

Birth By Sound

Musical Inspiration in Character Design



Developed by Geoff Kaiser

Forward:

The goal of this project was to figure out a way to create unique, personal characters. Music has always been an emotional release for me. I'll listen in my down time, or while I'm working. I've seen music transform a project. I've seen how music and visuals, when developed in tandem, can reinforce each other and create a cohesive world.

This set of exercises is an experiment to see if I could create a formal way to incorporate music into the design process. The results of the exercises are the born of the artist's personal response to the music in that moment. While this information can and should be reinforced with more traditional visual research and development, the emotional core is a unique creation.

I hope that, in using these exercises, you create some new and exciting characters and creatures. More than that, I hope that it is fun, as art should be.

Introduction:

In this process, we are going to complete a series of exercises. This will consist of taking a piece of music and translating the audio ideas into visual building blocks. The four exercises cover shape language, composition, value, and color.

After completing the exercises, there are a few steps to apply the information to build a character.

Part 1) Warm Up:

- 1) Choose a song, either from your project library or from your own list. This is going to be the emotional groundwork for your character. The same song will be used for all four exercises.
- 2) Before making any marks, take a few minutes to listen to the music. Think about its composition, the instruments and techniques used in it, and how it's put together.
- 3) Before looking for any outcomes, do a round or two of loose drawings while listening to the song. Try to get into the space of the song, and think about its nature.

Part 2) The Exercises:

Shape and Composition Exercises:

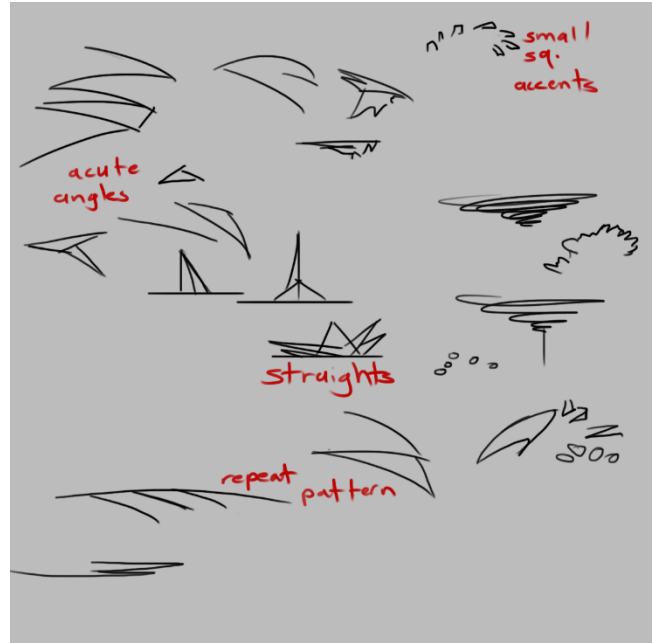
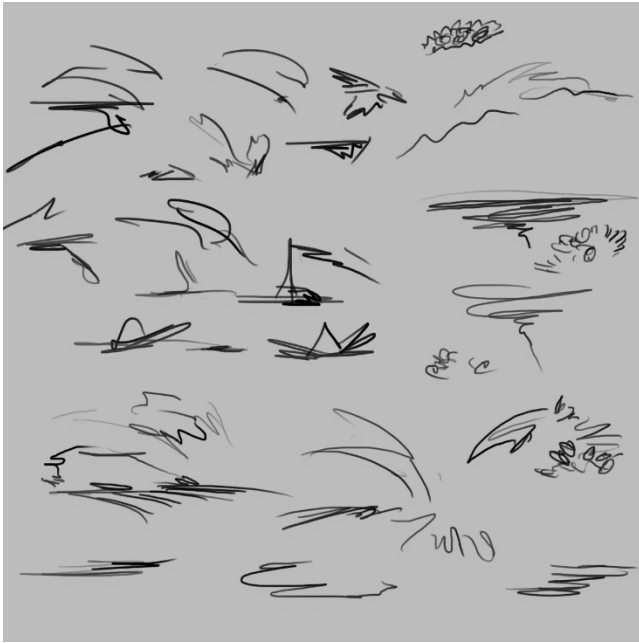
1) Shape Language:

The Goal: A library of interesting shape language. Think beyond circles, squares, and triangles. Look for unusual curves and angles, or thematic shapes (stars, raindrops, etc.) that can help direct your ideas. What trends in line, angle, and form appear in your sketches?

How these shapes are applied is up to you. They can inform or reinforce the composition as a whole. They can create elements within your composition, be it major elements or accents, and reinforce the emotional idea of your character.

Different shapes create emotional responses in the viewer. In translating the music into shape, we identify the emotional “texture” we want the character to have.

- 1) 1st listen: develop shapes, responding to elements and changes in the song. Note shapes regardless of repetition.
- 2) Look over your loose drawings for consistent elements. Consider things like:
 - line weight: thick or thin
 - curvature: straight vs. curve, flow vs. jagged
 - sharpness of angles.
 - horizontal vs. vertical line
 - line quality: many small strokes, or one long stroke



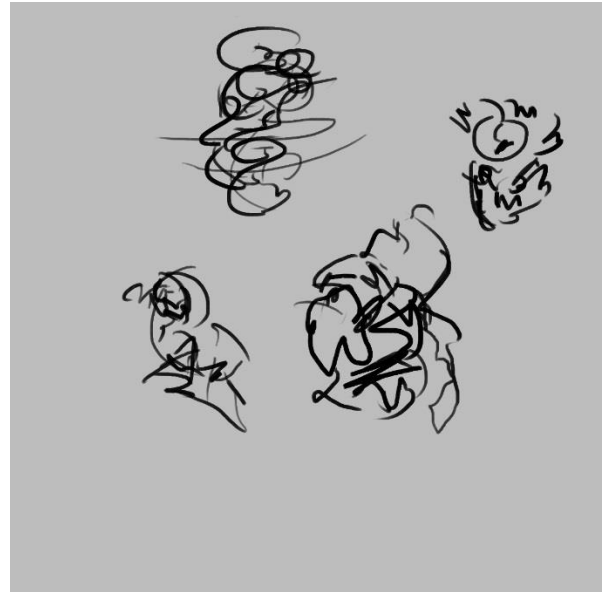
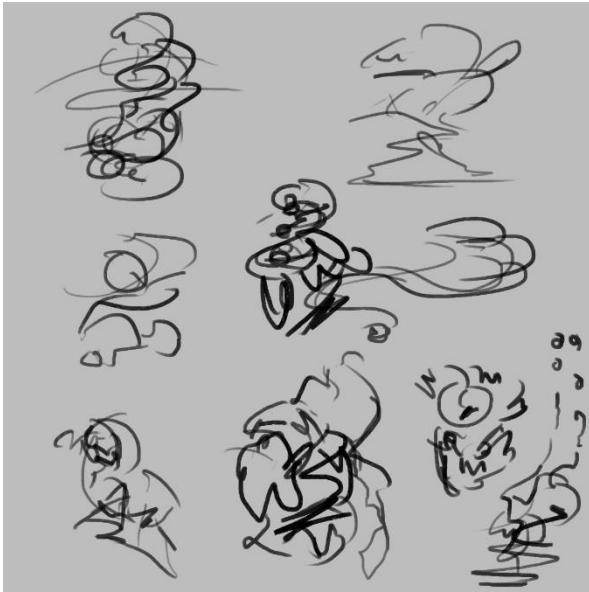
Not all of these might be applicable, but any of them could give you ideas.

3) 2nd listen: refine shapes from first pass, picking up on elements that inspired them. Narrow down to a more defined library. Listening not required, but encouraged.

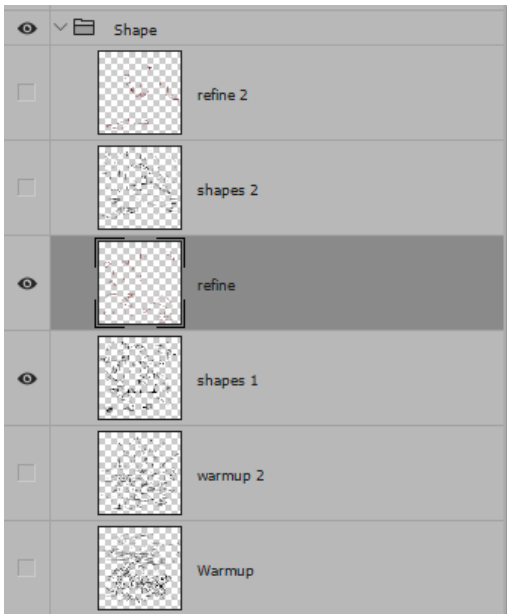
2) Composition:

The Goal: Create Thumbnails that you can refine into a rough silhouette. You can then start blending your results from the shape exercise to refine the character. Don't throw away the rough compositions: the loose, natural sketches can provide additional ideas.

- 1) Do another warm up round if you feel the need. Don't be afraid to cover the entire page.
- 2) Listen to the song. Work in large, loose shapes. Don't worry so much about the exact shape. Instead, focus on how the shapes interact. Which ones are larger, which are smaller? How do the shapes interact? What is the interaction like? What does the space you are defining look like?
- 3) Go back over your sketches, identifying large and small areas. Don't worry about incorporating shapes or applying anatomy. Just consider how the form feels overall. How is it divided? What are the areas of action and the areas of rest?



Examples of Layer Management

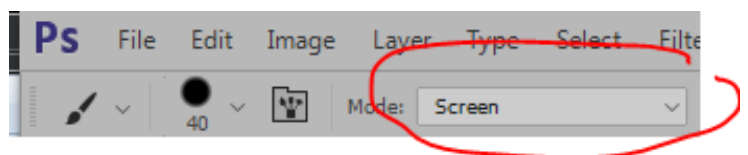


If you do the Shape and Composition Exercises in the same file, be sure to group the layers so it is clear which ones belong to each exercise.

Value and Color Exercises:

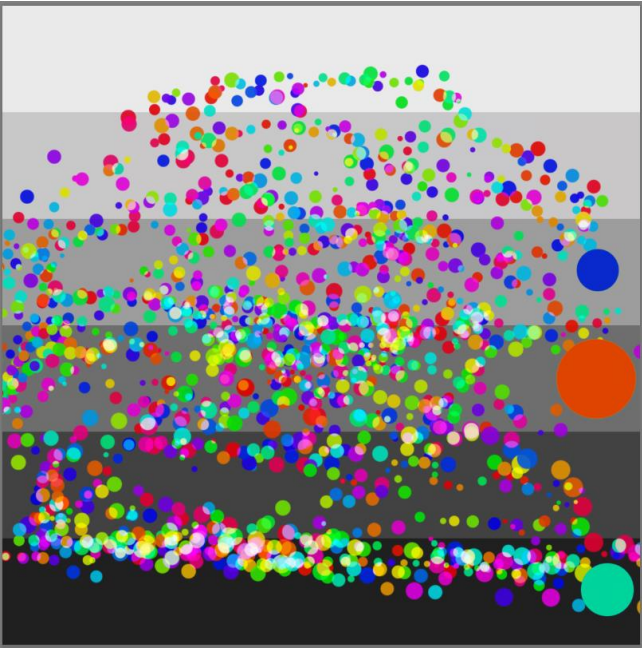
Heat Mapping for Value and Color:

- 1) Load in the heat map brush in Photoshop
- 2) Set your brush to screen.
- 3) Set your color a full saturation color, i.e. pure red.



Value:

The Goal: A value range for your character, identifying the lightest and darkest values to use, the overall trend (light, dark, or middle), and the intensity of contrast.

- 1) Open the Value Table PSD. Use the included heat map brush. Select a bright color (pure red) and set your brush to screen. 
- 2) Set a new layer underneath the table. This is so you cannot see your heat map as you work.
- 3) Listen to the song. What is the tone of the song? What is the rhythm? Is it warm or cool? Are there downward or upward trends? How does the song make you feel? Make marks in the values that you envision. Don't hold the pen down, make many marks. Jump around the table.
- 4) After you have listened to the song, pull your heat map layer to the top. Rank your values from most used to least used. Is there a trend to the values you selected?

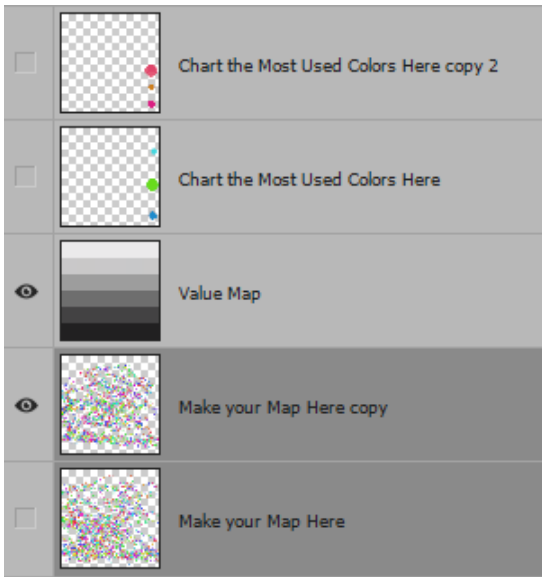
Color:

The Goal: Create a color gamut for your character.

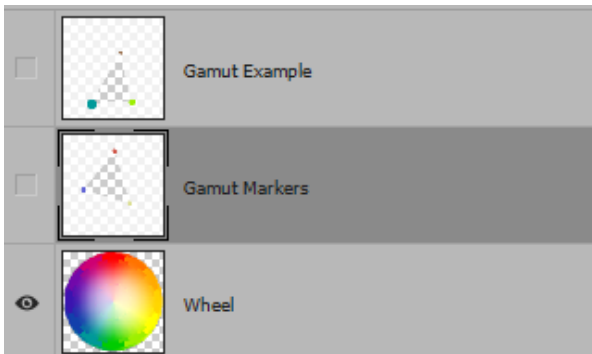
- 1) Open the Color Map PSD. Use the included heat map brush. Select a bright color (pure red) and set your brush to screen.
- 2) Set a new layer underneath the table. This is so you cannot see your heat map as you work.
- 3) Listen to the song for recurring elements and themes. What colors do they bring to mind? What is the temperature of the song? What is its energy like? How does the song work over time?
- 4) Once you have listened to the song, identify the color bars with the highest density of marks. The color with the most hits will be your primary color mark, with the other colors supporting. Depending on the type of character you want to make (monochromatic, trichromatic, etc.), pick out the appropriate number of colors. Take note of where you made the most marks within the bar (saturated, desaturated, average), and select the color appropriately.
- 5) On the Color Wheel PSD, map the colors with the highest mark density.
- 6) Draw out a shape between your marked colors. This will be the color gamut for your design. If your gamut is monochromatic, I suggest drawing a box between the color point and the center of the wheel.



Examples of Layer Management



Heat Map Layers



Color Wheel Layers

At the End of these exercises:

You will not have a finished character. Instead, you will have building blocks that will inspire your design and give you cool ideas for cool characters. These ideas will be unique to your interpretations of the music.

Part 3)

Turning these elements into a character:

The Shape and Composition:

1) Take your composition thumbnails and start laying them on top of each other. What interesting things come out of these more complex combinations? If these combined thumbnails become too chaotic, do a simple sketch over them for the important elements, then combine those. Repeat these steps as necessary.



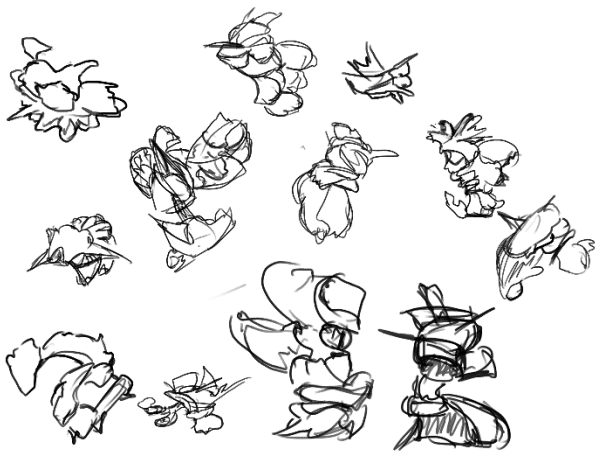
1

Comp Thumbs



2

Combine



3

Simplify



4

Combine Again

In the end, do two or three rounds of combinations. See what sorts of interesting, unexpected ideas come out of it.

2) While combining your composition thumbnails, consider your shapes. Do they help inform your overall silhouette, or do they provide direction for details, accents, and interior forms? Do you see your shape ideas occurring naturally in your compositions?

Value and Color:

1) Take your darkest and lightest values from the exercise, and use this to break up your character in a few different value compositions. Find interesting arrangements that help your character read clearly. You can then start to break it up with accenting values.

2) Select colors from within your gamut and lay them over your value map. It is recommended that you start with colors closer to your original selected marks, then work into the middle of the gamut as you deem appropriate.

Important note: The information you pulled from the exercises is not an absolute rule. It is there to help give you some direction in how to create your character, drawn from a personal response to the music. If you find, in your explorations, that the character needs to be lighter or darker, a different set of colors, or includes different shapes, it is good to experiment in that direction.

If you would like to see examples of character design using these exercises, or would like to submit feedback, please visit:

Geoffkaiser.weebly.com/BirthBySound

Feedback can also be sent to:

BirthBySoundThesis@gmail.com

Special Thanks to:

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The Class of SP17_Art251_C