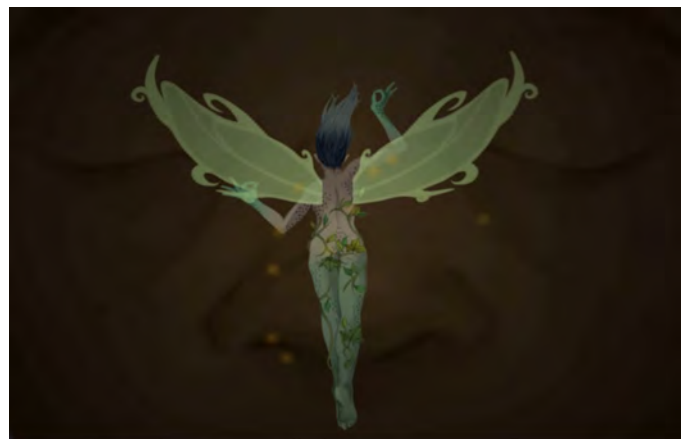# Hasani Tyus

Senoir Thesis

      The imagination is boundless; ever expanding and can provide recesses, pockets to escape reality and the means to blur the lines of what is real. Imagination is the realm in which fantasy inhabits and in the mind of a child it can be not only a source of amusement and play but also a valuable tool for navigating life. In my IP project I want to use the world of fantasy as seen through a child's eyes as a means to provide a journey and serve as a coping tool for a boy who has experienced severe loss.

      For my IP project I created an animated narrative about a young boy who loses his mother and comes to terms with that loss through his journeys in a fairy tale world. The primary challenge and appeal for me in this project has been visually representing the duality of these real and fantasy worlds as well as telling a concise but fully formed and realized narrative. The story allows me to stretch my imagination and be more creative in my visual representation as well as provides me with a thematically challenging framework to work from.

      Illustration has always been a passion of mine and the majority of my work has been illustrative and figurative. Most of this work has centered on depicting children and the elderly both simply in form but also in the larger context of what it means to inhabit these opposite ends of life. Working with these themes in an illustrative form has extended from drawing and painting to time based media. Using different media has allowed me to delve deeper into these themes and to explore them in ways that would be more difficult outside of time based work. Yet I still fell there was much more room for me to explore these themes especially in the realm of a narrative. Illustration has been my strong suit and as of late I've taken several animation courses and became really excited about different forms of creating a moving image.

I became interested in the way After Effects allowed me to use my illustrations to create movement without having to necessarily do traditional frame-by-frame animation. It created a stylized simple kind of movement that I visually responded to and allowed me to create more detailed drawings than I would be able to do in traditional animation. I was interested in expanding on the skill set I had acquired thus far by exploring 3-d elements. Lighting techniques and depth of field. Concurrently, I kept reflecting on the themes of aging and reflections on death, which kept popping up in my work. I had previously worked closely with senior citizens and had become interested in what it meant to be at the end of your life. This interest manifested itself in several forms in my work from grave rubbings, to drawings and a photo-comic on reflections on life and dying.

What initially attracted me to doing an animation about fantasy and reality was being able to further explore animation which I enjoy doing but also it gave me the opportunity to delve into creating creatures, characters and having a certain freedom that creating fantasy allows and that I had yet to explore. When compelled to come up with a driving force for the story I returned to two themes that continue to interest me children, specifically the world seen through the eyes of children and reflections on death. The challenges I have faced have been mostly in translating my animated style to such a full story and creating a narrative that is concise yet fully conveys all the themes.

The initial spark that provided the thematic framework for my project was a film by writer/director Del Toro entitled Pan's Labyrinth. The movie told the story of a child against a very serious backdrop and I had never seen fantasy handled that way, it was serious in tone but it wasn't a sweeping fantasy epic like Lord of Rings it was smaller like children's stories and the fantasy was intertwined with reality and real world problems. The dual nature and tone of the film was attractive to me.

Once I had concluded that this fantasy/ reality dynamic would be paramount to my work and started to investigate different fantasy artists I was brought to an artist who I was very familiar with but who I had forgotten about, Boris Vallejo. I was aware of him initially because of his work with comic book super heroes but Boris is best known for his hyper-realistic depictions of fantasy. His work with the human form and fantastical creatures and worlds is amazing Boris's work was of particular interest to me because like Pan's, the world of fantasy is represented in a very realistic, slightly matter of fact sort of way. Instead of asking what if this exists, the work seemed to be simply stating that it does.

While thinking of how I would represent the animation I kept searching for something and I stumbled upon the work of John Bauer. His work while not realistic seemed very real yet less severe than the work of Vallejo. John Bauer's fantasy depictions are iconic in a way, his style somehow simple yet detailed has an earnestness to it that allows you to enter the piece and feel the emotions of the characters, feel the mood. It has a character that while not photorealistic feels a bit more authentic to the world he's creating. Of particular interest to me was John's use of light and his muted color plate.

While Bauer and Vallejo were very influential in helping develop my aesthetic choices, watching the development of Pan's Labyrinth helped inform the structure and themes central to my work. There are themes and archetypes that are common to fairy tales and that help create what is considered part of a classic fairy tale narrative.

Reluctant heroes, magical helpers, the rule of three, magical items, damsels in distress, heroic journeys are central to most fairytales and thus I wanted to incorporate them in my story. However, I wanted to use them in a way that wasn't endemic of the way they were used in modern Disney fairy tales. The goal was for the tone to be more serious and for some of the archetypes and themes to manifest themselves in an unpredictable way. The hero in my story is a young boy who is sad and fearful, the damsel in distress (who needs to be saved) is his mother, and she's already dead, the magic gift doesn't work and at the end some things are left unanswered and the story isn't tied up in a neat happily ever after bow.

   While looking at the framework of what a fairy tale is the challenge was with filling in the spaces in the framework to create a compelling story and integrating themes that supported the overall premise of coping with loss. The themes that came to the forefront while forming the story were overcoming adversity, escapism, acceptance, faith, and the juxtaposition of reality and illusion. Escapism and the reality/illusion dynamic come into play in the main characters journey from his reality to a world of fantasy and illusion. While overcoming adversity and faith relate to the emotional hurdles the character has to go through as well as the trials he faces in the fantasy world. Finally, acceptance is what allows him to come to terms with the loss of his mother at the end.

  Illustrating and animating a story of the breathe I wanted, in the time frame available has proven difficult, however, I feel I've succeeded in creating a short-hand version of the story I intended to tell. In the interest of time I shortened the young boy's journeys or trials in the middle of the story, into somewhat of a mon-tage and the ending is much more ambiguous than I originally planned. The original ending gave more closure and was more explicit about what happened after the boy exits the fairy tale world and about his feelings. I was initially very disappointed with the new ending because it didn't plainly convey that the main character was beginning to come to terms with his mother's death, but the more I sat with it the more I began to appreciate the new ending. I felt there was some-thing poetic about the silence in the end and that after what had preceded it the audience could draw their own conclusions about what the single tear and feather meant.

  Despite the concessions made for time I was still able to meet many of my goals for my project. I was able to create the escapism I was looking for, create and animate characters, experiment with using lighting techniques and most impor-tantly tell a story that carried some emotional weight and blended the worlds of fantasy and reality.