

Animation and Storytelling as a Form of Public Memorial



Examining the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a ritual container for the metaphysical energy of the impact of the war on individuals and society

Duane Loose - Master of Fine Arts in Computer Animation
Miami International University of Art and Design

Outline

Included in this presentation:

- Thesis statement
- Statement of artistic intent
- Expanded Context of the thesis
- Outline of research completed and sources used
- Methodology
- Short narrative of the story for the animated film Requiem
- Discussion of symbolism
- Ethical issues considered during development of the thesis project
- Production planning including detailed schedules and production milestones
- Production bible including Requiem storyboards, visual reference and research and look development assets.
- Contribution to the field of knowledge
- Citation of sources

Thesis Statement

The purpose of the computer animated short film, Requiem, is twofold. The first is to explore the use of animated storytelling as a form of public memorial. The second purpose is to visually and symbolically portray the Vietnam Veterans Memorial as a symbol and metaphysical* repository for the grief and pain suffered by the survivors of the conflict, their fallen comrades, their families, and the nation as a whole; and the individual paths to healing that these groups have undertaken.

*Metaphysics: of or relating to the transcendent or to a reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses; concerned with abstract thought or subjects, as existence, causality, or truth; concerned with first principles and ultimate grounds, as being, time, or substance. Sources: www.dictionary.com and Merriam/Webster online dictionary - www.m-w.com

Artistic Intent

Requiem explores the impact of war on individuals and society and the concept of monuments and memorials containing the metaphysical energy of that impact.

My work, titled The Wall, is a fictional universe which explores this concept in the context of the continuing aftermath of the war in Vietnam. Although Requiem can be considered part of The Wall storyline, only Requiem will be submitted as the artistic component of this thesis project. All other rights to The Wall remain with Duane Loose.

My artistic focus is on story telling. The tools I use to create my work are secondary to the story itself.

Expanded Context

Modern society rarely acknowledges the necessity and power of ritual healing in everyday life. Consequently, our culture suffers spiritually, emotionally and physically. War, for example, wounds us as a society in body, mind and spirit.

Memorials, commemorative objects that remind us of people who died or an event in which people died, are one of the few remaining art forms that may facilitate healing.

Television and film have access to a wider audience than location specific physical memorials. Using these media to remember the past expands the concept of healing through memorials.

The act of creating the art with the intent of healing through ritual remembrance is a cathartic experience for the artist as well.

Research Completed and Sources

The underlying storytelling themes in Requiem are influenced by:

- The poetry of Robert Bly, Hafiz and Rumi
- The literary and scientific studies of Dr. Robert Moore
- The concepts of individual and collective shadow by Dr. C.G. Jung
- The published personal accounts of Vietnam veteran's combat experiences and visits to the memorial
- Original and unpublished interviews with Vietnam veterans
- The writings of Maya Lin, the designer of the memorial
- Related research into the role and power of public war memorials in our culture and society.
- Books, online journals and thesis databases.

Methodology / Inquiry Strategies

Using qualitative research methods I conducted a limited exploration into the effect of the war and the meaning and impact of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the veterans. Elements of the methodology included:

- Vietnam veteran interviews
- A review of private documents
- Correlation of transcribed oral histories about the war in Vietnam
- A study of the personal memoirs of chaplains who served in the war
- A synthesis of the relevant sociological and psychological concepts

Narrative

The story of Requiem follows an aged Vietnam veteran in his daily visit to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. His purpose is to honor the memory of the men who died saving his life in combat. His ritual is simple: he walks to the Wall, touches the engraved names of his fallen comrades, and says a silent prayer of thanks. He has done this every day for the past 30 years. On this day, he dies and is escorted into the afterlife by his fallen comrades.

Symbolism

The design of the Vietnam Memorial is symbolic in nature. The designer, Maya Lin said, *"...I have tried to create works that present you with information allowing you the chance to come to your own conclusions; they ask you to think."*

Exploring the elements of the design of the Vietnam Memorial is the main impetus for the visual language of Requiem. For example, the mirror-like surface of the wall is used to represent the barrier between the world of the living and the realm of the dead. Requiem explores this barrier using reflected imagery to connect the past with the present.

Ethical Considerations

Requiem is a fictional story dealing with the death and passing on to the afterlife of an aged Vietnam veteran. It would be a failure if the story and its presentation offend the veterans it is intended to honor. I obtained feedback from individual Vietnam veterans about the story.

I also considered how I will address criticism of what may be perceived as a promotion of war.

I included an open and frank examination of my own prejudices and beliefs.

Production Planning



Technical Direction: Issues/Challenges

- Scope: Initial asset evaluation and schedule development indicate that Requiem will require the remaining 5 quarters to finish to the level of quality I want.
- Non-photo-real imagery using custom shaders
- Character Modeling and Animation
 - Stylized human
 - Facial expression and animation
- Visual Effects
 - Reflected world – Vietnam
 - Realistic interactive VFX blending with stylized graphite visuals
- Matte Painting
 - Rely as much as possible on matte paintings for the background plates.

Research, Development, Production Process and Schedule

Thesis research and development paralleled development of the short film Requiem. CG production followed 3 distinct phases beginning with **Pre-production** which included script and storyboard refinement and look development for 2 quarters. The 2nd phase – **Production**- spanned 2 quarters. Phase 3 – **Post** production overlapped with production and spanned 2 quarters.

5 Quarter schedule:

Spring 2007:	Script refinement, storyboard lock, animatic, look development (color script, character design, etc.)
Summer 2007:	Animated slice, asset modeling, background plates
Fall 2007:	Animation, background plates, start shot production
Winter 2008:	Shot production, visual effects, compositing begins
Spring 2008:	Compositing, editing and final sound.

Production Bible



Production Bible

- Visual language
- Visual theme exploration
- Pre-production/look exploration*
- Character design*
- Storyboards
- Color script*
- Matte paintings*
- Animated Slice**

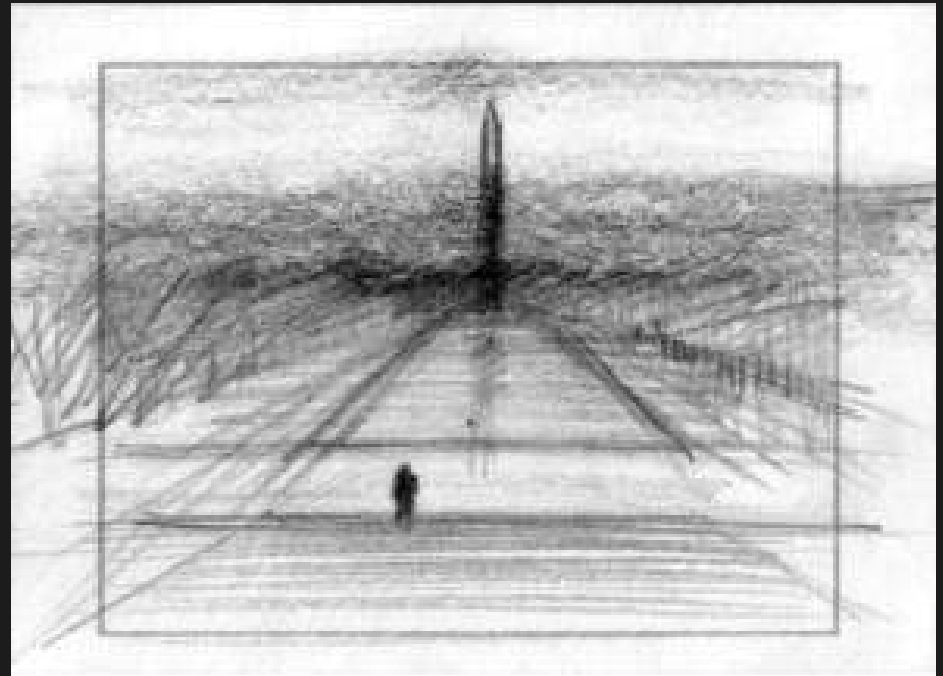
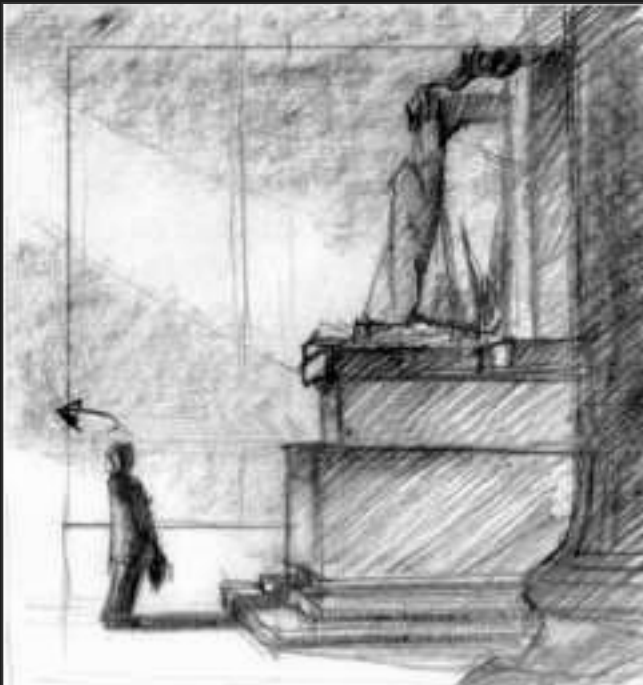
*To be Developed in future quarters.

**An animated slice is a preliminary fully developed animated segment of the final film used to verify the production pipeline and the final look target.

Visual Language

In Requiem I used non-photoreal (NPR) imagery to capture the cold and bleak feeling illustrated in the storyboard sketches

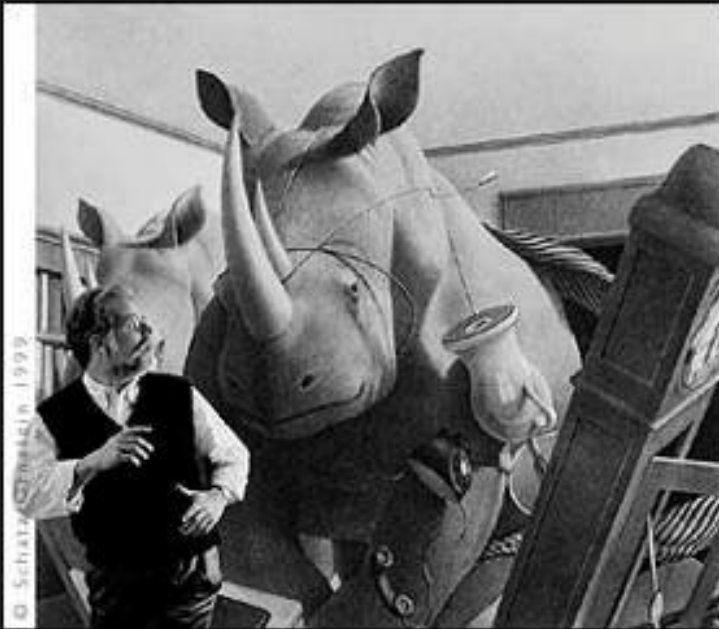
Requiem depicts a subtle change of seasons and time of day through the course of the story. This is intended to emphasize the passage of time and seasons in the protagonist's life.



Visual Language

NPR rendering inspired by the work of *Chris Van Allsburg* and other illustrators who use graphite as their medium of choice.

Requiem style: graphite illustrations brought to life.



Visual theme exploration



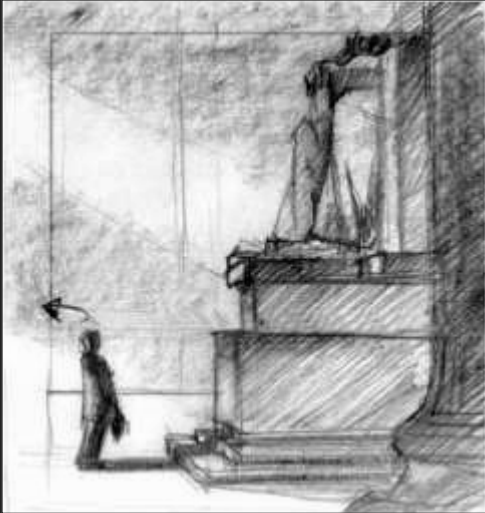
These images explore the paradox and duality of the war in a symbolic use of iconic imagery and color.

Visual theme exploration



I explored time of day, seasons, symbolism and metaphysics in the imagery created for Requiem. This image showing the US armies of Washington, Vietnam and Lincoln gathering at the wall to honor the fallen dead, for example.

Visual theme exploration



I explored light, color, and atmosphere as a major component of Requiem's visual language.



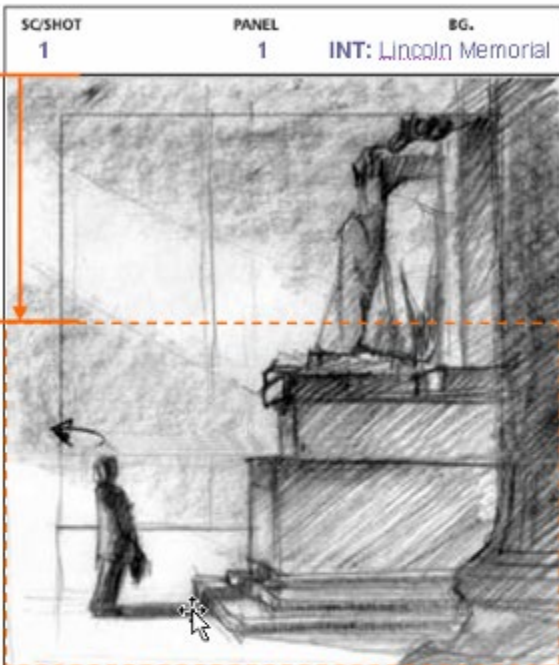
Visual theme exploration

Using reflected surface imagery to explore the wall as a symbol of the veil between the past and present, life and death.



Story Boards





Shot Ends: 00:11

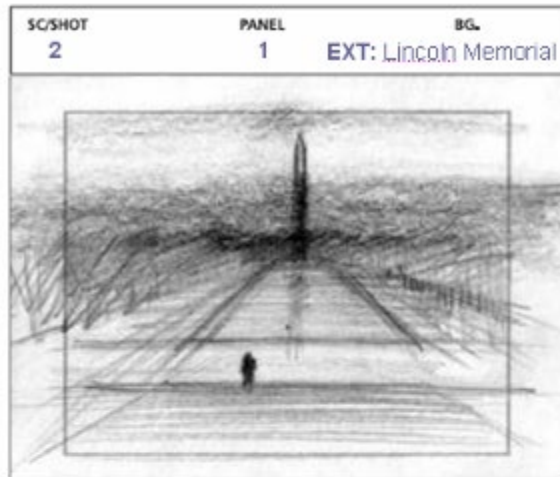
Fade in to Interior of Lincoln memorial

TOD: sunset/dusk. Medium long shot of a lone figure, an old man gazing up at the statue – hat in hand.

Old man hears a helicopter outside and rouses from his reverie –turns to look over his shoulder.

Old man puts his hat on and turns to leave.

Camera: Crane down to eye level



TIME 00:15

Cut to: Top of the steps of the Lincoln memorial looking down –

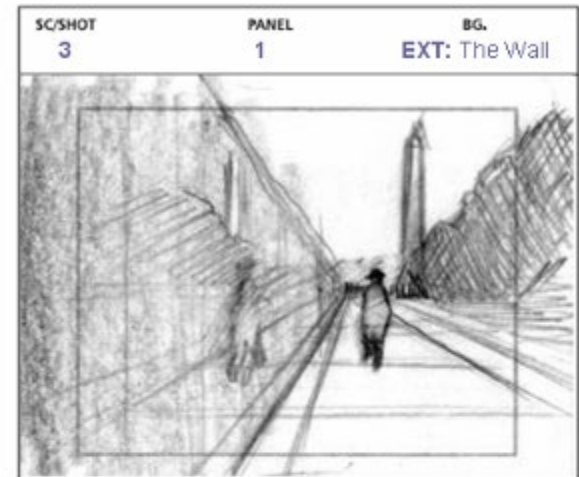
Old man is negotiating the last steps at the bottom – The plaza is deserted.

Helicopter patrols through the BG.

Washington Monument catches the last rays of the sun.

Camera: Dutch the POV

Note: It's bleak Mid Winter – Add cold breath as appropriate

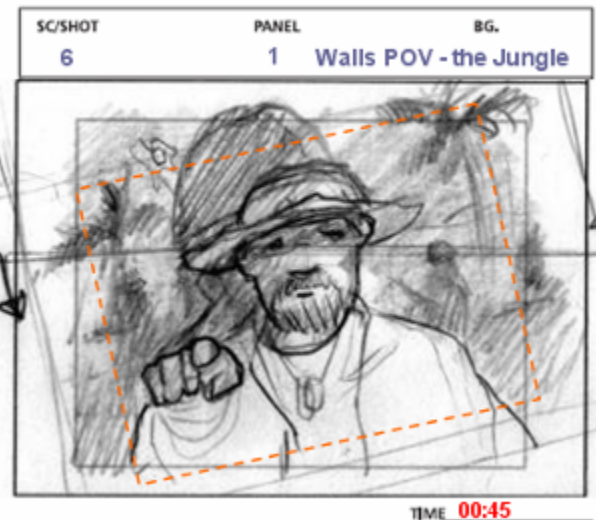
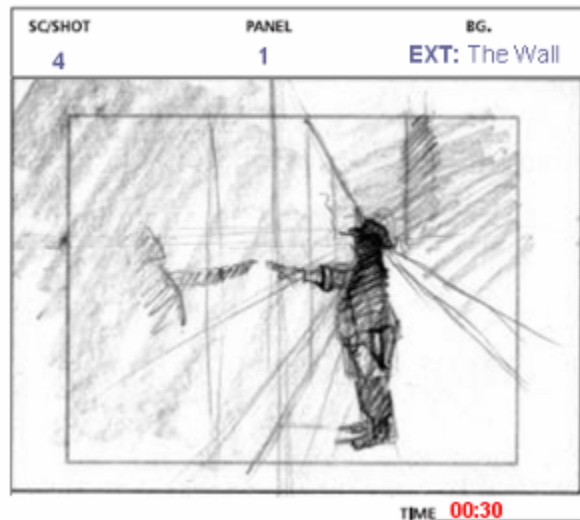


TIME 00:20

Cut to: Long shot of Vietnam vet memorial: the Wall.

Old man walking - back to the sun- away from camera

Camera: slight rack focus



Cut to: Medium shot –

Camera is moving slowly with the old man as he slows and faces the wall –still walking.

He is searching for a name, his hand and finger pointing but not touching the wall – moving from name to name as he walks and searches.

He drops his hand and stops - reaches up and starts to remove his hat.

Camera: Camera moves with man as he walks and searches

Cut to: tighter shot of wall and BG

Old man is initially out of frame.

Old mans hand reaches into frame from camera right.

Old man (in profile) steps into view. We see now that he is a Vietnam vet. Uniform coat tattered, patched and badges.

Hat full of memorabilia pins - one patch in particular – a shield with crossed lightning bolts stands out.

Camera: moves slightly to reframe action

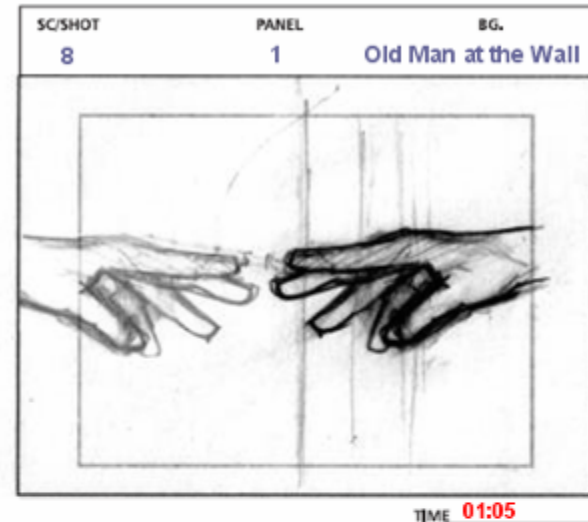
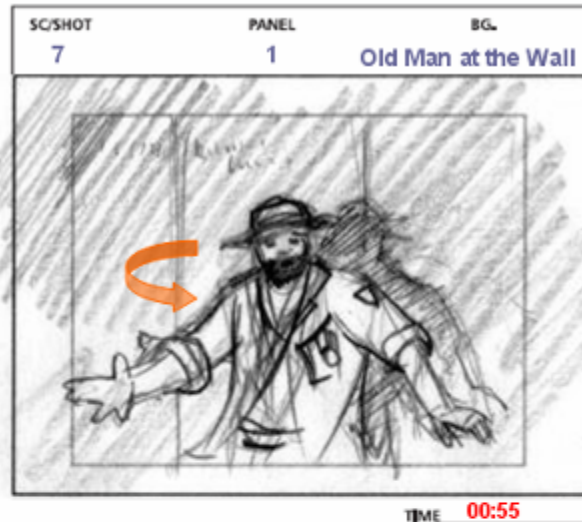
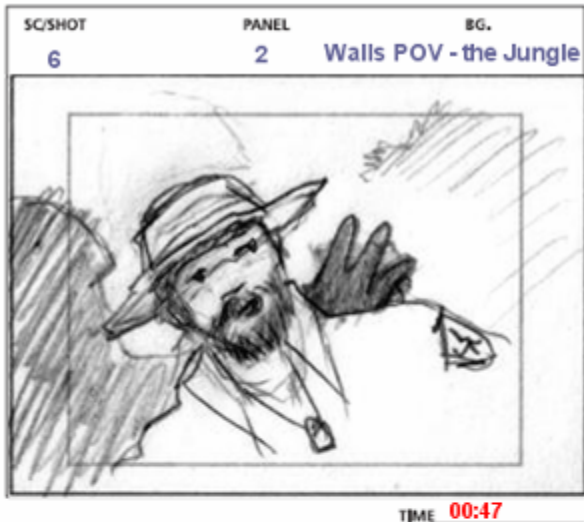
Cut to: walls POV of old man reaching out.

The BG blurred from DOF begins to fade away- replaced with blurry dark indistinct silhouettes of figures (soldiers) running behind him in a jungle environment.

Flares erupt as his hand draws closer to the camera as a shadow approaches behind him.

The old man pushes in to touch the wall.

Camera: pushes in as hand draws closer - slow dutch



Continuation:
TOD: Late Twilight

A battle worn strong hand reaches from the darkness behind him and gently clasps his shoulder

Camera: slow dutch

Cut to: medium shot behind old man

He twists violently around to face the shadow.

Old man wipes his eyes, shakes his head and turns back to the wall.

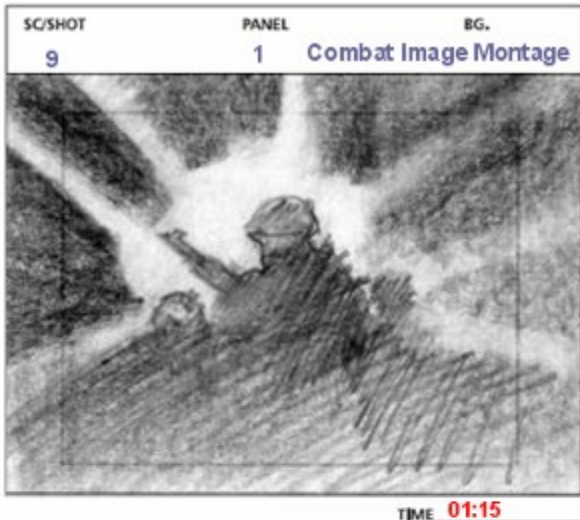
Camera:

Cut to: At the wall - hand reaching in -

The Old Man reaches back again to touch the wall. He hesitates, pulls back a bit and then touches the name on the wall. As he touches the wall **hard cut to:**

Camera:

Note: His reflection in the wall makes it look like there is a hand reaching out to him as he reaches in. The reflected hand is the soldier's hand that clasped his shoulder



Cut to: combat image montage

- flashes of light erupting in synch with arty and MG fire
- a pitched battle illuminated only by the shots and explosions
- A Huey approaches closer and hovers
- dirt and dust are being kicked up by the Huey.
- the image collage abruptly ends on cut to shot 10

Camera: slow truck in

Cut to: medium wide high shot

TOD: Night

Old man in a spotlight - dust is kicked up as he slowly turns around to face the hovering chopper.

He shades his eyes with his hand against the glare

Camera: Camera cranes down to ground level – continuous shot

Continue: Choppers POV –

A soldier, side lit by the spot, steps a few inches into the light.

We can barely make out his form, cannot see his face but we can see the battle gear and a shield and lightning patch on his shoulder.

He waits for a beat and then raises his arm and beckons the old man to come forward.

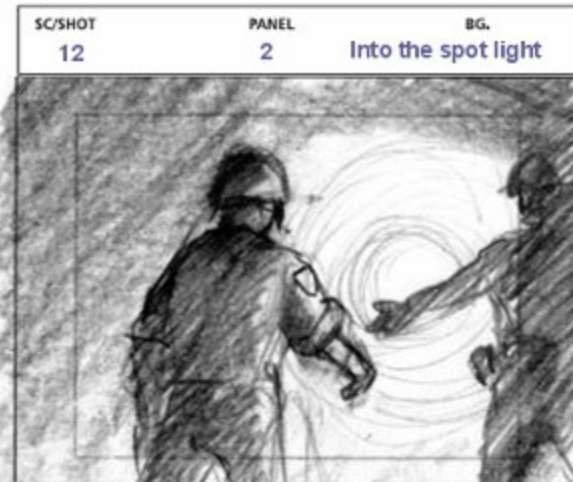
Camera: locked - slight dutch



TIME 01:32



TIME 01:45



TIME 01:50

Cut back to: medium high shot of old man.

He drops his hand from shading his eyes.

Straightens up and takes a slight step back- he's up against the wall.

Camera: locked slight dutch

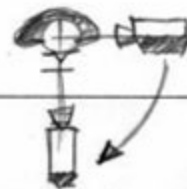
Cut to: CU of old mans face in profile.

Old man raises his head. We see his reflection in the wall.

(Camera rotates and settles before emotion transition)

Old man face transitions from apprehension to recognition, then uncertainty (will he be forgiven?) then relief, and finally joyful.

Camera: camera slowly rotates around to the old mans face



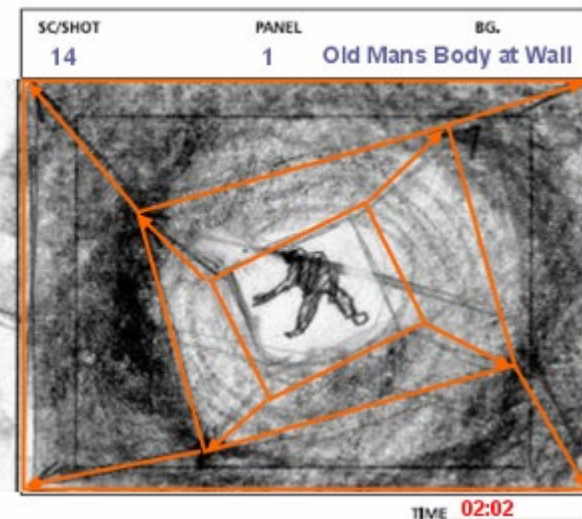
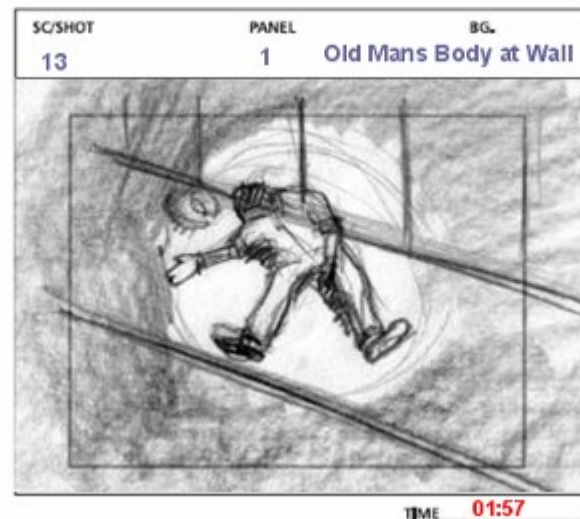
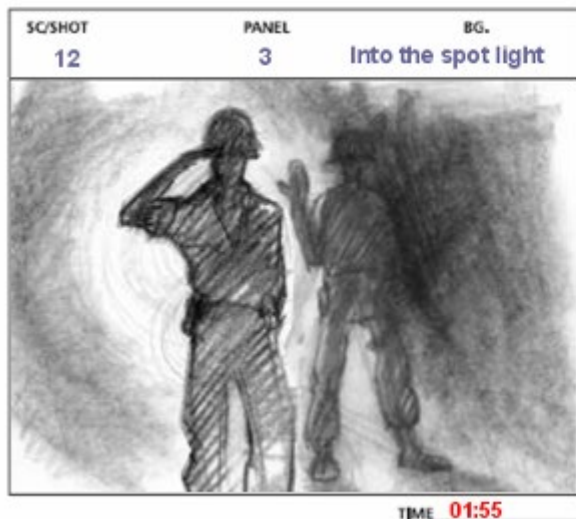
Continuation:

Old man walks toward camera out of view.

We see his reflection walking (into the wall) into the spotlight towards the soldier – who reaches out to him.

As he walks he straightens up – his clothes change into his battle fatigues -he becomes the young soldier he once was.

Camera: slow truck in into wall as the reflected image resolves into a mirror image scene.



Continuation:

He pauses and turns to look back – salutes - and then turns and steps beyond the light and into the darkness. The spotlight bounces as he enters the Huey – the motor spins up and the Huey lifts off.

Camera: slow truck

Cut to: slow mo wide shot from Helo POV

We see ground and wall as the Helo takes off. We don't see the Old Man Yet.

As the ground falls away the spotlight travels to the wall where we see the old man lying dead against the wall - sitting on the path.

Camera: Aerial camera pulling back

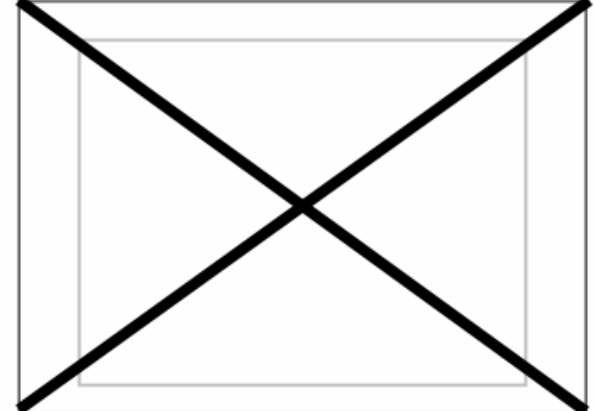
Cross dissolve to: same view, higher up – 3X

Spot stays on the old man – Fade to Black

Camera: camera slowly rotates. Old mans body stays center screen as it recedes in the distance

SC/SHOT	PANEL	BG.
15	Title Card: REQUIEM	
		
TIME 02:10		

SC/SHOT	PANEL	BG.
16	Credits	
		
TIME 02:30		

SC/SHOT	PANEL	BG.
		
TIME _____		

Fade to Black:
 Title Card fades in:

REQUIEM

Note: BG here is not pure black – use a slow crawl of the black wall with names – very subtle

Title Cards FTB:

Roll Credits

End

DIALOG

Contribution to Animation

- Non photo-real imagery as an artistic choice and exploration for contrast and paradox
- Animated storytelling as a form of public memorial
- Examining the cultural responsibility of artists in our time
- Using matte paintings effectively as a paradigm for production
- Combining dissimilar visual styles to tell more effective stories
- Methods of effective planning and cadence to achieve stunning results in a single artist production
- In addition to my written thesis, I created a production book that captures the process and techniques to create Requiem for those who follow behind in this program.

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Q/A