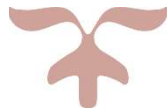


THE RUSTIC RUNWAY OF RADIATOR SPRINGS

Driving the Cast of Cars to the Stage



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Abstract

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Lights up. A lone figure sits onstage. She wears a teal fluffy sweater. *Wow*, you think to yourself. *That's so ugly. Why would someone ever put that abomination on stage?* Yes, it may *seem* ugly, but the character might not think so, or, more importantly, the costume designer might think it's perfect. Through character analysis, the actor and the designer may discover that while working in her small-town diner, this character likes to stand out. Perhaps it's teal because the leather seats in her diner are teal and she likes things to match. It's fluffy because, to her, fluffy equals fabulous. The audience may or may not be able to make these connections by the time the show concludes, but these are the choices a costumer needs to make in hopes of serving an audience in their understanding of a production, whether consciously or subconsciously, by manifesting a character's personality into a wearable ensemble. In alliance with this concept, my thesis project will adapt the 2006 Pixar classic *Cars* for the stage using deep character analysis in tandem with my costume design skills with an autoethnographical approach. This project will include character study, mood boards, sketches, and final renderings; an overview of the extensive research involved in costuming; and a record of the design process from concept to completion. Furthermore, my chosen film includes extensive character variety, and adapting inanimate objects to humans will pose an additional challenge. Ultimately, my work intends to shed light on the costume design process and show how – even when choices seem minuscule – they all contribute to creating a visual aid that helps guide an audience through a story. At the conclusion of this project, I hope to help audience members understand that it's not just a fluffy sweater. It's a *fluffy sweater*.

KEYWORDS:

Costume design, Character analysis, Theatrical production, Stage adaptation, Visual storytelling, Pixar *Cars*, Autoethnography

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The Rustic Runway of Radiator Springs: Driving the Cast of Cars to the Stage

Lights up. A lone figure sits on stage. She wears a teal fluffy sweater. *Wow*, you think to yourself. *That's so ugly. Why would someone ever put that abomination on stage?* Yes, it may *seem* ugly, but the character might not think so, or, more importantly, the costume designer might think it's perfect. Elizabeth Luden, Fulbright Scholar and Fellow at the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, reiterates this idea by stating, "costumes can be intentionally unappealing, torn down, outdated, and dirty" (Lundén 84). The art of costume design is one of many faces, designers are expected to cultivate productions rich with colors and textures to push along the plot as well as aid the audience in their understanding of each persona on stage. In some cases, this causes characters to be dressed in a way that society may deem plain or unattractive. The costume designer comes to this decision through the annotation of the script and designer and director meetings, during which they discuss their own interpretations of each character's personality and background in a study called character analysis.

Through character analysis, the director and the designer may discover that while working in her small-town diner, this character likes to stand out. Perhaps it's teal because the leather seats in her diner are teal and she likes things to match. It's fluffy because, to her, fluffy equals fabulous. The audience may or may not be able to make these connections by the time the show concludes, but these are the choices a costumer needs to make in hopes of serving an audience in their understanding of a production, whether consciously or subconsciously, by manifesting a character's personality into a wearable ensemble. However, throughout my own

study of costume design and curiosity about its overall process, I have found minimal information about and examples of other costume designers' procedures and preliminary thoughts. The closest that I have come to finding these answers is through interviews with well-known designers, but they fail to delve into the nitty-gritty details of where they pulled inspiration from, their dissection of the script, or the changes that were made between preliminary and final designs (Battle). To fill in these research gaps, I wanted to produce a project where I created a step-by-step recount of this process using a script that has distinct characters while still leave room for interpretation and creativity. Therefore, my thesis project adapts the 2006 Pixar classic *Cars* for the stage using deep character analysis in tandem with my costume design skills.

Literature Review

On the surface of costume design, adornment is an enticing visual aspect that draws audiences into a storyline and enhances the entertainment level of a production. Upon deeper inspection, this subsection of theatre, film, and television is integral to the conceptualization of character development, plot progression, and overall theatrical impact: "Costume is not merely a physical presence in the production, but a bundle of visual data to be read and interpreted by the audience" (Wyles 4). The center of this art form is the conversation between the designer and the audience, in which every color palette, texture, shape, and structure has been carefully assigned. There are numerous accounts of the importance of costume narratives such as Rosie Wyles' "Semiotics and the Language of Tragic Costume" from the text *Costume in Greek Tragedy*, however, an in-depth recount of that process – a step-by-step discourse of each costume choice and why said choice was made – is not as common. Thus, my project is a full report on each decision a costume designer makes, including exposition, using character study as the main

resource. To do this, I will dissect a film that uses anthropomorphic characters, the 2006 Pixar animated classic, *Cars*, and bring them to human form through costume.

The arts are inherently interdisciplinary. In performance, you can often find politics, science, humanities, social issues, and technology, among many other industries. For this project, I am accessing different forms of art, including fashion, costume, drawing, as well as the art of observation. Within these forms, there are historical, economic, and social engagements that will be studied under an anthropological eye. In order to document this, the act of autoethnography will be used in combination with the visual arts practice of costume design to further the research on designers' processes as well as inform those who are unfamiliar with this type of theatrical work. I have found Suzanne Crowley's *Making Visible the Invisible* to be quite helpful in the combination of these two disciplines. The visual arts are inherently non-verbal and autoethnography allows for depth and exposes the tedious research that is involved in this practice. Crowley states that this idea, using oneself as data, "introduces the personal story and relates it to the cultural. Rigour is not the province of only the sciences. If researchers are to use the self as data, they have to become the finest instruments they can be, and this includes cultivating a more intimate, friendlier relationship with ignorance and its companions. Using the self as data allows one to develop intensified looking and seeing, skills, and mindset useful for qualitative inquiry" (156). Crowley's work is both reflective and experimental, as mine is, and her dissection of the way invisibility creates an internal battle of self doubt and the desire to be acknowledged is exactly what this project stands for. This is a personal beacon of passion that I hold for costume design that is often overlooked by bystanders. Thus, this project stands as an example of how art derives from an interdisciplinary, educational, and informative baseline with

myself as a primary source and allows the artist in me to share my devotion to this line of “invisible” research—emotionally and psychologically—and make it visible to the audience.

My idea for this project stemmed from a social media and fashion influencer named Wisdom Kaye, particularly his career-jumpstarting project: a high-fashion styling of the SpongeBob SquarePants characters. For this project, Kaye used his collected designer pieces as well as gifts from brands like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Prada, and more. His interpretation focuses on color palette, texture, and shape to recreate the characters’ looks and personalities. For example, in his rendition of King Neptune (the supreme ruler of the ocean), he pulls from the King’s teal, brown, orange, and gold animation design, styling his human counterpart in a plaid blazer, slacks, loafers, and statement jewelry. The blazer displays the King’s high status, while the chunky gold cuffs and necklace provide insight into his wealth (Kaye). Thus, Kaye’s characters were not exact SpongeBob replicas but were instead modern interpretations enhanced by using contemporary pieces and trends. I was inspired to use this same approach with my own project, pulling from the characters’ original designs, while also contributing my personal interpretations. I plan to achieve this by using contrasting fabrics to portray texture and expanding each character’s color palette to provide dimension and individuality.

Regarding content, when approaching this project, I selected a piece of media that I felt passionate about and deeply connected to. Due to my countless childhood viewings of *Cars*, I am now able to perfectly and precisely regurgitate its every line. Additionally, the *Cars* universe is filled with distinct and unique personalities that provide the opportunity for range and variability in this project. For instance, the city-boy aura of Lightning McQueen in contrast with the blue-collar robustness of Mater enables a broad pool of information that can influence design choices based on the wide scope of characteristics (Buena Vista Pictures). Still, the major reason I chose

this particular film was because the characters are personified inanimate objects who, although they do have individual designs, do not wear clothing. This aspect supplies a lot of freedom in the design process and allows my creativity and style as a designer to poke through.

To deepen my understanding of the world of *Cars* I relied on *The Art of Cars*, which offers an inspection into the design process of the film as well as the creative undertaking of cinematic concepts. Written by the film's director John Lasseter, it includes preliminary sketches, inspirational location photos, and numerous illustrations of basic and final designs. Because this book is primarily focused on the visual aspects of the film, it offers a plethora of information about character development. The interviews with the Pixar team provide context and insight into certain decisions, including which characters were based on real people or certain historical events, such as Lizzie, who was put in as an ode to Tom Ford's first car, the Model T "Tin Lizzie" (Lasseter). It also highlights the film's setting, Radiator Springs, with real-life photographs of different locations across America from which the producers pulled to create the vibrant and nostalgic town. The dissection of the town proves useful to my project by giving me more context to pull from and allowing historically accurate details to poke through the costumes, such as color matching or correct fonts for graphics. This overview of Pixar's artistic journey aided my own in adapting their artistic contributions from 2D animation to physical form.

To organize and conduct a full character study with information provided by Pixar as well as my own interpretations of the characters, I used a character chart found in *The Magic Garment: Principles of Costume Design*. This is the textbook that is used in Chapman University's Costume Design course, and it offers a breakdown of what it takes to be a costume designer and provides guidance for students who wish to enter the said career field. The textbook

covers historical context, conceptual design, fabric selection, and construction techniques with an emphasis on how this area of design can influence character development, narrative, and audience perception. More specifically, the author's character chart includes specific questions that prompt the designer to discover aspects of a character that might have otherwise been overlooked. These questions are both surface-level and profound, and they include age, economic status, profession, ethnic background, education, objective, and so on and so forth (Cunningham 46). With this text, I was able to dig up personality details and display them in a comprehensible manner for my reader to further apprehend my understanding of the character and how certain design choices might stem from specific character features.

With respect to the renderings themselves, they are an exploration of my previous training in sketching, but with the added expertise of Huaixiang Tan, author of *Character Costume Figure Drawing: Step-by-Step Drawing Methods for Theatre Costume Designers*. This book consists of a step-by-step approach to drawing costumes including, but not limited to, poses, proportions, facial structure, fabric texture, and drapery techniques. There are numerous picture examples of the sketching process as well as final designs in a wealth of different productions which encourages readers to delve into their own style. With this guide, I was able to improve my abilities as an artist and therefore portray my ideas in a more clear and articulate way.

To review, this autoethnographical style paper allows the author, me, to access the data of their experience and deliver it to the audience, with the hope of provoking conversation and emotional connection. This is a very important aspect of theatre and the performing arts in which costumes play an important role. In terms of Kaye, he only shared his final product with his audience, whereas for my project and my own experience within this field, I will be logging each

thought so that my audience may track these choices and be able to tangibly grasp the origins of certain opinions to thus supply evidence for the makeup of my final portrayal. Suzanne Crowley's work demonstrates the power of creative practice as a research methodology, showing that art can be both a form of inquiry and a means of uncovering hidden aspects of experience, and I will be taking that approach and applying it to my own work. The cohesion of each character chart, mood board, sketch, and final rendering will emphasize the transformative power of art and autoethnography through the exploration of my own identity and the broader societal forces that shaped my life (i.e. Pixar *Cars*).

With all these sources, I cultivated my own exercises as a costume designer and record my process with clarity and distinction for others to use as an example or inspiration for their own design process. The practice of autoethnography has helped serve me in my career as a display of my style as a designer as well as how my brain interprets and unwinds characters. The interdisciplinary approach of anthropological design with autoethnography allows me to use as much information and as many creative skills from my toolbox to produce work that is well-informed, specific, detailed, and cohesive. This detailed account can provide context to possible directors, audience members, and other designers regarding the scaled length and depth of a costume designer's job and the research that is required to excel. My project will serve as an addition to my portfolio for future job opportunities and represent the appreciation and care I supply to my work as a designer. I intend to share that passion with those who take the time to respect this art form and highlight the meticulous attention to detail this field requires and the superb payoff that can materialize.

Methodology

This project includes character study, mood boards, sketches, and final renderings. To start, I created a general mood board to represent the overarching theme that I wanted the costumes to emulate. In order to achieve a concept accurate to the world of the film and its characters, I refer to “The Art of Cars,” a portfolio of production design research compiled during the film’s creation (Lasseter). This stands as a guide to keep the production cohesive, be a reference point for color schemes, and provide examples of certain pieces that resonate with me for certain characters. A character study was then conducted for each character. Due to the surplus of personas in the *Cars* franchise, and the time restraints on this project, only seven to ten characters are fully designed. The basis on which these characters were chosen was on how important they are to the plot and the contrast they provide to the other characters. Each character study loosely follows the character chart found in Rebecca Cunningham’s *The Magic Garment: Principles of Costume Design*. Based on what was found through the character study, individual mood boards were created that pose as mock preliminary deliverables in this design process. These include inspirational pictures, color palettes, possible links to real pieces, and a list of any specific accessories or garments that the film depicts or script mentions. Next, putting together what was gathered in the mood boards, I recorded my sketching process by taking pictures of any stage the rendering is in while discussing my difficulties and successes during this stage. For any drawing hardships, I reference the sketching guidebook by Huaixiang Tan: *Character Costume Figure Drawing: Step-by-Step Drawing Methods for Theatre Costume Designers*. After I was satisfied with the state of those sketches, I developed them into the final stages of renderings with color. The completed project is presented in a mock final deliverable fashion including an overview of the extensive research involved in costume designing.

The interdisciplinary nature of art and its combination of technology and culture is particularly evident in character design. Designers need to be able to understand behavior, history, and heritage to expertly craft authentic and relatable characters. To do so, an anthropological approach is often explored. Anthropology plays a key role in character design, because it offers insightful information as to how human societies shape identities and social structures. By studying cultural norms, rituals, and historical contexts, character designers can create beings that reflect real-world diversity, ensuring that they are not only visually compelling but also deeply rooted in the complexities of human experience. This anthropological approach helps to create characters that resonate with audiences on a cultural and emotional level, making them feel more believable and grounded in the world they inhabit. Thus, in my deep character analysis, I will be considering racial background, religion, economic and political status, family history, and more to ensure that my work is based in truth and using what the animators and producers have already discovered in addition to my own depictions of the film.

Ultimately, my work intends to shed light on the costume design process and show how – even when choices seem minuscule – they all contribute to creating a visual aid for guiding an audience through a story. This record of the design process from concept to completion will be added to my portfolio and allow possible employers and directors to explore how I operate during the creative process. Furthermore, the material that I have chosen to design poses a few obstacles that allowed my inventiveness and imagination to poke through. For one, the film includes anthropomorphic characters, ones that in real life are inanimate objects but are personified to include human-like traits. For this project, I adapted the design of motor vehicles to human shapes in a way that still ties them to their original form without losing the entire concept (the film is called *Cars* after all). Secondly, the challenge of using a piece of media as

inspiration and not completed decisions forced me to adjust my conception to my own needs and wants instead of creating an exact replica of the previous design. The goal of this project is not to copy other people's work but instead to draw from numerous external sources and compile something that still represents the main ideas of the original piece.

Not only will this project aid me in my professional career, but it will also help with the recognition and appreciation of other costume designers and their continual career efforts. Our interpretations and understanding of characters are just as important as anyone else involved in the process of creating theatre: “Costume design brings a specific character to life by adding meaning through garments to the script, character guidelines, and director’s indications, using the actress/actor’s bodies as canvases. In doing so, it complements acting and body language to elevate performance” (Lundén 91). This artform is one in which I hold so much passion and joy, and I strive to share that with other creators in my field. Finally, at the conclusion of this project, I hope to help audience members understand that it’s not just a fluffy sweater. It’s a *fluffy sweater*.

Origins

My experience in collegiate and professional costume work has been a combination of positives and negatives, collaborating with different personalities and work ethics on full-scale funded projects, small experimental projections, and everything in between. Working on all of these projects has given me a strong foundational toolbox to enter the professional world post-graduation. Acknowledging the interconnectedness of departments in a theatre or film production whilst following a director’s vision is one of the key factors of the job. Costumes must either enhance or blend with the lighting design, match or juxtapose the set design, add to without taking away from the actor, and more. However, due to the complicated nature of combining

these factors alongside the director's specificity, the opportunity to indulge completely in my creative instincts has not been presented. Thus, I would like to take this occasion to design something on my own terms, allowing complete creative freedom to direct me through this project. In the past, I have adjusted my work to accommodate selective directors who like to be hands-on with the costume process. Although this skill is very important to my career, this time I am interested in the process where my brain has few limits: no budget, no team, and no executives. Therefore, this project will be a spawn of all interpersonal decisions and a demonstration of how big this girl can dream.

When the idea for this project first appeared, it was after I had stumbled upon the fashion content creator Wisdom Kaye. His rendition of high-fashion *SpongeBob SquarePants* characters was ingenious and very inspirational. Since then, he has produced a few more similar high-fashion projects, such as the lookbooks of *Teen Titans Go*, the 2023 film *Barbie*, *One Piece*, *Phineas and Ferb*, and his most recent, all 30 teams from the Olympics based on each country's flag. Based on the surplus of animated material he pulled from, I also decided that I would do the same. I wanted a piece of material that had clear characters but not exactly human features, as I hoped it would pose an interesting challenge. I also wanted a piece that I connected to, possibly one from my childhood, because it would put an entertaining cap on that part of my adolescence as well as add some passion and joy into a seemingly daunting undertaking. Originally, I proposed *Toy Story* due to its plethora of characters and because it is a classic from my youth. However, I felt as though this film would be too easy due to the sort of "uniforms" the characters were animated in, like Buzz's space suit and Bo Peep's dress. I wanted something with a little more leeway to honor the poetic license aspect of this project. After flipping through the massive number of Disney and Pixar movies, *Cars* was proposed to me by a friend, and I grasped it

immediately. I could feel the potential and overall enjoyment of the idea from the very beginning, and I took that as a sign that I needed to commit. Now that I had chosen my material, it was time to begin.

Production Mood Board

The first thing I like to do when I get assigned to a costume project is to create a mood board for the overall feel of the production that I am either trying to align with based on a director's input or the essence that I myself am trying to portray. In general, a production mood board is a visual tool used by the creative to establish the overall aesthetic and tone of a production. My go-to organization for this part of the project is making a Pinterest board. I find it is the easiest way to pull inspiration due to its mass amounts of content. On Pinterest, I can pull images that convey mood, certain ensembles that I am attracted to, color palettes, writing, historical portraits, links to external pieces, and general vibe photographs. These will then be organized in a way that is readily displayed to my team or director. So, I sat down to watch the film and "pinned" my little heart away. I started by gathering general images of old cars and models, looking for that dusty, vintage, and serene vibe. I was hoping these would produce an overall essence of the town of Radiator Springs. I then searched for actual stills from the film, nothing too obvious, I was looking more for scenic or setting shots. I then jumped to 1950s locations, and a lot of diner photographs showed up, which was perfect for Flo's inspiration. Then, off of that, I just simply searched "1950s" to see if any clothing items or ads would pop up. This will help me gain an idea of shape and color. My concept of Radiator Springs is a town stuck in the past, but not completely. It still has modern influence, but it is not completely up to date. As Sally mentions in the script, some of the town has been recently renovated, but it still fits within the rest of the dated town. These characters are trying to achieve this homey-and-

welcoming atmosphere, so I believe the costumes should also reflect that. Flipping through *The Art of Cars*, I found some insightful pictures that the Pixar animation team used to inspire their drawings. I thought the colors were really beautiful, and the rundown nature of the cars would be a great inspiration for texture and fabric (See Index 2A and 2B). I also started looking into racing jackets and how I am going to create Lightning McQueen's "stickers." I thought the patches on a racing leather jacket would be a great adaptation and wanted to see some real ones and pull Lightning's sticker design from the *Art of Cars* for an authentic but natural look. I rounded it off with a couple of pictures of Cars World at Disneyland so I could see how artists have adapted the animated setting into realistic-looking architecture (See Index A). All in all, a quote I read from the film's director really stood out to me during this part of the process: "A film with cars as characters who experience the expected along the nation's superhighways, experience the unexpected along the back roads, and learn that the 'journey in life is the reward.'" I wanted to capture that essence into my designs as best as I could because I believe that is the heart of the film, what makes the story so charming, and the characters so lovable (Lasseter).

Character Charts

There are over 80 characters in the first Cars movie. Now, most of those characters only have a few minutes of screen time, leaving about 20 characters with solid roles in the plot or key relationships with the main characters. For my process, I knew I wanted to focus on the small-town personality of the cars from Radiator Springs instead of focusing on the numerous race cars as characters. I also knew that due to time restraints and the weight of this project, I would only be able to focus on about seven to ten characters. I wanted to give each design the time and effort it deserved, and in order to accomplish this, I shaved off a couple of characters to maintain integrity and precision in my work. The top three characters are obvious: Lightning McQueen,

Mater, and Sally. The next character with the most screen time and plot relevance is Doc Hudson, McQueen's mentor and crew chief. Then I looked at the ensemble roles of Radiator Springs, which included Flo and Ramone, Luigi and Guido, Sarge and Fillmore, Sheriff, Lizzie, and Big Red. I wanted to try to keep the grouped ensemble members together, such as Flo and Ramone, who are a couple, or Luigi and Guido, who are the Italian owners of the local tire shop. Another factor was to try and include as much diversity in personality as possible so that I could really dive into the different aspects of aesthetics and color palettes. My first list included the two Italian boys as well as Lizzie and the Sheriff. However, this exceeded my set limit. I decided that Guido didn't provide as much of an addition as some of the other characters, and to keep with the coupling of characters, I opted out of designing Luigi as well. As for Sheriff, his design would have been a basic police officer uniform, and although there is some variability in that, I knew that other characters would provide more opportunities. Thus, he was struck from the final list. Lizzie is a favorite character of mine and one that has a boatload of personality. However, her part is so minor, much smaller than Luigi and Guido's, and it didn't feel right to include her instead of them, so I abandoned her as well. I concluded with the following list: Lightning McQueen, Mater, Sally, Doc Hudson, Flo, Ramone, Fillmore, and Sarge. Although I did go on to design all eight characters, for the content and length restrictions on this paper, I will only further be discussing four: Lightning McQueen, Mater, Sally, and Flo.

Now that I obtained my list of characters, I began to create their character charts. Usually, these charts would just be in the costume designer's notes for them to reference and wouldn't be presented to the team or the director. However, because this project has a large visual aspect, I decided to design them in a presentable way for publication purposes. As for the content of these charts, I am basing mine on an example I found in a textbook, *The Magic Garment: Principles of*

Costume Design, written by Rebecca Cunningham. This chart is very thorough and clear, which was a great starting point for me (*See Index 4A-4H*). So, taking that chart as a baseline, I created my own version with a more concise list of directly relevant questions. First, I created a more profile-esque section where I could gather bibliographical information: age, education, religion, profession, political viewpoint, and social standing. The other questions were designed to find deeper personality features and objectives. I also wanted a place where I could compile any script references so I would remember to include them in my designs.

For the content of these charts, I watched the film a second time and filled out the information as it was revealed. Some of the questions were obvious, like each character's profession. However, most of the questions required some level of interpretation and analysis. Because this is a Pixar movie meant for children, there are certain subjects that the film can imply by using tropes and references, but they can't explicitly state them. This is evident in aspects like their political affiliation and religion. So, I had a little bit more freedom to derive my own understanding and develop them into well-rounded and specific characters for these questions. For example, the film's setting is a small-town tourist stop off a major highway in the middle of the Arizona desert. Arizona is historically known as a red state, and given the dated and retro design, I assumed these townspeople's views would be a little dated. With small towns comes the general affiliation to a particular religion; in small-town American culture, this most commonly means Christianity. However, some of the characters have a strong Italian influence, so Catholicism must also be present. However, a few characters, such as Fillmore, seem to be more worldly and less confined. I placed him in a Buddhist or a more spiritual category. Now, these questions are relative to design because they give context to certain clothing choices due to the beliefs or "rules" that religion or profession has. For example, just because a character is

Christian, it doesn't necessarily mean they have to wear a gold cross and a "Jesus saves" t-shirt to convey that information. Perhaps this character dresses more on the conservative side or, on the opposite side of the spectrum, they have a scripture tattoo. There are multiple different ways that people display their faith, and it is important not to be confined to certain stereotypes so that the designs are well-rounded and serve the story, not certain viewpoints unless, of course, that is the concept of the production. For this production, the goal is to turn these anthropomorphic characters into real-life humans who live within the context of modern America.

Now, in this animated world of automobiles, race and ethnicity are not really acknowledged. However, because these characters are taking human form, it is something that I must be aware of. Enter Anthropology. To use as much of the original work as I could, I recognized that most of these characters are Italian or have Italian influence, meaning that a lot of these characters are white presenting. However, through my research I did discover that Flo is voiced by Jenifer Lewis, a Black American Actress and I decided to honor that casting choice. Similarly to this, the actor that plays Ramone, Cheech Marin, was born to Mexican parents, so this will be put into my designs as well. Another factor I realized is that Sally is a town outsider. She says in the script that she broke down near Radiator Springs and Flo took her in. I didn't know exactly how this would present itself, but it developed on its own through a discovery I had while curating her mood board which will be divulged later in this project. In addition to these characters, I decided to make a casting choice of my own. I wanted to draw Sarge as an African American man because that is the way that he presents himself in my head and, although he is voiced by a white male, I think that this choice would inform his character and provide an even bigger contrast to his counterpart Fillmore – voiced by Gerooge Carlin – who is, according to the Pixar casting, Irish.

Character Mood Boards

The next step in my process is to develop a mood board for each character I am designing so that, in a real production process, I have a tangible way to show my thoughts for each character with visuals. These are very important in communicating themes and topics to the director to make sure the team is on the same page before renderings begin. I use PowerPoint as my deliverable format and import images from online search engines. I started first by putting the names of each character on their slide and importing their picture on the bottom left so I, and the production team, could have a reference of the original character's design. Then, one by one, I gathered images of clothing, shoes, and accessories that I felt best served my vision. Some of these decisions have been sitting with me since I began this project while others develop as I go along. I find this to be the most enjoyable part of the process because sometimes a character will not appear right away but through different images I see along the way and when I am finished, I am left with a very unique and fresh character.

To begin, I didn't start from the top of my list. I constructed Sally's mood board first because I had the strongest vision for her. I knew I wanted her to be a little more modern than the rest of the town and very dignified yet subtly sexy. Sally is the love interest of the show, and in the film, she is represented as a Porsche which is a very classy and desired make in the automobile world. Yet, she is the town attorney and is extremely educated, so there has to be a sort of professional and intelligent aura to her. I decided to pull a little bit from the 2000s, being that the film was released in 2006, because I knew that the rest of the town would be based in the 1950s/60s. Her color palette is fairly obvious: sky blue, navy, grey, and black. I knew I wanted her to wear a blue blouse, something that would pass for "casual Fridays" at a law firm. I decided on a $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeve so we could really see some of the silver bracelets and a $\frac{1}{2}$ button up to show just a

tease of her chest. For the 2000s factor, I chose to put a tank top under the unopened blouse and some low-rise skinny jeans. The jeans are very crucial for her design because in the film, she turns around to reveal a subtle bumper sticker which catches Lightning's eye and renders Sally terribly embarrassed. In the human world, I decided to manifest this as a tramp stamp. Something she would have gotten to feel rebellious in her youth and regrets in her maturity. Thus, her pants needed to be just a little low and her shirt a little high, so that we could catch just a glimpse of it. I wanted her to then have some sort of slouchy black stiletto boots to show her boss-bitch energy and that she means business. Overall, I started to visualize her in something that Gloria would wear from *Modern Family*, which led me to see her with some Latina background. For accessories, I wanted to emulate her passion and obsession with the Wheel Well Motel as well as her Arizonian roots. I gave her a very western/desert inspired silver cuff bracelet that would go nicely with her sleeves and a little wheel pendent necklace. The image I found was a bit too heavy, so I made myself a note to lighten and soften this in her rendering. I also picked a black work bag for her as well in case I wanted to add this later in the process (*See Index 5C*).

Next up was Lightning McQueen and I wanted his design to contrast Sally's while still alluding to their compatibility. One of Lightning's key factors is that he is a rookie: a title that comes with youth, inexperience, and sometimes cockiness. I saw him as someone who is a little self-obsessed and narcissistic and the best way I could think to execute this was to design him based off of men I see in the media. His ensemble had to be the most modern in the whole cast so that he would really stick out in Radiator Springs. And above all, he needed a racing jacket. This would be my way of placing his "stickers" on, resulting as patches on his coat. The Art of Cars had an image of all his stickers, so I copied that into my presentation for later sketching. His color palette: red, orange, and yellow. But to tie in Sally, I wanted to add just a hint of her blue

possibly in the patches or the piping on his jacket. I gave him a *Back to The Future* t-shirt because I felt that this subtle reference to cars would be a lot more tasteful than a blunt NASCAR shirt. But I wanted to cut the sleeves like guys do for their gym shirts because that, to me, gives major arrogant energy. I was originally going to put him in jeans, but to make him different from Sally a bit, I settled on baggy jean shorts that will hopefully, at some point, show the rim of his boxer shorts conveying his confidence and laid-back nature. The shoes were based on what I saw the popular guys wear in High School: crisp and clean Jordans. His accessories were drawn from a Jacob Elordi photoshoot I saw after *Saltburn* came out. I also came across this picture of a guy wearing a bandana on his head that I thought was very modern and it stood out in a way that I think Lightning would have liked, so I added that into his design as the last step (*See Index 5A*).

Moving on to Mater, his concept was quite simple: a blue-collar mechanic. I knew I wanted him in coveralls, something that he wears every day, but because he's not working for the majority of the film, I thought that tying the top part around his waist would look messy and clumsy in the best way. I also wanted him in a sleeveless flannel due to the Arizona heat, one that he probably cut himself so it would be a little jagged and stained from his work. I found a great picture of this bleach-stained flannel for inspiration. I then just added a plain tank top as his base, but I knew this would be stained as well. And, of course, the classic dirty, untied work boots. After that I felt that he looked a little plain, so I decided I would add a rag in his pocket and maybe give him some work gloves. I thought about maybe giving him some construction headphones around his neck but I'm not sure if they will make it in the final design. His color palette is mostly browns and rust orange, but I do want a little bit of his old teal paint job to poke through, so I decided to put a hint of that shade in his flannel. I also found a picture of what Mater was based on in *The Art of Cars*, and the original truck is sort of burgundy, so I wanted to

add a touch of that somewhere else in his design. I eventually decided that Mater looked a little plain but that was okay, he's not a very flashy guy and he seems to enjoy the simpler things in life, so I decided to embrace that and just let him be (*See Index 5B*).

Flo was more of a challenge; I knew certain aspects I wanted her to have, but her whole vision wasn't as clear in my head. I wanted her to be unapologetic, a little motherly, while still being full of energy and a sort of youth that never grows old. I also wanted her to be very coded in 50s, but the more I progressed, something about her outfit felt out of place and too much. The first image I found was of this beautiful halter top. At first, I felt that it was a little too young for her, but then I thought that was just the kind of spirit she would have. I was really drawn to the windowpane pattern, but then, while looking for bottoms, I came across these really lovely striped capris. I was then a little conflicted: normally the clash of patterns would not bother me, as we can see through Doc Hudson's costume, but I wanted Flo to be a little cleaner and put together, but not completely matchy-matchy in her color palette of teal, cream, and pale yellow. I then found a pair of jeans with a beautiful stitching pattern on the pockets. This then inspired me to do a white or cream pair of jeans and leave the pattern to go on the top. I slept on it, woke up, and hated that idea. I thought that the base of her costume needed to be her beautiful teal, and because of this, I went and found a good striped pattern for her cotton capris and decided to keep the stitching from the jeans' pockets just for a little something extra. As for her top, I am going to try something new: seeing what comes to me during the sketching process. Maybe I'll have a burst of creativity, or a new vision, who knows! This was very exciting. Looking at her tires, I decided to give her a black and white saddle shoe to encapsulate both her colors. I also found the most perfect pair of retro earrings that would look great with her pants and really tie the look together. Overall, I think she is very period, but maybe not, I did hear through the grapevine that

capris are making a comeback... (*See Index 5D*). The following characters can be found in the Index, 5E-5H: Doc Hudson, Ramone, Fillmore, and Sarge.

Sketching Renderings

With the mood boards completed, leaving me with plenty of reference images, colors, and overall energies, it was time to start sketching. Now, I will be honest in saying that I am not the world's most talented artist. However, I also acknowledge that every project I do makes me a little better and if anything, these sketches are a learning opportunity and although they terrify me now, will make me a better designer for the future. To help with my lack of sketch training, I decided to try a digital medium to help with supply costs and pose configuration. The two software applications I decided to use were Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Fresco. I also made the decision to only render four out of the eight characters because of time and workload. I thought that by only doing half of the cast for the purposes of this thesis, my audience could get an idea of my final ideas while still producing work that is my best and up to standard. I knew that because I was learning a new medium, completing renderings would take me a little longer than usual and I wanted plenty of cushion with this section of the process to make sure that I was proud of what I had accomplished and didn't sacrifice any detail work for the sake of time. Therefore, my renderings will include the three leads – Lightning McQueen, Tow Mater, and Sally Carrera – and one additional side character which would be determined after the first three were completed.

To begin, I used Adobe Photoshop to sketch out my poses, facial features, and general garment shapes. I was able to import certain images of different bodies in different poses to help myself with proportions and create dynamic images with different angles to challenge my drawing capabilities. The sketching of the figures was the easy part. It is very similar to what I

used to do with pencil and paper, but it is a lot easier to clean up mistakes and I eliminate the possibility of smudges or stains that can come from everyday environmental factors.

The one part I was significantly worried about was the character's faces. I have never been able to include facial features in any of my renderings because I feel as though they are not done well enough and therefore distract from the rest of the rendering. To help with this aspect, I consulted Huaixiang Tan's *Character Costume Figure Drawing: Step-by-Step Drawing Methods for Theatre Costume Designers*. When I was first starting as a designer, this book helped me a lot with balancing the body and putting the figure into positions that were natural but still had fluidity and motion. Now, I flipped to Chapter 2 where the author introduces facial structure: Creating the Face. Although there is a lot of information on how to contrive emotional expressions and how to derive personality from facial features, I wanted to focus on just the facial structure itself due to my inexperience and the project's short timeframe. The author breaks down facial sketching as follows: Step one – Establish the head as an abstract form or mass, Step two – Block the features, and Step three – Contour the features (Huaixiang). I began with Lightning's rendering. I had already sketched out the position of his head and the perspective of it when I was configuring his pose. He had a three quarter turn and his hair was already drawn. To block the features, I divided his face into the suggested sections. In this textbook, Tan suggests that the eyes hit at the halfway point, the nose at the three quarter, and the lips slightly below. I quickly discovered that because of his head positioning and direction, the proportions of his features were disagreeing with the chosen perspective. At this point, I was getting quite frustrated, and I think it is because I jumped a step in terms of my learning. I decided to put Lightning on hold, and I switched over to Sally, she had a direct angle to her head, so I thought it might be a little easier for me at this point. So, I followed the same steps of

positioning, and it was starting to look a little better. I created each feature a little abstractly, because I thought that I could go back during the contouring step to really bring it all together. Alas, I was mistaken. I was really struggling with her nose shape, I thought it looked too cartoonish, and her eyes, which were far too lopsided and irregular. As I was reading the directions that Tan had in his book, I understood what I was reading and looking at, but in practice, I was all over the place. For Sally specifically, I think I was struggling with the soft aspect that usually accompanies feminine faces, my Sally looked far too sharp and angular. I went back to work on Lightning for a while and ended up in a spot where the face wasn't exactly contoured, but it did have shape.

With a half-done McQueen and an even less done Sally after an obscured amount of work hours dedicated towards 1/8 of a final rendering, I had to make a choice. Ultimately, I decided that these faces looked too obscure and unnatural. I felt that instead of adding a sense of realism to the drawings, the facial features were, like with all my past facial work, too distracting and I honestly felt quite uncomfortable with them. Therefore, I erased my efforts and kept them blank. I did, however, keep one face sketched for the visual purposes of this project (*See Index 6A-6D*). In retrospect, it is not the worst sketch of a face I have ever seen, but I definitely was not proud of it. I wanted to create renderings that I was happy with in their entirety, or at least as close as I could get, so although they were faceless, I thought that it would present better plain than unnatural.

Final Renderings

The final part of the process was coloring my renderings. Completed colored renderings are the most important visual aid when designing a production because it allows those who cannot piece together 10+ images in their head to full conceptualize what each character is going

to present as. For this step, I switched over to Adobe Fresco due to its higher brush count and simpler accessibility. Initially, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out all the different brush types and textures and learning what features the software provided. Once I got my bearings, I started with Sally. Hers was the simplest out of the three leads, and I wanted to ease myself into the program before I tried to do anything crazy with texture or color layering. I started with her skin tone after watching a YouTube video of another artist using Fresco said that is how she starts all her renderings. I wanted her to look a little tanner than the other characters given her Latinx background. Then, I gave her a once over in a basic solid brush with different colors for her blouse, jeans, boots, and bag. After that, I thought she was looking a little too 2D, so I went over her jeans with a faded yellow spotted pen to try and get the stitch marks of her indigo jeans to poke through, as well as “liquifying” a scratch brush to add dimension to her top. I used a multicolor marker for her bag to show the spots of leather and added highlight markings in a pencil tip to all her jewelry to make it seem subtly reflective. I then penciled in the folds of her scrunch boots. I also changed to a pointed tip marker to create the strands in her hair all while switching colors to give her highlights and lowlights (*See Index 7C*).

Using these same techniques, I moved on to Lightning and Mater. With Lightning, I imported the picture of all his “stickers” and placed them across his jacket and erased the excess. Although this was very time consuming, I think it was totally worth it because I am really happy with the final result. His shirt was very detailed, but the viewer just gets a sliver of the *Back to The Future* vehicle that does exactly what I was hoping: alluding to his car obsession without being too blunt with it. For Mater, I went a little crazy with the smudge and splatter brush to create all kinds of stains on his coveralls and a little dirt or grease on his skin. I thought this effect played into his rusted look that he rocks in the movie. Mater’s plaid cut-off flannel was

also incredibly time consuming because of all the different brush sizes and colors I used. But again, I am extremely satisfied with the final product because I think it adds a level of texture that contrasts nicely with his solid brown coveralls. I also decided to make Mater a subtle red head to lean even more to that rust aspect and to try and create more of a contrast between the two white male leads (*See Index 7A and 7B*).

For my final rendering, I chose to do Flo. I thought that she would add the most variation to my collection and, as stated previously, a lot of her design decisions were left to be completed during the sketch and coloring process. I first started with her capris. I implemented the fabric swatch I pulled and gave her teal, yellow, and cream striped pants. When coloring her top, I wasn't exactly sure what I wanted to do. Originally, I felt as though doing a teal top would be a little too much of one color, but when I did a mockup with her wearing a beige one, it didn't feel "Flo" enough. I then tried it completely teal and figured since the original animation is mainly one color, then this would be okay. I then went over in a sheer texture brush to give more dimension to her top, but even after I did so, it still felt a little plain. Due to the busyness of her pants, I knew I wanted her top to be not as loud, but something still wasn't right. So, I did some field work and asked around my household for suggestions. My roommate generously lent me the idea of a name tag since she works in a diner. Now, I do believe that everyone in town knows Flo by name, so I don't think she'd need it. But I do see her having joy in putting on her "uniform" every day, so I accepted the idea and drew one on. I also added some stitching detail around the edges of her halter top for just a little more variability. For her hair, I wanted it to describe as much personality as I could. I believe that Flo is loud, proud, and confident, so I gave her big hair which allows the pop of teal in her earrings to really stand out (*See Index 7D*).

Conclusion

After I finished all the renderings, I imported different stills from the film to serve as backgrounds and add a little more diversity and color to the final product. I then wrote the names on each and signed them at the bottom to claim my work. Ultimately, I was pleased with my efforts and was proud of myself for learning a new medium in such a short time. However, that doesn't mean that they are perfect. This was the most challenging part of the process for me and although there are still some things that I would change, like minor tweaks and some shading. The latter is something that I really struggled with. I couldn't figure out how to make the natural shadows and folds in the fabric blend in seamlessly. I tried different brush types, intensities, and techniques, but I thought the added shadows just made the renderings look messy. I decided to opt out of doing them so that the renderings would look a little crisper, but it does make the final product look a little too flat. This is something that I am going to continue working on. And again, drawing faces was a huge let down for me, I was really looking forward to mastering this technique. I think that my expectations were set a little too high for myself which then just cultivated a disappointing attitude around this part of the process. Next time, I will allow myself more grace and let myself work on this outside of a project or deadline so that I really have the time to explore because learning something new does not happen immediately (even though I really hoped and thought it would). Another issue I had during this process was that my computer kept crashing while I was coloring. I believe my file size was too large, and my computer storage and speed could not meet what I was asking of it. Because of this, these renderings took a lot longer to complete on top of learning the software and the usual mistakes and mishaps. However, with all these factors in mind, I know that I should downsize in the future

and perhaps when I upgrade my technology in the future, I will look for something with extra memory and better graphics.

In more positive terms, I really did enjoy myself during this project. I wanted to cultivate something that pushed creative boundaries and allowed for the learning of new skills to add to my professional toolbox. This thesis gave me the space to learn new drawing techniques, new systems, and expand my vision capabilities to create something cohesive, enticing, and fun. This project emulates who I am as a creative and a designer which allows me to share my passion and the inner workings of my brain with other professionals, collaborators, or even friends and family. I believe that this project also serves as inspiration for any students looking to understand more about this process and serves as an example of how to organize thoughts and ideas. Additionally, the overarching theme of this project was to display how each decision is made and ground it in purpose and practicality. This detailed recount where I divulged into every nook and cranny of my design process and gave explanation for each fabric selection and garment shape proves how much thought and care goes into taking characters off a page and into the real world. The use of character study and anthropology provides evidence for these choices and allows for more quirks to be discovered and then implemented. At the conclusion of this project, I vowed to leave my reader and audience with a new appreciation for the clothes that they see onstage, no matter how ill fitting, ugly, or outdated they may seem. Sure, my rendition of Lightning McQueen looks like the average white boy, but perhaps that was the intent. And maybe Sally seems a little plain and Mater looks like he hasn't showered, while Flo appears a little too young for her supposed age. But perhaps that is because Sally enjoys the simple life, or maybe Mater forgot to pay his water bill, or that Flo feels constricted by her age and actively tries to defy it. This is the beauty and importance of autoethnography, proving the dedication and research

behind all choices and decisions can allow insight into costume design as an artform and an intellectual exploration. Crowley writes, “Making art is a form of problem solving and it oscillates, for me, between the concept and the question of how to implement meaning; various ways to create may be considered, and the making may involve a number of iterations before some creative resolution is achieved. Being before it is intellectual does not mean the artwork does not have intellectual content” (124). What may seem like a silly hobby or an undefined play area for creativity is actually a meticulously curated and analytically defined craft. This is an art so defined, yet with so many open doors for new ideas and interpretations that it almost feels overwhelming or impossible to comprehend every choice. But costume designers aren’t asking for a complete understanding of each accessory. All that they ask is for the audience member to leave the space with the acceptance of and acknowledgement that it is not just a fluffy sweater.

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