Production Dossier of
See
a film by Julia Nicolescu
Poetic, Coming of age, Experimental | Target audience: young adults | Length: 4 minutes |
2D digital animation mixed with paint on glass
Declaration of Intention

In a vast and lonely beach there is a girl and a giant wave. It goes on forever, never crashing at her but always building up, stronger and more powerful. The water is dark and mysterious, the girl feels a strange pull to it.

This is a dream I often had when I was younger, and strangely, so did my mother. But for her, the fear and anxiety dominated her. She can't swim and feels like she is trapped in the middle of the ocean.

I began this journey by being inspired by this dream my mother and I shared when I was younger: it is the story of mother and daughter in the moment of disconnection; finding themselves and facing their fears. It is a poetic narrative, using symbolism of water and the ocean. The daughter yearns for the ocean, has a strange pull to it, meanwhile the mother fears it.

It is a film about womanhood marked with the different stages in a woman's life. I want in this story to explore the universal links to motherhood and the ones I have with my mother. To explore this dynamic, and reflect on some questions and issues I encountered in my life.
The story of mother and daughter drifting apart.

Water is where they have the connection and disconnection. The water of the womb and the seawater.

The mother cannot enter the sea and the daughter wants to go to the deep.
Premise

The Daughter has to break the bond with her Mother to become her true self. However this bond is never forgotten, it is a part of her essence.
Film

Link to watch Film.
Link to open Storyboard.
**A poem in 3 colors**

We first have the curiosity and playfulness of the Daughter as a child, playing in a friendly sea; The Mother protects the Daughter in the friendly sea after it presented a first threat (the big wave);

The origins and earning of the intimacy the Mother and Daughter share when they are in the womb together; In the womb alone, the Daughter grows older and her hair becomes like her mother’s, made of sea waves, incorporating the influences and connection with the sea in herself;

The young woman surfaces in a familiar place, a beach where the water is darker and stronger; The Daughter calls for her mother to join her, but the Mother hesitates in fear; The young woman faces another threat (a second big wave) as the Mother watches from the beach; After the Daughter dives for the big wave, facing the challenge, we shift perspectives to the Mother. She takes courage and enters the sea and both are rejoined; The women play by the water and reconnect, the image morphs into a mother and small child, the Daughter’s image of when she saw the sea for the first time.
“See,” a film about the restless feeling of breaking the bond with our mothers while trying to find a way to recover it. Throughout the film, the sea is presented as a metaphor for the world. Therefore, going to the deep waters represents the yearning to reach independence and explore it.

In this film, there are three main characters: the Daughter, the Mother, and the Sea. Each of these characters show a different emotional stage throughout the story, revealed by the way the sea is portrayed—hence the colors and brushstrokes change as the story progresses.

The film begins with live action footage of a calm and empty beach, as if the audience were observing the waves' movements from the sand. This scene cuts to the paint on glass with a window view of our first character, the sea. We slowly enter the story by syncing together our breaths, observing and understanding the language in which this story plays out. The next character we see is a woman sitting by the beach watching the sea. As we cut to a close-up side shot of this woman, her hair is animated with the strokes of the paint, the camera pans to the side and we get submerged in the textures of the water.

This first part of the story is depicted in brighter blue, portraying the Daughter’s innocence. She plays and explores the sea and has no fear of it. However, when a big wave approaches the shore, we see how little the Daughter is in this place. A giant hand blocks the wave, and the Mother is introduced as the wave approaches. The Mother has a goddess image, a giant with hair made of the sea's waves as if she is a part of the water, in contrast to the child, whose hair does not have the same texture. As the Mother lovingly embraces the Daughter, the film’s color shifts to red.

The red is vibrant and pigmented in the womb, a place of utmost protection and comfort. In this place, a fetus appears and grows alone. Nevertheless, just after, the Mother reappears and embraces the Baby, representing the return to the womb when the first bond between Mother and Child was born. At one point, the mother lets go of the baby, sinking back to the red and disappearing. When that happens, we see the Daughter morphing from a baby to a young woman: she has grown, and her hair is now textured with paint, like her mother. As she swims up from the depths of the water, the red turns into the blue ocean, then finally a deep darker blue, almost purple, as she surfaces as a young woman.

The Daughter swims freely in the waters in this new, yet familiar place. She spots a figure by the beach, outside the ocean: her Mother. The Daughter calls for her, and for the first time, we see the perspective of the Mother. She is no longer the image of a giant goddess, but a common woman like the Daughter. However, the Mother hesitates to enter the sea. She stands by the shore with a look of surprise and wonders as she watches her Daughter in the vast and threatening sea—the Mother can not swim. The calm moment is interrupted by a giant wave approaching the Daughter. The Mother seems distressed and tries to warn the young. When the Daughter faces back, she dives under the wave into the water, accepting and navigating the threat the sea shows her.

At that point, the Mother gets confused about what happened to her Daughter and enters the sea, though only in its shallow part. Just as she starts worrying, the Daughter playfully throws water on her, appearing safely by her side. They both play around in the water. When they take their hands together, the image morphs into a mother and small child, the Daughter’s image of when she saw the sea for the first time.
Style
The works of Aleksandr Petrov inspired me to use paint-on-glass animation to provide a deeper personal point of view to the story: a personal story told by my own hands, brushstrokes, and artistic expression in the frame. A lot of references from impressionist painters inspired “See”, such as Monet, Renoir, and Theo van Rysselberghe. Those artists have a wide repertoire of paintings that portray different types of water; peaceful nature scenery, french gardens with women in boats, and wild strong ocean waves. Those references always piqued my interest due to the combination of brushstrokes and forms that would represent real-life images, while still giving nature and characterization to these types of water. However, what resonated with me the most was the movement in these paintings, and how they would translate into this technique. With that, I realized I wanted to explore the style by enhancing the textures and movement of the paint to represent my characterization of the sea seeing that I am an animator, not a painter. I am more concerned with the movement I could create with the paint-on-glass technique than to achieve an image of realism and minute detail.
The character's design was developed during the storyboard and animatic stage. When exploring the possibilities in the paint, I was also exploring how these characters would look like.

Sketch and notes from director - "mother constraining this sea to be a controlled and safe world for daughter."
Animation for specific scenes was done a rough in digital animation that I use as reference in Dragonframe to animate the paint on glass. After that I use this same rough animation to do the cleanup (in TVPaint) of the lines for the characters, as shown in the image 1.

Image 1, rough animation. Blue lines for digital animation and red lines for paint animation

Only paint on glass, no color correction

Final Frame
Each sequence is marked by its color: bright blue marking the curiosity and playfulness of the Daughter as a child; red providing a warm and comfortable environment that symbolizes the first moment of the bond between mother and child; and blue-violet representing the junction of blue and red that the Daughter has gone through, the consolidation of experiences that has led her to express herself in this new yet familiar place. The background and characters are merged in the paint, with the negative space — the illumination from the light table — becoming the shapes of the Mother and Daughter characters. The lines in digital animation are done in TVPaint, and follow the same colors of its sequence, with a glow effect applied to it. The young Daughter is all made of digital lines and has a transparency inside her lines, so that we can see the paint of the water going through her — it’s as if she is a blank canvas and is experiencing everything as something new, taking it all in. Throughout the film, the Mother has her hair made with paint, its color changing depending on each sequence. At the end of “See”, both Daughter and Mother have their hair made of paint. When in wide shots framing — where the characters are on a small scale — their lines are all drawn as white since their filling is supposed to be the clear illumination from the light table.
Style in Blue

Final Frame
Style in Red

Final Frame
Style in Purple
Sound

The sound design of “See” is based on two fundamental elements: authentic sound effects of beach and underwater ambiances and the interaction between two melodic motifs, symbolizing the Daughter and the Mother. To achieve a realistic ambiance for the animation’s sound effects and to create a contrast with the more ethereal moments of the narrative, a combination of effects from online libraries and foley techniques were employed. As for the music, the Mother’s melody embodies a deep, lower-octave sound with greater intervals between notes, representing age, patience, and care. In contrast, the Daughter’s melody is constructed upon a 4-note arpeggio, played in higher octaves, signifying playfulness and carefree spirit. However, as the story progresses, the Daughter’s melody gradually descends, representing her transition from childhood to adulthood and the growing proximity between Mother and Daughter. Although the melodies initially diverge, they eventually converge into a hybrid melody, symbolizing the strengthening of the bond between Mother and Daughter. Acoustic instrumentation, such as guitar and piano, was employed to maintain an organic sound and avoid any sense of artificiality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item description</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Virtual Budget</th>
<th>Re:Anima Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>600.00 euros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storyboard/ Animatic</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>4,500.00 euros</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation Roughs</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>1,700.00 euros (Senior Animator)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation Paint on Glass</td>
<td>2.5 months</td>
<td>5,500.00 euros (Senior Animator 60% and Junior Animator 40%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation Clean up</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>1,000.00 euros (Junior Animator)</td>
<td>100.00 euros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animation Total</td>
<td>3.5 months</td>
<td>8,200.00 euros (60% Senior Animator and 40% Junior Animator)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>3,500.00 euros</td>
<td>300.00 euros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composing</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>2,400.00 euros</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>2,000.00 euros</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>20,600.00 euros</td>
<td>1,000.00 euros</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Team

Director, story, paint on glass animation, 2D animation, editor.......................Julia Nicolescu
Producer...........................................................Re:Anima European Joint Master in Animation
Clean up artists.............................Helena Coelho, Julia Nicolescu, Rebeca Nigri, Toni Soares
Sound Design and Music............................................................................................Yann Lemos
Supervisor................................................................................................................Tuula Leinonen
Advisor.....................................................................................................................Eliane Gordeeff