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PT2 MA Illustration

THE CRAFT AND THE MIND

My Journey of Craft-Based Animation



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INTRODUCTION:

At the beginning of P2, I was feeling anxious about where my practice was heading. I had started to develop a style outside of my usual black and white lino cut animations, and I was now experimenting with other methods of working. Although I felt like I was developing as a creative, the constant fear of my future was always at the forefront of my mind. Through this Monograph I will be explaining how these emotions helped fuel my practice and take me down routes I never considered.

Many of the pieces I created during P2 were inspired by the feeling of nostalgia. During Lockdown there was a lot of time spent reflecting on past thoughts and feelings, therefore my designs began to take on empty spaces and muted tones to represent the idea of reflection. I was drawn to artists such as Barbara Nessim, Wassily Kandinsky, as well as other artists from the Bauhaus movement, which simultaneously inspired me to focus on abstract forms in a way to represent how I was feeling at the time. In this monograph I will be discussing three fundamental areas of my practice:



Emotions: How I convey emotions using colour, shape, movement, and timing.

Craft: The reason I choose to create craft-based animations as oppose to digital, and its influence.

Professionalism: How participating in extracurricular activities through MMU has led me to new opportunities, and how I now see my future after the MA.

I believe all these areas of my practice have influence one and other in some way, and although my work has taken on many forms up until this point, I think that even the work I have not continued has been useful in my final decision making.

FORMS OF EMOTION:

Emotions play a huge part within my animations. As someone who has been very insecure about their work in the past, I now find it a release to use animation to express how I am really feeling.

COLOUR:

The use of colour within my craft-based animation allows me to represent my feelings without making it obvious to the audience. Therefore, when choosing different tones, I use ones which are not only aesthetically pleasing, but also have a deeper physiological meaning to me. For instance, turquoise (as seen in *Ribbon of Thought*), represents anxiety: the cool blue tones reflect negative feelings, whereas the green reflect uncertainty. Although I want the animations, I present to be calming in the way the move fluently and repeat, I still want to project a personal and hidden meaning which can be interpreted in diverse ways. This technique was use by Wassily Kandinsky. In

his book, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1977) Kandinsky explores the relation of colour and form and how they can covey emotions. In the chapter "Movement" (p.15) Kandinsky states that "how" is one of the most important questions an artist must ask in their work, as it leaves the meaning open to interpretation. For example: "How will the audience feel when they view my work?" Or "How are these colours representative to me compared to someone else?" This is a particularly important question that needs to be asked throughout the creative process, and something I did not necessarily take into consideration when making work at the start of the year.



(Abbott: 2020 a)

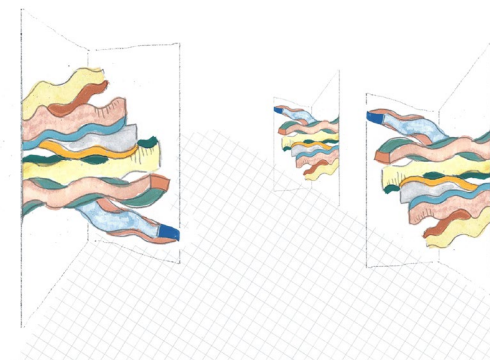
SHAPE:

After having a discussion with one of my co-workers at Project inc. about the use of abstract shapes, they suggested I read *The Dot and The Line: A Romance of Lower Mathematics* by Norton Juster (1964). The book is simple but explains relations between opposing shapes in an imaginative way. Throughout the book The Line changes its form to make The Dot fall in love with him. Norton Juster used simple maths to explain how a line can change into complex forms, whereas the dot remains perfectly round. This idea of "opposites attract" is something I use throughout my work, juxtaposing straight

lines next to rounded objects, and is why I found this book so compelling. In the case of Norton Juster, The Line is masculine and The Dot feminine, however I find, the use of abstract shapes allows the reader to interpret the message of the story on their own - again, relating back to Kandinsky's colour theory. In my work I wish to continue to use abstract shapes a way to convey certain emotions to allow audience to imagine their own understanding of the piece. Like Juster, I like my animations to be simple so the audience may focus on one emotion at a time.

MOVEMENT & TIMING:

Movement and timing also play an important part within my animations. When speaking to other animation directors in the industry such as Sam Moore: Head of MA Animation at MMU and Emma Lazenby: Director and Founder of ForMed Animations, they both told me to change the timing of my animations to 2fps (frames per second). Although I understand that this is the standard frame rate in the industry, my frame rate runs at 3fps. As my work contains a lot of



(Abbott: 2020 b)

texture, a slower pace makes it visibly pleasing to the eye and therefore more relaxing to the audience as it allows them to process what is happening in the animation. When I first started to create GIFs, I did not take into consideration the idea of "looping" my work. If I were to change any element of my earlier pieces, I would make the pieces seamlessly transition to make it more satisfying for the audience to watch, and therefore more therapeutic.

Above: *Social Anxiety* (2020), is about leaving the house after the Pandemic. I think this animation would have been better looped into one continues motion to represent the anxiousness of opening the door and leaving the house.

A TRICK, A WILE, A CRAFT

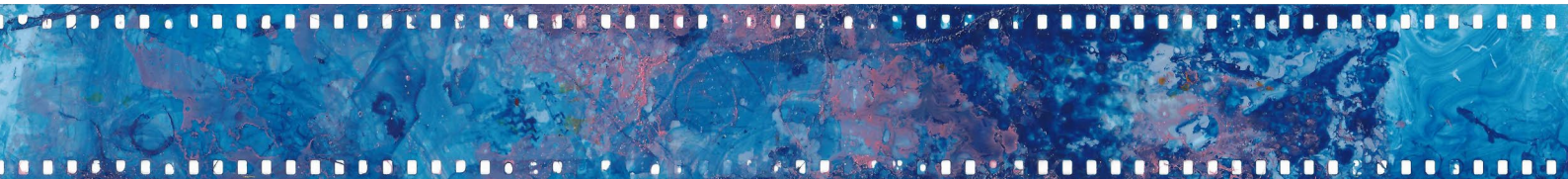
One question I am asked a lot is “why craft-based animation?” It is understandable why some people might not understand why I chose to stick to more analogue ways of working, especially using lino cut and gouache. In most cases, people associate animation with more mainstream representations in film and cartoons made digitally 2D or 3D. Craft-based animations combine the two, whereas the print or painting is physically 2D, the handmade textures and the imperfections make the piece 3D, as they tell the audience that this is a handmade animation. Although people may challenge my technique and suggest I could create the same style digitally, there is more to craft-based animation than challenging the industries norm.

MAKING MY MARK:

I believe one of the most important parts of my craft is the use of analogue materials used to create digital animations. After talking to the Animation MA tutor Sam Moore about the possibilities of where craft-based animations can be used, she suggested I read *The Crafty Animator: Handmade, Craft-Based Animation and Cultural Value* (Ruddell: Ward, 2019). It was not until reading this book did I realise the importance of tactile animations. I have always felt a bit of an “outsider” when it comes to creating animations, as someone who uses mixed-media methods, such as gouache and Lino; it has been difficult to understand why I am using these materials. One reason is its accessibility: hand-drawn frame-by-frame animations can easily be made with any materials on scraps of paper, I argue that the animations can be extremely abstract - if there's movement, it is an animation. Therefore, anyone can do it, therefore breaking down the barriers which has

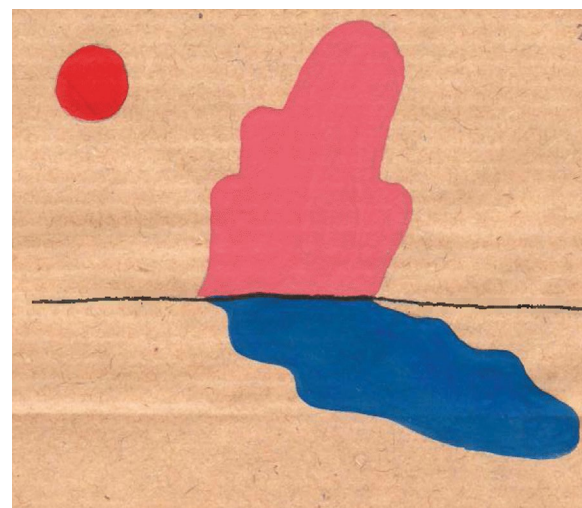
been set up by mainstream animation, that it must be expensive and take years to produce. This leads me onto my second point, cost, and reliability. As a student I thought I could use different software to my advantage, such as Cinema 4D, but not only was this subscription limited, the software often broke or did not render properly. Craft animation is a very forgiving technique, if there are so called “glitches” or if mistakes are made, it is often covered by the multitude of textures within the method used. When researching into craft-based animation, I stumbled across another genre: Experimental Animation. Animators like Len Lye and Barbel Neubauer reinforce my previous point, as their work is often a celebration of mark making and spontaneity. By drawing directly onto the film reel, they remove the digital aspect of a 16mm camera, and step straight from drawing to the projector, allowing for natural shapes and movement to form on their own.

Below is an experimentation using 35mm film and marble inks inspired by Barbel Neubauer's animation *Colours and Minutes* (1994). I found the process very entertaining, and I continued to show this technique to students at Project inc. Although I do not know where it fits in with my final piece, it was important to experiment with new methods.



(Abbott: 2021 a)

Throughout the second year of my Masters I struggled a lot with my identity as a practitioner. I found it exceedingly difficult to choose a “style” and doubted whether craft-based animation was worth the challenge. I put pressure on myself to create a full-length animation: first *The Arm*, and then *The Origin of Birds* by Italo Calvino. Although I have turned my focus onto something that represents the whole of my animation and teaching practice, I still learned a lot from these animations. In *The Arm*, I tried to combine craft and digital animation, using gouache illustrations and patterns, and animating them using After Effects, although I am already confident in Adobe, I was able to adapt my style and push myself out of my comfort zone to try new techniques. The animation was based around the idea of social Anxiety, but unlike the GIF it was more detailed and less abstract. After trying out different scenes, the narrative was not strong enough and did not support the type of technique I was using.



(Abbott: 2021 b)

CUT IT OUT!:

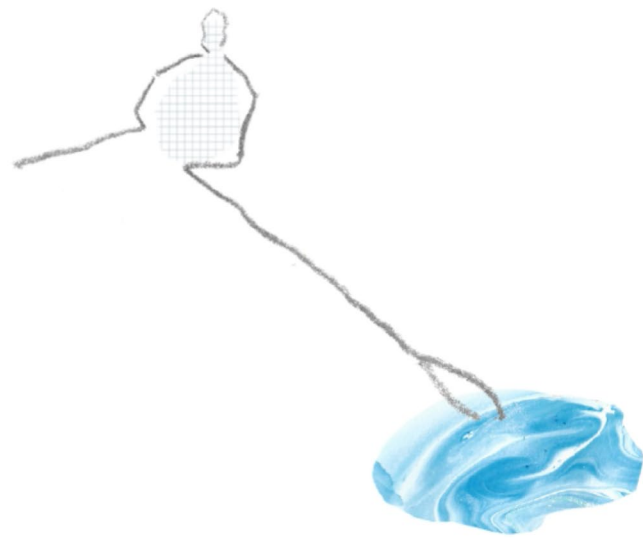
It was especially important to me to look research into some of the early pioneers of craft-based animation and why people are sceptical. Reading *The Crafty Animator* reinforced my own ideas as to why craft-based animation should be identified more within the industry. Linking back to my earlier point, craft-based animation has therapeutic benefits as well as aesthetic ones; painting and printing each frame allows to relax and enjoy the making process. However, the book brought my attention to why people see craft-based animation to be lesser than mainstream animation, and that is its association of being “feminine.” Lotte Reiniger created the first feature length animation back in 1926 completely out of paper cut silhouettes called *The Adventures of*

KEEPING IT CRAFT:

During P2, I have struggled with narrative and used fiction such as Italo Calvino's series of short stories: *The Cosmicomics* (1964) for inspiration. *The Origin of Birds* (pp 167-179) stood out because it was written in the style of a comic book, I initially thought that it would be a challenge to try to recreate the story as both a comic book and an animation. Although I enjoyed the hand drawn parts of the making process, such as creating lino cut and gouache GIFs, I started to feel like I was trying too hard to create a certain aesthetic which did not coincide with my craft-based style. I tried different forms of techniques: digital, mixed media and ink. Although I felt like I was getting closer with each step, I could see that I was rushing the creative process. Slowing down and taking time to do craft-based animations has taught me to appreciate the process as much as the finished result.

Here you can see *Bounce* another GIF inspired Italo Calvino's *The Origin of Birds*. Although this is just the first half of the full action, this simple GIF encompasses the narrative and surreal humour of Calvino. The craft paper adds a charm, along with the frame numbers in the corner that proves that this animation has not been altered digitally.

Prince Achmed. When reading the reviews of the film the critics used phrases like “Pretty, pretty cut outs” or “...cunning fingers to hold magic scissors” (Hosea, 2019) the review seem to indicate the Reiniger must have used magic to create her paper cuts because she was unable to create it all by herself. The film was later overshadowed by Walt Disney's *Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs* in 1937 which was then claimed as being the first feature length animation. I feel that independent film makers such as Lotte Reiniger will always be overshadowed by industry, however I see craft-based animation as a rebellion rather than a degree of skill. Although companies will seek out animators with skills in the software, I believe after time certain styles become overdone.



 [CLICK HERE TO
VIEW PORTFOLIO](#)

(Abbott: 2021 c)



(Abbott: 2021 d)

PROJECT BASED:

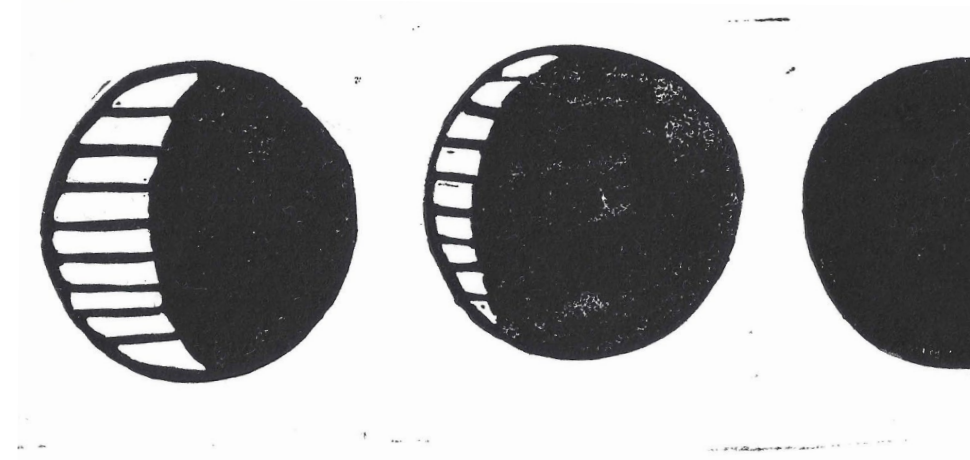
During the second year of my MA, I decided to join the RISE Programme to further my skills outside illustration. Through Rise I worked alongside the Arts for Wellbeing Incubator as a workshop coordinator. We worked as part of teams to attend weekly training and create our own arts for well-being workshops over zoom. Although I was nervous, I was pleased how the workshop turned out, and made connections which would later be useful when looking for later employment. Hebe, one of the programme leads, later contacted me, and introduced me to other faculty members working with the Lowry Community

Arts Workshops. As well as the Arts for Well-being Programme, I took advantage of all the different free workshops RISE had to offer, in particularly the careers and LinkedIn workshops. Through these I made numerous connections and began to build my professional status based on the advice given by Alberta Mason. I was a little sceptical of LinkedIn and it is benefits to me as a craft-based animator, however in May I was contacted by Lisa Alberti, the Founder and Studio Lead for Project inc. a creative college based in various sites around the North West focused on supporting neurodiverse students.

HELP & SUPPORT:

Working as digital support had helped me discover that the work, I was doing during P2 is relevant and can be used to help neurodiverse learning. As many of the students are drawn to animations outside of Project inc. I saw the opportunity to introduce them to traditional and craft-based animations. Having the opportunity to create my own lesson plan and as a direction towards something I knew the students were interested in is an incredibly fun and rewarding experience. As many of the students benefit from more tactile ways of working, I saw the advantages of craft-based animation as it combines the art skills they have become accustom too and new techniques that is

exciting and challenging. I introduced some students to Barbel Neubauer and Mary-Ellen Bute to create some experimental animations on top of acetate. Drawing along to music, the students were fast to express their emotions and styles onto these new materials. I later helped one of the students recreate his journey through Project inc. onto 35mm film reel. I had to adapt my way of talking and how I explain steps clearly. Although the students enjoyed the practicality of the techniques, I still do not think they understood its potential or importance. I am excited to go back next year and to continue my work so I may teach more experimental animation methods.



FUTURE FOCUS:

Speaking to other tutors at MMU, Project inc. and even my old teacher from college, I have decided I would not like to study a PGCE right now. One reason is because I will have to give up my role as a teaching assistant and the other is I will have to work in mainstream education. During college I saw my teachers struggle for funding and to gain the attention of students who were told art was not a serious subject. In my email, my teacher states that "there has been recent cuts in art-subjects which is very short sighted." I agree that there is a lack of understanding by those in power towards art and design subjects and have never seen first-hand the benefit art brings to all sorts of diverse groups of people.

One project I have been working on outside of the MA is creating comic book workshops for neurodiverse students. After my Testing Time critique with Tony Pickering, he really enjoyed my adaptation of The Origin of Birds and suggested I read Lynda Barry's *Making Comics* (2019). I really liked the way she played out her books and taught in the form of comic books; taking inspiration from her book and from the Italo Calvino comic book I designed, I began to make my own. After some further research, I found the work of Carol Grey and her book *Comic Strip Conversations: Illustrated Interactions That Teach Conversation Skills To Students With Autism and Related Disorders* (1994), where she explains the benefits of comic strips as a form of conversation for students struggling to communicate. I created a comic book about how to create a comic book. I initially tried this out with a few of the students and expected to hear nothing back, but one student told me it was helpful and had already started to create new characters. Hearing back what the students thought of my lessons is helpful when creating new classes for the future, in and outside of Project inc. I would like to continue to create a few more comic book workshops that I can do online or in small classes.

CONCLUSION:

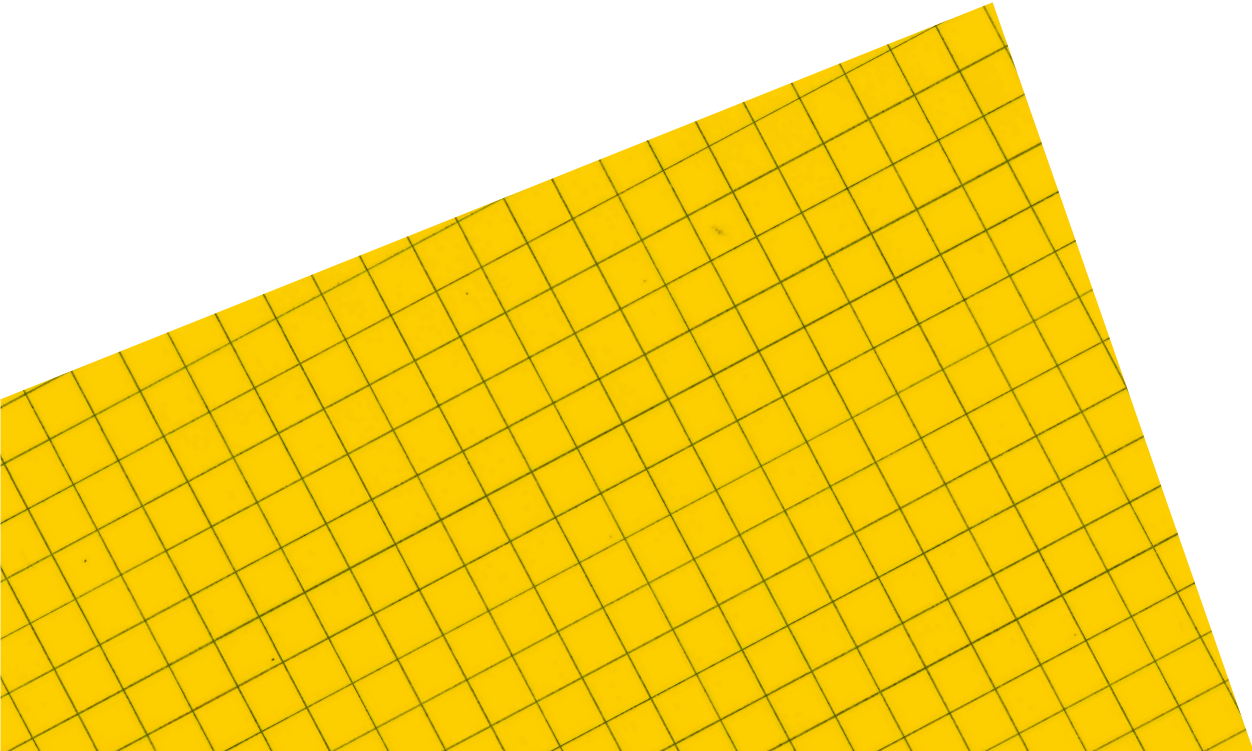
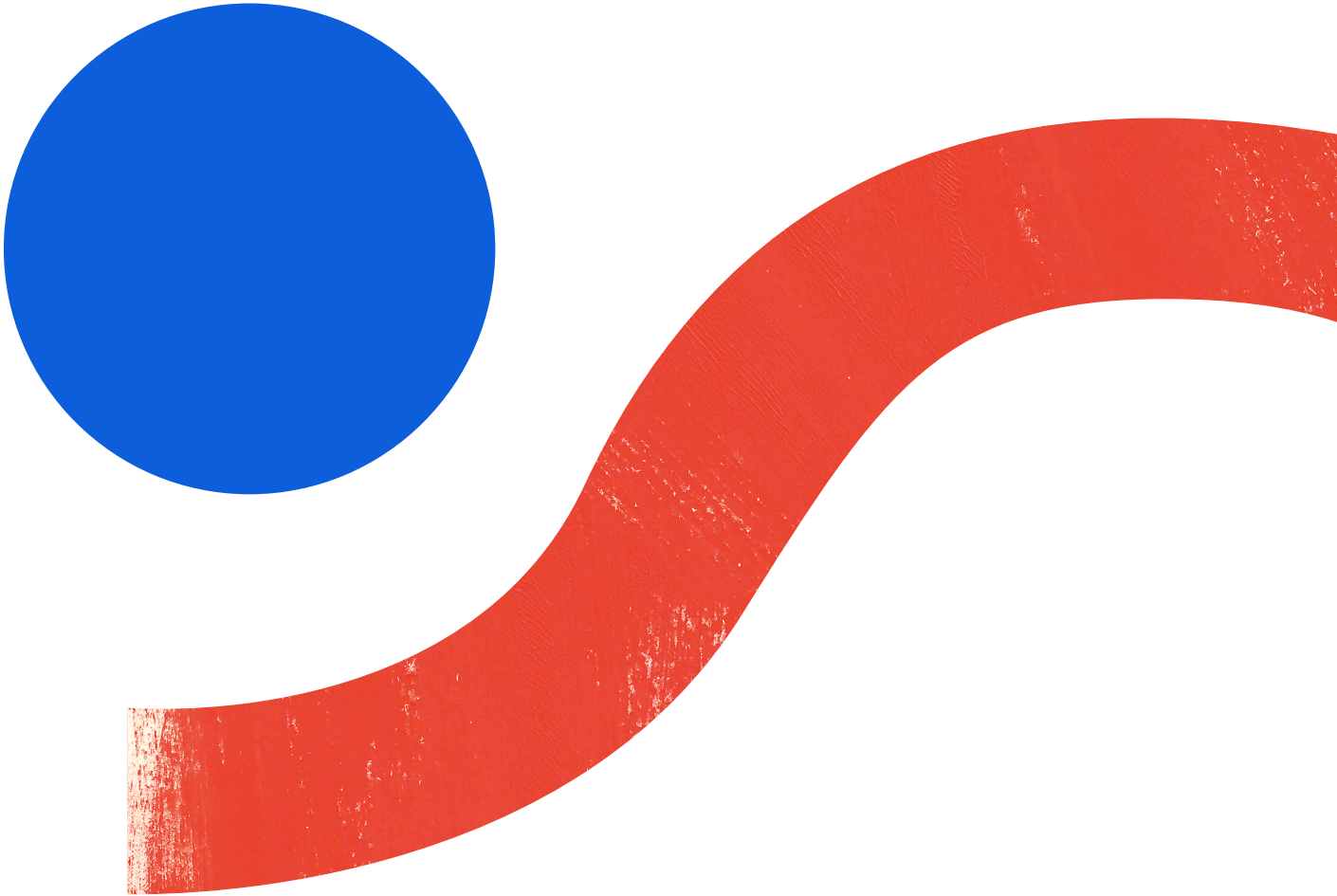
I believe my practice has grown drastically over the last few months since working with Project inc. and so has my confidence. Throughout the Testing time talks I was told my confidence has improved, and I could tell it changed the way people perceived my work. I would like to network with more creatives in the industry, specifically in sports and children's television, I have already made strong connections with co-workers at Project inc. who have links within these industries and can help me build my practice further.

After my MA I would like to continue to create craft-based animations alongside my work with Project inc. Although I do not see it as long term, it is wonderful experience to run along my practice which is heavily based around mental health and communication.

WHERE DO I SEE MY PRACTICE GOING?

As well as mental health, I can see my practice working for sports or athletic adverts or online editorials. There is a strong connection between mental health and physical health, The original designer of the Olympic Rings and early ambassadors Pierre de Coubertin, states the Olympics should combine "the muscle and the mind" (International Olympic Committee, 2020). With recent events in the Tokyo 2021 Olympics with United States gymnast Simone Biles withdraws from the games to "focus on her mental health" (BBC Sport, 2021), this vision is still extremely relevant, and it will be interesting to explore how we feel when we are competing or taking part in a sport. This means, broadening my connections out to more communities I never thought I would have a chance to work with.

The movement of the abstract shapes, along with the bright colours, are representative of the motion of the body and mind working together. I wish would continue my GIFs focused on emotions so I can keep building my portfolio, and create a short animation made up of GIFs for each emotion. Saying this, I know my skills within animation will grow over time and encourage me to branch out into other industries. However, now I am still pushing myself to express my own emotions through craft-based animations, whilst encouraging others that they can do the same.



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