

~ CARTONEROS ~

An animated documentary about a death experience

Hochschule Luzern. Design & Kunst

Documentation - Master of Arts in Film / Animation

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Advisors:

Anja Kofmel, Ted Sieger, Marine Hugonnier.

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Luzern, CH.

Logline:

In 1936, after a death experience, an artisan portrays through his carton craft skills the creatures he witnessed.

Synopsis:

One night of 1936, a couple of carton artisans from Mexico City are working on a carton Judas representation for a '50 pesos prize' contest. Adela, who is pregnant, enters the room where Pedro is working and reminds him to take the herbal tea medicine insisting that if he doesn't, he could die.

The next day, during the burning Judas celebration, Pedro suffers a big pain in his belly and faints to the ground. The atmosphere of the background changes until he awakes in a completely different universe full of trees and mysterious sounds.

While Adela is practicing herbal cleaning rituals and praying for him to get better, Pedro narrates through an original recorded interview, his death experience in which, after a series of surreal events, zoomorphic creatures stalk him yelling "Alebrije!"

When Pedro finally comes back to life, he and his wife, decide to recreate in carton figures those horrible creatures Pedro witnessed and sell in the market Abelardo Rodríguez, where Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo appear among the first customers.

Detailed description of the project:

Title: Cartoneros

Length: 10 minutes, animated documentary film

Technique: Stop Motion

Target group: +12

Distribution target: Film festivals. Permanent exhibitions at Museums

Language: Spanish

Format: 2K 16:9

Director: Carlos Soto

Producer: Paola Rivera

Animation Director: Miguel Anaya

D.P. : Sandra de Silva

Visual Development: Diana Luna

Music: Felipe Pérez / Zindu Kano

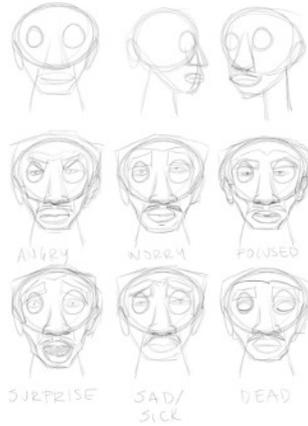
Sound design: Carlos Cortés

Motivation:

When I came to study, I brought from Mexico a subject that had been matter of passion for me some years before. Then, while undertaking a first draft script, I realized I was also dealing with very personal aspects that resembled the memories and emotions I felt when my father was in a coma for two years with vague tints of consciousness. It seemed he was literally living in some other world far from us. That is why I decided to honor not my father, but instead Pedro Linares, who despite he is the inventor of the most iconic Mexican popular art-craft; “Alebrijes”, his name is hardly remembered.



PEDRO LINARES, Character Design. Carlos Soto. November, 2019



ALEBRIJE, Character Design. Carlos Soto. November, 2019

I think Pedro Linares was really dead for a moment and from there he brought, more than a word, a sound: Alebrije. Perhaps a fear forced to overcome in life: the fear of dying. I knew I was also dealing with some inner fears, such as a personal way of understating fear, death and hope.

In the Mexican pre-Hispanic cosmivision, death was often the product of a sacrifice and was considered honorable and even to a certain degree desirable, according to the celebrations and dances around it. However, nowadays, death is far from being a desire of life in our contemporary world. Mexican pre-Hispanic understandings may offer us knowledge that could make us conceive death as a transcendental objective of life. What is exactly being dead? I think in a way, we are already dead. Every second our cells are being born and dying.

And those who are already dead, aren't they still so alive?

Starting point

My first intention was to recreate his experience in a VR (Virtual Reality) World full of these creatures as a installation, so I started some first drafts of the main character and one of the creatures he described but then, the process went into a much more complex path. I was dealing with a real story, so I had to do deep research on the topic and the writing of a script. This process resulted in defining a more significant concept: an Animated Documentary that exploits different ways to index authenticity, described by Anabelle Honess (2013) as “functions”; such as substitutive, non-mimetic substitution and evocative. These theoretical aspects are better exposed in my written thesis:

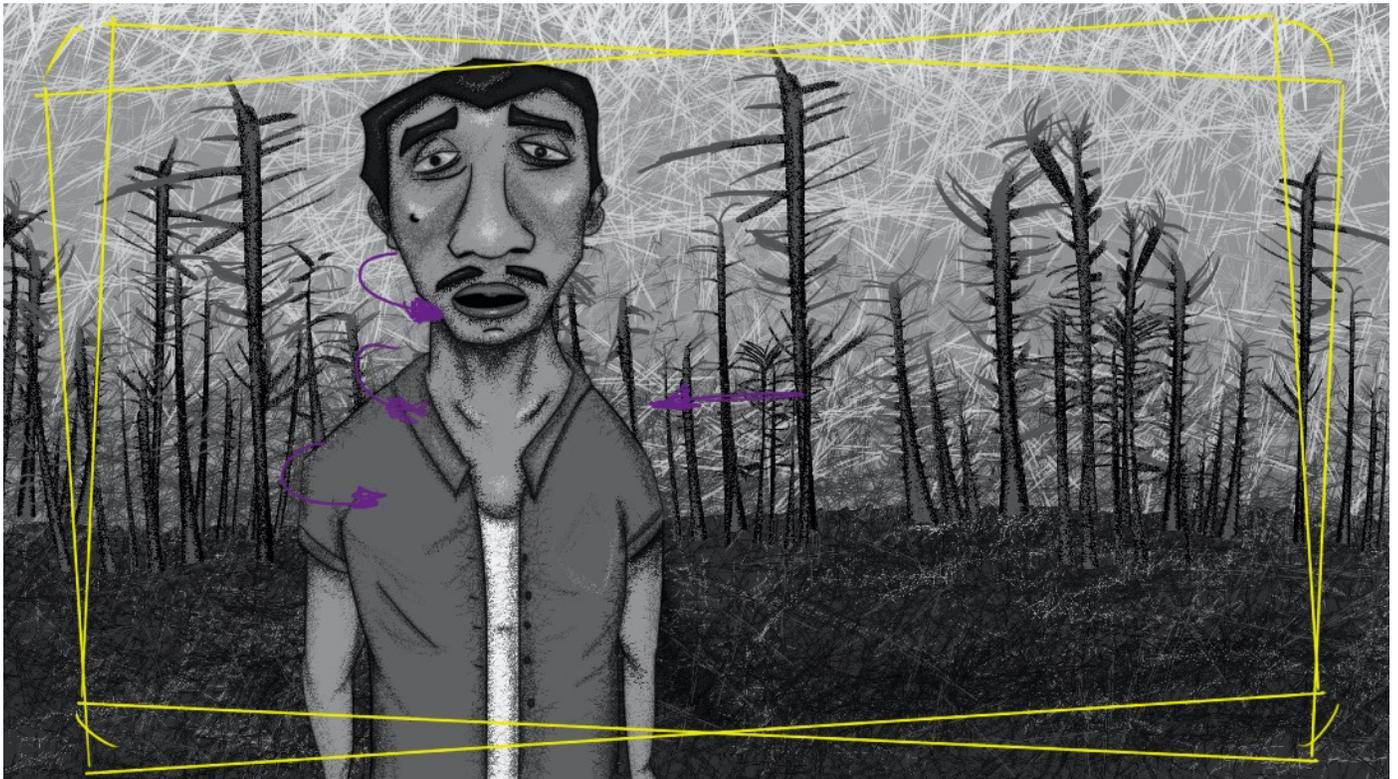
“How can imagery affect authenticity in animated documentaries?” Mentor: Florian Krautkrämer.

Aesthetic and technical development:

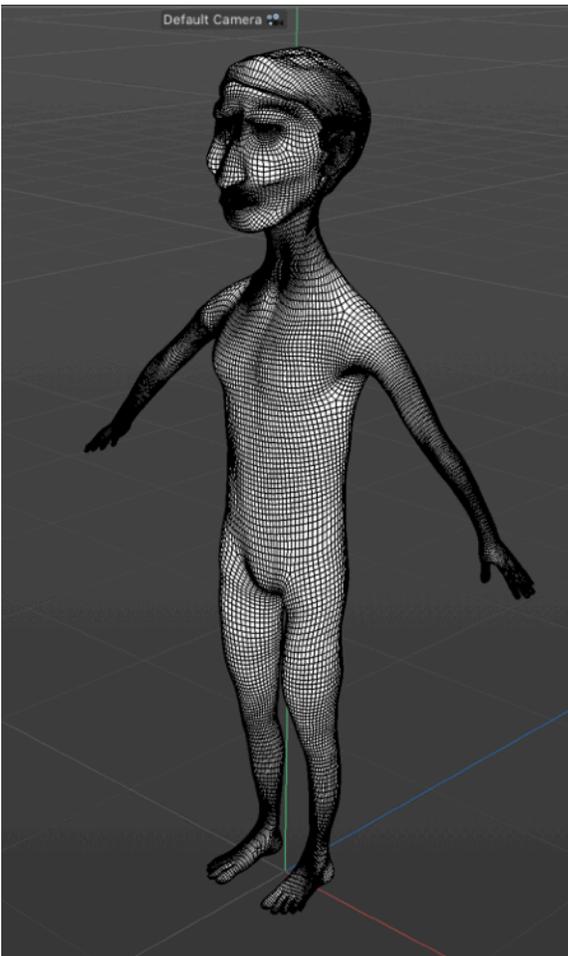
At this point, because the length and complexity of the script, the project wasn't anymore a VR experience, but instead a short film. I decided to refer to the two most important art movements of the 1930's decade in Mexico, according to the two main different worlds: muralist paintings for the living world and engraved wood for the death world. The next step was working on the 3D modeling and texturing to get this look.



Living World Concept Still. Carlos Soto. February, 2020.



Death World Concept Still. Carlos Soto. February, 2020.



Pedro Linares 3D model (C4D) and 3D painting (Zbrush), Carlos Soto. July, 2020

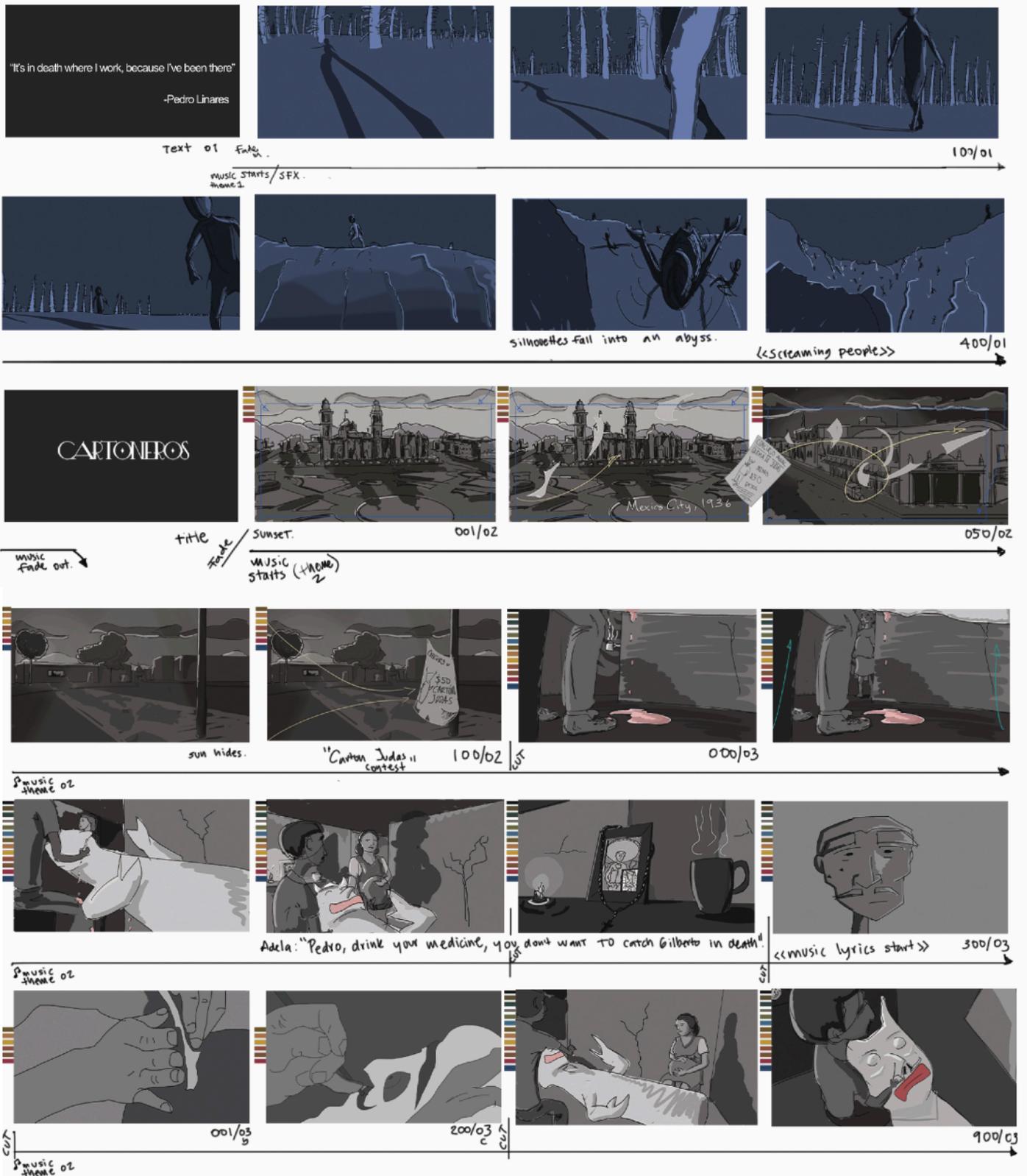


C4D + Arnold "Engraved tests" render Carlos Soto. July, 2020

<https://vimeo.com/412256325/bf6f41f02e>

Storyboard and Animatic:

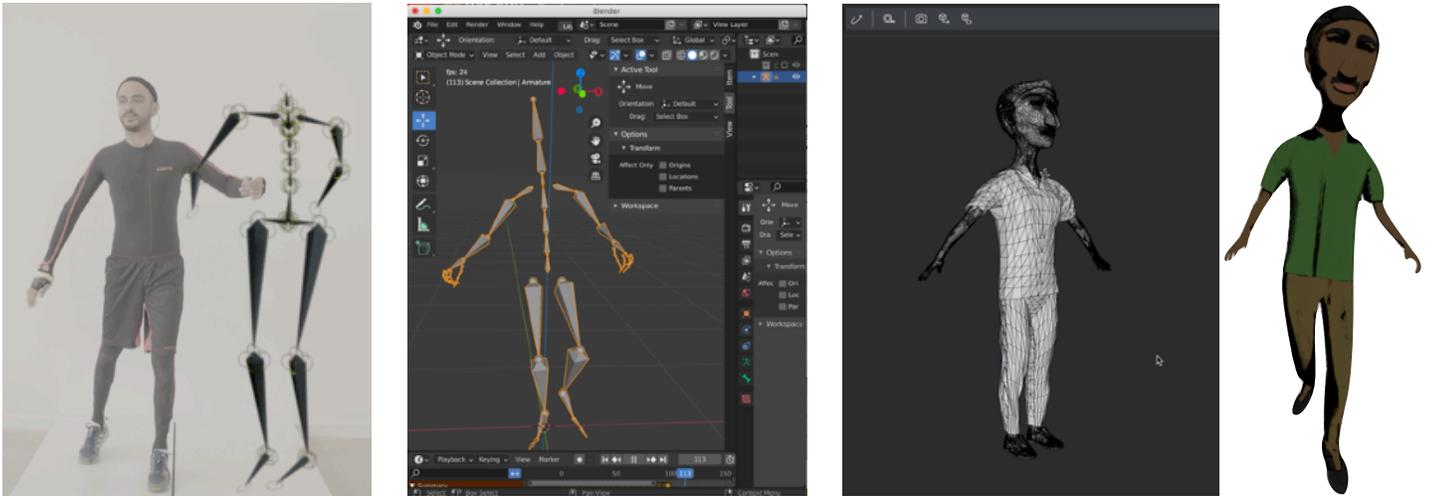
During the third semester, I learned a lot, both from bibliography and courses, the theoretical and technical aspects of scripting and storyboarding. I improved my drawing abilities and understanding of visual storytelling. The complete Storyboard is part of the Dossier.



Storyboard development, Carlos Soto.

At the same time, convinced of keep going with a 3D animation short film, but without having a team of animators, I started trying Motion Capture X-sens and libraries such as Mixamo from Adobe.

With the 3D textured models I worked on the binding and mixing animations processes. With all this work done, I started the animatic which was explaining quite well the rhythm, positions, actions, lighting and cameras. A future re-animation of details was necessary , but without funding, the plan started to seem far from reality.



MOCAP, (Xsens, Mixamo, C4D binding) Carlos Soto. September 2020- June 2021



Illustration, (Photoshop) Carlos Soto.

3D model, rigging, animating, texturing (Zbrush-C4D) Carlos Soto.

Preproduction

In September 2021, I traveled to Mexico and visited the house where Pedro Linares used to live and work. Among all the previous research I had done until that moment, such as face-to-face interviews with his relatives, looking for film footage, and reading books and articles, there was only one thing I didn't do before. It was visiting the Mexican National Audio Archive. There, I found an interview done to Pedro Linares in 1990. This interview was transmitted only once on a radio show that same year and never again had been exposed again. When I contacted the owner of the interview, an 80 years old journalist, he vehemently agreed on this audio becoming the core of this film.

(Ricardo Montejano, Day of the Dead, 1990, Radio Education)

At that moment I started working on the Dossier for the Mexican Funding. They immediately suggested changing this project technique into a stop motion done with carton. Of course, because it made sense the idea was before in my mind, but with all the work done, I was refusing it. Without wasting more time I quickly get in touch with one of the most important carton artisans of Mexico City to teach me how to do carton figures and at the same time I started gathering the crew for the film production.

The complete animatic can be seen in the following link: <https://vimeo.com/701989596/87a7ba6763>



Character development. Diana Luna, October, 2021.

A new challenge: Stop Motion

After a complete workshop of 8 hours per day for 2 weeks in Mexico City, I ended up with good knowledge about how to do Alebrijes and their materials, colours, and even got closer to Pedro Linares who was a colleague of my teacher, a recognised carton artisan of Mexico City, Martín Durán.



Alebrijes Workshop, December, 2021. Martín Durán.

I was ready to work on the puppets so I 3D printed the model of Pedro Linares for doing the mold and started trying with different materials.



3D printing and mould testing, January, 2022.

In February 2022, I enrolled to the Stop Motion BA course taught by Irmgard Birrer and Adrian Flückiger.



I tried with materials that were not achieving the puppet look I wanted, until I finally used foam covered by paper. For the face I used Super Sculpy and painted it with magnetic painting for moving mouth and eyebrows.

The glue I'm using is wheat flour, which I started using during the Alebrijes workshop. For the other props I used wood covered of paper and carton.



Stop Motion course, February, 2022.

Getting this textures on 3D it's still a challenge for big studios and would had been highly expensive. My goal was achieved, I get the aesthetic look I was looking for and now was time to work on an animation test. I decided to work on the scene in which Pedro awakes in the World of Death, because it proves not only the animated character but also some animation of props.



In this link is a video with the animation test:
<https://vimeo.com/706211814/0923301504>

Next Steps

I will still look for funding both in Switzerland and Mexico to complete the film this year or next one. In my professional career, I will explore different creative ways of expressing ideas about death.

Additional content

As part of the graduation agreement I developed a complete animatic which can be seen in the following link: <https://vimeo.com/701989596/87a7ba6763>, the final shot of the “death valley” <https://vimeo.com/706211814/0923301504> a dossier for producers and a still image of how the “living world” will look like.



Final look and feel of the living world, June 2022.

Thank you for reading.

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