

Amanda Mancuso

Senior Project

Story

For my senior project I chose to illustrate the most impacting events in my life during my four years at the University of Tampa. A project so big and crucial as my last I would ever complete as an undergrad needed to be powerful, meaningful, and thought provoking. Most of all I wanted to create something new that had never been done before at the University of Tampa by using the programs Modul8 and MadMapper to create a video project installation onto a foam core structure I created and hung myself.

In March 2010 I was in a fatal car accident with five other University of Tampa students. Walking away with only subtle bruises was one of the hardest realities to stomach, when my friend Tessa Byers lost her life in that same car. Pursuing my Bachelor of Arts with the same enthusiasm after this tragic event has not been easy. She became a reoccurring theme in many of my school projects including creative non-fiction stories, poems, and installation art. Honoring her through my art and writing gave her a second voice. Creating art has been the most cathartic release for me and has helped me to understand and let go of the stranglehold of emotions her death has had on my life for years.

This past December, Susan Lanigan my best friend from high school, was driving home for Christmas break in a snow storm when she lost control of her Ford F-150, slid into the right lane, and was hit head on by a snow plow. The reoccurrence of a second accident of someone close to me instantly brought back the horrific emotions I felt that rainy March evening. Although I was in emotional distress and turmoil, I had to continue my life and goals. Life does not stop when these things happen to us- it simply cannot. And that is something I have come to accept and realize through these separate stories. Susan Lanigan suffered severe injuries such as broken bones, a torn liver, ruptured gallbladder and spleen, and the list goes on. The medical miracle woman managed to pull through and use the next six months to achieve an almost full recovery.

I chose to combine both stories together and create one single project to show the compare and contrast of how almost the same accident can cause death and survival.

Process

With my idea and knowledge of what I wanted to create with the specific programs I wanted to use, I started writing a narration on paper. I began by writing down adjectives and keywords to brainstorm ideas for my filming process. Knowing I wanted two separate story lines to combine together into one, I realized that the syncing of 10 different videos together would not be an easy task. I asked my film major friend Marisol Marin to help me execute the filming of calm ambient videos to use in conjunction with the horrific tragic stories. We filmed water, the beach, all kinds of nature, and sky with the school's old black and white film camera. I combined images of news stories about Tessa's death, obituary articles, stories from The Minaret, and images from her memorial together into a slide show. For the second story I asked Susan to send me photos of her scars, photos of her crushed car, and her in the hospital. I used exact Facebook posts from her boyfriend explaining the details of her recovery for another portion of video. I used the VJ program Modulate to produce my own illusion of rain and snow by repeating one set of brush strokes into an animation with falling gravity. For the manikin head portion of my installation, I used a video of my own face that I took myself with a Flip HD camera.

I edited, cut, and combined all of the raw footage in Final Cut Pro. I made each of the ten videos the same duration--one minute and five seconds long. After all of the videos were cut and synchronized I exported them as each individual files to QuickTime Movies. I then imported each video into After Effects to create one giant mosaic of videos playing together. Once I sized and moved the movies around to where I wanted them, I rendered the movie with the highest possible quality to my desktop. Finally, I re-imported the video into MPEG-StreamClip and used an Apple Motion JPEG-A codec to decrease the size of the file.

Execution

Picking the space for this emotional installation was crucial for the execution of my work. It needed to be segregated from the rest of the senior art show because it was to stand-alone. I used the photography studio because it was big, open, and had the ability to be completely dark. I wanted the audience to be able to get up as close to the foam core installation as possible and move around its 3D set-up. I was able to set the projector, extension chords, and my computer with ease due to the vast open area. I used a massive amount of tape to hang the boxes and luckily, they stayed hung throughout the entire night.

The day of the show I uploaded the final looping mosaic video into MadMapper, another VJ program. With this program I was able to separate each individual video onto its own surface and then map it directly onto the hung boxes and manikin head. Aligning the eyes to the manikin was one of the most challenging parts of the execution as the head is an organic shape and the video was a rectangle. Over all the projection worked and came together beautifully. I used the song "Sweet Disposition" by The Temper Trap to play in the background of my piece. This song is very important and meaningful to me, as I remember it being played during Tessa's memorial at the University after the accident. The song will forever remind me of her.

The Show

I was extremely pleased with how well the projection installation was received by others. As the videos were in a constant loop, it glued the audience to my piece. With the amount of images and videos I used it was impossible to see and understand all the videos in just the one short minute. Often I noticed, people would stay for up to ten minutes just watching and absorbing the stories. The most frequent things people said to me was "You have a guardian angel", "I can't even imagine how you are feeling", "How are you so strong?", "What programs did you use?", and "I've never seen anything like this." I affected people directly. Not only did they view my story and wonder how I was able to cope, but my project also forced them to think about their own lives.

It was sincerely incredible that President Vaughn and his wife shook my hand and told me that my project was something they had never seen before and that I had done an amazing job. I have never felt such an honor in my life.

To my knowledge I witnessed a total of eight people cry while watching my video. That alone is enough for me to know my project was successful. Art that reaches others in a direct, emotional fashion is the best kind.

I stood for over an hour watching my installation play in a loop. The repetition of the images on the screen hurt to watch at first, and at first I cried. But, after a while it helped me to realize that these events are over now. I have gone through them and although they are sad, I am ready to move on.

I am truly proud of my project. I am proud of the strength I have now after reliving and seeing these images over and over again. I am honored to be a pioneer of using MadMapper and Modul8 for a project at the University of Tampa.