

Materials and Creativity in Short Film Stop-motion Animation

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Abstract: Stop-motion Animation is a special form of animation. With the development of the times, the Stop-motion Animation is more and more well-known to the public, and the application of the field is more and more extensive. Followed its development in the fields of film, advertising, MV and so on, more and more creative works have appeared, and the creative materials have also become more and more abundant. Material is one of the most important differences between two-dimensional animation and three-dimensional animation, as well as creative media. However, whether it is a Stop-motion Animation or other forms of film and television works, better performance of creativity is the ultimate goal, so the material is also in the Stop-motion Animation for creative services. Therefore, as far as I am concerned, I'm looking at how to select materials and use materials to express creativity is of great significance to the flexible expression of Stop-motion Animation. Compared with the feature-length stop-motion animation, the short film is more abundant in materials and creative in the content, so my research scope is limited to the short-film stop-motion animation. This thesis discusses the relationship between materials and creativity in different types of short film stop-motion animation. The creativity is divided into materials and artistic styles by analyzing the material characteristics and creative cases of different types of short film stop-motion animation. At the three levels of plot, the originality of material, the relationship between material and artistic style, the relationship between material and plot, and finally how to make material are discussed, ultimately coming to the conclusion of a better combination of material and creativity.

Keywords: Stop-motion Animation; Materials; Creativity; Plot; Artistic Style; Visual Effect.

1. Introduction

Currently, there are many articles and books on stop-motion animation materials in the Chinese academic community, while many of them use puppet animation as the main subject of introduction, and many introduce the materials and production steps for making puppet animation. It rarely involves research on materials and creativity, and the introduction of materials other than puppet animation. Therefore, after consulting some books and literature related to stop-motion animation and screenplays, as well as watching and analyzing different types of short film stop-motion, how stop-motion animation materials can better realize creative themes from the three creative levels of the material itself, artistic style, and plot is explored.

2. The Material Itself is an idea

Realizing ideas in stop-motion animation needs implementation on materials. The scope of "material" mentioned here means that as long as it is an object that can be used to photograph frame by frame, it can be called a "material" ¹. The stop-motion animation is divided into two categories: material animation and character animation. And the material's creativity in material stop motion and the material's creativity in character stop motion is separately analyzed.

2.1. The Creativity of Materials in Material Freeze

"Material stop-motion animation" specifically refers to the type of stop-motion animation weakening character performance, focusing on showing the physical characteristics of the material, and showing the material itself in an interesting way. As creators continue to explore stop-

motion animation materials and advance in technology, materials are no longer limited to traditional materials such as clay, wood, and decoupage while more and more new materials are being used in creation, such as pins, wire, insects, wire... These materials break the way traditional materials are expressed, bringing creators more inspiration and more space to play with materials. It is necessary to know that the creativity of the work is not only reflected in the plot. In terms of material stop-motion, a novel and alternative material can completely be used as the idea for the work.

For instance, "Be a Hunter or Prey" is a tattoo stop-motion promotional film created by the world brand drink Jägermeister with the theme of its own logo, stag. The theme of the promotional video is: Dare to change, break through oneself, and break the current pattern. Using tattoos as materials is very relevant to this theme. Firstly, tattooing is an act of braving to break through oneself, and secondly, continuous images of different people tattooing different parts have a strong visual impact, making people feel empowered. Leaving aside the theme, the materials alone are bold enough and attention-grabbing, which largely determine the success of the promotional film.

The creator's ingenuity in selecting materials can be seen. These materials reflect the author's creativity and thinking about the film's theme. The novel and appropriate materials helped the author to better express the theme, so material selection is both the author's wisdom and the film's creativity.

2.2. The Material's Creativity in Character Freeze

Character Freeze is an animation that mainly shapes the character and is complemented by showing the characteristics of the material. Puppet animation is a type of character stop motion animation that is well known to everyone. The creativity of the materials in character freeze is mainly

reflected in the materials used to make the characters. The most commonly used materials include clay, wood, wax, paper, sand... In addition to these, there are also many creative materials used to shape the character's image.

For example, in the short film "Enough," wool felt was used. This material has strong plasticity, is closer to the texture of skin and hair, and is more delicate. Another example is the stop-motion animation "A Girl Name Delastika," created by Canadian artist Guillaume Blanchet, which uses pins and rubber bands as materials to create the image of a little girl who is brave in adventure. The combination of pins and rubber bands is easy to operate and easy to change graphics, and the figure is simple and recognizable. Another example is that Czech stop-motion animation is good at using physical objects as characters. In "The Story of the Bookcase," the use of books as characters vividly shows disputes between various types of books.

It can be seen that any kind of material can be used as a material for character identification, mainly depending on whether the material's creative ideas match the theme of the short film.

2.3. Material Ideas in My Works

In most of my works, traditional materials are used. The character's body is made of aluminum wire, covered with sponge, and then with a sponge jacket, clothes, and the head is kneaded with slurry. At first, I considered using silicone to express the skin texture, but after many unsuccessful attempts, I still needed to further experiment with the steps of reversing the mold and hardener blending ratio, so the performance in terms of skin texture was not ideal. There is only one part of the film that uses fewer common materials. In terms of seawater, slime is used as a material to represent seawater. Slimes are very extensible and highly transparent. So slimes with a blue gradient are used. Visually, the effect is very close to real seawater, providing a solution for the expression of "water" in stop-motion animation. Meanwhile, this kind of material is rarely used in fixed production, so I think it is a successful material experiment and an expression of material creativity in my work.

3. The Relationship between Materials and Artistic Style

Excellent films all have their own unique artistic style, which is also an aspect of creativity. There are many factors that shape the artistic style in stop-motion animation with materials as just one of them. However, the expression of an artistic style must be achieved through materials.

3.1. The Characteristics of the Material Itself Influence the Artistic Styles

Each material has its own characteristics, and has a unique texture. This characteristic is reflected in the fact that it will show different lighting and shadow effects during shooting, and the spatial effects will form different artistic styles, generating different visual and emotional experiences in them.

For example, the sand painting animation "The Owl Married to a Goose" by American animator Caroline Leaf is one of the earliest sand stop-motion works in stop-motion animation history. The author used sand as the material. The graininess and fluidity of the sand gave the audience a real and delicate feeling, and the simple and direct expressive techniques gave people a "self-contained" feeling. Coupled

with cute animal images, the whole film seemed very childlike. Using the creative method of sand painting, combined with lighting, a wonderful flat image effect was created.

Therefore, if you intend to be creative in artistic style, it is available to choose innovative materials, find the uniqueness of this material itself, and highlight this uniqueness in shooting, which may produce new visual effects.

3.2. Combinations of Different Materials Influence Artistic Styles

Different materials have different characteristics, and different combinations of these materials will collide with different effects, thereby influencing the artistic styles.

For example, in the stop-motion work "Seahorse" produced by ANIMAEDRO Animation Studio in Bogota, Colombia, the scene props and characters in the short film are all expressed using everyday tools, such as ropes, buttons, cloth strips, and metal parts for home appliances. Some metal parts are used to reconstruct the shape of the marine life, making the marine life have a mechanical feel. Coupled with the light green waves and dynamic seaweed represented by soft cloth strips, the weight of the metal and the softness of the cloth strip are combined to make up for the stiffness of the metal material in movement. The metal material also adds light and shadow effects to the picture, making the picture feel more like a seabed. The combination of materials made up for each other's limitations, making the whole film both strong and soft, and complement each other. What is unique about "Seahorse" is its unique materials and artistic style. Using waste materials as materials is not only environmentally friendly, but also full of creativity, and also expresses the author's deep intention to call on everyone to protect marine ecology. Therefore, the combination of different materials will give the audience a richer visual experience and create different artistic styles.

3.3. How are the Artistic Styles and Materials in My Work Expressed

My works use relatively conventional materials in the application of materials, so the characteristics of the materials have little impact on the artistic style. Some of the less conventional materials used, such as wool felt and slime, only gave people a richer visual experience, but their influence on the artistic style was only minimal. Therefore, the artistic style of my work is mainly reflected by choosing different materials and matching colors. The surface is colored with clay-shaped objects, the other objects are wrapped in non-woven fabric, the walls are covered with pink plaid stickers, and the floor uses ice cream sticks to simulate the texture of a wooden floor. The colors of the paint and cloth are mainly yellow, brown, and pink, so the picture shows warm colors, plus some stripes, polka dots, lattice, and mosaic tile decorations, making the picture more decorative. The overall feeling is warm, cute, and lifestyle.

4. The Relationship between Material and Plot

The creativity of a short film is largely focused on the plot. To be ingenious about the story, it mainly depends on the author's brain and screenwriting ability. Therefore, the material is only used as an auxiliary factor to help the story be better expressed.

4.1. How do the Materials Highlight the Creative Points in the Story

Not all creative points in a story have to be expressed through ingenious materials, but choosing carefully selected materials will definitely better express creative points.

Using my work as an example, the film tells the story of the heroine being dragged away from the bed, tried to break free many times to no avail, and finally broke free from the bed. The theme explained is that people are dependent on a comfortable environment, but this comfort sometimes becomes a constraint, causing people to develop laziness and procrastination habits, so we must break free from this restraint. "Being dragged by the bed" shows the bed's restraint on people, as well as the protagonist's inner struggles. "The hand that sticks out of the bed" is one of the creative points of my work. I made ten pairs of hands of various lengths, made of aluminum wire, wrapped the sponge on the outside, and painted in color on the sponge. Unfortunately, I didn't use any special materials, and the effect of the finished film was not ideal. This creative point can only be reflected in the plot, but it's not visually impressive. Another creative point is that the main character becomes a cloud floating in the air. I used pink wool felt to make clouds. The wool felt itself is very light in texture, and the pink color can highlight the feeling that the main character is fluttering lightly due to comfort and happiness. The third creative point is that the floor of the room has been turned into a sea to highlight the distance between the hostess and the computer. At first, I used the effect of drawing water in two dimensions, but it didn't match the feeling of shooting the whole film in person, and the results weren't ideal. Later, at the teacher's suggestion, I tried using slime as a material. Compared to the two-dimensional method of expression, slime was more in line with my picture style. The visual effect was closer to real seawater, which was very eye-catching, and better expressed creative points.

Therefore, in order to better express the creative points of the story, it is necessary to continuously experiment with materials to find the most enhanced visual effects, and only materials that reinforce emotions can express creative points to the greatest extent possible.

4.2. How does the Material Participate in the Development of the Story as an Auxiliary Factor

The development of the plot is determined by the playwright, so essentially the material does not have an effect on the development of the plot. The material I'm talking about is participating in the development of the story as an auxiliary factor. When writing a story, the playwright can consider participating in the development of the story as an element of some of the material's own characteristics. However, not all material can participate in plot development, so what we talk about in this section is just an example.

Through watching a large number of short stop-motion films, I discovered that some short films took the characteristics of paper into account in the development of the story. For example, in the short film "The Rabbit and the Deer,"

after the rabbit changed from two-dimensional to three-dimensional thesis, the author applied the characteristics of paper being afraid of water and wind to the development of the story. The next plot revolves around how to overcome this weakness. Another example is the Oscar-winning short film "Incurring," which is a two-dimensional and static film. It shows the story of a two-dimensional character trying to escape the animators' toying, break the limitations of paper, and try to change from a two-dimensional character to a three-dimensional character, but in the end it ended in failure. It can be seen that both of these films were made on paper. It's a material, and it all involves a transformation in spatial dimensions.

Using the characteristics of materials to participate in plot development is a great way to add creativity in the story and use of materials in short films, which greatly inspired my future creations.

5. Conclusion

The focus of the thesis is to explore the relationship between materials and creativity, through three separate discussions on the creativity of the material itself, the creativity of the material for the artistic style, and the material for the story. It is concluded that in short film stop-motion animation, materials are indispensable in expressing short film creativity. It can affect every aspect of the film, and ultimately it is about the quality of the overall idea of the short film. Choosing creative materials is critical for stop-motion animation.

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