Moonshine Babies

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Moonshine Babies

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Credits

Actors:
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Arghavan Heydareslam

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Abstract

Moonshine Babies is a two-screen film made of collage/cut-out stop-motion and live-action. It is a visual poem based on my journals from when I recently started living in the US as an outsider. The experience left me feeling divided between the empty present and memories of the past, suggesting that there are collective memories among a group of interconnected individuals that unite them within a single narrative.

There was a moment when I asked, "If you are your memories, what does it mean to be somewhere you have no memories of and no one has memories of you there?"

Memories are not stagnant. They evolve and transform with us. The more one revisit them, the more they morph, creating a dynamic interplay between past and present. In Moonshine Babies, I delve into the profound impact of memories on our identity, while the present context shapes how we remember our past.

Space, as the vessel that carries our memories, is a pivotal element in my work. The visuals and textures of our living spaces imprint on our memory, shaping our sense of self. Displacement, a disruptive force, can alter this flow of spaces imprinted in memories. Yet, even in the act of remembering a place, the experience remains spatial, albeit more fragmented than reality. To capture the essence of memories within physical spaces, I blend collage and stop-motion in Moonshine Babies.

Fluid but segmental, the images within the Moonshine Babies collages are textures or objects that connect me to people I wanted to keep close to me and belongings I could not carry with me.
The Methodology and the Body of Work

Practice as research is a process that sparked in me first through a talk with a friend who did not see herself as an artist but as a researcher.

She used art to embody creative energy to further investigate and work through a problem she cared about. After that talk, something started to grow in me: to capture the process and value it as much as the product.

This assertion manifested within my work: The process of Moonshine Babies turned into a feedback loop for me. I will provide more information about how this happened later.

A little background: I faced significant challenges for the first time in my life after starting my master of fine art program: the demand for tangible products and a shareable progressive process that ends in a completed film in a way others can evaluate with predetermined deadlines. This was a stark contrast to how I used to work before. Previously while studying narrative Cinema, I had a different approach to the creative process in which I took a long time alone to write a perfect script before sharing it with people, and then I got feedback about if the story makes sense storywise from my teachers. The challenging part was that although one can criticize the timeline of a narrative script it is still a part of a bigger visual project in which the way you show the story (production) is as important as the story itself and no one can really imagine the result until it is done. I constantly felt that my initial intention was being neglected, so I wouldn't present my work for feedback until it was completely finished. In this new MFA critique space, there was no time to finish a whole project in between each presentation, so I was challenged to find other approaches to the filmmaking process.

On the other hand, I have become more of an observer because of the amount of artists and artwork I consume on a daily basis. I was only sure of one thing, and that was that I wanted to appreciate the process as much as the product, even going further to find a way to exhibit the process as the body of work. This was perhaps the reason I was initially attracted to time-based media: the ability to capture and present dynamic processes.

In this paper, I delve into the unique aspects that have shaped the body of my work, discussing how they have piqued my interest, whether through personal experiences or inspiration from other artists. I also explore the methodologies I've employed to delve into these themes, hoping to inspire and intrigue others with my journey.

How can narrative film be considered art practice as research if the only part of the process shared with viewers is a finished film?
How can Storytelling be a research?

I have carried a vast interest in stories from childhood, first by hearing and reading them and later by making them. I inherited this from my mother. She exposed me to many imaginary worlds, stories, and tales. I started looking for story elements in my surroundings. That was when elements of magic entered in; later leading me to magical realism. What intrigued me about this genre was its hyperreal spontaneity in encountering everyday life without its need to make the events more comprehensible. Magical realism finds its existence in not making sequential logic for life's events. Another element that affected me a lot is my constant exposure to psychology through my mother again. I became more sensitive to human behavior, resulting in imagining revised endings for events and interactions.

Later, through my mother's suggestion, I read Women Who Run with the Wolves by Clarissa Pinkola Estés and two books by Marie-Luise von Franz. Shadow and Evil in Fairy Tales and The Feminine in Fairy Tales. Through these books, I became interested in how storytelling has been one of primitive human beings' desires to create a logical narrative to understand their lives.

This is where symbols, subconscious, and dreams become interesting as I learned fairy Tales, fables, and religions are all based on communal stories on which a nation bases its identity. Fables and myths are still relatable because they touch the core of our existence and root us back to our ancestors. In my opinion, They still make sense no matter how different our environment and lifestyle have become. These particular books perceive the world from a feminine point of view, and feminine archetypes are what links me to the world I am basing my work in. which is why, in my work, the main characters are women. I believe in the need to bring more feminine energy and point of view to a world ruled and structured by masculinity. My way of doing it is to read and fit myself into the work of artists who express this feminine point of view. Stacy Steers, Janie Geiser, Kelly Seers, Janelle VanderKellen, Remedios Varo, and Betye Saar are a few Artists who choose this perspective. In addition to feminist viewpoints, I share these artists' thematic exploration of surrealism and dreams.
Story; The Subject and The Methodology

I believe that the essence of a story extends far beyond mere escapism when it reflects real-life events, particularly in its portrayal of the emotional layers underlying those events. What truly captivates me is the perspective of the individuals involved in these events. In my view, a story is essentially the unfolding of events within people's minds, and it's their interactions that lend authenticity to the narrative, often conveyed through subtle details.

My perception underwent a significant shift when I began to view storytelling as both a subject of research and a methodology in itself. This shift was prompted by my recent displacement following my move to the United States. I came to the realization that I wanted to move beyond traditional screenwriting, as its inherent structure tends to overlook the exploration of emotions and the research process that I was interested in pursuing.

For me, this prompted a new approach: formulating questions for myself and utilizing storytelling and photography as tools to delve into these inquiries. This methodology allows me to explore the depths of my initial questions while capturing the essence of my experiences in a more profound and meaningful way.

To delve deeper into the intricacies of truth, one effective approach is to examine the same narratives from various perspectives across different parallel universes.

Recognizing the need for a shift in my storytelling approach, I reconsidered my traditional method of development: from initial imagination and idea-catching, to processing and personalizing, followed by the symbolic representation of the story's reality, translation into visual imagery, and the sourcing of external elements like objects, people, locations, and lighting before shooting.

While acknowledging the value of this conventional process, honed through practice, I realized its limitations. It heavily relies on language as the primary medium for comprehension and embodiment. Scripts, for instance, are structured around linguistic coding to convey the narrative's worlds.

I sought to transcend these linguistic constraints and explore storytelling as a means of portraying reality, uniquely perceived by individuals.

In this pursuit, I envisioned a new process guided by emotions rather than logic and language. Material selection would be driven by the emotions they evoke, devoid of rationalization. By observing this intuitive process, artworks would organically evolve, tailored to the specific project.
This shift, influenced by Practice as Research (PaR), positions art not as a predetermined outcome but as a vehicle for exploration. It facilitates a deeper engagement with storytelling, embracing the complexity of emotions and impulses in comprehension.

This process is manifested in my current work through introspection and the examination of my emotions. I came to understand that what I was experiencing at the time was a profound sense of emptiness, nothingness, and loss, stemming from displacement. Although "loss" accurately encapsulated my current state, further exploration revealed deeper roots tracing back to childhood experiences. This recent loss served as a catalyst, bringing to the surface an older and more profound feeling of emptiness that had haunted me since childhood.

Throughout my life, I had harbored a fear of disappearance, both of myself and those around me, which manifested in a compulsive need to fill spaces with objects. Yet, I later discovered this void within myself, projecting outward into every aspect of my life. This existential crisis left me feeling like a nonentity, unable to navigate everyday tasks due to a lack of grounding and clarity of thought. This feeling of disorientation was compounded by physical displacement and the shifting realities of our modern era.

In addition to these existential challenges, I grappled with the practical hurdles of being a filmmaker in unfamiliar territory. I lacked familiarity with the locations, language, culture, and people, making it difficult to translate my thoughts and emotions into my work. My primary struggle was finding my voice amidst uncertainty and doubt.

My research led me to autoethnography, a methodology through which scholars explore their own cultural, racial, and gender identities by examining their lives and sharing their experiences. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of complex situations that often go unspoken, shedding light on common yet overlooked struggles.

My new project emerged when I acknowledged and embraced the profound sense of loss as the foundation of my work. The prompt "I cannot see myself in the mirror" became a catalyst for exploring this internal turmoil. While returning home seemed like a potential solution, my interactions were colored by the recent experience of being away. I began my exploration by delving into the thoughts and memories that consumed me during my time in the US.
Exploration into my Culture

Joe Bousquet: "My wound existed before me; I was born to embody it."  

In a very short time after the Iranian revolution, there was a massive change in the structure of Iran's society in many ways. Iran's new authorities needed to erase much of Iran's previous history in order to establish itself. Therefore, there was a project to remove Iran's historical legacies. Elements of the new authority’s plan include 1988 executions of Iranian political prisoners, demolishing and changing the use of architecture and places, censorship in the media, destroying the pop culture of Iran, and exiling whoever was a part of Iranian identity; A plan that continues today. All followed by an 8-year war in which many people died. That was the context my parents spent their childhood in. A shift in the last ten years occurred when my generation saw how we were denied rights, talents, joy, hope, people, and sources. Pondering this, I realized that what I am experiencing is something collective and related to the environment in which I was raised. I tied this experience to my personal overwhelming sense of Loss previously mentioned and broadened it to include the experiences of people around me, and related experiences from people around me. I wanted to know how they each experience it physically/physiologically. What do they do when they lose someone/something? What does loss mean to them? To be more precise, what is the first thing they think about when they hear loss? Do they see it in their past or their future? I also realize that this topic is seen in the practice of many other Iranian artists. I see this as a long-term exploration.

Event

“In an Event, things not only change: what changes is the very parameter by which we measure the facts of change, i.e., a turning point changes the entire field within which facts appear.”

In Zizek's definition of an event, one characteristic that I found familiar is that the event happens in the past but shows itself very suddenly in the present. That reminded me of many social things that, when they happened, felt like they had happened a long time ago to me but now are finally manifesting outside. In most situations, I could not see myself or anyone else as an agent because the event happened to us and not through us. We were bodies through which this event, this collective knowledge, was configured. Recent events such as the large-scale protests following Flight 752 in Iran in 2020 or the Women, Life, Freedom movement in 2022, also in Iran, serve as

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1 Joë, bousquet, Traduit du silence, 2020, République des Lettres, Amsterdam
notable examples. This concept of event as collective knowledge combined with how individuals experience Loss created by the events leading up to this point are the basis for my collaged images and animation.

**the Face of Loss**

Our brains are very similar to the structures of cities; both have alleys, houses, and units in our heads. Based on this idea, my initial question was: If our brain and cities are similar in structures, which one was first? Is the city a mirror of our psyche or vice versa? My answer is that both affect each other like a reverberation. This makes architecture and urban design essential for exploring a nation's culture and history.

In Iran, showing up in the city can become a political act and a factor in shaping one's identity through the places one chooses to spend one's days.

As mentioned before, Iran's government has started erasing history by changing public spaces to religious or government places. Moreover, the city's identity is now tied to many factors: the city is a zone of surveillance, and cameras can be found everywhere. After the Iranian green wave in 2009, one of the most severe uprisings after the revolution, the city changed its structure with the politics of suppression. For example, they divided a two-way wide street with fences and a pedestrian walk, and they arranged their morality police and occasionally riot police in the thresholds of the fences so citizens could not escape (Figure1).

![Figure 1](Intersection of Valiasr and Enghelab Street, Tehran, Iran, unknown photographer)
The government uses walls, stands, and banners on the highways, streets, and alleys for propaganda uses (Figures 2 and 3), besides creating permanent structures that appear to be temporary (figure 4) for special occasions to portray its occasional use, but many times, they remain there and turn into religious or surveillant place. That is how Iran's government tries to take the city under its control.

Figure 2_Valiasr square, Valiasr Street, Tehran, Iran, Unknown Photographer
In Tehran, despite tension between citizens and the government, there's a resilient spirit among ordinary people who uphold their culture in private. While public spaces are limited, those that
exist often symbolize resistance against suppression. This juxtaposition creates a visually striking narrative of defiance, contributing to Tehran's reputation as one of the world's most beautiful cities. The character in Moonshine Babies serves as a metaphor for exploring the city's complex dynamics further, hinting at the depth of its social and cultural landscape waiting to be discovered.

Figure 5_A Picture of my House, by the Author, 2023
Figure 6_ A building in Tehran, Photographed by the Author, 2023

Figure 7_ A Super Market in Tehran, Photographed by the Author, 2023
**Journaling, Collecting**

I journal to collect moments and material from everyday life.

I started a period of everyday journaling for a few weeks. The journaling recorded things I saw daily and how I felt about them. One of the reasons for doing this exercise was to locate myself in a new place and under new circumstances. They usually consisted of me wandering in the streets and taking photos as a tourist. The evolution of this practice led me to experience the relationship between time and space, because I started to take continuous bursts of pictures as I walked up the streets. I started thinking about what happens if I put images next to each other in space. This exercise led me to the topic of place, displacement and the use of stop-motion to mark out this experience.

Journaling also helped me define my sense of Loss as a liminal experience that was pervasive in my process as research exploration.

**Collecting, Collage, and Memory**

Collecting objects and images has been one of my favorite things since childhood. Some objects have magic, while others do not. For me, this is a decision based on aesthetics and a method of making. This indicates a sense of documentation of an event. Based on the earlier definition of the event and the concept of reality, collage is a close way to represent my idea of portraying multiple POVs. This notion parallels the concepts of Cubism regarding the perception of a landscape from various angles. Cubists have challenged the significance of a singular observer and introduced the notion that the object's definition is not solely reliant on the observer. As I began this practice, which involved walking through spaces and photographing objects from various perspectives, I accidentally encountered David Hockney's photo collages. Hockney's method, rooted in his exploration of space through photography, prompted me to contemplate how I could similarly utilize images in my own work.

David Hockney brings cubistic ideas into photography. He creates a sense of dimension and depth by putting pieces of multiple copies of the same image. He inspired me to see what happens if I layer together images I take while walking in the same space, a practice that later led me to take pictures of interiors for Moonshine Babies. (Figure 8,9,10)

“ I photographed Walking in the Zen Garden at the Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto, Feb. 1983. I made it into a rectangle by moving around myself and taking shots from differing positions, whereas any other photograph would show it as a triangle”

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3 Martin, Gayford, A bigger message : conversations with David Hockney, (Thames And Hudson, London, 2016) , 78
Figure 8. Sitting in the Zen Garden at the Ryoanji Temple, Kyoto, Feb 19, 1983, David Hockney
Figure 9. _Gregory Watching the Snow Fall_, Kyoto, Feb 21, 1983. Devoid Hockney

Figure 10. _Shoes_, Kyoto, Feb. 1983, David Hockney
While our practices diverge in their objectives, David Hockney's approach heavily relies on manipulating images from a single scene to create a new rendition of the same space through photography and collage. In contrast, my aim is to flatten space, despite using pictures captured from various angles, aligning my approach with the aesthetic principles observed in Iranian miniatures. In this style, patterns define surfaces without conforming to realistic perspectives, with angles and scales remaining unadjusted. (Figure 11 and 12)
Figure 12_ Khusraw goes out hunting and approaches the castle of Shirin, Nizami Ganjavi, Iran
Objects carry energies and imply distinct meanings or memories. There are different ways a person might be attached to objects: a gift from a loved one, an object from a certain event or place, holding to someone else's belongings as a way to keep them close to you, or simply being fond of an object because of how it looks.

In Moonshine Babies, I created spaces that don't actually exist to capture how I remember certain places. I gathered images from the streets of my homeland, real homes, and interior spaces that hold deep emotional significance for me. Taking photos of objects or places I cherished felt like collecting memories, especially when I couldn't physically possess them. This film is essentially built upon the images from my home; they're the foundation of its existence.

I firmly believe in the transformative power of intricate details within visual art. To clarify my approach, I prioritize the selection of locations and objects within the frame over the action unfolding within them. Each element must be meticulously chosen to achieve the desired impact. To me, these objects and places serve as extensions of human beings, integral to conveying the essence of a story.

Collecting these locations and objects is an integral part of my creative process. Sometimes, they serve as catalysts, sparking narratives within me that can only be expressed through them. In The Moonshine Babies, I aimed not only to depict specific locations, spaces, and objects but also to portray them as memories. Memory, inherently subjective, alters our perception of events by selecting certain details to retain and subsequently modifying them. Each individual remembers an event differently, influenced by their thoughts and emotions.

While we cannot physically revisit specific moments in time, we can return to places imbued with memories. However, the experience of revisiting a place only to find it different from our recollection prompts deeper reflections on the nature of memory itself.

A few works that are centered on the theme of collecting:

**Museum of Innocence, by Orhan Pamuk**

"…I wanted to collect and exhibit a fictional story's "real" objects in a museum and write a novel based on these objects. At the time, I did not know what sort of place the museum would be, and neither did I know the shape the novel would take, but I had the feeling that focusing on objects and telling a story through them would make my protagonists different from those in western novels—more real, more quintessentially of Istanbul. What I had in mind was a sort of encyclopedic dictionary in which not only objects (a radio, a wall clock, a lighter) and places (an
apartment block, Taksim square, Perlur Restaurant) but also concepts (Love, impatience, Panic) would be the subject headings…"^4

I had the chance to visit this museum in person, which greatly inspired me in my exploration of collecting, the essence of found objects and images, and the narrative potential of arranging collected items in a sequential installation. Within the museum, there are various displays, some incorporating collages and assemblages, while others are presented on paper.

"The more I gathered for the museum, the further the story in my mind unfolded."

The narrative of the book centers around two lovers who collect objects from each other during family gatherings. Thus, this museum becomes intertwined with the fictional world and serves as a guiding process for the writer. Rather than relying solely on imagination, writing is influenced by tangible discoveries. The objects themselves shape the trajectory of the story in many instances. Through this ongoing process, the writer has cultivated a rich source of inspiration, always accessible and evolving.

This example illustrates how the creative process evolves into the final product. Furthermore, it blurs the lines between fiction and reality, expanding both realms simultaneously. (Figures 13 and 14)

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To broaden the concept of collecting, I drew inspiration from Sophie Calle's book "Exquisite Pain." In this work, Calle explores the experience of loss by sharing her own and then inviting others to share theirs. Through this process, she believes she can alleviate her own pain by absorbing and understanding the pain of others.

Similarly, I embarked on a journey of collecting not only physical objects but also intangible elements such as thoughts, stories, vulnerabilities, and dreams from those around me. By interviewing friends about their experiences of loss and attempting to encapsulate their emotions, I delved into a collage of emotions, aiming to embody the essence of their experiences within myself.
In essence, Calle's approach of sharing and collecting pain resonated with me, leading me to confront my own losses in a similar manner, both visually and emotionally, through the art of collage and collection.

- Atlas Group: collecting as a Political Act

"The Atlas Group was a project undertaken by Walid Raad between 1989 and 2004 to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon, with particular emphasis on the Lebanese wars of 1975 to 1990. Raad found and produced audio, visual, and literary documents that shed light on this history."\(^5\)

The Atlas Group" is a project focused on politics but utilizes seemingly apolitical material. I find parallels between this project and my own artistic practice. I resist categorizing my work as "political" because I believe that merely existing within social and economic structures is inherently political. To truly understand these structures, I believe it's essential to depict everyday life topics, offering glimpses into the complexities of human existence.

In a similar vein, "The Atlas Group" approaches citizenship in the modern world through a nuanced lens. Their collection spans a diverse range of subjects, from images of exploded cars during wartime to dentist signs in the city, to the pastries ingrained in people's upbringing.

This approach highlights the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate elements of daily life and underscores the political significance inherent in the mundane. Through these collections, both projects shed light on the multifaceted nature of citizenship and the intricate web of societal structures that shape our experiences.

Figure 15. Notebook V. 38, the Atlas Group, 1991
Figure 16_ Notebook V. 57, The Atlas Group, 1992
Inspiration

I acquired new techniques that directly corresponded to the themes I was exploring. The initial inspiration for this project stemmed from a three-part film composed solely of still photographs, drawing influence from La Jetée along with some paper collages I crafted during my candidacy year. However, my curiosity was piqued when I encountered stop-motion animation—a storytelling method that disrupts conventional notions of time and challenges the way objects move in the real world.

I found stop motion to be inherently aligned with my artistic approach, as it provided a means to visually convey the intricacies of memory, dreams, and the inner landscapes of the mind. Recognizing its potential to amplify the narrative I wished to convey, I realized that it was time to embark on this new storytelling journey.
Numerous other artists captivated my interest, and I eagerly sought out more individuals to learn about. Yet, three specific artists stood out to me; I delved deeply into their work to enhance my technical abilities in a manner akin to theirs, as I aimed to incorporate elements of their visual style into my creations.

*Surviving Life* by Jan Švankmajer inspired me to delve into stop-motion animation, impacting me in various ways. Švankmajer's unique visual language, crafted to navigate an unstable reality, resonated deeply with me, particularly his portrayal of a protagonist grappling with the blurred boundaries between reality and dreams. This influenced my creative concept, as the environment I aimed to construct mirrored this delicate balance between memory and dreams, existing within a realm of uncertain stability. His method of constructing space by utilizing static two-dimensional images (figures 18 and 19) for the background intrigued me from the outset, drawing me into his film. The way he skillfully conveyed the essence of the story's setting by revealing only fragments of the space stimulated my imagination and encouraged me to consider alternative approaches to depicting a location (Figure 20). In his films, the settings often resembled a theatrical stage, with angles and relative sizes appearing slightly askew, creating a sense of uncanniness. Inspired by this, I incorporated similar distortions of angles and sizes in my work, leveraging the uncanny effect to give the setting its distinct personality within the narrative. Additionally, I pushed this concept further by transforming specific parts of the background into loop animations, a technique I will elaborate on later.

![Figure 18](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Figure 18. A still from *Surviving life*, Jan Švankmajer, 2010*
Figure 19  A still from *Surviving life*, Jan Švankmajer, 2010

Figure 20  A still from *Moonshine Babies*, 2024
From a technical standpoint, I extensively studied his approach to animating characters in stop motion. This involved creating two-dimensional puppets with movable parts (Figure 21), enabling each body part to articulate freely and interact with the environment. This aspect proved to be particularly challenging for me due to constraints in production time. I found myself simultaneously filming actors' movements within the space while still working on its design. Ideally, I would have completed the spatial design before commencing actor movement. However, I had to reverse this process in certain instances, adapting the space based on the actors' actions. Some scenes prioritized the actors over the setting, while others demanded the opposite, necessitating compromises on my initial concepts to achieve the desired outcome. (Figure 22)
Later in the process, when I faced challenges in crafting uncanny environments, I became acquainted with Stacy Steers' trilogy: *Phantom Canyon, Night Hunter, and Edge of Alchemy*. Her creations also explore dreamlike, surreal spaces, where environments resemble wisps of steam—ethereal and enigmatic. The imagery is deliberately elusive, with concepts taking precedence over concrete visuals. For instance, a kitchen (figure 23) might be suggested with just a window and a table, blurring the lines between tangible and abstract. At times, textures alone define the space (Figure 24), yet it remains discernible as a bedroom or kitchen. Inspired by Steers' approach, I opted to push the boundaries of conceptual space further in my work.(figure 25 and 26)
I adapted this approach to fit my vision. Recognizing the need for additional elements and photographic excerpts, I shifted my focus. Rather than merely creating a space for the story to unfold, I aimed for the space itself to become the narrative—a central storytelling element.
I have selectively chosen elements that hold significant personal meaning within each space. For
instance, in Figure 25, the lamp and backdrop evoke memories of my mother's home office, while the window and curtain symbolize my brother's room, and the door represents a part of my mother's space. The carpet featured in Figure 25 comes from my room back home. Similarly, in Figure 26, the kitchen setting reflects my friend's home, and the carpet mirrors our kitchen. The kettle, adorned with modern interpretations of traditional Iranian patterns, holds a special significance to me, as it embodies a nostalgic familiarity from my upbringing. This aesthetic choice extends to the patterns in Iranian households of a certain era, such as those seen on the ceramic wall in the second image. These elements carry an energy that resonates deeply with me, evoking many memories and emotions. By incorporating them into my work, I am paying homage to their significance and tapping into a broader narrative that encompasses my cultural heritage and personal experiences. While these interpretations may not be immediately evident to all viewers, they infuse the overall design with a subconscious essence that enriches the narrative as a whole.

In addition to providing visual inspiration, Steers' work has also been profoundly instructive for me in technical aspects. A notable feature across many frames of her work is the utilization of multiple animation loops, creating a mesmerizing whirl of color pencil strokes that mimic the play of light on surfaces. Whether it is bugs fluttering in a loop or steam swirling around a kettle, these loops contribute to a complex visual pattern that establishes the mood and identity of her work and engenders a sense of rhythm through the depiction of movement. Even in scenes where characters remain relatively static, this boiling effect on the surface effectively simulates movement, infusing the frame with dynamism and vitality (as seen in Figures 27 and 28).

Figure 27_ A still from Edge of Alchemy, 2017
In one of my scenes (Figure 29), inspired by Steers' technique, I employed a similar approach of blending different loops together. As the character wakes up, I draped her with three distinct sections of the same curtain, each loop varying in frame count to create a mix of faster and slower movements. Simultaneously, the textured background moves at a completely different speed, contributing to the dynamic effect I aimed to achieve. Similarly, in Figure 30, I experimented with various movements to explore their impact on mood and rhythm dynamics. For instance, the window movement is stop motion, while the eggs feature a single image with moving patterns. Additionally, the window shutter is presented as a video, and the bird is composed of individual frames without loops. This experimentation allowed me to discern how different movements influence the overall mood and rhythm of the scene.
Figure 29_ A still from *Moonshine Babies*, 2024

Figure 30_ A still from *Moonshine Babies*, 2024
I aimed to transition gradually towards abstraction as the narrative approached its end. For the second part, I utilized fabrics to evoke a soft texture, reflecting the character's experience during a post-abortion phase. To convey her condition, I incorporated symbols reminiscent of the female reproductive system, such as eggs and (rotten) fruits, along with elements signifying mortality and pain. My intention was not to make explicit statements but to depict experiences that blur the line between reality and perception. Initially, I envisioned creating a house transforming into a forest containing these symbolic elements. However, considering the character's foggy and unstable state of mind, I decided to drop any literal representation of space and instead embraced abstraction. I relied on editing techniques and effects to convey her dreamlike experiences (Figure 31 and 32), such as sequencing images to depict her dreams. In this process, I drew inspiration from Janie Geiser, who constructs narratives by editing still photos (Figures 33 and 34) to convey emotions rather than thoughts. Geiser's use of unconventional image movement and effects greatly informed the development of this visual language.
Figure 32. A still from *Moonshine Babies*, 2024

Figure 33. A still from *Arbor*, Janie Geiser, 2012
Another significant influence from Janie Geiser's practice on my work is the concept of collage sound. Collage sound seamlessly integrates with the imagery, enriching the world portrayed and enhancing comprehension. Sound not only accompanies the visuals but also adds depth and texture. Sound and image form a multisensory collage, evoking emotional responses, memories, and narratives within the viewer's mind.

Sonic textures are essential in Jan Švankmajer's work, where sensory stimulation is often a central focus. This emphasis on sensory experience is particularly pronounced in *Conspirators of Pleasure* (Figure 35), where sound and imagery can evoke sensations akin to physical touch in the audience. Moreover, sound serves as a powerful tool to evoke primal human senses such as disgust, fear, and desire. With its inherent flexibility, animation allows for the exaggeration of sound effects, presenting an opportunity to harness this aspect for artistic expression deliberately.
The initial idea behind Moonshine Babies centered on the concept of observation. Specifically, I envisioned my main character, Kamand, as an observer, engaged solely in the act of witnessing the stories of others. This act of observation, I believed, was not just her primary action but also the catalyst for her transformation. This decision stemmed from my recent experiences, which I previously elaborated on in detail. Reflecting on these experiences, particularly my overwhelming sense of invisibility, led me to seek solace by exploring the meaning of loss among my peers. Through this exploration, I discovered the core significance of observation—a passive yet transformative act—a juxtaposition that intrigued me.

To develop this idea further, I initially depicted Kamand as a traveling eye in every frame (Figure36), but this evolved into a two-screen format. In the first screen, the stories of other characters unfolded, while the second screen depicted Kamand's eye—an observer. This concept was inspired by the mirror motif I had previously utilized in my work; Kamand's inability to see herself in the mirror prompted me to use two screens mirroring each other, symbolizing this theme. Additionally, I wanted to incorporate the experience of space into the installation. Placing two screens in front of each other required the audience to physically turn between them, evoking a sense of dimensions and spatiality. However, I found that this setup did not fully
encapsulate the transformative nature of observation, leading me to depict Kamand as floating mirror shards within the frame. (Figure 37)
This encapsulates the evolution the idea underwent before reaching its ultimate form:

This journey of ideation culminated in the decision to film Kamand watching herself in the mirror (Figure 38), portraying her restlessness and uncertainty. Rather than inserting her into a black background, I opted to keep her in her natural environment—a forest backdrop symbolizing unconsciousness, with elements like flowing water representing emotions and transformation. The juxtaposition of the concrete world and the ethereal vision was integral to conveying the themes of the narrative.

For the installation, I projected the animation and film onto screens positioned at a 45-degree angle, deviating from the initial mirroring setup. This placement, along with the absence of seating in front of one screen, invited viewers to contemplate the distinction between watching and seeing. The sequencing of the screens, as determined by their installation, became a subject of further exploration for me. (Figure 39)
Figure 39. From *Moonshine Babies* Installation, The Anderson, 2024
Conclusion: Unearthly to Earthly

“Turning something from an idea into a reality can make it seem smaller. It changes from unearthly to earthly. The imagination has no limits. The physical world does. The work exists in both.”  

– Rick Rubin

It's fascinating how inspiration can spark motivation in my own work simply because it excites me to explore new possibilities. The process of adaptation is equally intriguing, as ideas merge and evolve, ultimately taking on a new identity influenced by various elements working together harmoniously. It's this collaborative interplay of different components that ultimately transforms individual pieces into a cohesive whole.

The journey of creating Moonshine Babies was truly one-of-a-kind for me, a whirlwind of learning and growth compressed into seven intense months of production, primarily undertaken solo. What struck me most profoundly was how seamlessly various threads of my past artistic endeavors intertwined in this project. It was like witnessing a constellation of conceptual thoughts and ideas align and mutually reinforce one another.

Exploring stop motion animation emerged as a natural choice to translate these interconnected concepts into tangible form. The medium's inherent freedom allowed me to construct narratives from scratch, bridging the gap between abstract ideas and concrete expression. Yet, Moonshine Babies transcended mere work; it became a spiritual odyssey—a journey inward to uncover what truly resonates with me, to discern my unique perception of the world, and to establish a foundational ethos for my artistic practice, at least for this phase.

Through this exploration, I uncovered themes of loss, memory, dreams, and the subconscious, manifested through the lens of architecture and space, pervasive in everyday life. The temporal nature of animation offered a nuanced canvas to articulate these deeply internalized concepts, where every aspect—from the texture of movements to the composition within the frame—became a deliberate expression of personal introspection.

Beginning this project, I found myself in a phase of uncertainty, unsure of its ultimate trajectory. However, as the process unfolded and evolved through iterative feedback loops, clarity emerged. Each day brought a renewed sense of excitement and inspiration, fueled by the progress made in

6 Rick, Rubin, *the creative act; A way of being*, Penguin Press, 2023,17
the preceding steps. Moonshine Babies not only served as a fulfilling endeavor in itself but also ignited a creative spark that continues to illuminate future projects.

Graduation, for me, signifies not an endpoint but a new beginning. Armed with the practical skills and newfound confidence to embody conceptual ideas, I approach the future with a sense of purpose and direction. Challenges are no longer daunting obstacles but rather opportunities for creative problem-solving, guided by a deeply ingrained understanding of my personal artistic process.
Bibliography


