ABYSS

MANOJH REDDY

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN FILM & ANIMATION

COLLEGE OF IMAGING ARTS AND SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
DECEMBER 2017
THESIS COMMITTEE

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Abstract

“When the human civilization continues to pursue its darker deeds, the wrong doings, the dark demons in every individual, the rage we show towards Mother Nature is the path to the end of the entire civilization. And, that end will not come with a bang, but with a whimper” - Manojh Reddy
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This film wouldn’t have been possible to make without the help of Professor Stephanie Maxwell, my friends Fraaz Khan, Phillip Leteka, Venkatarama Shakamuri, Niharika Nakka, Abhilash Makkena and to my beloved team at Moviesnlife productions to whom I dedicate my work and all the faculty and students at RIT’s School of Film and Animation. The collaborations with these artists not only helped me in finishing the conception and completion of Abyss, but also turned out to be long lasting friendships that will be with me for the entirety of my life. My love and respect for all these people and my family for making my vision and dreams come true is endless.
**DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT**

*Abys*ss started as questions. The questions that I have been asking about the bad and ugly things happening in the world. The sufferings of innocents, the cruelty shown to other life forms, the abuses we do to each other and how nature constantly reminds us with her disasters to question our inner selves and correct our doings. This idea drove me to create *Abys*ss. I’m a cinematographer and my skills and interests are in visual expression. Light as emotion, blended with an actor’s expression and the music in a precise timing is what can make the audience experience a feeling and emotion. I chose the experimental genre to create the little moments. *Abys*ss became a film with sequences communicating thoughts through powerful metaphors.
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ORIGIN OF ABYSS

The abstract idea is what evolved into the beginning of the process of making *Abyss*. The idea of *Abyss*, mentioned above, was the only thing I had in my head, I didn’t have a plan, a script, a beginning or an end. I come from a background of cinematography. Visual expression of narrative was a novel form for me. was a new to me. And, I wanted *Abyss* to be a visual narration with no dialogue. I chose the experimental genre to tell the story since there is the freedom of expression with sound and light and less conventional drama and to convey a story with metaphors with a unique precision for conveying ideas. I always liked narratives, but for making *Abyss* I thought the experimental approach would give the freedom to invent a precision and exactness of metaphor with ideas without the expectations for conventional drama.

I have researched many poems and essays on the destruction of human civilization. Finally, I found my idea that is very largely inspired by one of T. S. Elliot’s poems...

**Between the Desire**
**And the Spasm**

**Between the Potency**
**And the Existence**

**Between the Essence**
**And the Descent**
Falls the shadow

**This is the way the world ends**
**This is the way the world ends**
**This is the way the world ends**
**This is the way the world ends**
**Not with a bang but with a whimper**

- T.S. ELLIOT
INSPIRATIONS

Emmanuel Lubezki, ASC and Roger Deakins, ASC, BSC are two cinematographers who have had a great influence on my life, and most importantly my work. My work is a constant reflection of their inspiration. Their art has inspired me as a person and also helped me to grow as a professional.

Prof. Stephanie Maxwell introduced me to experimentation and radical cinema. She is very great with experimental expression in her films. I was given the opportunity to work with her and I have learned a lot of techniques and, most importantly, the very unique perspective of experimentation. It is really tough to do an experimental and I now consider fiction is more in the comfort zone of filmmaking.

I have worked on four films with Stephanie Maxwell as editor. All the four films were shot in water and using the water and light phenomena as main subjects. At first, it was hard to adapt to working experimentally and to understand a film without characters, especially since the primary focus as the ‘characters’ in her films were pure water and light.

But, I slowly learned how to ‘see’ these characters and understand them on a deep level. I actually started to notice arcs in these subjects. I started paying attention to their movements and behaviors and I came to understand the artistic metaphors they were always trying to communicate. So, I adopted the usage of metaphors and experimentation techniques that I learned from working with Stephanie Maxwell.

Additionally, I was also very inspired by Terrance Malik’s way of visual expression. The metaphors he uses to communicate his vision gave me great insight on how I might convey my story to the audience through the use of metaphors.
**SCRIPT / SCREENPLAY**

Preproduction in *Abyss* was different from the production of making a conventional narrative film. Instead of a traditional screenplay as a script, I had written the shots in detail. I wanted to make a cluster of smaller films and montages communicating the overall idea within the larger work. I also wanted that the communication of the idea should be mixed with some kind of motion or performance.

The script for *Abyss* was nothing more than visual storyboards. The story is set up in a surrealistic world. The origin of set or place where a scene takes place did not have any name. They were set up in a surrealistic, loosely defined world. I tried to recreate these set ups and environments using matte paintings, set extensions and camera mapping.

After I had introduced the idea of the film, I started to work on the concept art, as I had no idea on what my characters should look like. I named my main character Gaea, which in Greek language is the name of the goddess of nature.

The whole writing process was performed very differently as the script kept changing and was constantly updated, even while we were editing too. So, the script remained written in a very abstract way so I could remain open to progressive experimentation.

When I talked with the Gaea main actress and during rehearsals, she shared her personal experiences about her ballet background and performances. I thought it would be wonderful to experiment in conveying the story very differently. I shared all my abstract thoughts and the little cluster stories I formed with her and I thought if my main actress could tell the story to the audience as a sort of ballet performance, I could use interesting visual devices on her performance to ‘narrate’ ideas and story using strong metaphors through my cinematic choices.
BUDGET

Budget is the toughest part of any film waiting to be born. This part scared me the most since I kept getting more and more ambitious about the film. I started imagining scenes that involved a lot of CG work. Since we decided on experimental communication, my visuals for the film had to be very engaging and strong.

Thanks to a *Callahan Grant* awarded to me by the School of Film and Animation based on my original thesis proposal, I was awarded 500 dollars, an amount that would only help me to cover very basic costs of the *Abyss* production. But, I needed more money. So, I used all the money that I had been saving for up to a year and a half, all the money I earned as Grad Assistant and other freelance work, and I spent all of it on making *Abyss*. But, still the amount I pitched in was wasn’t good enough to cover all the final needs of production. This forced a lot of compromise in the amounts of shots and created the need to use more CG.

It was very frustrating to crush my ‘dream shots’ and find a balanced way to narrate the story. In the end, none of it mattered as long as the audience engages with and believes the world you create. So, I took care to make *Abyss* very believable. Below is the list of item costs for completing *Abyss*. 
### Budget

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production and Equipment</td>
<td>1500 $</td>
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<td>CGI &amp; VFX Work</td>
<td>1000 $</td>
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<tr>
<td>Actors Costs</td>
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<td>Film Festivals and Deliverables</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>4800 $</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SCHEDULING

This was another crazy thing to deal with, especially since I was directing and shooting the film by myself. I sort of produced the whole film too, as I was the only one who knew how everything, including locations unfolded. *Abyss* is a very exterior film. The majority of the locations were exterior. I shot in many places around the Rochester area. As for the scheduling, I managed to make the film in three days. This was a great challenge to me to be able make the film with many changes and variations in the shooting script in just three days. We had to go to three, and sometimes four different locations in a day to finish all the scenes.

Some of the locations presented problems with severe weather, and some scenes had to be rescheduled, since it was too difficult for the actors and crew. But, by eventually boosting the number of scenes shot in one day allowed me to keep the film on schedule and *Abyss* was actually completed within the set time frame.

We started the production on 4 November 2016 and completed shooting on 6 November 2016. There wasn’t any particular deadline we had to meet, except the SOFA screenings deadline at the end of the fall semester in December. I didn’t feel rushed and I could take my time to get all the things I had planned to shoot on location.
CASTING

GODDESS GAEA/ MOTHER NATURE METAPHOR CHARACTER –
Phoebe Giandomenico

I spoke to many of my friends during my initial idea development. I discussed a lot about my concept and I told them I was looking for some inspiring concept artwork for the look of the Goddess character, since she was the most important character to connect all the stories in Abyss. I envisioned her as looking elegant, tall for power, and goddess-like, and her body language should carry her power in quietude.

Concept art references and casting decisions were closely related, as this is an important aspect for the story. Also it’s an experimental narrative with ballet performance so I had to look for an actress with ballet experience and active practice. I posted on Backstage.com and spoke to some casting agencies about my requirements. I then received an answer from someone who fit my perfect requirements. Her name is Phoebe Giandomenico. She is from Buffalo, New York. We scheduled a meeting and discussed the story and her character. The only thing I was worried about was the ballet performance and narration with the performance, as I didn’t have any professional performer to choreograph the ballet performance.

So, Phoebe choreographed her own ballet dance composition. She broke down every line of the script and made a ballet performance that was so appropriate to the emotion and story
I was trying to communicate. She was the right person to cast for the Goddess character, and her costume and her look and most of all her ability in narrating the story was very helpful in completing *Abyss*.

I'll always be thankful for the determination and dedication shown by both the actress and also her mother in completing this film. Their support is greatly appreciated.

*The above picture is from the ballet performance world in *Abyss* and the second image of Phoebe as Goddess Gaea in *Abyss*.*
For the Warrior, I wanted the character to be very strong, muscular and robust. So, I spoke to a couple of actors for this role that were from the Screen Actors Guild (SAG). There was a lot of red tape to get SAG actors on board, and there were also some conflicts with the scheduled dates for filming. So, my only option was to contact local talent agencies. I spoke to Wilhelmina Rochester, and the agency helped me research local actor profiles for the right person to play the role of Warrior/Human Metaphor. They forwarded me Aaron Barber’s details. I met Aaron and we discussed his role. He was confident and very excited about the character. He was perfect for the part and had acting experience. Above is the still of Aaron Barber playing his evil metaphor of the Warrior character in Abyss.
The Evil Host is one of the most important characters in *Abyss*. This character is a metaphor representing all that is bad in the world. When I started the script, I wanted to focus on issues like child abuse, drug abuse and animal violence. I needed a character actor to represent all of these terrible things visually without any dialogue. Behavior over time is very essential in filmmaking. The actor’s body language and movements contribute a lot in narrating the story. I was very lucky to have Brian as the person representing the bad in three different situations in the film. His timing to each situations and reactions were very helpful in making *Abyss* a satisfying experience.

He was perfect for the characters also because of his great ability to improvise, which really surprised me and suited my desire to allow the script to be very open and feel very abstract.
Zoe is a 12-year-old. I found her on Backstage.com. Even though she is too young to understand the creepy and the darker side of the world, she gave a performance that was extremely important in elevating the emotional value of *Abyss*. Her character was a metaphor representing the innocent victims of child abuse, and the helplessness and suffering that can happen for being loyal and good.

There is a great level of suffering in her character and I wasn’t confident how to give her the proper inner motivations. Luckily, Zoe’s mother was always available on set to make Zoe understand the inner motivations of the character and communicate the feeling I was looking for from her character.

I was worried that I should be careful in making her understand the world that the story is set up in. Most of the time I would just asked her to react in particular ways, or move in a certain way, like running scared. All of my directions for her were funny and childish, as I didn’t want her to really understand the creepy world of *Abyss*. 
THE EVIL PARTY/ THE EVIL GROUP

ROBERT LINDQUIST, BARBARA LINDQUIST,

JEFF MILLER, LISA GIANDOMENICO

This is my favorite scene in the whole film. Thanks to all the actors who made it a wonderful and believable scene. Coming from a background in cinematography, I have worked with a lot of different actors on different movies. At first, I was really nervous with this scene, as I didn’t have the budget to pay for all of the needed actors. So, I contacted some of the actors I worked with previously, and luckily everyone was very excited to be part of Abyss. It was a large cast for a small scene, and I really respected the time and effort everyone put into in making this a fun and amazing scene.
CONCEPT ART & COSTUMES

Before starting the production process, I had to nail down a lot of details on how each character should look, what the colors should be for the costumes and what kind of costumes would be perfect to make the audience feel that the world of Abyss is believable. The costumes, locations and make up were very important assets to convey the story. So, I started to do more research and collected many different conceptual artwork and other reference images that helped me visualize the world of Abyss. The following two samples show what I envisioned the characters should generally look like.

Although I wanted the Goddess Gaea character to be more elegant, tall and powerful, I also wanted her to be calm and innocent at the same time. I wanted her costume to be green to
reflect the green color of nature and Goddess Gaea is Mother Nature in the story. So, after a lot of searching we found the right costume for the Goddess Gaea main character.

_Gaea’s costume. This is a scene with her in the apocalyptic world of Abyss._

The color of The Goddess’ costume was also very important to visually isolate her from the grey apocalyptic world. Her standing out in the frame felt more important as this is a story that completely derives from the Goddess’ point of view. For the ballet performance, I wanted it to feel completely the opposite and contrasting to the mystical dark world scenes. So, Gaea’s ballet performance had to be very minimalistic and subtle.
Below are some references for the ballet performance.

To make Gaea’s ballet performance resemble these references I wanted to use the green screen. Unfortunately, the camera we were using was not very detailed and so instead of working in post, and then having much to deal with in post, I wanted everything to be done in camera. Since the overall ballet performance was meant to be very simple, I used a black cloth that covered most of the studio and I used a white costume to isolate the dancing
Also, I made a collection of some rough concept artwork that showed “fire & blood” as their story. I used these words to research concept art in order to build a vision for the apocalyptic sequence, which conveys the same meaning. Here are some reference images for the apocalyptic sequence.

Below are the actual screenshots from the Gaea’s ballet performance in Abyss.

For the Warrior’s costume, I took the same approach as with the Goddess. The costume needed to be dark to represent ‘dark nature’, death and the creepy side of the Warrior’s character as he changes from good to evil.
The actors for the evil dinner scene were all dressed in suits in black and white to advance the timeline to modern times and to appear very formal. Costumes were so important for this scene, since the actors had to perform an animalistic way of eating, like people living in the Stone Age, but the only way to isolate the time period to modern times was by their costumes and the contemporary artwork and props in their surroundings.
ARTISTIC APPROACH TO STORY, CINEMATOGRAPHY & PRODUCTION PROCESS

ARTISTIC APPROACH

This is my favorite part of the journey, the actual cinematography process and production. This is where Abyss is made. This is the point where Abyss and the characters come to life. And, this is the part of the journey that will stay with me forever.

Many creative decisions and choices were made during this phase. I strived to make sure every frame of the film should look like a painting. This is the phase that excited me the most.

THE CHILD ABUSE: THE BROKEN DOLL METAPHOR

I used the broken dolls as a metaphor to represent the innocent children going through abuse in every different way. Zoe’s performance in this scene was very believable and most of my directions to her were to make her behave like a doll that has hope and life in it, and what she goes through in the scene is more similar to the dolls she is playing with. She is constrained in a very strange attic with her dolls and I used more dolls with scratches and broken heads to make the
situation look like it is happening every day. The more scratches and broken the dolls are the more she is getting abused.

Brian played the role of Evil Father in this scene. His character comes every day to the attic and abuses the child. Brian’s performance was so good, making the child tremble with fear as he is entering the attic. Everything was choreographed and rehearsed and worked perfectly.

![The Evil Father looking at his innocent child.](image)

For the shot above, I framed it at a very low angle and used a wide lens from under Zoe’s shoulder to make it more of an OTS shot to establish everything going on from her perspective. I left more empty space on the side of father to make the father character more free and movable and on Zoe’s side it is more limited and with less space to make it feel like she is trapped under this evil father forever. The low angle also makes the father appear more powerful, but also using it from below Zoe makes her look big as she is always fighting for some hope, as will be seen later in the
ending resolution of the film. The lighting for this shot creates more contrast. Also, the evil father’s black clothing and the girl’s red dress, along with the wooden beams in the background create depth and separation in the characters; make the image more interesting and believable.

I wanted to make the image darker but I also didn’t want to make it very obvious, so I left the scene to play out in a more natural and real place. What I enjoy the most as a cinematographer is to tell the story with the blend of light, lenses and colors.

Below is another image from the attic scene
The Evil Robber

Brian playing the Evil Robber using drugs

This scene was a metaphor to show the bad and ugly side of the dark streets, how easily one can lose someone else because of violence on the street. Brian plays the Evil Guy high on drugs and desperate for money, and he kills the mother, but leaves the child alone.

This scene called for a very low and natural lighting that was challenging to create since our cameras can only perform in certain restrictive ways in low light conditions. I only had a small LED light that I used to light Brian and produce some key to develop strong contrasts for his character. The feeling of desperation that Brian acted out and the sadness of the other actors as he confronts them in this scene made the effort so worthwhile.
Below are frame grabs from the *Abyss* Evil Robber scene
The Evil Dinner

This is my favorite scene in *Abyss* and the best part. I enjoyed the production, postproduction and every second spent on making this scene. This is a very metaphorical scene conveying the evilness we all show to animals that encourages animal violence. Every being has the equal right to live and we are killing these beings to satisfy our hunger, which we could do in number of less murderous ways.

Human civilization is acting out the same animal violence that was done in the Stone Age. But, in modern times violence to animals has progressed and become even more violent with modern methods and tools. Don’t we question if what we are doing is right? This Evil Dinner scene was meant to bring out this question through visceral emotions and thoughts.

The amazing performances by all of the actors (and especially some of the actors) really did a great job in creating the uncomfortable and disturbing emotions in this
scene. I wanted the audience to feel disturbed and uncomfortable about the scene.

In the above frame grab you can see the different meat and also the table outfitted with candles and wines to establish a very noir kind of atmosphere.
In one of the shots, I asked Brian if he could eat the raw meat to show how animalistic humans are. He really did eat it raw and he actually chewed it. It was a very good shot to capture the emotion, and it was really well performed.

**The intro scene/ The Rise metaphor**

This is the beginning scene of the film. The reason for discussing this scene at this place in this paper, and after the three scenes, is to have a clear picture of how the other stories are related to everything that is happening in the world of *Abyss*.

In this scene, we established Gaea and her world. The scene starts with the Goddess enjoying the fresh breath of her creation and she wants someone who can protect her creation for her.

**The warrior / human metaphor**

Gaea gives the human form the responsibility of protecting her creation. I used a Warrior as a human metaphor to establish the trust and the strength so that it is more believable that someone like him can protect her creations. Also, the Warrior being the metaphor establishes how strong and trusted human beings are.
The above images show the Warrior accepting her creation to save.

THE BALLET PERFORMANCE

The ballet performance added a dimension in making *Abyss* more engaging. In India, the classical dance Bharatanatyam is used as a method to tell ancient stories about Indian history and the expressions dancers use are very inspiring. Since I wanted to try some other art form to convey the important ideas of *Abyss*, I chose ballet performance to tell the story and used all the montages as a visual narration to the performance. There are very high and low moments in her performance that helped to enhance the rise and fall of *Abyss*. 
The Evil Human Scene

Humans have evolved to be more greedy and selfish over time. And this is the main reason why all the natural resources are depleted and Mother Nature’s creation is destroyed. So, the Warrior or the human metaphor she trusted gets greedy and transforms into the Dark Evil person chasing innocence and all good existing in the world.

The good, innocence, kindness and helplessness are represented using Zoe as metaphors. We used a white wardrobe to represent the peace, calmness and innocence. Also, the human civilization with its constant need to become rich and strong, people mining the Earth, factories polluting and everything the rich do is through exploiting the poor to make sure they get what they want. The world is turning darker more than ever.
I wanted to convey all these ideas with the human Warrior metaphor turning into Evil Human scene and making the Warrior turn ‘dark’ with dark shadows under his eyes and acting out a frightening deliberateness in his pursuit of the girl he is chasing. The girl keeps running and falls down as her energy and hope dies. The Evil Warrior gets complete control over God’s creation.

*The below image show the innocent girl running away to save the creation from the Evil Human metaphor.*
This is the finale of *Abyss*. This is the point where the good rises and the bad falls down. I’m also establishing the fact that this is how our civilization will come to an end, and in *Abyss* it’s the aftermath of all the deeds in the scenes coming before the end. This is the payoff and the climax of the drama and the actions that take place in this film.

In the story, as the wrong deeds and suffering increase, Gaea will come to a conclusion that she should take back control over the world. So, she punishes the bad. The idea I wanted to convey using the film’s metaphors is that the wrongdoings of human civilization is what is causing the natural disasters that we face frequently on Planet Earth.

Nature always tries to balance the bad with the good, and in this case Gaea decides to punish the evil wrongdoers. So, the aftermath shots are all simple, mostly having a single subject in almost every frame so the audience can see only the subject and the expression for the idea I hope to communicate. The ending keeps getting darker
as the whole world is being destroyed, as the lighting and cinematography is drastically changed to tell the story with light and composition.

This concludes the cinematography process of *Abyss* production.
EDITING & SOUND DESIGN

Fraaz Khan is a talented, professional editor and a MFA graduate in The School of Film and Animation. He performed the editing and sound design on *Abyss*. I always work with Fraaz, as his editing is precise and his style makes it very easy for the audience to understand the story better and in an engaging way. His style is paced and his way of telling the story uses less information and he always makes sure the mystery is sustained by giving only enough information that is necessary for viewers to follow everything that is happening in the film.

Since *Abyss* is a visual experience, we decided to use less sound design and only use it when necessary. So, the only scene where more sound effects were used was the dinner scene as the sound of flesh chewing and more of the eating meat sounds were necessary in exaggerating the uncomfortable feeling that the viewers would have watching the scene. Fraaz did the sound design by himself, as he knew how it would cut properly with all the effects and visuals. We discussed the edit pattern and decided to use the shots that carried the most human emotion. Most of the editing was already planned during the preproduction, since I wanted to be sure that every shot I filmed carried a strong emotion. I also didn’t want to waste any resources, as the initial idea was to rely on CG. The editing process for *Abyss* was very different from editing a narrative fiction since it was an experimental work. We still did the coverage, but the cuts to close ups and many other shots were completely based on the emotion and story we decided to communicate to audience. Overall, I was very happy with Fraaz’s dedication and passion in trying to communicate the idea.
**Screenings, Festivals & Awards**

*Abyss* was screened for the first time as a part of the School of Film and Animation’s fall semester screenings in December 2016. The film received great compliments and feedback from faculty and other members present at the screenings. Most of the audience enjoyed the experimental narrative structure used in the film. Some liked the grandeur of visuals and cinematography methods used to communicate the story.

**Awards & Recognition**

I have applied to a lot of film festivals using filmfreeway.com. So far, the film has been officially selected to screen in two international film festivals and it has won an award at Frostbite International Film Festival. The film is still in judging status in 20 more festivals and I’m also applying to more environmental and experimental film festivals. Selections for most of the film festivals will take place in 2018. So far, we are really happy with how the film is doing in international film festivals.

Below are the award and official selection laurels from the festivals

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**OFFICIAL SELECTION**

*AAB International Film Festival*

2017

**BEST SPECIAL EFFECTS**

*FROSTBITE International Film Festival*

2017

**OFFICIAL SELECTION**

*FROSTBITE International Film Festival*

2017
TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

For cameras we used Sony Fs7 and a7sii. For the Fs7, I filmed using the Slog3 picture profile. Shooting in Slog3 was helpful in preserving the dynamic range. Using the Slog3 the range for color grading was also more and I was able to gain many more details in shadow areas. Preserving highlights was also good using this camera.

For lenses, I used the Rokinon CineDS kit. These are not the greatest lenses, but they did the job. With this lens kit I had focal lengths ranging from 18 mm to 135 mm. We used the DJI Ronin M for the steady shots, and used a7sii to mount on the gimbal, as it was much less in weight compared to the Sony Fs7. We used doorway dolly and Kessler slider for some interesting movements to convey more emotion.

For the lighting, we used the Arri HMI, Arri Tungsten kit and some LED’s. There was lot of rigging with muslins and negative fills for exterior shots. And, 6*6 frames were a must have for the entire filming.

For Software specifications, the editor used Adobe Premiere Pro and Adobe After Effects for editing and Protools for the final sound mixing. For CGI and VFX work, the compositors used Nuke and Blackmagic Fusion for final compositing of shots. The Matte paints were created using Adobe Photoshop. The final color grading and master output was created using DaVinci Resolve Studio.

This concludes the technical specifications for Abyss.
Our Journey Deep into the Dark

MOVIESNLIFE PRODUCTIONS in association with NLP CINEMAS
“ABYSS” PHOEBE GIANDOMENICO BRIAN BARRET AARON BARBER
music SIDDHARTH SADASYU editor BAAZ KHAN cinematography MANOJH REDDY
costume design NIHARIKA NAKKA producer PHILLIP LETEKA ABHILASH MAEKENA
VENKATARAMANA S written and directed by MANOJH REDDY

A Film by Manojh Reddy

ABYSS
2017
APPENDIX
Thesis Proposal
Rochester Institute of Technology
Master of Fine Arts

Manojh Reddy
“ABYSS: Our Journey into Dark”
4.17.15

Approved for Submission By: ____________________________________________
Stephanie Maxwell (Committee Chair)

(Committee: Frank Deese and Ambarien Alqadar, SOFA)
Writer & Director: Manojh Reddy
Title: Journey Without a Destination
Thesis Advisor: Stephanie Maxwell
Running time: 15 minutes
Genre: Live Action, Experimental Narrative

Concept
The concept for this work is an exploration on the abstract form of the human soul that each person possesses but also shares certain common attributes. This work will take the form of a film that consists five smaller films. Each film will be based on a question that I pose and then research, and then finally I will write a short script and make the short film that exposes the question and creates change in the characters within the film.

The questions come from my own personal journey through life and this work will be a personal exploration for me. I have already begun to develop a list of questions that, for a start, have allowed me to uncover my uniqueness, but also describes me as possessing certain attributes of being that everyone shares, and for me these attributes are the glue of being a human being. But the glue can be poison and guilt producing when life is a fight to find one’s happy soul.

The Questions
The following is a list of sample questions that I have developed as an initial exploration of the journey and the motivating theme of this work. This list is just the beginning of the journey for me, and these questions may change down the road. In addition, I have decided that I will limit the thematic questions in my production to five questions. Each question will become the foundation of one of the five films; each film will be three minutes in length and be perceived as a single shot.

• If a person is born as a full entity, why would he want to try to imitate another person to become like him?
  • Subordinate Questions/Ideas:
  • Why would someone try to imitate another person’s mental character?
  • Why would someone try to change his own character?
  • When was the last time he was himself?
  • Can a person reach their personal destination in life?
• Why do we react to another person when speaking to them, as if predicting their inner thoughts and then reacting accordingly?
  • For instance, why do we change our thoughts and reactions about something knowing that the other person reacts to it differently or has a different opinion?
• What is real and what is fake?
• What gives us happiness and what takes happiness us away from us?
  • Why are some people happy and why are the rest of us trying to find what makes them happy?
• What are the effects of the dimension of time for measuring one’s
existence and worth?

• What is nature doing to us?
  • Life and happiness are directly proportional to one’s point of view and treatment of nature
• When something dies the energy (soul) is neither created or nor destroyed and is transferred. When a person is so sure that he dies at some point of his life, why does he fight for race and religion?
  • What if a person dies as a Jew and is born again as a Muslim? What is the point in even having a war between both the religions?
• Why does on waste time in thinking about all these issues above?

Inspirations
These are filmmakers and films that are inspirations and references for my films for visual style, cutting and narration:

  Terrence Malick (Tree of Life, Knight of Cups story)
  Godfrey Reggio (Koyanisqatsi)
  Dziga Vertov (Man With a Movie Camera)
  Gaspar Noe (Enter the Wild)

Visualization Concepts
Metaphors
Infinite tunnels (journey)
Clones (changed person and real person)
5-sided crystal where each facet on the crystal is a film (crystal composition and growth)

Technical Approach
Digital live production
Matt paintings
Set Extensions
FlowCam shots
Infinite camera tracking shots
Green Screen
And more…

Personal Beliefs and Possible Resolutions Expressed in the Films
Here are some of my thoughts and beliefs that will guide my exploration and research:
• All of the questions above are related, as everything in the universe is related.
• Everything is related to one unique unknown entity which people term as God.
• That singular entity is unknown and cannot be seen or discovered, but its force takes us along the journey from a mother’s womb to a wooden coffin.
• The discovery of the unknown entity and how it is related to everything will always remain a mystery.
Rationale
This is an abstract idea about exploration of how everything is related. It's a journey of individuals in five short films to find the Unknown Entity and to discover and explore the inside objective of life.

The idea of trying to reach a destination comes from my personal journey of all these years in discovering happiness. It also comes from my personal frustration of seeing people acting differently than their more truthful self or abandoning their original true self completely.

The presentation of this idea in this set of five short films is far different from conventional storytelling. It is also a worthy challenge for me to explore the filmmaking and develop a unique filmmaking artistry and further my craftsmanship with the film medium. I will accomplish this work also by incorporating emotional characters, choreography of camera and music.
Abyss: Our journey into the dark

By

Manojh reddy
RATIONALE:

The premise of this film is about mankind’s destruction and obsession. This film is a cluster of smaller scenes leading to a bigger idea. Driven by the thoughts on how the world will end if we (the human civilization) continue with our darkest deeds.

IDEA AND SCENES

We see Gaea (Goddess of earth and nature in Greek Mythology) touching and feeling her creations. She walks by small plants, smelling the fresh air.

Gaea creates a human form (A warrior – metaphorically showing that the humans are given all the strength) to save and protect her immense creations. In return, she gives the human form a power in which he can only be destroyed with his dark deeds.

Time passes by, seasons change. Gaea standing by her crystals, decides to check upon her creations. All she sees in the crystals are fire and blood.

All of the crystals around her slowly start to shatter, leading her to take a look at what is actually happening.

SCENE:1

We see a 10-year-old girl, with bruises on her face (hair frizzy and messed up), looking scared. A Man dressed in suit around 38 years old, comes into a room. Slowly unbuttoning his shirt (a cross necklace is revealed), he puts a smirk on his face. Goddess looks at the little girl, helpless.

[ the above scene is a metaphor saying "people who are intended to save the world are the one’s putting the world in danger ]

SCENE:2

We see a Junkie sniffing cocaine. He takes a moment to let it sink in. His mind starts to feel dizzy and blurred up. He then loads his gun. On the other side of an alley, we see a mother and daughter walking out of a movie theatre. The junkie starts to walk towards the theatre. He sees the mother and daughter and as soon as they cross each other’s paths, the junkie reaches for his gun. The mother tries to reach into her bag for money while the junkie reacts to the mothers movement and immediately shoots her. The mother
falls to the ground while the junkie takes the money and leaves the daughter along the side of the body.

SCENE:3

We see an evil host with a group of people. we see different kind of meat, flesh, human brains on the dinner table. We see group of couple toasting with meat. The host is trying to cut the meat with his knifes but unable to do it, he grabs the raw meat and put it in his mouth and chew it. We see Gaea face confused looking at all these people.

(the above scene is a metaphor of how all our minds are as violent and abusive towards other creatures and replicating the scenario of how people eat during stone age and how they consume meat of innocent creatures even in the modern age).

SCENE:4

There is a small girl, with her hands tied up. She’s embracing her fingers together, as if she’s trying to protect something. The warrior[ human form] the Goddess sent in the beginning is seen chasing after the girl. The girl trips over and falls to the ground. A small plant falls out from her hands. The warrior cuts the plant in half.

[ The above scene is not a metaphor but it says the human form that God created in the beginning turned into something dangerous and he cuts down the last plant in the world which the little girl was trying to protect ].

Next scenes in sequence:

Reaching to the final point, the Goddess is blown away into ashes. Followed by her disappearance, the whole world starts to get even darker.

MONTAGES: 1) Blood dripping through the streets ( We see blood flowing through the streets.

2) cities burning down ( getting the drone shots from different cities using them as a background plates to turn them to an apocalyptic scene )

3) Fruits ripening ( We see a time lapse shot of fruit getting dried and dead)

4) earth from a space view turning into a black void and revealing it as a complete black eyeball of Godess Gaea.

THE END