Research Week 2020

3D Category Submission

"Tommy" Character Sculpture

By Chayton Koehler

Research Problem Statement:

The answer to this prompt has multiple facets to it, but the most basic statement I can give is this: I found myself in need of a character design. That is the truest answer for why this project was made. But as for the deeper "why," the concept began in my mind as a story. The character I sought to design is one of three main characters from a story I plan to one day turn into a full-length graphic novel. The plot follows three teenagers who gain superhuman abilities after a freak accident leaves them briefly stranded in the disturbing and incomprehensible "backstage" of reality itself. At its heart, the story acts as both a refutation of nihilism and character study in emotional trauma, meant to demonstrate how trauma victims can help each other to rebuild. Tommy, who appears in the finished sculpture, is an angry 17-year-old with a smoking problem and a dead-beat father. This is where I began.

Communication Objective:

The primary objective was to visually communicate Tommy's personality. As previously stated, the story I'm creating will be a character study in emotional trauma. Tommy's own personal trauma manifests as rage, which in turn becomes his primary character flaw. His character arc will explore the outward effects of internal anger, the balance of his anger toward his family with his love for his friends, and how both anger and love can translate to power. The biggest need became finding an aesthetic which could realistically communicate a character of this complexity.

Visual Solution:

In order to convey the character traits and at least imply some of his background, I looked to the grunge aesthetic popular in certain circles of music, such as hard rock and heavy metal. Stereotypical fans of these genres are often associated with bad habits (like smoking) and paternal baggage (AKA "daddy issues"). Although I don't believe stereotypes should be promoted, much of character design is about the use of association. As a fan of heavier music genres myself, I based some of his clothing off of my own style, including the leather jacket and ripped jeans combination. Apart from clothing, I wanted to convey Tommy's personality through a visual manifestation of his superpower. Based on the character traits discussed above, it seemed only fitting that his ability should be the manipulation of fire. Fire not only implies smoke (thus an association with his bad habits), but it also acts as a widely recognized symbol of anger, power, and aggression. The most difficult part of visual research was finding examples of sculpted fire that I could try to replicate with polymer clay.

How was it produced:

The medium I chose for this project was *Sculpey* brand polymer clay, which I used extensively in character sculptures last semester. I wanted to push the limits of the detail I've been able to achieve with the medium, and this character design was just the project to accomplish that. I used three different sizes of metal wire to create an underlying frame for the character, acting as a skeleton to finalize the pose before sculpting. In order to conserve as much clay as possible, I used tin foil to bulk out the form around the frame. Then, using a hammer, a nail, and some super glue, I secured the supporting leg of the skeleton into a circular, wooden base. Finally, I began applying layers of clay with increasing levels of detail. For the jacket, I actually cut out sheets of clay in order to assemble it piece by piece, attaching the components where the seams would be in a real-life leather jacket. I used a pointed, wooden sculpting tool to achieve most of the details, including the various folds in the clothing and the texture of the hair. The final product stands just under a foot in height, and exhibits some of my best work in sculpting to date.   **(See Photo Appendices)**

Research Week 2020
Biblical Worldview Statement
By Chayton Koehler

A good friend of mine once told me something that has stuck with me and shaped my idea of storytelling ever since: "We do not need more *Christian* stories, but we do need more *good* stories." What he meant by that is that Christian movies and books have become a genre of their own, and stories made *by* Christians and *for* Christians can have a way of missing the point. While those stories may be a good thing with a real audience, Jesus did not ask us to sit and entertain ourselves. He asked us to take our message of love and redemption and deliver it to the masses. When Jesus told stories (and he told a lot of them) he did not exclusively tell them to his disciples, nor did he tell the same story over and over. If I set out with the intent to tell a "Christian" story, then even if I succeed, I will miss greater opportunities. Rather, I should set out to tell a *good* story, a *redemptive* story, and let it fall on whatever ears will hear it. I believe that, if I am in Christ and he is in me, then his redemptive messages will find their way into my stories whether I plan it or not. Not all stories will be *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and that's okay. The world needs stories about hope, love, and redemption, and that is what I strive to create. And if the Holy Spirit wills it, then I cannot help but do so.

Photo Appendix B

Photo Appendix D