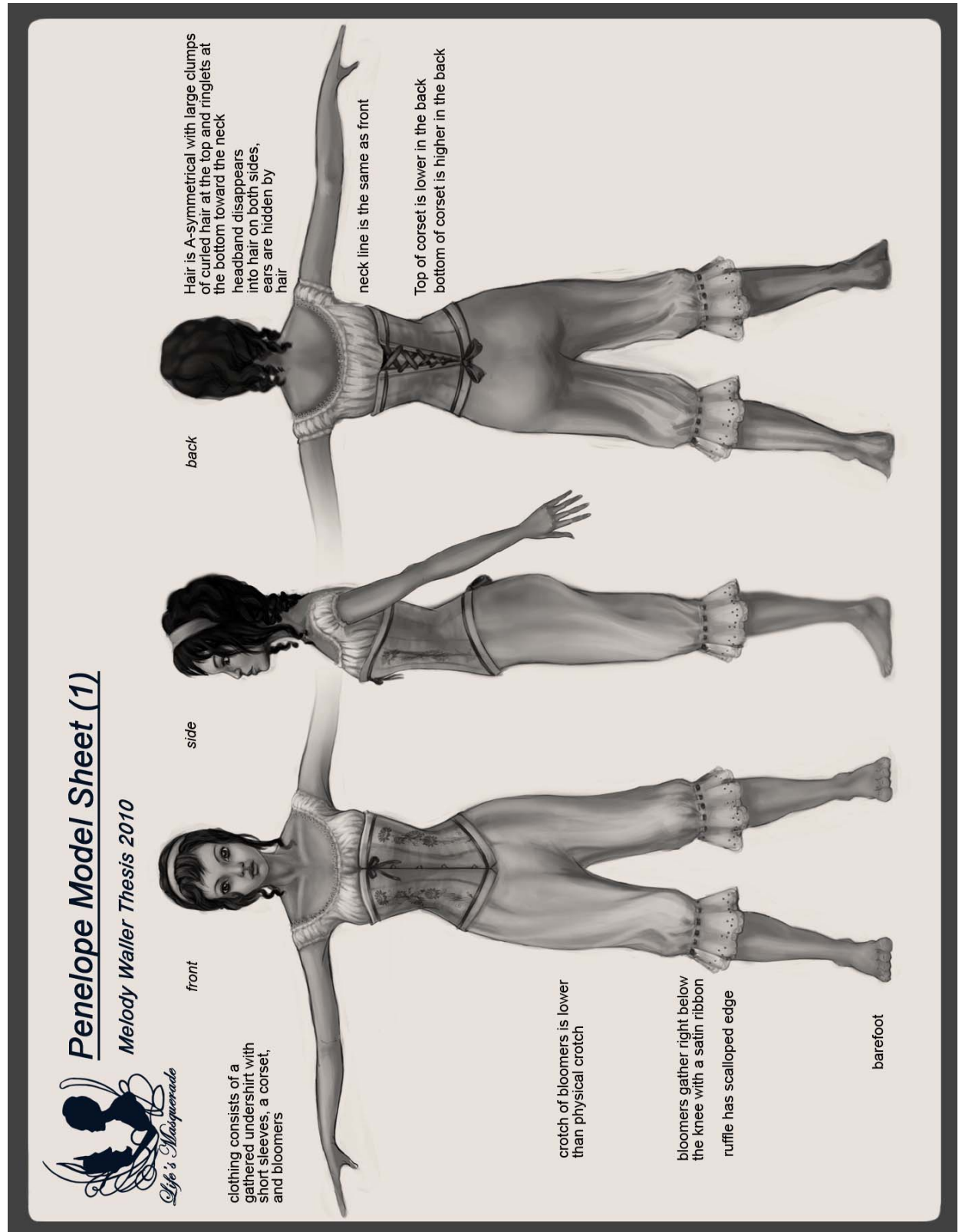
Illus. 1. Penelope Model Sheet (1)

Illus. 2. Penelope Model Sheet (2)

Illus. 3. Masked Man Model Sheet (1)

Illus. 4. Masked Man Model Sheet (2)
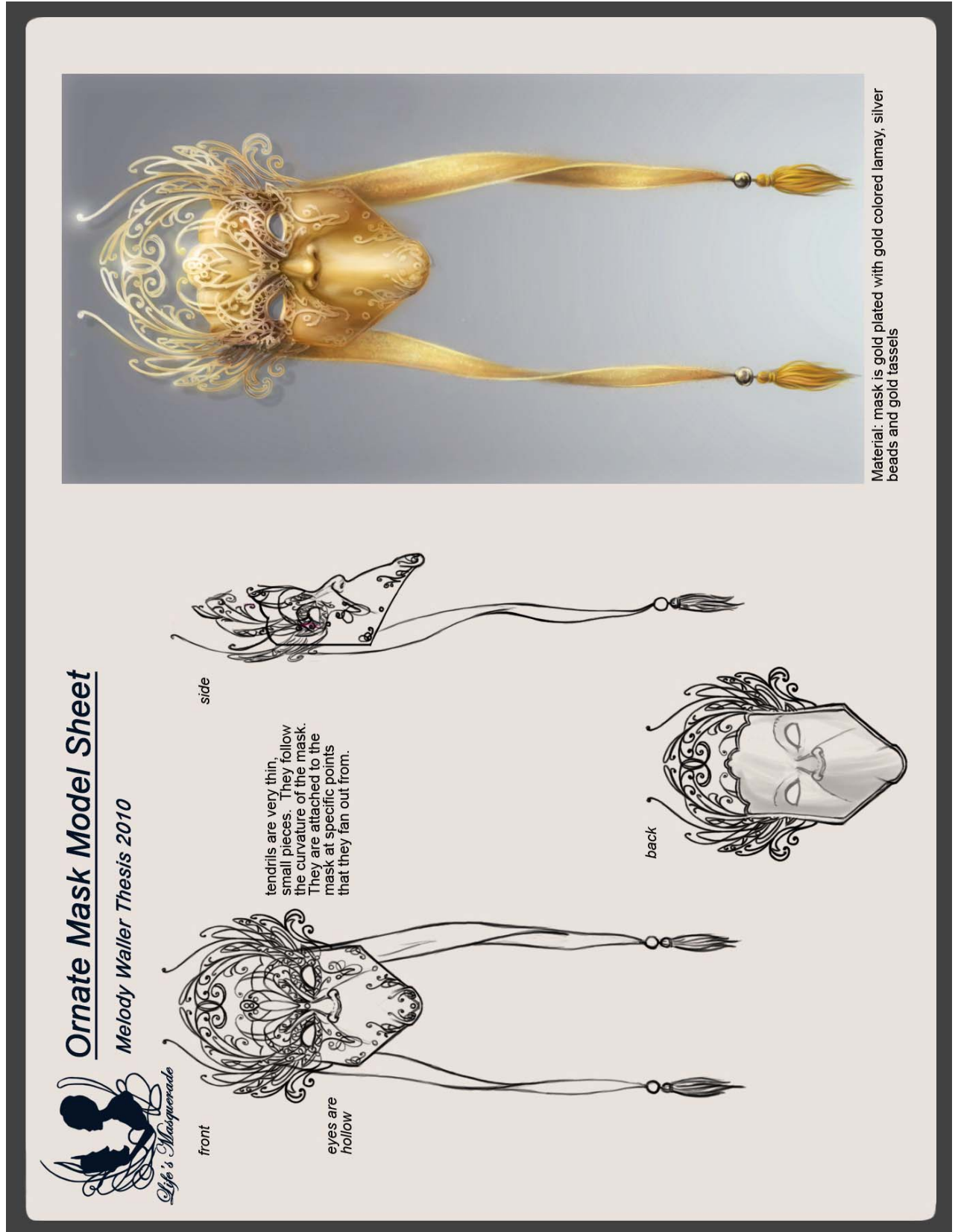
Illus. 5. Ornate Mask Model Sheet
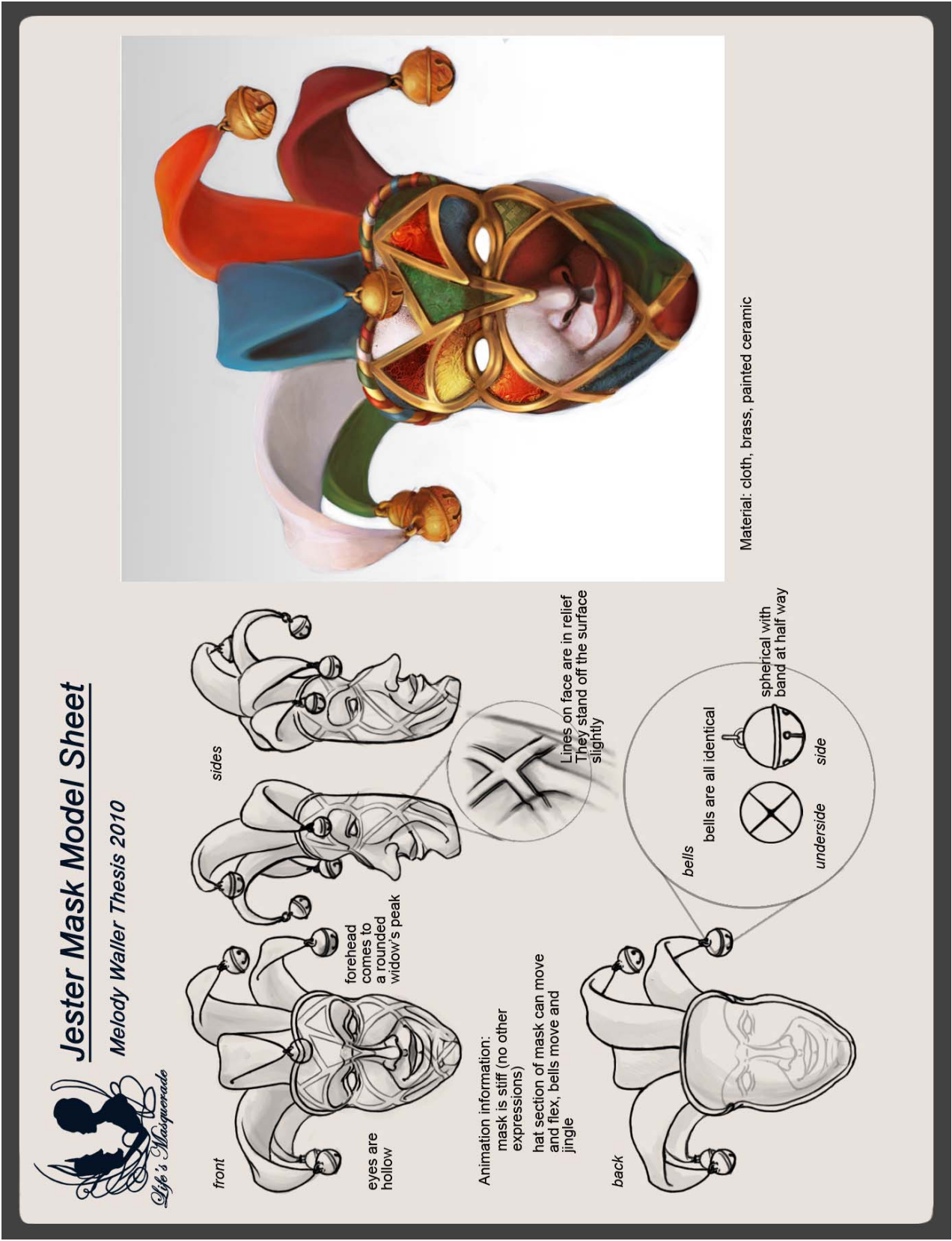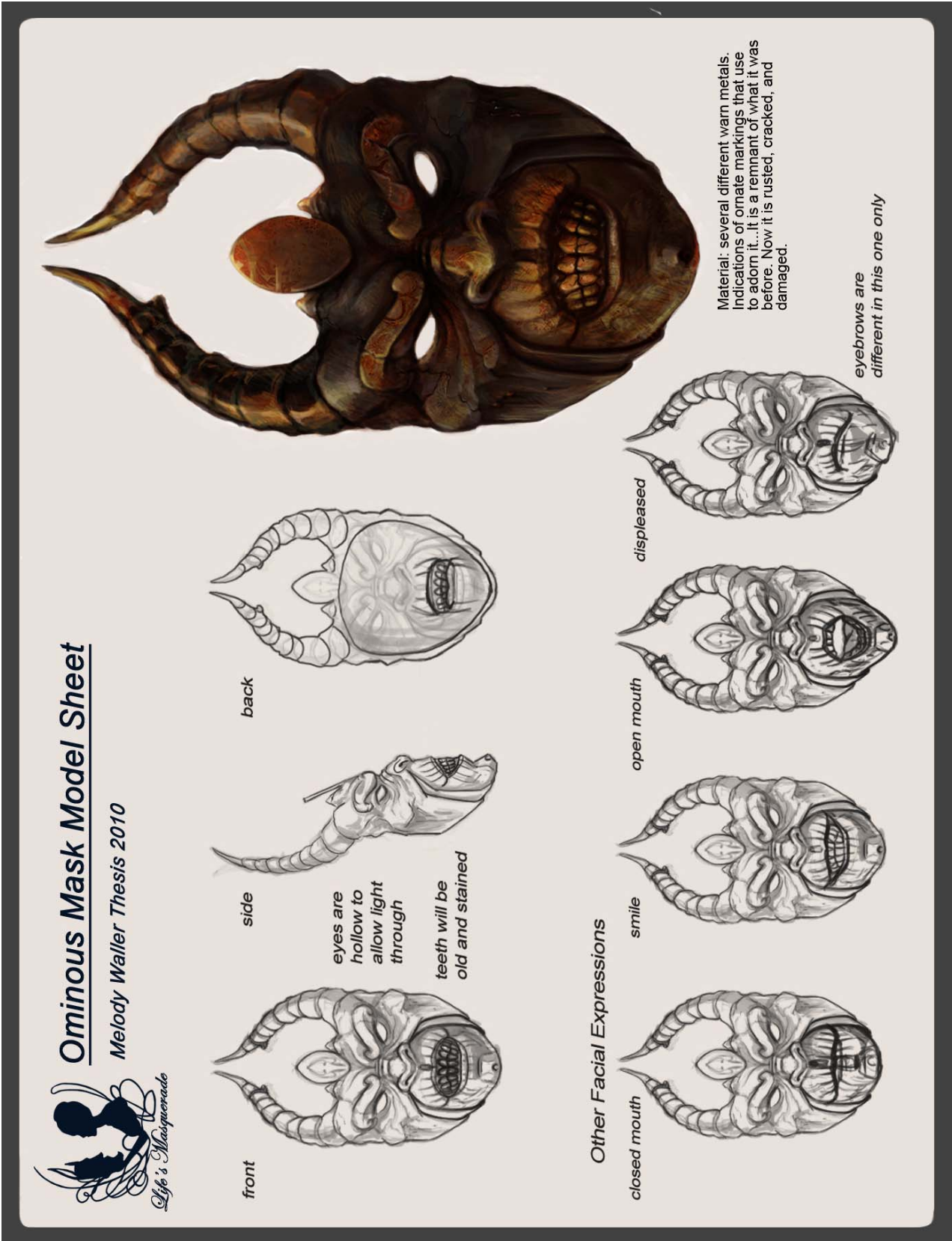
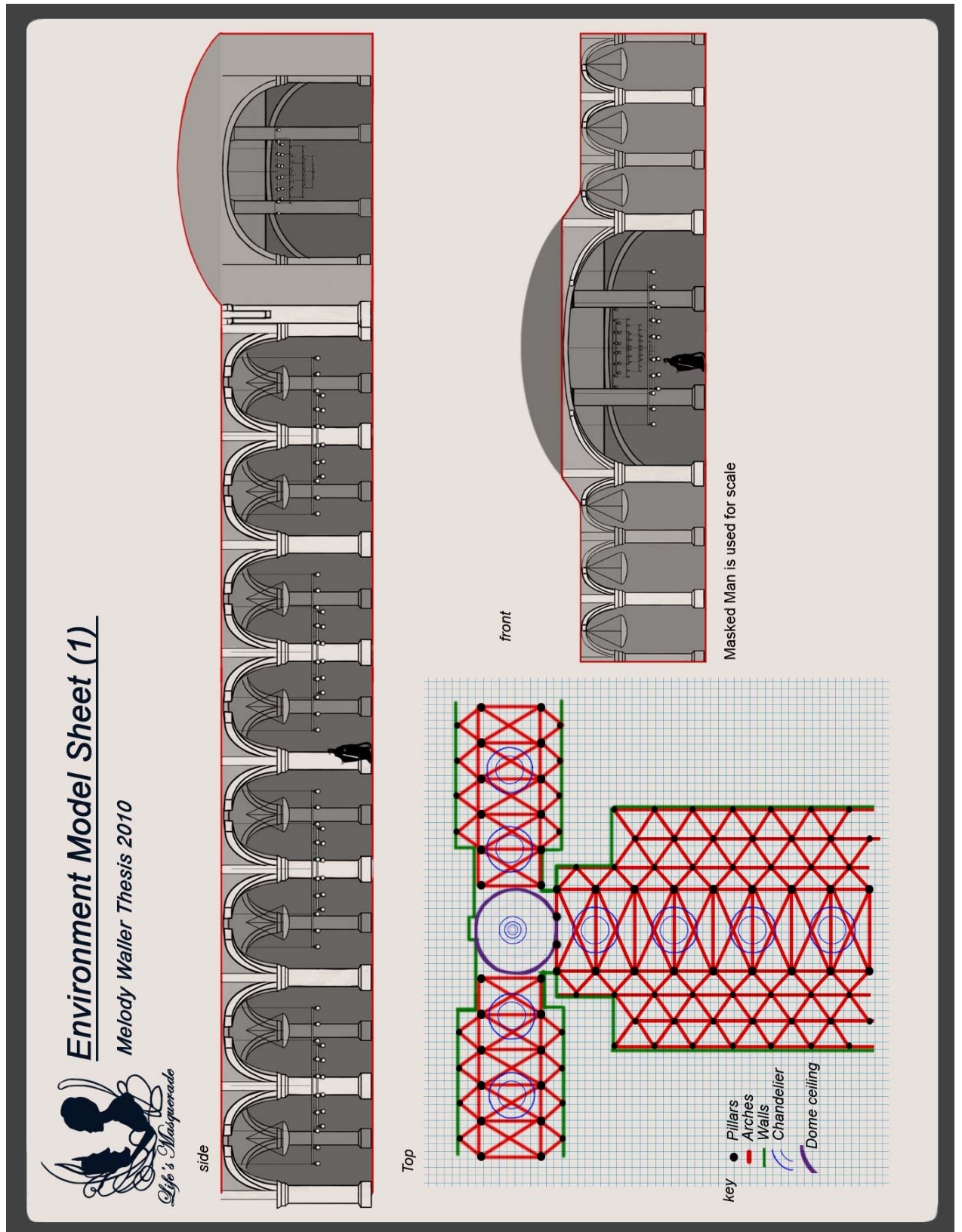Illus. 6. Jester Mask Model Sheet
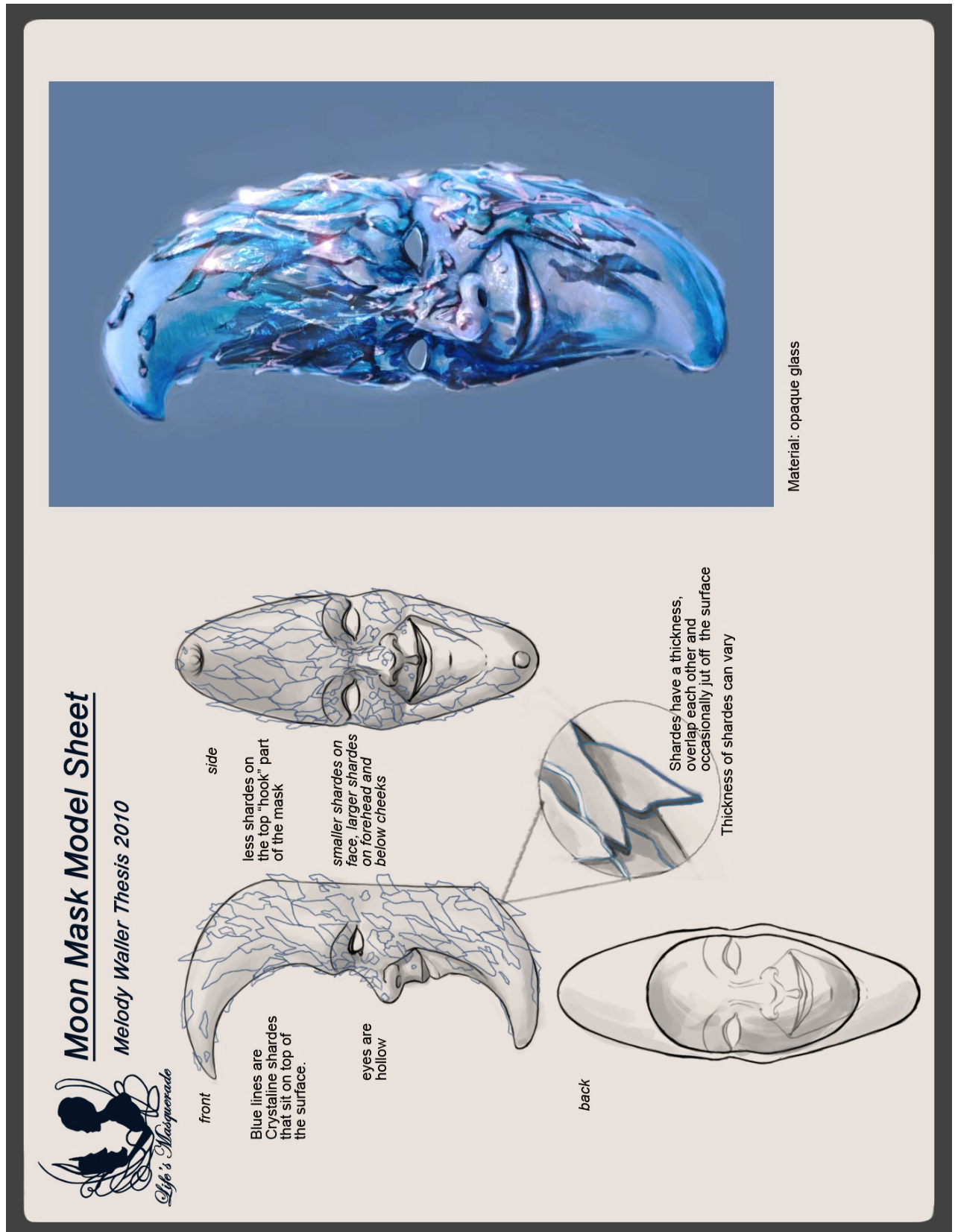
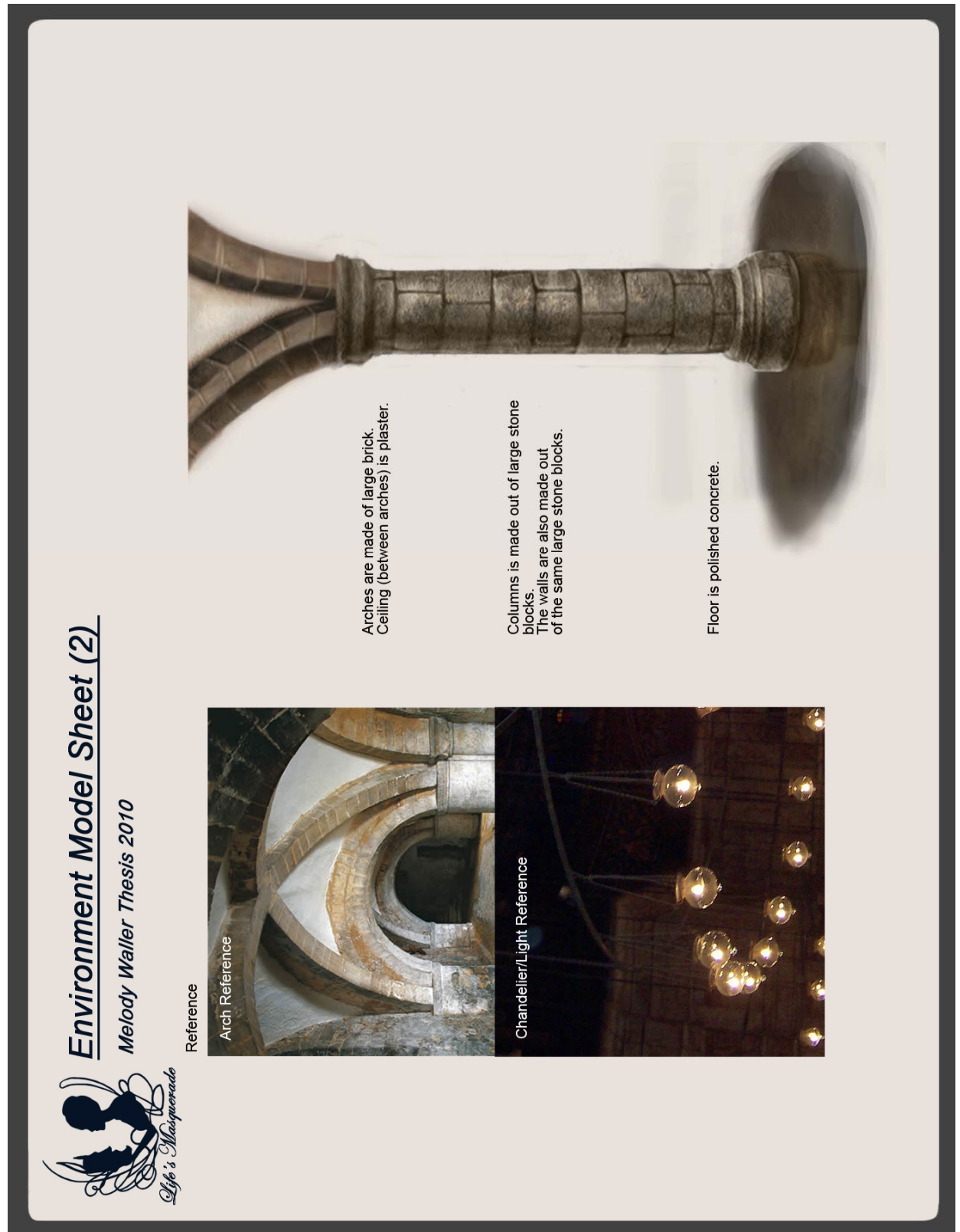Illus. 7. Moon Mask Model Sheet
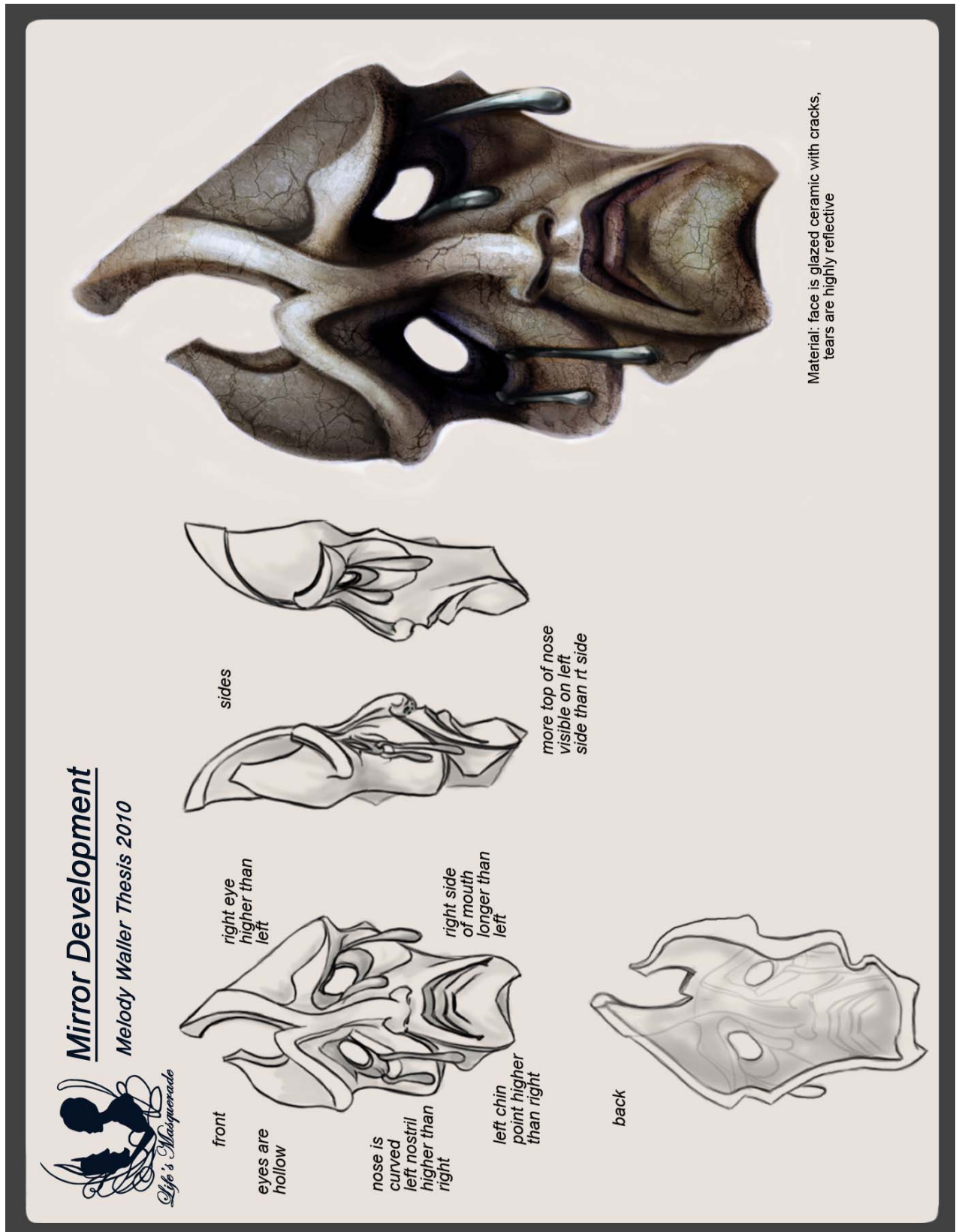
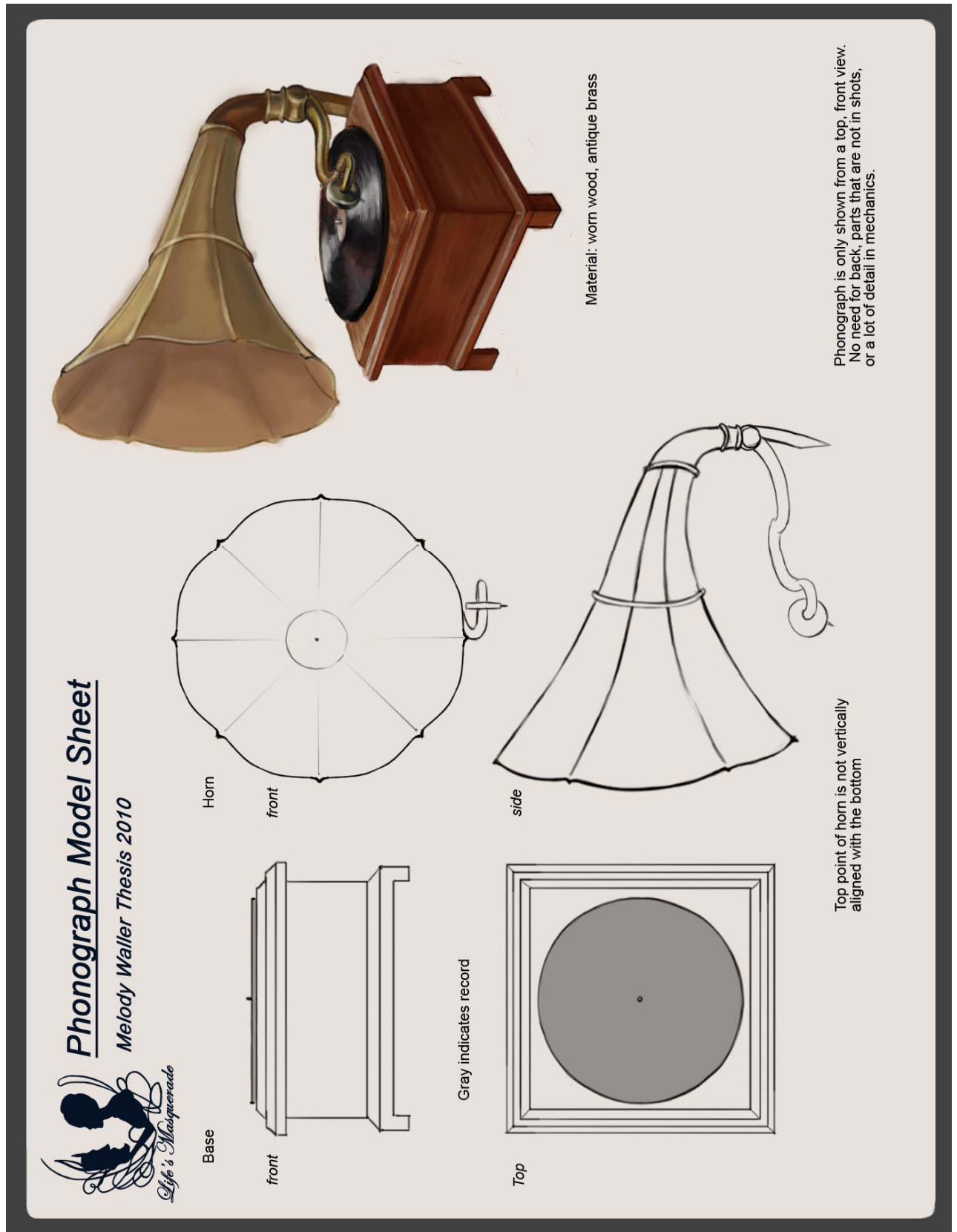Illus. 8. Sad Mask Model Sheet

Illus. 9. Ominous Mask Model Sheet
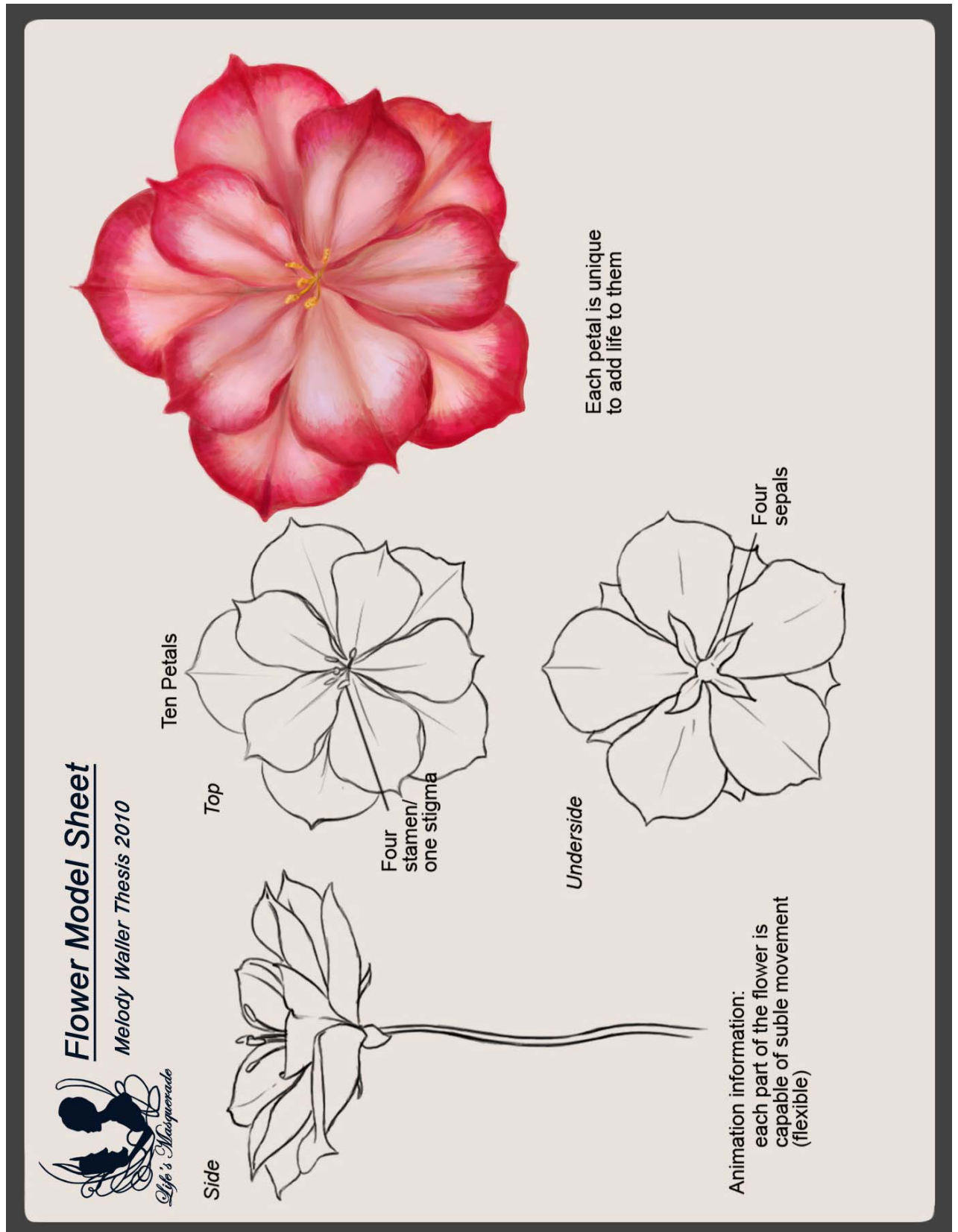
Illus. 10. Environment Model Sheet (1)

Illus. 11. Environment Model Sheet (2)

Phonograph Model Sheet

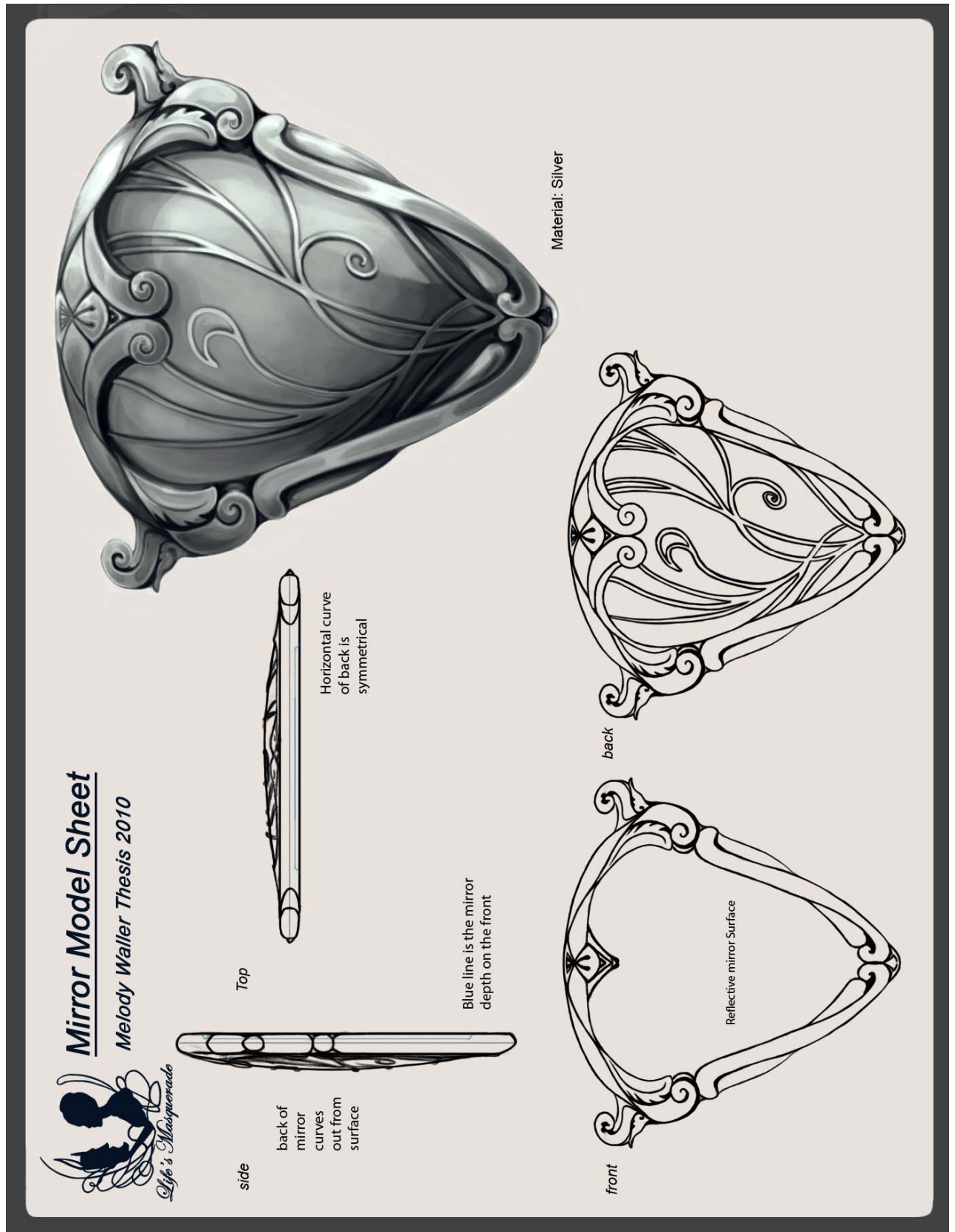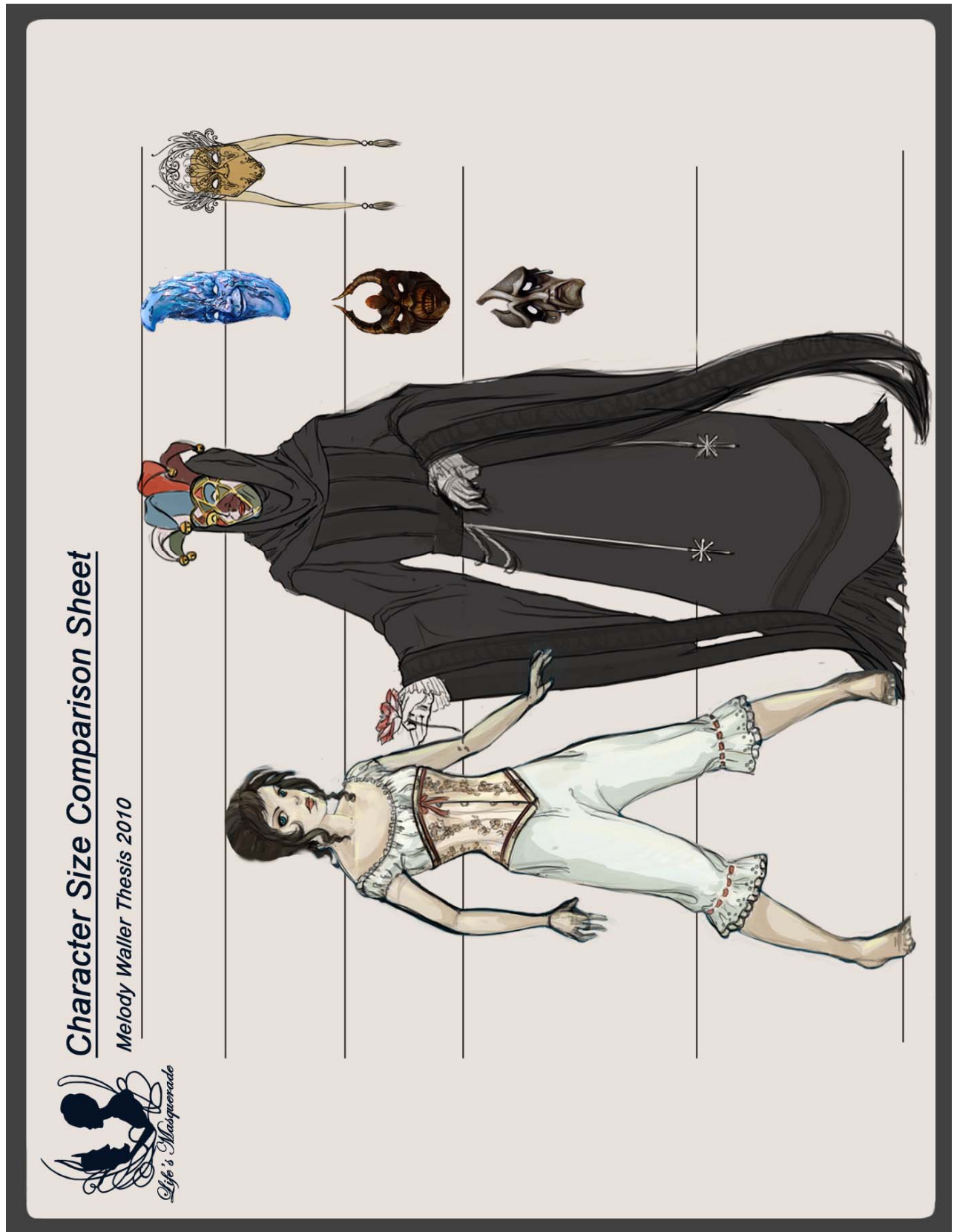Melody Waller Thesis 2010

Life's Masquerade

Base

front

Gray indicates record

Top

Horn

front

side

Material: worn wood, antique brass

Phonograph is only shown from a top, front view. No need for back, parts that are not in shots, or a lot of detail in mechanics.

Top point of horn is not vertically aligned with the bottom

Illus. 12. Phonograph Model Sheet

Flower Model Sheet

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Life's Masquerade

Top

Ten Petals

Four stamen/one stigma

Underside

Four sepals

Side

Each petal is unique to add life to them

Animation information: each part of the flower is capable of suble movement (flexible)

Illus. 13. Flower Model Sheet

Mirror Model Sheet

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Material: Silver

Top

Horizontal curve
of back is
symmetrical

side

back of
mirror
curves
out from
surface

Blue line is the mirror
depth on the front

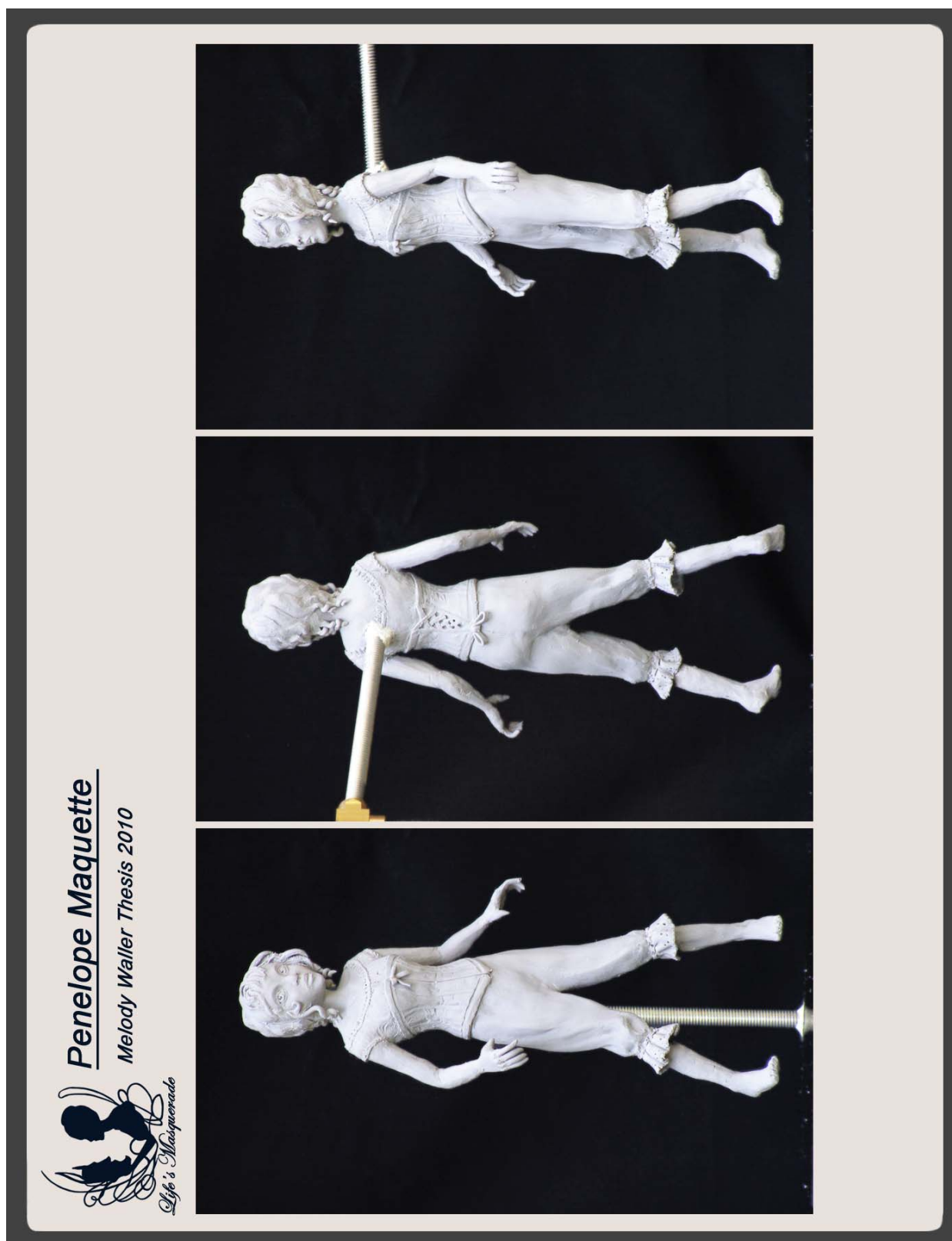back

front

Reflective mirror Surface

Illus. 14. Mirror Model Sheet
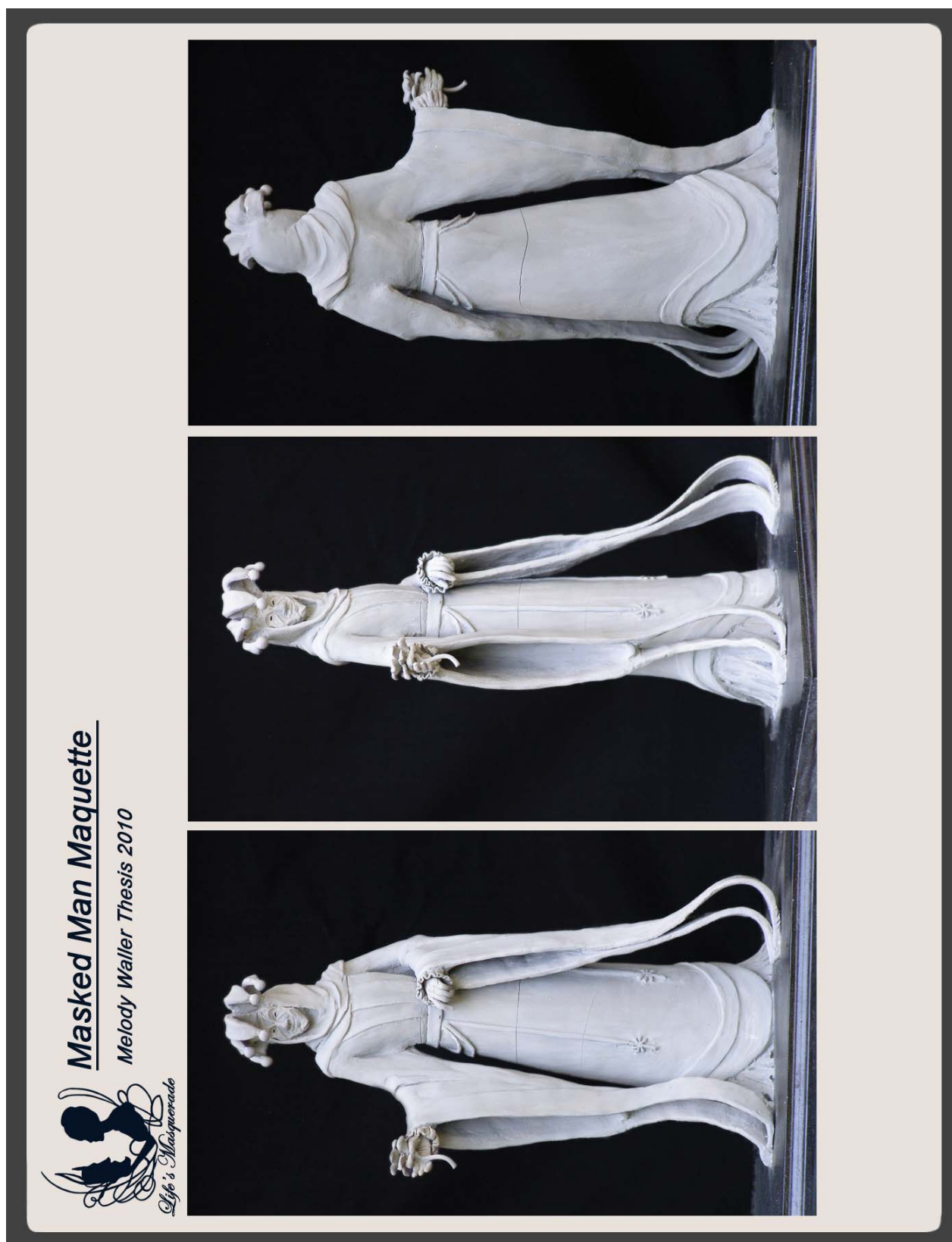
Illus. 15. Character Size Comparison Sheet

Appendix K: Maquettes

Illus. 1: Penelope Maquette

Illus. 2: Masked Man Maquette