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Art Project Documentation 01/15/08



Table of contents:

Pages 2 - 4 Description and plot summary

Pages 5 - 18 Work completed to date and documentation photographs

Progress webpage: http://www.hummm.net/altstadtmythos/update_01_15_08.html

Project Title:

How Dreadlocks Brought Phones to the City

Description:

This animation study builds upon the first year component of my MFA degree. The film is a stop frame animated short with learning challenges including dialog and high resolution photography. It is the second of a series of vignettes featuring the myths of Dreadlocks along with other deities and creatures dwelling in Old Town. The set, puppets, and props are all hand made elements that are lit, photographed, animated and edited into a selection of shots that both demonstrate advancement in learning the art form and a treatment of the story. The sound design will include dialog, music and effects.

A portion of the following plot synopsis will be completed at the end of the school year:

Jav' approaches the sacred pub on a scooter wearing a helmet with wings. It is slow going because he has a large stone in his basket. He is a messenger (communication god).

Dreadi (the trickster), Mahogany Woman (fertility goddess) and Thera (supreme deity) are sitting around a table in a mythic pub. In poetic verse, Mahogany is lamenting the slow communication between her and her lover, Walnut Man, as she awaits hearing from him. Dreadi chides her for her promiscuity and questions whether her infatuation is genuine. Thera mediates on behalf of Mahogany and reminds Dreadi of proper behavior in the sacred hall. Dreadi fires back at Thera that she lives outside the rules.

Jav' enters the pub carrying a large runic stone. Dreadi trips Jav', the stone falls on the

table and shatters, and that destroys Mahogany's long awaited message from her lover. Thera commands that Dreadi makes it right – the goddesses won't forgive her until the problem is resolved. Dreadi demands Mahogany's necklace as ransom for the necessary technology and takes it with her.

Dreadi goes to Gong, one of the Inventors, and requests the tools necessary to satisfy the deities in exchange for the necklace. Bell shows Dreadi a phone, but says it is not working yet. He needs the magic from the sea. Dreadi walks to the river. She dives off the bridge in Old Town and changes herself into a salmon. She journeys to the sea and follows the song of the Humpback. Dreadi finds Humpback and discovers the beautiful song is generated by a conch shell on her blowhole. Dreadi distracts Humpback by offering Mahogany's necklace and snatches the shell.

Dreadi as salmon swims back toward the river without relinquishing the necklace. Humpback is in hot pursuit. Salmon withers away as she reaches the bridge and changes back to Dreadi's form (this is why salmon die when they return to spawn), and she makes it back. She takes the conch to Gong. He holds the conch up to his ear and notes that it indeed allows remote hearing. Gong shakes it and out falls a SIM chip, the necessary part to complete his phone. Dreadi burns him of the necklace, too, and runs off with the phone.

The goddesses are once again sitting around the table in the sacred pub. However, this time everyone is on her cell phone talking at once. Dreadi sits with her hands covering her ears. A close up of a sign says, "Please refrain from using your cell phone while visiting this establishment."

Work completed between 11/15/07 and 01/15/08:

I've completed the puppets and the set for the interior scene at the inn and run some animation tests. The sound designer/mixer, Glen Nagy, and I selected the best selections of recorded voices for the puppets. I photographed each puppet with their replacement mouths and using *Magpie* software plotted out "dope sheets" - a plan for which mouth to use for each frame. Samples of the puppets with voices, dope sheets, and an updated shot-by-shot storyboard are available for download on my documentation webpage.

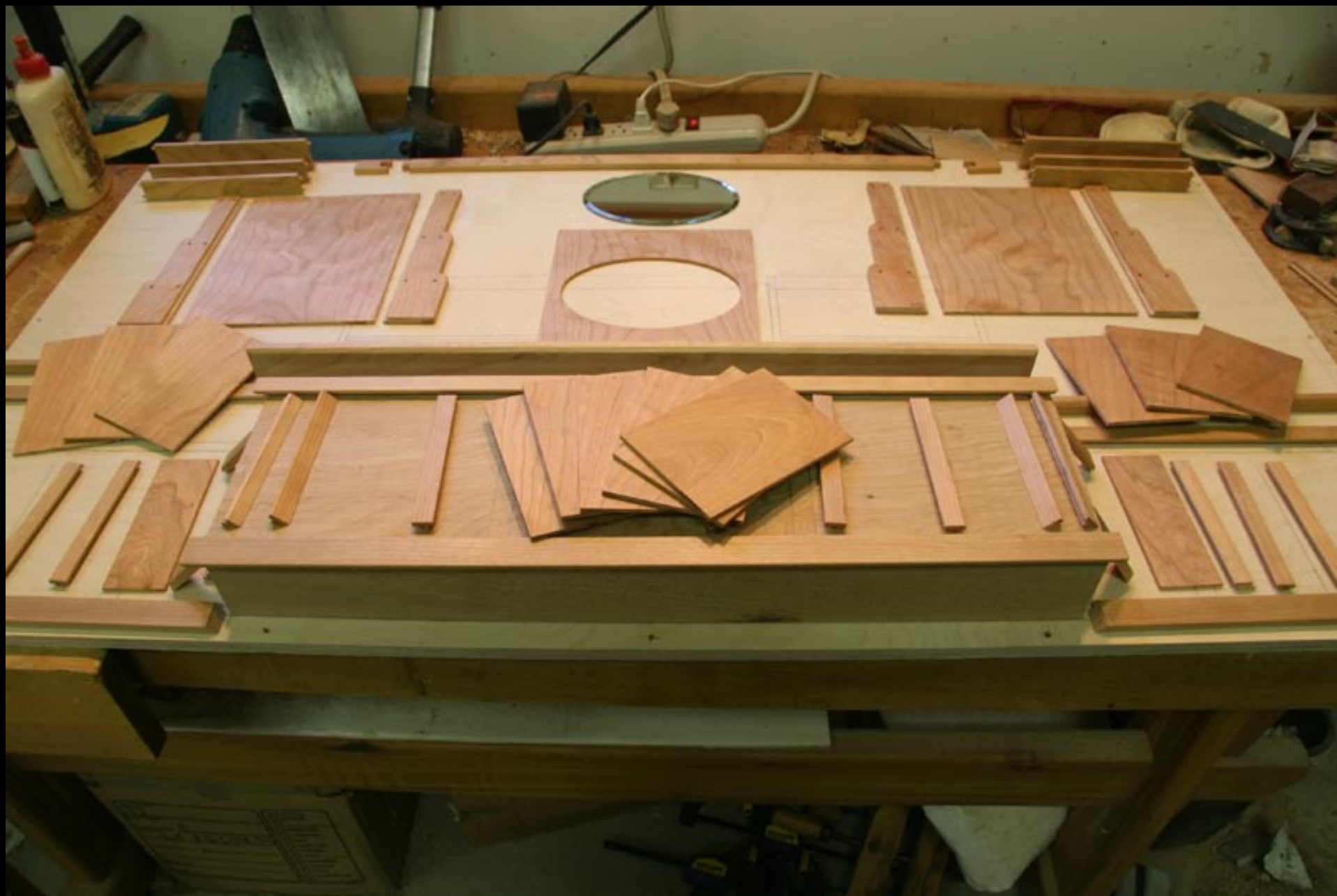
I designed a new system for cinematography using a Canon 40D digital SLR, which allows for high resolution photography. I needed to work out bugs using Stop Motion Pro software. Initial test shots had flicker, which was resolved by modifying the camera lens. Also, the high resolution shows previously unseen details, so some redesign of the main puppet, Dreadi, was required. She now sports a long-sleeve shirt hiding her joints. Tests also led to some rethinking of lighting and animated movements.



The finished set consists of a vertical grain fir floor on a sturdy base with four removable walls. The "4th wall" is always removed to allow for the shot.



The walls consist of many small cherry parts that are oiled and glued to baltic birch plywood. Wainscoting surrounds the room. Shown below are the bar and shelving behind it.



The finished bar has a brass footrail. The back houses an oval beveled mirror and the shelves support miniature bottles I found at an antique store.



I cast the wine wine glasses with plastic resin in a urethane mould.



On the bar sits a serpent head that is a wine dispenser. In the stationary position its mouth is closed and it has sterling silver eyes. In the pouring position its jaw drops and the eyes turn to jasper.



A couple of Celtic "shields" are hung on the back wall symmetric to the centered banquet table, chairs, and Thera, who sits at the end. The table and chairs now have an oil finish and upholstered seats.



The wall behind Dreadi has windows that are blackened out in order to provide a non-distracting and contrasting background.



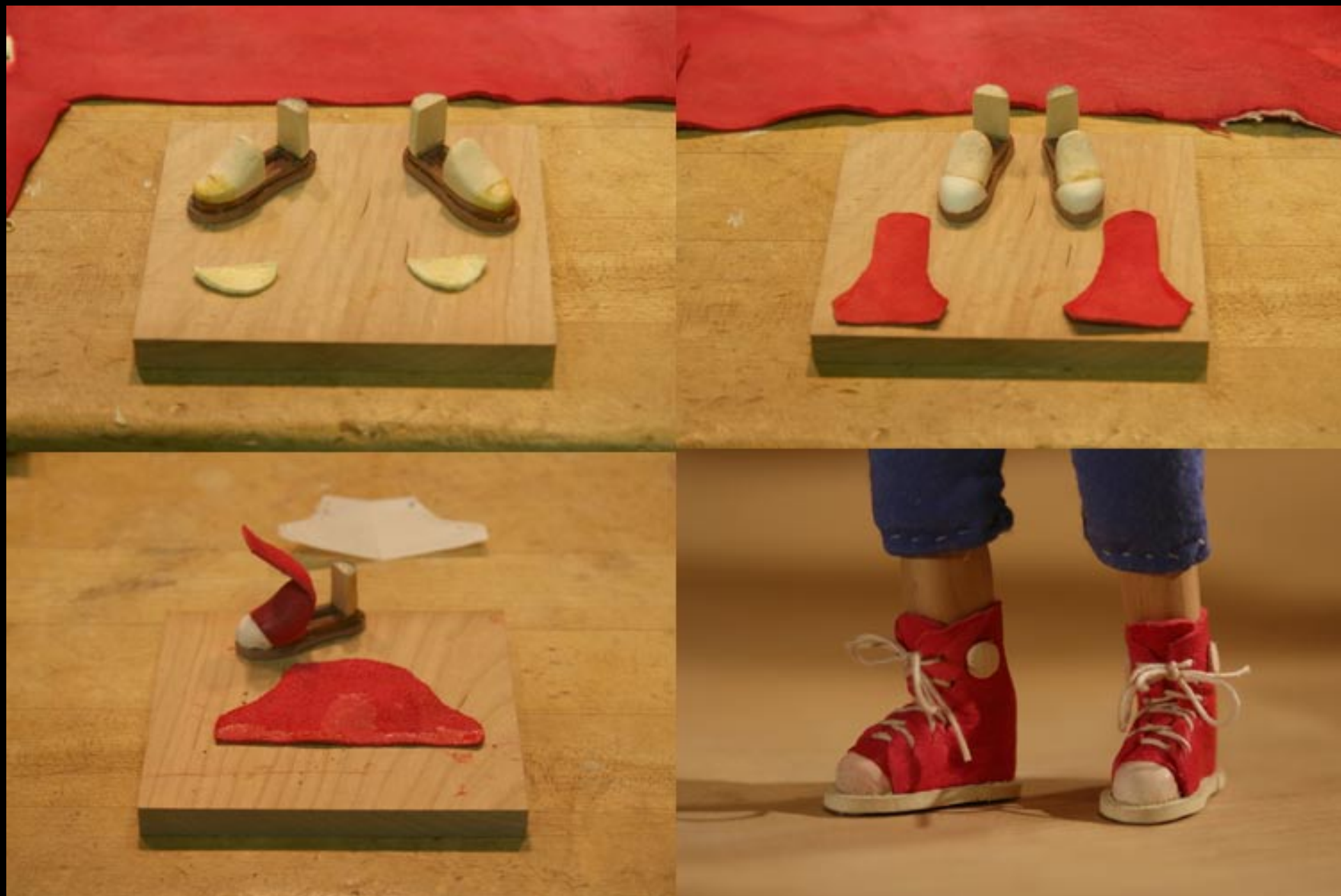
The "4th" wall has the door and is ready to mount for the shot when 'Jav enters the hall.



Jav's costume is completed with a spandex suit and red high-top sneakers. He now sports some eyebrows.



The soles are made from rubber gasket and built up in wood. The leather is dyed red. The gasket material is lined with white leather thongs. Holes are punched for the laces.



I reconstructed Mahogany's armature replacing the wire with ball and sockets to allow for more subtle movement. She now has black leather slip-on boots.



Thera now has some eyebrows and a glass of wine.



I carved two additional mouth shapes for each puppet - there are now eight positions that replicate certain phonemes.



This photo shows my progress as of 11/15/07. To view work completed prior to that date please go to: http://www.hummm.net/altstadtmythos/update_11_15_07.html

