

A Different Kind of Life:  
An Exploration of Water's Personas  
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Integrated Project Thesis  
April 5, 2009

Water can be as pristine as the smoothest mirror. Yet a single drop of water from above can break that mirror into a myriad of reflections. Upon my own self-reflections, I realize that there have been many small and different moments in my life. The significance? These moments exposed the resolve I needed to initialize drastic changes to the way I live. While some would see this as taking everything too seriously, I look at this perspective as garnering appreciation for almost anything I have in my life. My goal with these past seven months was to express the awareness that even seemingly insignificant things can be immensely complex; the element of water was my inspiration where illustration and character design were my language.

The form of my project is a large-scale watercolor illustration depicting the creation of six unique characters in one unifying movement. Since my main inspiration is how the smallest things can be innately intricate, this illustration also depicts how each of these characters all emerged from a single entity. Their designs are sparked from personalities derived from researching the element of water.



The unique personalities that each of my characters express arose from aspects I formed about water. These aspects were created from a large number of random facts regarding the element. The initial aspect that really gripped me was its metaphorical one when I first heard Bruce Lee’s martial arts philosophy:

“Be formless...shapeless, like water. If you put water into a cup, it becomes the cup. You put water into a bottle; it becomes the bottle. You put it into a teapot; it becomes the teapot. Water can flow, and it can crash. Be water, my friend...”

I was in wonder of how such simple, often ignored properties of an entity could be compared to something as important as a way of life. The work of Andy Goldsworthy rushes to the forefront of my mind in this moment. His sculptures are a quintessential explanation of exactly how crucial a single small component is to bringing an entire sculpture together. This only heightened my approval for the appreciation of the more minute things and prompted me to find where else water appeared other than ways of living.



An ice sculpture done by Andy Goldsworthy. (<http://www.sculpture.org.uk/image/504816331403/1/>)

The previous quote being my starting point, I began looking at other facts of water. I eventually amassed enough that I could collect the most prominent and interesting information into the following aspects:

<b>Metaphorical:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Literature uses water as a means to describe emotions or to explain events that were unexplainable</li> <li>- It is used to explain the proper performance of movements of Chen Shi Tai Chi Quan</li> <li>- It describes a healthy way of life</li> </ul>
<b>Chemical:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Water is made up of two of the strongest hydrogen</li> </ul>

	bonds found in molecular structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It has both a positive and negative charge</li> <li>- It is made up of two gases</li> <li>- It will dissolve anything given the time</li> <li>- It exists and can cycle through being a gas, a liquid, and a solid.</li> </ul>
<b>Physical/Geographical:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Water is responsible for shaping most of the main landforms on the earth</li> <li>- It can wipe out major cities in an instant in the form of floods and tsunamis</li> <li>- It delivers silt and minerals and enriches soil to stimulate growth</li> <li>- The precipitation cycle is key to ensuring that there is enough moisture in the air and on the earth, as well as maintaining the earth's temperature</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the Christian Bible, God sent down a torrential rain that flooded the world to rid it of its corruption</li> <li>- In the Hindu religion, the God of Rivers actually presided over time, which is described to flow like a river</li> <li>- Water is a key component in almost all creation myths around the world</li> <li>- It was the first means of conveyance during the beginning of international trade</li> <li>- Water is also responsible for bridging wars across oceans</li> </ul>
<b>Health:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The human body is approximately 70%-80% water</li> <li>- It is necessary in facilitating the distribution of nutrients throughout the body</li> <li>- It is essential in attaining personal hygiene</li> <li>- It breeds and spreads disease that has wiped out thousands in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries</li> <li>- It is essential to have clean water during a pregnancy to ensure the health of the fetus. Lead poisoning in water can lead to major birth defects</li> <li>- Having too little water in your system can lead to dehydration where too much can lead to water intoxication (literally water on the brain)</li> </ul>

As I was perusing these aspects, I gradually began to perceive them more as the personalities of the characters in my illustration. I started thinking about them with more depth, asking myself questions about what they were doing, what reminded me of this particular personality trait, and how did they move. Are they a verb or a noun? What are they made of? Is it hominid? Finally, the decision was made: I wanted to find, design and show these characters:

<b>The Creator</b>	A shaper and sculptor / someone who ‘forms’ / older and bent over / thoughtful / calm / careful / stiff
<b>The Juggernaut</b>	A destroyer / a titanic force / blind and unwitting rage / uncaring of who it affects / explosive / huge / completely unforgiving / it doesn’t actively seek out destruction, it’s just what it does / layered and sharp edged / heavy
<b>The Messenger</b>	A carrier of things that benefit / ‘speedy’ and friendly / a bit of a dope that just goes around doing its job / always smiling / light and thin
<b>The Vector</b>	A breeder and spreader of things that deteriorate others it comes into contact with / lonely and unloved / just sloughs through life unable to help its own nature / gooey and dripping / viscous
<b>The Shape-Shifter</b>	A combination of different forms / a portrayal of transition / a show off / a verb / a transparent in both persona and substance
<b>The Source</b>	A starting point / a noun / it just exists / infantile / a seed from which things can begin / solid but fragile in appearance

In the design phase of my characters, I drew from as many different inspirations as I could to combine them into unique individuals. Substance, movement, pose...all



The “Cannibal Funfair” designer toy series by Tado. (<http://www.sculpture.org.uk/image/504816331403/1/>)

these things are put into consideration when thinking about *what* these characters are and *how* they interact with the world. I thought about designer toy artists such as TokiDoki, Tado and Touma. They have a way of drawing inspiration from multiple sources, and unifying them into a single sculpture

accessible for all ages and walks of life. That was a huge inspiration for me in the conceptual design phase of these characters. Using this thought process, my characters took on forms and characteristics that are exclusively theirs.

Due to their distinctiveness from one another, there were so many different things about each of my characters I wanted to express. It got to the point where I had to decide which aspect of them was most important for me to show. Do I only want to show their character development and who they are by themselves? Or would it be more beneficial to show them interacting in the world? I decided that answering the second question

served both purposes and that an illustration would be the best course of action to execute it. Unfortunately, I was then faced with the question of what I'd be illustrating.

The fact that something initially insignificant can in reality be an entity of great importance is a philosophy I wish to express with my characters. Considering this frame of mind, it occurred to me that this concept was really a 'birth' of sorts. What I wanted to depict in addition to being able to convey their design and actions was their process; the moment when they all came into being from a single point. Works from Mike Mignola and James Jean were a huge inspiration in constructing the illustration's layout and design. They are both artists who voice complete stories in a single image using excellent composition and color, which was something that I really wanted to achieve with this piece.



These two illustrations are by Mike Mignola (left) and James Jean (above).  
(<http://www.hellboy.com/>)  
(<http://jamesjean.com/>)

Capturing this moment of creation was extremely difficult. It is not only meant to represent a burst in time of the very moment they came into reality. It is also meant to portray their individual personas, engaging the crucial parts of their design and the way they interact with their environment. Therefore, in addition to taking visual cues from Mignola and Jean, the illustration is influenced by Chinese landscape paintings. The way those paintings describe small details and separate stories all in the same large setting seemed appropriate for me to apply. In this case, I exhibited each character in their own section of the illustration. While they all inhabit the same, overall landscape, each character interacts with the space they occupy themselves in their own personal way.

Furthermore, their arrangement is dynamic, lending depth, flow, and presence, to the painting. The overall movement of the piece is supposed to recount a meandering, flowing movement (as a river would) while moving closer to the viewer in space, emphasizing their birth into reality and onwards.

The greatest thing about this experience is that I know that this is not the end of this project. If anything, it has been a wonderful learning experience; both about myself and about the way I perceive things now. By being able to create diverse characters from a single entity as inspiration, I feel I am now able to carry this method on to other projects, further enriching them with a broader range of inspirations. With regards to changes to how I perceive things, this experience has taught me how to check myself and place things in perspective. Never take things for granted; you'll never know *when* it'll be useful, but it's useful somehow, somewhere. So in the words of Bruce Lee, be water my friend; be formless and shapeless, flow and live, but crash if you need to.