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IP Thesis

### Cultural Masks Abstracted to Express The Hidden

Yes, It's another one of those masks projects, with its awesome concepts and idea's. But I tell you this, my mask's are eerie, dramatic, emotional, cultural, and a bit me. But I guess a lot of masks revolve around those same traits. Even so, I felt the need to re-create my own masks for the purpose of expressing myself. If you have seen me around, you'll notice that I'm not a very outgoing guy, with emoish features, a shy mentality, along with my Korean American background. Knowing myself, I thought only the concept of what a mask means can justify my need to express the goodies I have kept hidden from the public. I fell in love with that idea; this mysterious feeling, hiding the face of the owner, expressing or hiding what you are, or to entirely become someone that you are not. To be hiding oneself and become someone else entirely, something that can express what is hidden.

Now that my senior year is coming along, The University wants to kick me out with a degree. But I can't leave without a bang. Pondering about how I can achieve this bang of expressing myself as an artist, I thought about my multicultural background and its many complex experiences in life that came with it. Working in Korea for half a year, I always saw these random masks on the street markets with stereotypical Korean expressions. Upon researching there purpose, it turned out that they were actually a traditional set of Korean masks called, Tal'Chum Masks. These masks were created during the period of the Three Kingdoms in 18 B.C to 935 A.D. This was during the Goryeo dynasty. Legends say that a man living in the Ha-Hoe village was encountered

by gods who told him to make 12 masks while avoiding the contact of humans. If he were to encounter another human, he would have to suffer a gruesome death. The story ends with him dieing because a curious girl peaks into his house, having him die before he could finish the last mask, the fool. Fun story but to be more realistic, they were more likely made by the Ha-hoe villagers who wished to perform plays, which grew in popularity during that era, spreading and influencing other villages to do the same. These masks are better known to be as the start of Korean theatrical plays. The intriguing part was that they weren't played in stages or in a huge theater, but were more played in the public city markets or town centers. Acted by villagers or poor people.

With this in mind, I decided to use these Ha-hoe masks to portray a play or story about a life of expressing one self with the help of animation. I wanted to express my interest and hobbies that I have kept to myself to the public because of my undeniable shyness. Being Korean and all, I really found that I could relate to these masks, because each masks depicted a certain stereotype in the society of Korea. For example, the mask that legend say was unfinished was better known as "The Fool" or the servant. This mask has been characterized as a stereotypical servant during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, who were uneducated, dirty, and did very stupid like behavior. What really inspired me to work with Tal' masks is because they relate to life and its daily struggles. The word Tal actually means to rid oneself, or free oneself from something. So the name Tal-nori, or Tal-chum(Tal dance), is known as the dance that helps shed ones stress and grief. Being raised with a Korean culture, while going through the life of being a minority in America, my life even now is filled with stress and issues created by the society that I live in. I guess I can be seen as many as an Asian who speaks Chinese and loves the ling longs and



ting tongs. But this society is the society that I live in and will have to continue to live in such an environment. I do believe the society has become more culturally diverse but the stereotype will always be there. I thought my life could relate to the Korean mask's purpose. They were used to tell stories and tales of their life struggles or make fun of the stereotypes during their time. During the Goryeo Dynasty, the social tension was a big issue and the lower class who started the Tal'chum, used these masks to relieve not only their everyday stresses, but the tensions which existed between the many social classes in Korea. These plays often satirized the upper class and monks, and played fun with the commoner masks. Many stories were related with making fun of the corrupted monks, who used their power to better their own greed, along with personal issues commoners had with life, poking fun at comedic movements.



I wanted to use this idea to help express my hidden traits, as many of the performances masks are also related with my hobbies; dancing and music. Dancing and musicians, who played music to each play, accompanied each performance during the 12th century. All of which are my passion besides art. Being shy and afraid that people

may judge me, I hid these hobbies that were expressed so openly through these Tal'Chum Masks.



*(Studies of transforming my face to a Tal'mask like figure, hiding myself)*

Through the concept and cultural meaning of the Tal'Chum masks, I chose two out of the twelve masks to create an animation that revolves around a figure, who transforms and integrates into the life of two different masks; the life of a mafia leader (the Aristocrat), and a street gangster (The Fool) living on the streets. During 18 B.C, Korea also used these masks to be someone other than himself or herself. For example, the slaves would wear the mask of the aristocrat to act out and pretend to be nobleman while the nobles would wear the mask of the fool to act out the life of a slave. Through this idea, I wanted to make an animation that shows the different life style that each mask portrays. Basically stepping into another person's shoes, viewing the world in their vision. Why I chose to go with this gang like plot was because through my online research, I came across an artist by the name Charles Cho, who took the concept of the stereotypical Tal'chum masks and molded it to create a new story, where each mask portrayed the personality and status of a person with in this gang.



The examples above starting from the left show the mask of the aristocrat which is portrayed as a upper noble class during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, is now represented as the gang leader of Charles story. And on the right is the mask of the fool that represented the servant role, who is now represented as “loyal to his friends. Although not very bright, he’s very practical at times. He keeps things simple.” Charles basically took the historical content of the mask and evolved it to create this story line which I thought was inspiring, relating each mask’s historical stature to match the personality and role of each character with in the gang.

The animation that I made, is basically a introduction to the two masks I said above, showing a complex yet mysterious feeling of each mask, as the figure experiences the roll of each mask with in this dark and retro city. The animation is based on the principles of how Tal’chum masks were performed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, along with movement and music to match the personality of the masks. Tal’chum masks were often accompanied by music and dancing steps that matched to the masks personality. For example the aristocrat would come into stage with his Yangban’s swaggering steps, or as

the flirtatious young women lingers with her elegant steps to seduce to Yangbang, but the fool will come in with his faltering steps, bumping into the scene to create a mess. And with each dance form of each character, the music would come in to match the role of the mask. In a lot of the stories you'd here a soft tune when the flirtatious women would come in to the scene to seduce a man, then change to a slow and pronounced beat when the aristocrat came into the scene.

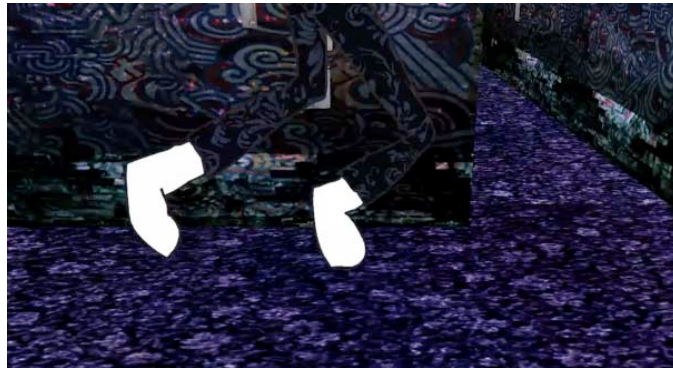
As I watched videos and plays that used Tal'Chum masks, I saw the beauty in its dancing, as each character had their own steps and foot work that matched with the music. Many were soft and slow movements while others were energetic and aggressive. Even as the masked figured walked, they walked with body movements that characterized the personality of the mask. It wasn't like hip-hop dancing or any form of dancing we seen now, but it was more of a theatrical feel. The movement were swayed and moved with the music as it told a story about the masked figures. I wanted to recreate these movements with the modern Korean music and movement we hear and see today. The modern Korea that we know now has actually been urbanized with in the past 50 years. Before then, Korea was still under dynasty rule of Shilla. The Korean culture and life style has changed completely as it has become more westernized after the World War Two, and is now well known for its hip-hop culture that is popular even among the neighboring countries. I wanted to use these modern songs that Korea finds popular and have the movement of each character respond to the modern music of what South Korea is today. I wanted to bring this modern feeling into these masks and try to relate the past content to show the change in South Korea's culture and of how it has evolved.



*(Introduction to the city)*



*(Walking scene of the Mafia Boss)*



*(Running scene of the street gangster)*

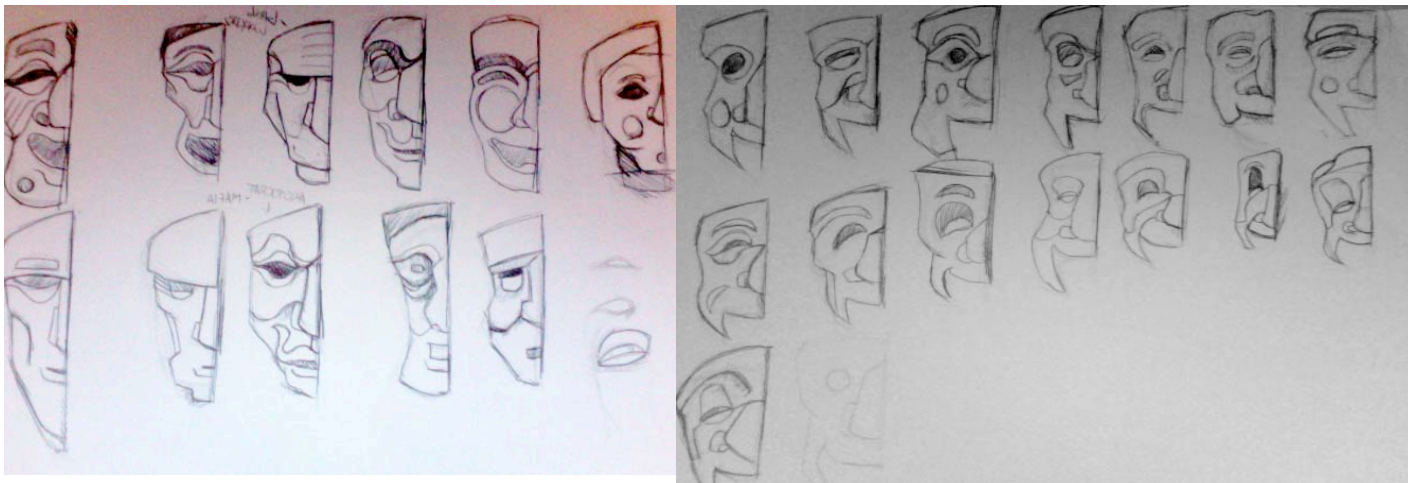
What I wanted to do was to create my own version of Tal'Chum masks to fit the more modern look of what I think the masks should look like today. I made the features of the mask to look more western because a lot of Korea's modern look and style has been inspired through the westernization of Korea. I picked the following two below



*(From left to right, The fool, The Aristocrat)*



*(Plaster cloth molded mask studies of the Aristocrat and the Fool)*



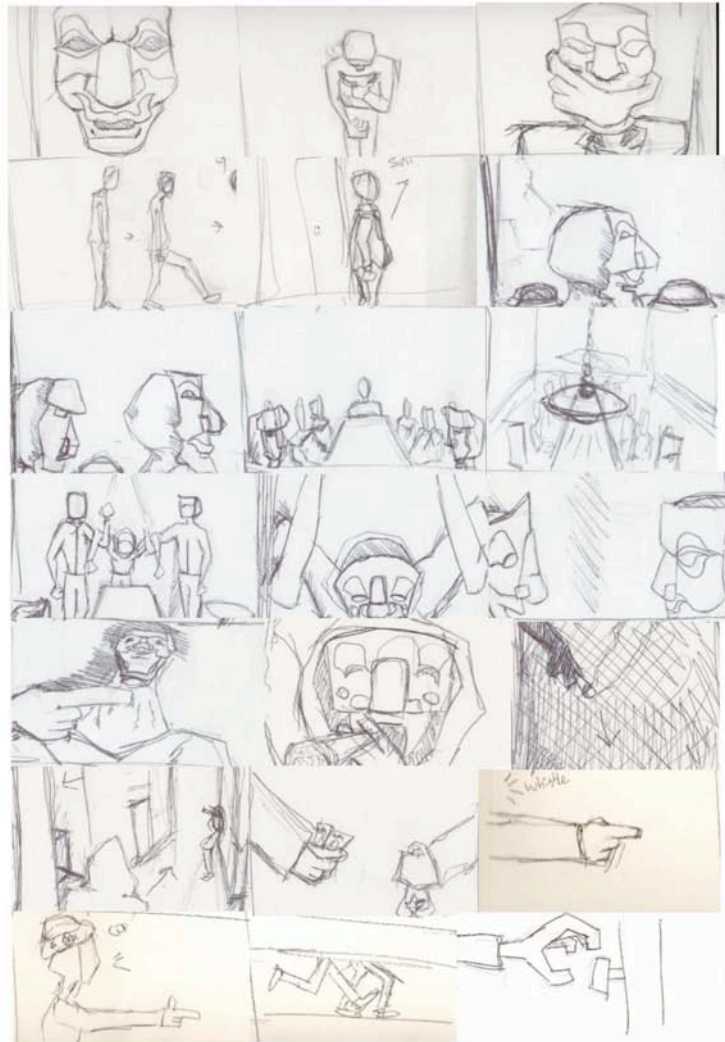
*(Studies of what the Aristocrat mask should look like along with the fool)*

Because I thought they matched well with the modern look along with the historical features the mask originally had. The main plot and point of my animation is to create a music video like atmosphere, where they are set in the setting of this dark city, where crimes a big issue. This city is based on the modernization of South Korea and how its sudden growth in power has left the society into new corruption and issues. I create a story line to show these masks being put on by a figure, transforming the figure into the life style of what each masks lives in. If the figure wanted to change out of that life style, it would just have to find another mask to put on. My animation shows this transition



between the two masks, creating and giving you the sense of realizing the difference between the two masks and their status in the crime world.

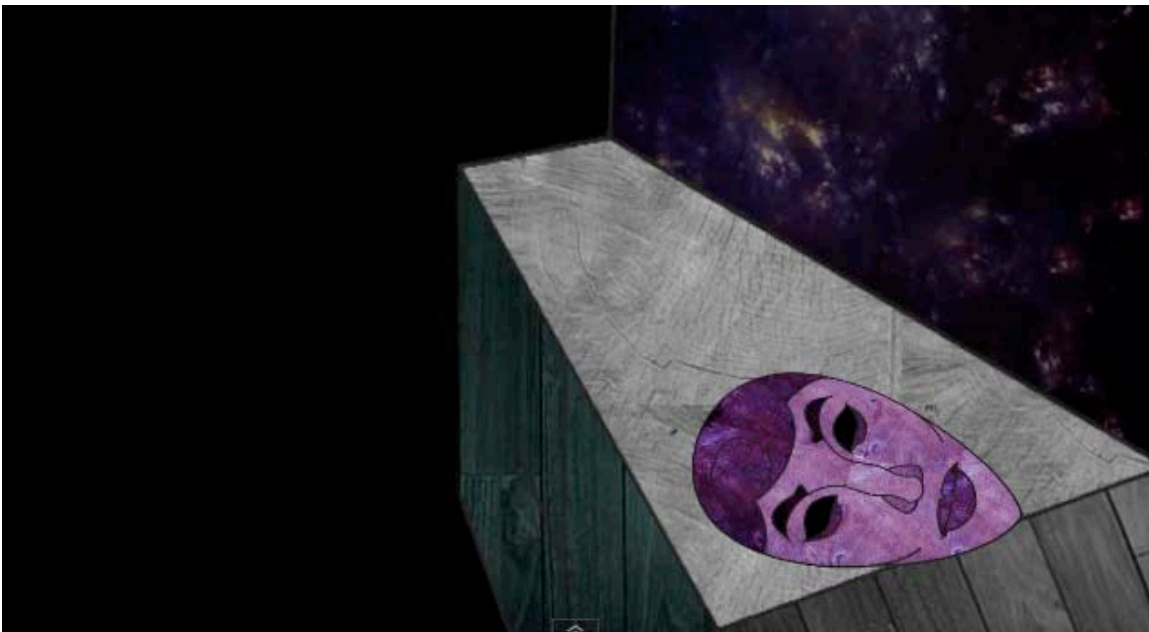
*(some of the  
story board for  
animation)*



The animation process was a new experience for me, as I created an animatic to show the timing and a preview to what my animation would look like. I found this to be very useful and realized that it really helps to organize an animation and to add and take out scenes that you don't seem to work well. I created this animation with After effects, Photoshop, and Illustrator, bringing it all into Final Cut Pro to edit and finalize the animation. The animation has been created to express my hobbies through art, by

creating scenes where the mask figure walks and runs with a dance like movement, moving to match with the beat of the modern Korean music that I found fond of. It brings all my hobbies and passion all into one, along with my desire to express myself to the world. The Tal'chum masks and there purpose helped with that category as the masks hide the figure's personality, and acts out the personality of each mask instead. The mood and atmosphere of my animation was to create this mysterious feeling, along with beauty to show my personality of being very shy and hidden, but can be beautiful if people understood it or took the time to get to know me. I was able to relate myself with the concept of what Tal'Chum masks were used for and really helped me to see my place in society and in what ways I can be myself and still live in a society that judges you for your physical traits. The music was chosen because like I said before, I wanted to have these masks be represented and put into a modern atmosphere, so I chose two Korean songs that are popular in Korea now and used them to show modernization of South Korea and how it has effect the style and movement that Korean dancers move today. You can say my Asian American Culture inspired this animation. The plot was perfect too because I always enjoyed the gang movies that Korea produced. The Korean gang was totally different from the gang mobs in America, and I wanted to use this idea to create an animation that shows the different life styles a Korean mob leader experienced, compared to a local college gang member, to a women who robs people. As a kid I always was amazed at the scene and life style that these lives were expressed in movies. They were always so dramatic and powerful with each mob leader in every drama or movie, or to see the lone person who sells drugs and robs stores to survive the streets of Seoul.

Though this animation has no voice it has movement and imagery to tell the story of each mask and its status with in the society. From the IP process and experience, it has really gotten me to wake up and realize that my life is just about to start, and that through out my college life, I have only experienced and learned a great deal of multiple medias and history. Even though I am more of a digital, 3/d animator; I wanted to create a real model of these masks to hide my own self. If you go back a few pages, you can see my plaster cloth masks I created to hide myself and will continue to create more so that I can some day wear one and express my hobbies to the public while being protected by the mask. Through this process of IP and animation I have decided to really take this animation and put it as a starting point to create more animations to add on to this plot that I have created. In the end of my animation, I give a preview of what the next mask would be, the mask of the flirtatious woman.



I left the animation with this scene because I wanted to show that this animation is just a introduction to what my goal in the future will be. Because the information, history, and

complex ideas of these masks are so potent, It was hard for me to really give myself a chance to fully create a story and animation about each mask, so instead I created this animation to be more of a preview to show what each mask is basically being represented as, there fore ending the animation with this mysterious mask that isn't represented.

My future goals for this animation is to continue with it by creating more scenes and movements to the other masks and hopefully get a series in to fully show and express all 12 masks of Tal'chum originated back when Korea first surfaced the idea of entertainment. With the help of my IP professors Shaun Jackson, and Marianetta Porter, the GSI's Michael Borowski, and Yuan Ma, and with the special help of Professor David Chung, I was able to create this animation through the constant pressure and motivation they have put me through to finish this animation. As life goes, I have gone through a lot of stress and problems that has swayed me away from being a hard working student, but each person has kept a constant worry for me and has really helped me to realize that my life is what I make it, and that I can't just be a little kid forever. My time to grow up has come and hopes that this animation and the future animations will show my continuing growth as a person and as an artist. This IP work has not only opened my eyes to my cultural background but also gave me a reality check that will keep me motivated to work hard.

The End

Music by: Vicki Huang

Songs: Tonight by: BigBang

Hands Up- BigBang

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