

## **BFI Film & Video Workshop – The BTS**

**[By Jess: Holburne Future Collective Member](#)**

Hi! I'm Jess, a member of the Holburne Future Collective. In February I was given the opportunity to spend a week away from home at a British Film Institute (BFI) Film & Video workshop where I worked with my team to produce an animated short film. Here's some of the behind-the-scenes of how the workshop is structured, and how my group in particular used the time we had before and during the residential week. We worked hard throughout two online sessions and one very intense week!

I was very lucky that my college recommended this course to me back in November, a few weeks before the application deadline. As someone who specialises in illustration and is interested in animation, the decision to apply was easy. The application process was relatively simple; only a few personal information questions and questions about my experience in film. When applying I was nervous that I wouldn't meet the requirements as someone who's never animated or done VFX before, but there was no need! The course considers anyone interested as a potential candidate! All that was left was to explain why I should be chosen for the course, and then the option to provide a portfolio (though this isn't mandatory).

Soon after the deadline, I received an email confirming and congratulating me on my place on the course, along with links to shared folders where I could access information about the online sessions and the residential itself ahead of time. One of the most important things included in this email was the link to the course Discord server. It's the best place to communicate with others on the course and ask questions to the tutors directly! My advice? Talk to people! I made good friends with other people on the course before the first online session, we had loads of fun and it was obvious we were all very excited to spend time with each other! This server was also just a nice way of bringing together creatives in different specialisms; from cinematographers to writers!

# **“The Puppet Show”**

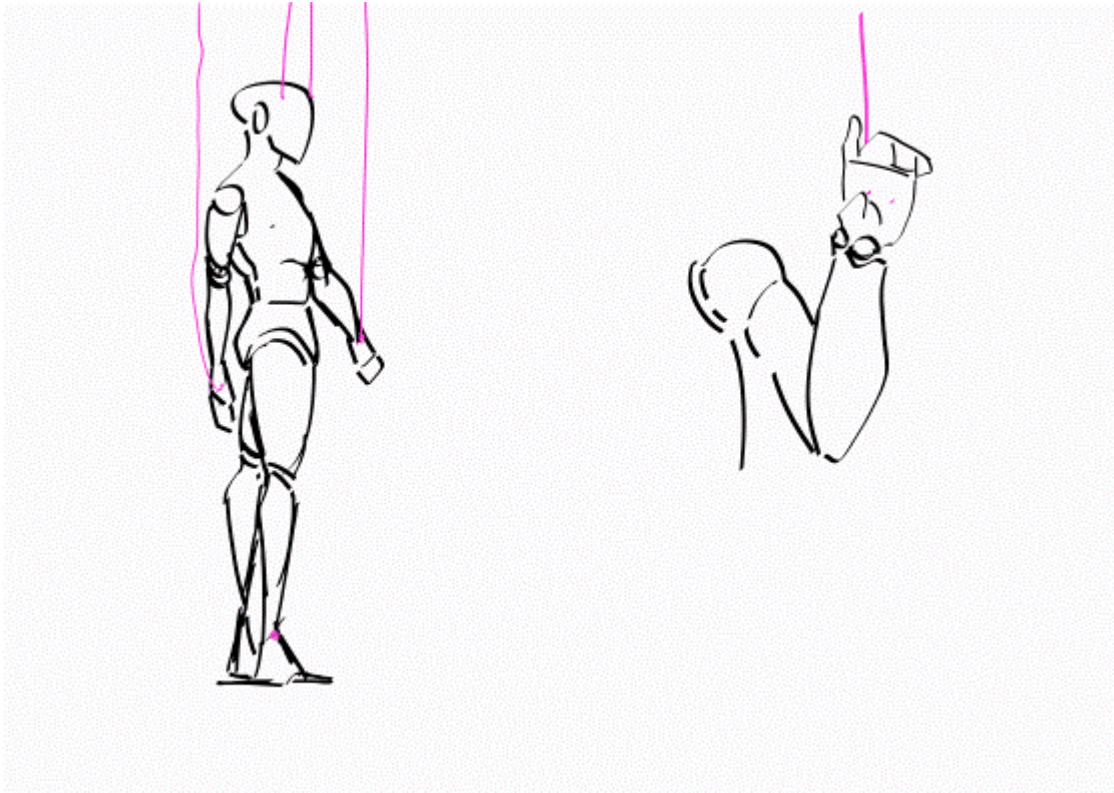
Animated Short Pitch - Jess Chard

While we were tasked with making friends, we were also tasked with creating a pitch for a short film before the first online session. So, alongside working on socialising, I put together an animated short film pitch, titled “The Puppet Show”. Even as an art and design student, I’d never had to create a pitch before so I was a bit unsure how to make it look visually appealing but still get my idea across.

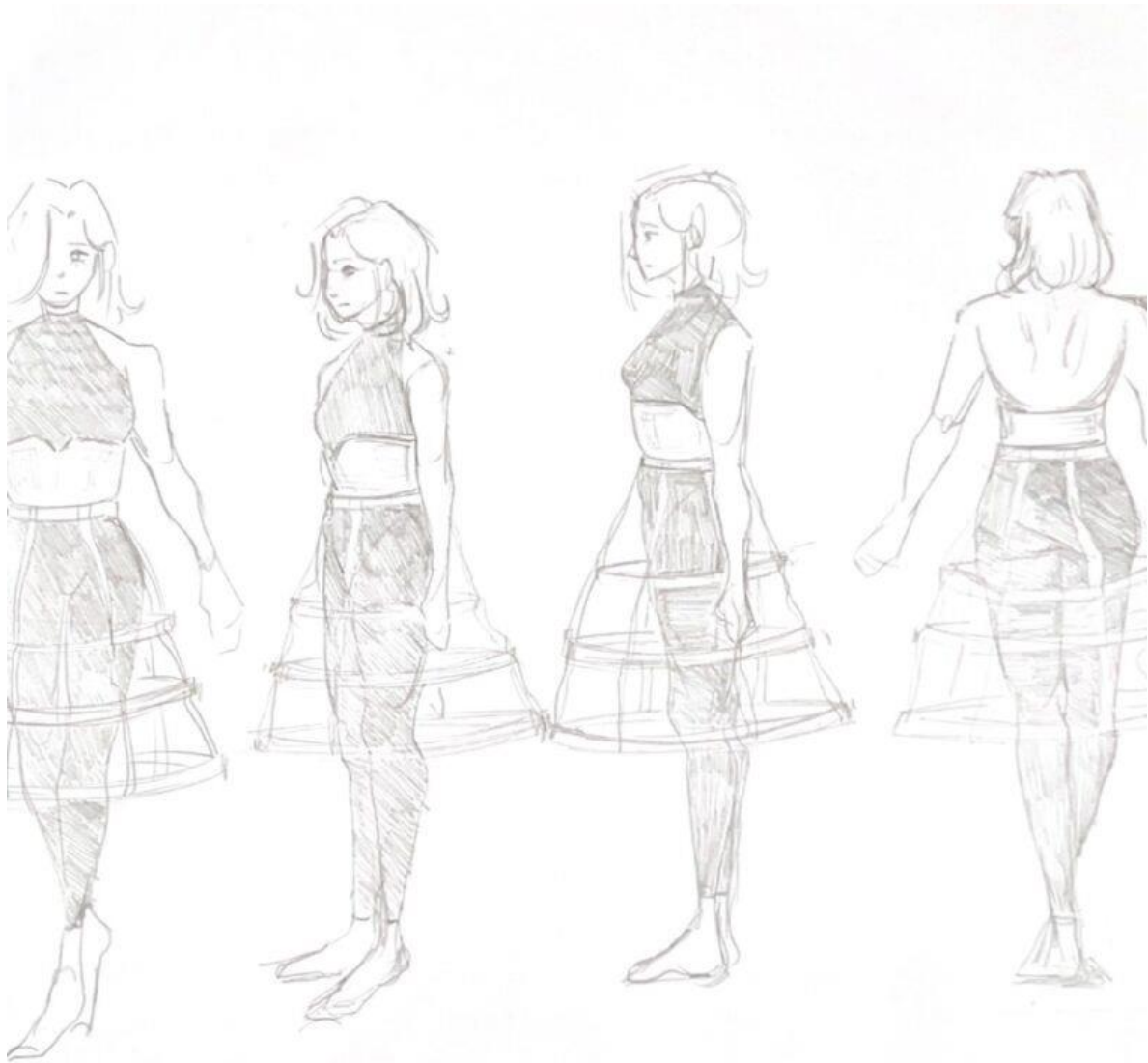
I joined the live call on January 20th, not sure what to expect, but I received a warm welcome and a brief rundown of how the day was going to work. We were to use the Discord voice channels in our speed pitching groups (organised on the huge information spreadsheet we received right at the beginning of the course), and between 4 people we had to quickly introduce ourselves and our idea before moving channels again. I heard lots of amazing pitches and spoke to my peers using my voice instead of text for the first time! It was a little nerve-wracking! A lot of us felt the same and were a little relieved that we weren’t expected to repeat our ideas to the entire course and instead, our tutors would be doing this step for us. They put a lot of effort into selling your idea- based on any information you could provide to them before the afternoon part of the session. Finally, we had an hour-long Q&A session with an industry speaker, before a short explanation of when voting for the pitches would open and close. Three votes each, for your top three ideas that you want to work on.

In the few days leading up to the voting deadline I refused to look at the document, I didn’t want to know if mine was gaining votes or not. Then, we got our results, and “The Puppet Show” had received enough votes to be produced! I was so glad that people enjoyed my concept!

Online session number 2! Before getting into our groups, we had the chance to participate in some short online workshops for things like online presence, CV advice and portfolio feedback (among others). These were very insightful for the industry however, the best part of the second session was kickstarting the pre-production process. After introducing ourselves and meeting our group’s tutor, we got straight to work on talking through the most efficient way to animate and discussing a shot list. Our tutor provided the idea of rotoscoping; an animation technique where you trace over live footage, I was very eager to do this as it meant we wouldn’t have quite as much freehand animating to do. From there we spent a few hours talking through details such as setting, potential character designs and who would start working on what. At the end of this, we did have a well-established foundation of material to begin preparing, while also having a few other aspects still needing a bit more thought. I rarely work in groups, but coming up with the shot list and seeing everyone’s ideas for the pitch made me excited to work with my team to produce the film. It also immediately developed the idea into something that we all had a part in, rather than it being solely mine.



In the weeks leading up to the residential, my team worked on separate parts of the pre-production, which we kept each other updated on as well as asking for feedback. Between the four of us, we split background design, character design, video editing, colour palettes and other odd jobs that needed doing before we got to the residential. My contribution was mostly the character designs and colour palettes, but I did also spend some time working out how strings realistically move a puppet. Putting this research into practice, I animated a very short clip of a “string test”. During the actual character design stage, we made a few changes as a group based on our tutor’s advice. One big change was the removal of the skirt that was originally in the dancer’s design; while it made an interesting silhouette, it would be incredibly difficult to animate in the time we had. Overall, these few weeks were very productive for the group and it made the animation process so much quicker as we had basically everything but the animation done beforehand and could get started straight away.



On February 11th I travelled to Cirencester, where the residential would be taking place in the middle of Macaroni Woods (no, we don't know why it's called that). Here, I met my team face to face, as well as friends I'd made online. Since some of us were earlier, we took the opportunity to explore the grounds- mostly spending time staring at the animals! Once everyone had arrived lunch was served, before a short introductory talk and then the final task of the first day... setup. Team Puppet Show's base was in the kitchen of the smaller building, alongside another group under the same tutor. There was a lot of taping wires down (for health and safety!), but we knew if we got it done the first night it meant we had the rest of the time available for production. It was really exciting getting to use the industry-standard equipment! Even though we weren't expected to start working until the morning, the whole group wanted to try out rotoscoping as soon as we could; this made a huge difference in our efficiency overall as someone in my group

managed to completely animate their scene in an hour. I think this gave the rest of us motivation to keep working.

Waking up on the first proper day at the residential was an interesting experience. I remember getting ready and then texting my friends (who were literally in the same building), to see if they were ready as well. Eating breakfast with so many people was also something I'm not used to, but found I quite enjoyed the tired conversations! Every morning we had about an hour and a half for breakfast before a short meeting about how the day would play out, often including a very brief talk about the film industry as well- which gave great insight. For the first two days, we had workshops run by the tutors, each on a different aspect of filmmaking. My first workshop was on the basics of Adobe Animate- I chose this since my team wasn't using Animate but knew it was a popular programme for animators. The hour went by fast, leading to a lunch break before we started production again. We were quite productive, I alone managed to get roughly 64 frames done which is equal to 8 seconds (working at 8 frames per second). 64 drawings! Other members of my group also got a lot of frames done, providing us with the confidence that we would be able to finish the rotoscoping within the time we had. Once again, we ended up working slightly over what we were expected to work, but we had fun talking and making jokes so it didn't feel that taxing. After dinner, it was an hour of screenings before free time- most of us spending it with the little groups we'd formed! First day complete!

On day two, it was another workshop opportunity. I chose to do a Photoshop animation workshop this time (run by my tutor!). The programme was new to me and I was keen to expand on what I'd already learned in the past day- the biggest thing was the importance of timing your animation and aligning it with any sound effects. Following on from this, Team Puppet Show had a productive afternoon with two of us finishing our scenes. At this point I had drawn the same two figures dancing so many times I think I could do it with my eyes closed! It was very repetitive, but worth it! Due to some of us finishing shots and others being relatively close, we decided to take a step back and collect everything together in one place to get an idea of what was left to do. Luckily, we weren't missing too much material, mostly just some faces and a background shot- both doable in the time we had. Using the list we put together, we split the remaining work up again, but also agreed we needed a break. Instead of pushing to finish everything in one night, we opted to spend some time relaxing and playing games with people from other groups and just had a quiet evening all together.

Waking up on day three we had our first full day of production ahead of us! It was a very important day as we were going to be presenting our work in progress (WIP) to the rest of the groups in the evening, meaning we would need some sort of content to show. As I'd finished my wide shots the day before, I was tasked with finishing off a teammate's shot as they weren't as confident with consistently drawing the face of the dancer. I worked quickly and managed to get it done within about an hour, freeing me up to draw all of the strings of the puppet; this also only took about an hour or so as it was such a simple detail to add. My final task of the day was to begin animating some curtains that would be at the start, opening to show the performance. The biggest difference here was that I had to fully freehand draw the curtains, rather than rotoscoping over a reference, meaning it took me the whole rest of the afternoon and into the next day to finish! But, finally, after a long day, we could see everyone else's WIPs. Most people were just under halfway done with their projects at this point and it was exciting to see what had been achieved in the time we'd had so far.

Thursday is what I'd call our last day of production, we had the full day to get the animation finalised before it needed to be composed. As mentioned, my curtain animation ended up taking me the entire morning to get done as I struggled with animating the fabric effectively. Around lunchtime we began exporting all of our animation files, collecting them on the team's hard drive to both make transferring them easier and have a backup if anything went wrong during editing. Going into the evening, our group made a last-minute decision to fully shade the figures, knowing it would be worth the extra time. The entire team worked well past our expected hours and finally finished shading every frame by close to midnight. We did have a small celebration at this point as we knew that we would be able to finalise everything in time for the deadline.

Friday 16th. The deadline. Getting straight to work on editing, a member of my group worked closely with our tutor to put together all of the different scenes while waiting for some final credit animating to be completed. The sound design and compositing was a long process, and I was anxious that something was missing and we wouldn't have time to fix it. But, fortunately, we had everything that we needed! At 2pm we handed over the master copy of our animated film and began packing up our equipment. We'd done it!

Following on from all groups handing in their master copies, we took a trip to Oxford where we had an hour to explore before watching a movie. Afterward it was free time back at the site, which I spent with friends and just had a fun night. Since it was the last night a lot of people didn't want to go to bed, not wanting to leave on Saturday- it was understandable. We'd make good friends, had a great time and made films to be proud of while enjoying the atmosphere. Sadly though, we did have to eventually turn in...

Finally, Saturday morning came around. Everyone had packed the day before so it was a quick breakfast before getting on the coach (with your luggage) and travelling to Swindon. Our films were being screened to an audience consisting of family and friends! It was such an exciting moment, we could see all of our hard work on the big screen! Everyone had done so well, all of the films were amazing! At last, it was time to say goodbye to everyone, it was a bit of a sad moment as we're all in different parts of the UK. However, I also think a lot of us were happy to see our parents or siblings again, and were looking forward to a weekend of rest after the intense week we'd had.

My final thoughts on this experience are that it helped cement my desire to go into illustration and animation, actively helping me through career advice and first hand experience of what it might be like. It's helped me plan out the next year or so, giving me options I didn't even know I had. So, would I recommend it? Absolutely! It was an amazing offer and I'm glad I didn't just ignore the recommendation from college. I know this was a long read, but I couldn't find a way of saying how great it was in any less words!

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