

AN INTRODUCTION TO SHADOW ART (IMPROVISATIONAL PIECE)

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images. – Plato, The Republic



The Story

When I asked my Mum what she wanted for her birthday this year, she replied **“something handmade and can help your art coursework.”** This conversation happened the evening before her birthday. Going back to my room, I decided I’ll have her gift by tomorrow and surprise her with it (being the great daughter I am, I’ve always given her birthday gift a week or month after her birthday, but not this year!).

Looking around my room, I tried to see what I can make with the things I already own. I saw my bedside lamp, and thought that maybe....maybe I can make shadow art. After all, I’ve always wanted to try making one myself someday. Looking around my room again, I saw a bunch of folder binders that were no longer in use and just stacked there in the corner of my bedroom. Following that discovery, I remembered that I still have a collection of cassette tapes my mum bought and used to play for my brother and I in our childhood.

Having gathered some of the key materials I need to make shadow art, I started to plan out what shadows and atmosphere I wanted to cast.



Gathering the materials I can use and find around my bedroom and living room. Folders on the bed, toolbox, bedside lamp, and of course, corks!



I attached the folders by using the nails I bought for my string art project, then sealing the ends with wine corks to hold the nails and prevent anyone (myself) from getting injured during the process of making this piece of art. I punched a hole and borrowed a hook from my curtain to suspend the folders above my bed.



Soldering iron and the tapes inside the cassette tapes to suspend the cassettes in mid-air.



The Meaning Behind Using Cassette Tapes as a Suspended Medium

Earlier in the introduction, I mentioned the significance of these cassette tapes to me and how it symbolises my childhood. These cassette tapes are filled

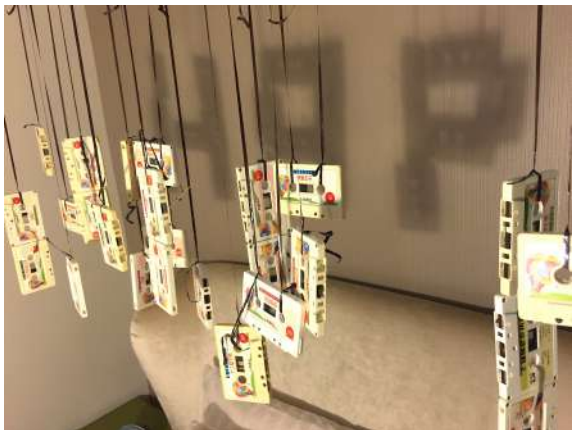
with stories that gave me a great deal of entertainment and imagination at bedtime. My Mum often slept beside my brother and I as the story plays in the background. I’ve always cherished those wonderful stories and my mother’s presence as those stories unravelled.



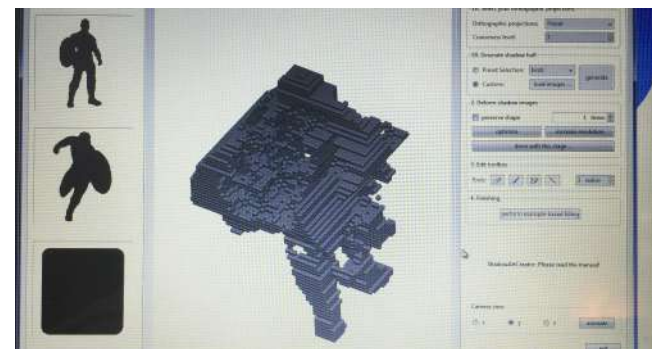
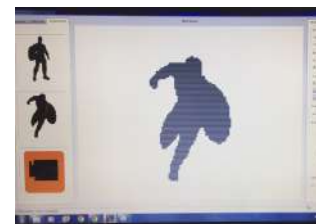
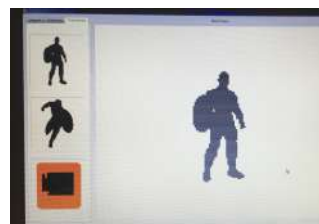
In the process of making ‘Happy 46th’. What I realised during the process is that by suspending these pieces individually, they were able to spin around at their own leisure. This gave the piece a life of its own, and added an extra dimension to the meaning to the work.

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P2: THE EXPLORATION OF TIME AND SPACE



The process of making this piece took me the entire night. I think what would've made it much more efficient is changing the wire support used. I used what I could find, which was a coil of soldering iron to link the binders together to create a structure. What I did not anticipate was that the soldering iron is too soft and would bend as more cassette tapes were suspended on it. The bending of the structure meant that I had to adjust and re-adjust the cassette tapes every time I tie new one up. Additionally, a more systematic way to approach shadow art would've probably made the outcome more authentic and precise. But all in all, I believe I took a great first big stride into the realm of making shadow art.



Next step: approaching shadow art in a more systematic way. Above are screenshots of Niloy J. Mitra's demo programme (see next page).

NEVERLAND – A SHADOW ART PROJECT (DIGITAL FABRICATION)

A MORE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO SHADOW ART

“In time they could not even fly after their hats. Want of practice, they called it; but what it really meant was that they no longer believed.”

– J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan

Artist Statement

‘Neverland’ is a shadow art project that explores the themes of childhood and imagination. It aims to reconnect the viewers with their childlike curiosity and the courage to pursue their dreams.

The shadow on the left panel depicts a silhouette of Peter Pan flying fearlessly in his own flair. This symbolizes the freedom of imagination we have possessed and experienced as a child. As we go through life and traditional educational systems, however, our childish wonders and dreams start to fade, and many of us start to conform. The silhouette on the right panel depicts Peter Pan sitting down in a civilized manner, looking as if he is conscious of his actions. Through this piece, I want to encourage people to chase back their childish imagination and untamed dreams by looking back at their childhood experiences.

How I Started

Unlike my previous attempt at creating shadow art, the first version of *Neverland* was digitally fabricated. Likewise, unlike my previous improvisational project, I approached this piece in a more systematic way (though much more experimentation has gone into this piece). So, how did it all begin?

After reading Niloy J. Mitra and Mark Pauly’s paper and documents on shadow art on Stanford’s Graphics webpage, I was fascinated and determined to explore this medium in more depth - by of course, doing a project on it. At first, I approached it by downloading the demo version of their program, but since it was a demo, the features were very limited (not even an export button), so I had to find other ways to approach the making of digitally fabricated shadow art.



RESOLVED WORK (DIGITAL) OCTOBER 2016

INFLUENCES – DISNEY’S 1953 ANIMATED FEATURE FILM PETER PAN



[Image source here](#)



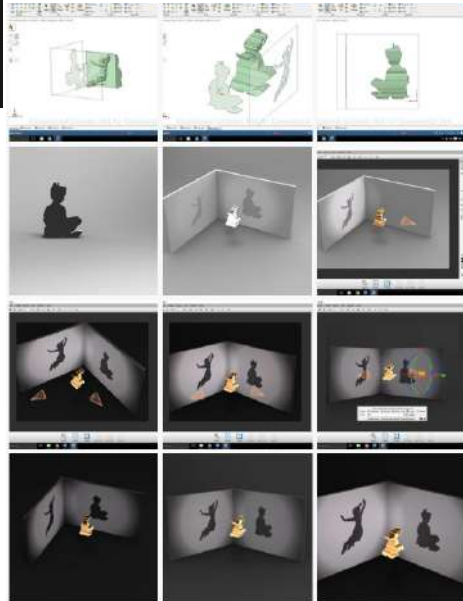
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I believe Lotte Reiniger, an artist I look up to, also had influences on my work because she often used fairytale characters for her silhouette animations as well. She famously once said: “I believe in the truth of fairy-tales more than I believe in the truth in the newspaper.”

The reason why I deliberately chose Peter Pan is because he is a familiar childhood character to many of us in the same cultural context. By utilizing a well-known character, I hope to trigger the viewers to reconnect with their childlike curiosity and imagination by enabling them to look back at their fleeting childhood experiences. (Note: my exhibition theme is “Childhood”).

The Process

Frustrated that I could not export the file on Mitra’s demo program, I started to look for other ways to create digitally fabricated shadow art. At last, I figured out how to use a combination of the Spaceclaim (CAD program) and Keyshot (a rendering program) to create my digitally fabricated shadow art model. On Keyshot, I was able to create two spotlights and project them at the object from two different planes to create silhouettes on the boards behind. The images in the third row below depict the process of adjusting the distance of the light source in relation to the Peter Pan model.



NEVERLAND - A SHADOW ART INSTALLATION 110 x 120 x 180cm February 2017

FOR THE FINAL EXHIBITION

EXPLANATION

For my final exhibition, I decided that I had to print out the *Neverland* model, as I wanted to recreate the shadows for my viewers in real life. I wanted to translate my digital fabrication to a 3 dimensional installation as I believe it would be much more effective for the viewers to see what was going on, figure out how it works and I hope I can give the viewers new paradigms and appreciation for 3D related mediums.

THE PROCESS

At first, I thought the process would be straightforward, as I just needed to print out the model I have already created digitally. However, the process of 3D printing posed additional technical challenges that I had to overcome.

THE PROCESS CONTINUED

After I realized that it was the heat of the nozzle and the air circulation that were causing the failures, I fixed it quickly and finally....

THE FINAL TOUCHES

Adjusting the position of the boxes and the flashlights in relation to the object.



At first, I had to transfer my drawing into another software called 'MakerBot Desktop'. Then, I had to input all the extra details such as the heating temperature of the nozzle, the cooling speed of the fan, the percentage of infill, etc. It was pretty much a trial and error process. I went back and forth between the school's desktop computer and the 3D printers several times, as some times the machine would not read the file. Eventually, when I got the machine to start printing, I went back home and came back the next day to find that the model didn't print.



Black cloths over the flashlights & boxes to dim down the lights and effects *Neverland* have on other exhibiting artworks

