



Like You and Me

Sarah Baird - B00069156

Project Statement

A projected art installation piece which confronts the viewer with the difficulties that Syrian refugees undergoing order to escape war.

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Project Overview

Like You and Me is a projected art installation piece which confronts the viewer with the difficulties that Syrian refugees undergo in order to escape war. Through-out the experience we follow four journeys.

Rima describes the fear she experiences being in Syria during the war with her family. Jamal recounts the traumatic experience she faced while crossing the sea in a boat. Karam speaks of being smuggled to safety across the Syrian border into neighboring countries and Yusuf talks of his life now living in a refugee camp. Together they immerse the viewer in the emotion and despair the Syrian people face everyday.

This project was created using a combination of Blender, Adobe Premiere Pro, Reaper, Audacity and Mixamo.



Key Influences

Portraits of Fear - Magdalena Pacewicz



Portraits of Fear were created by the Poland based artist Magdalena Pacewicz. She combines digital technology with traditional media. The thought behind this project is looking into the human psyche.

She peels back the human face to see what lies within. She sees fear and sincere pain.

I like the confusion of this project. It causes curiosity within the viewer. There is a dept to this project which intrigues me. More then meets the eye.

The Weight of Water - Elaine Honey



**THE WEIGHT OF
WATER**
Elaine Hoey, 2016
Seeking asylum in a dark
landscape

Elaine Hoey is student from NCAD. She created a virtual reality piece telling an artistic story of Syrian refugees landing in Greece on boats. The exhibition is currently being shown in the Science Gallery in Trinity College Dublin. Through-out the experience a women recites a poem.

I expected the VR experience to be more literal, but instead it was very abstract. Elaine portrayed the story in a very different way. I did like this piece, but I didn't find it to be very emotional.

The Displaced - The New York Times



The article speaks of how over 60 million people in the world have been displaced due to war. 30 million of which are children. It is with this information they created “The Displaced”. This is a 360° project where we get an insight into how these displaced children live.

We get a 360° view into their lives and get to hear what is like to live in such dangerous places. They spoke in their native language and this is translated into English and displayed on the 360° video. We see them playing, working and receiving food. I love this idea. The audio is minimal but very effective. Hearing them speak brings an innocence to the video.

The Story

The main focus of my project is to show the viewer the hardship Syrian refugees go through and that they are just like you and me. I originally wanted to create a virtual reality piece to tell these stories but I decided that an art installation piece would be a better medium.

I wanted to tell these stories as I noticed that the Syrian civilians were being forgotten. They were being looked at by the world as bad people. I wanted to show that the Syrian civilians are just like you and I with jobs, homes and families which have been taken away from them due to war.

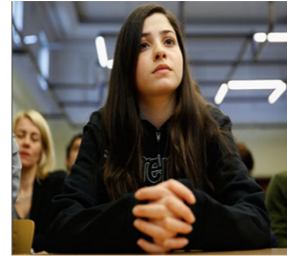
In order to make sure that the stories that I told were honest and true I did a lot of research.

I started with the Irish Refugee Council. They were able to provide me with a lot of information regarding the Syrian Refugees. I also found a couple of podcasts by the Apologetics Canada Podcast.

They interviewed a Syrian refugee who told her story and the journey she took to get to safety. This really inspired me as she was a young girl just like me and just wanted safety for her and her family.

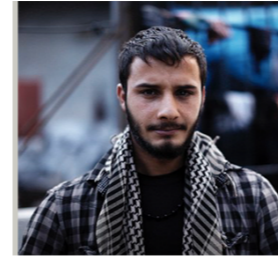
I also wanted to include strong visuals and sound throughout the project to help make the project engaging.

Designing The Characters



Name: Jamel
Age: 16
Gender: Female
Info:

Jamel lives in Demascus with her parents and older brother. She goes to a local school and helps out in her father's shop at the weekends. She wants to become a school teacher when she grows up.



Name: Karam
Age: 31
Gender: Male
Info:

Karam lives in Aleppo and works as a carpenter. Before the civil war broke out he lived with his friends. He soon moved back to be with his family as the city became very dangerous. He need to help his family escape the danger that surrounds them. He works extra hours to make up more money so he can offer his family a better life.



Name: Rima
Age: 42
Gender: Female
Info:

Rima is a mother of 3 from Homs, Syria. Everyday she stays at home and looks after her two young children. He husband worked as a chef in a local restarant. She worries every night



Name: Yusuf
Age: 8
Gender: Male
Info:

Yusuf lives in Kobane, Syria with his mother and father. He attends a local school and plays football with friends afterwards. He plays for his local team and has matches every weekend which he looks foward to.

From the beginning I wanted to have four characters. I started by brainstorming. I felt that if I gave them names and identities it would build a life around them and see them not just a characters but as real people with real stories.

I made profiles for each character. The profile gives you a little background to each character like where they live, who they lived with and what their lives where like before the war broke out.

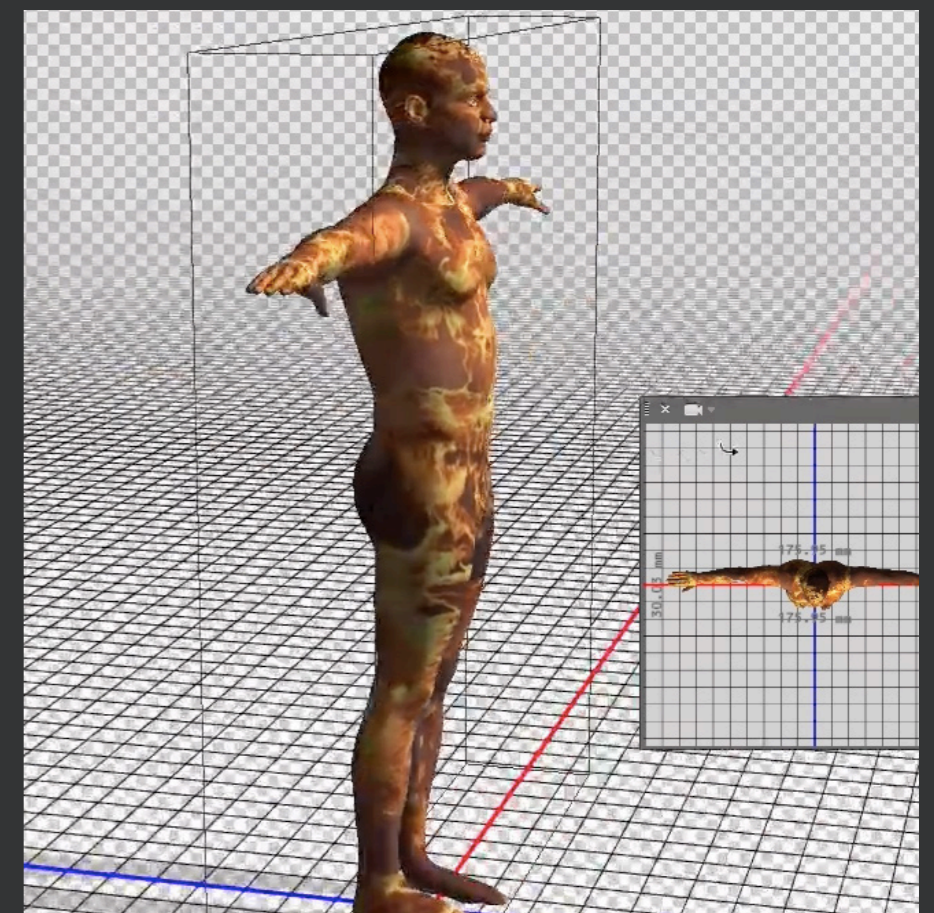
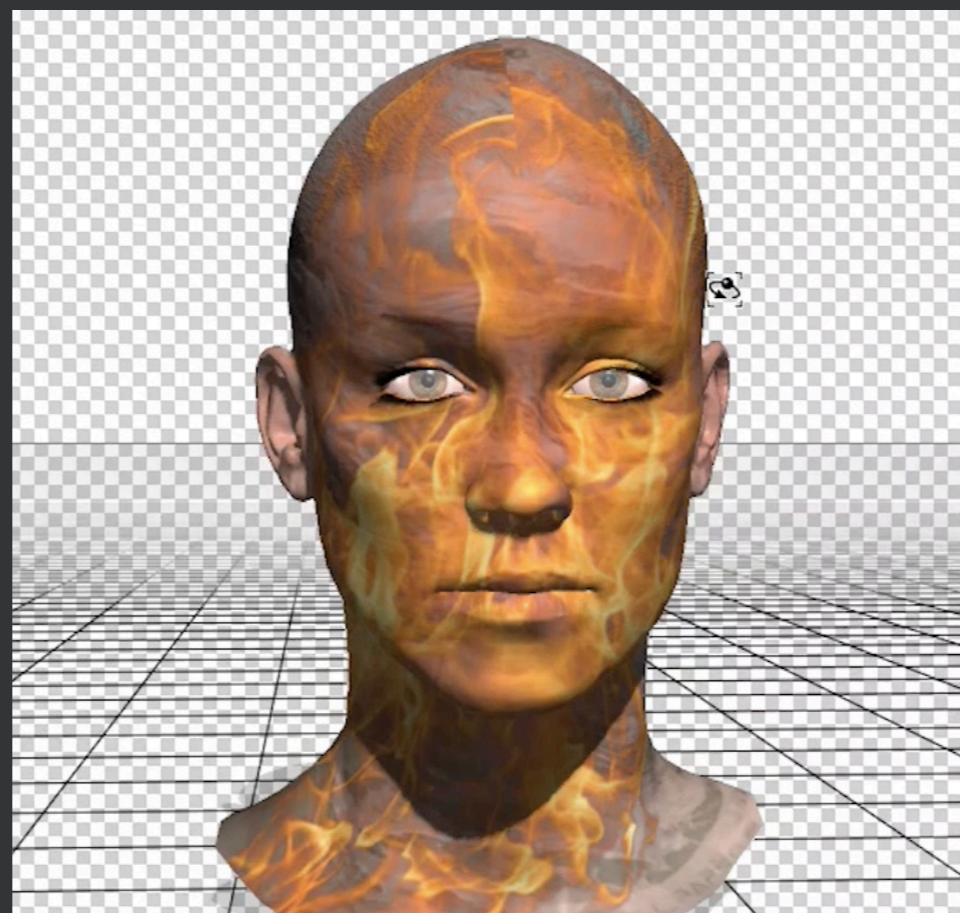
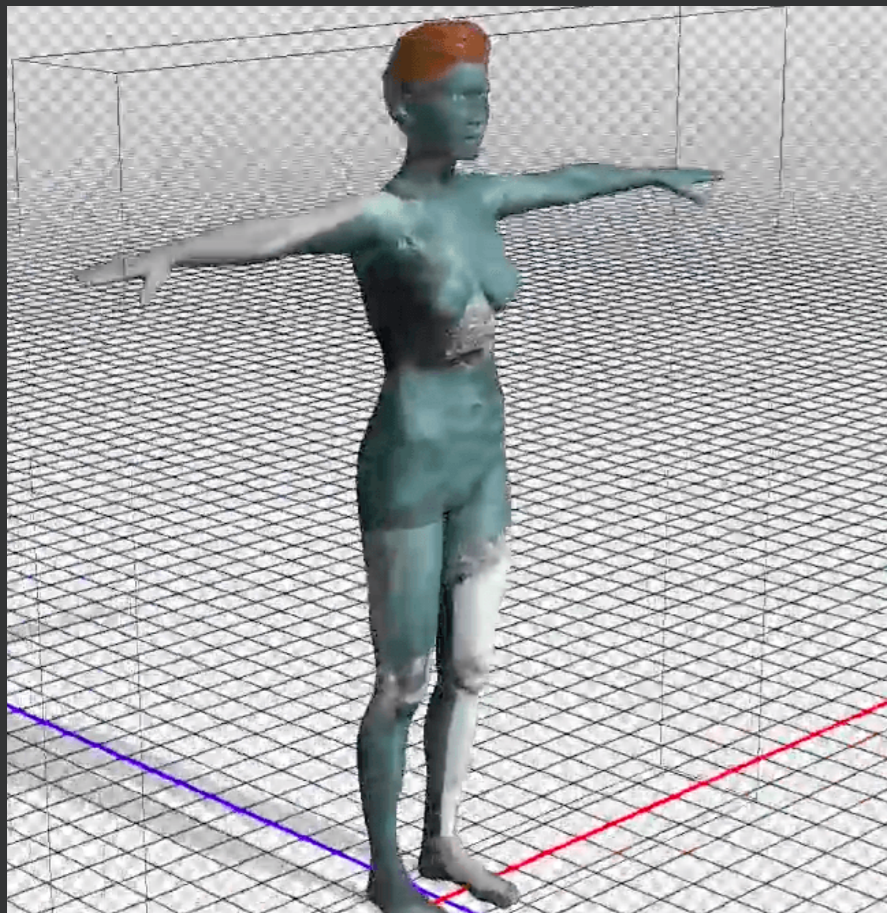
Once I had the profiles complete I moved over to Adobe Fuse where I brought the characters to life. In the final piece the characters clothes and skin will be muted. This is the look I am going for.



The Initial Prototype

My initial prototype was created around the idea of projecting the Syrian refugees experiences on them. Using Adobe Fuse and Photoshop I was able to simulate what this would look like. I then animated them in Maximo. As much as I loved the stills of the 3D models when making them in Blender they didn't look as good. At this point I decided to look at my project idea again.

After brainstorming some more I decided to project the experience onto object that would be within each scene. For instance one of the characters would be on a beach and the projection would be place on a boat.



Scene Colour Schemes

FIRE



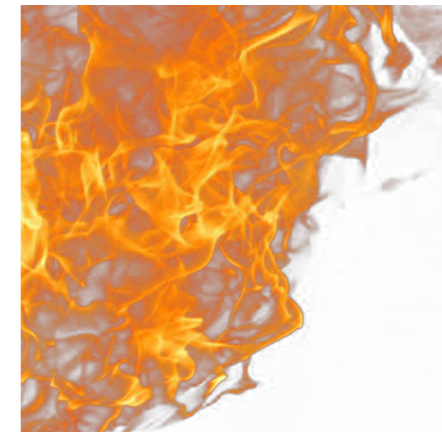
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Y = 20 K = 94



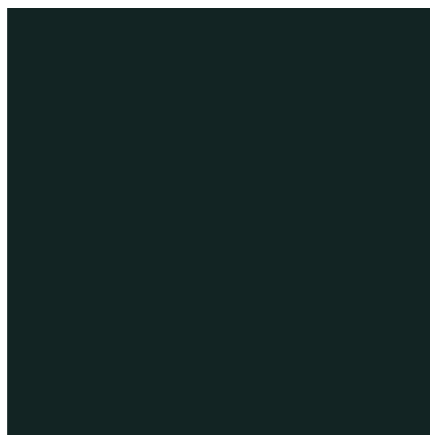
C = 0 M= 0
Y = 0 K = 57



C = 0 M= 59
Y = 99 K = 57



SEA



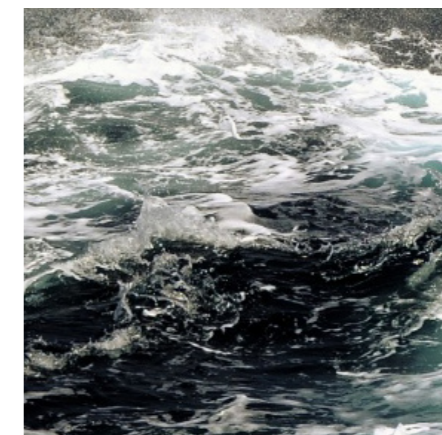
C = 80 M= 62
Y = 66 K = 71



C = 100 M= 57
Y = 20 K = 94



C = 25 M= 19
Y = 21 K = 0



LAND



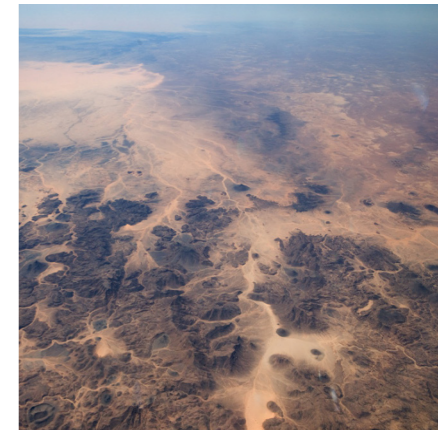
C = 46 M= 60
Y = 61 K = 28



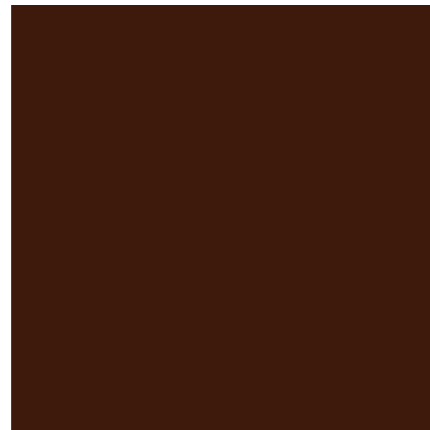
C = 25 M= 42
Y = 49 K = 1



C = 4 M= 35
Y = 48 K = 0



CAMPS



C = 47 M= 77
Y = 84 K = 70



C = 73 M= 46
Y = 100 K = 48



C = 31 M= 100
Y = 100 K = 45



The Scripts

I wanted to make the scripts as honest and real as possible. In order to do this I did a lot of research into the journeys that Syrian refugees take. The scripts are all based on real life stories and facts that I gathered from my research.

TEEN

EXPERIENCE OF WATER/BOATS/DROWNING

I lost them in the chaos. My mother's hand slipped out of my reach as we were pushed onto the boat. We were told the journey would take a couple of hours and it would be rough. Beside me was a small child. Like me, she was on her own. I held her hand. The journey was terrifying, but I knew that this was safer than staying in Syria. We left at dusk. As it began to get darker, the sea became very choppy. Water splashed into my face and soaked my body. I was freezing. I held on to the little girl tightly and to the boat in fear of her falling out. Someone threw us life jackets. I grabbed one for the little girl. There were 10 life jackets, and 40 people on board. A huge wave approached, and the boat flipped and submerged us all into the chilling sea. I pulled the little girl to me, her face being splashed by the unforgiving waves. I swam for as long as I could, not even worrying about the direction I was going in. I just needed to keep warm and get to a safe place. I looked back to the little girl whose face was completely underwater. I stopped and lifted her face from the water. She was gone. When I reached the shore, I lay her down unsure what to do.

MAN

EXPERIENCE OF LAND TRAVEL

I decided to leave my family. I want a better life for them. I will find a safe place to stay, get a job and send for them. Currently, I am travelling by land. The risk of going by water scares me. I have heard so many sad stories about death. Even though travelling by land is more expensive and puts me at greater risk, I need to do this for my family. I sold my car and belongings to pay the smugglers to get me to Egypt. From there, I travelled to Libya, where I hid for a couple of days. I became friendly with another young man who said we should go to Zuwara. We travelled by water, which terrified me, but it was only a short crossing. We got into the boat. After thirty minutes at sea, we heard shouting and gun fire. I ducked down and could see another boat getting closer to us. I dived into the sea and swam as fast as I could. I was pulled from the sea by the neighbouring boat and was brought to shore. I lost my money and phone. Now I have nothing.

WOMEN

EXPERIENCE OF WAR

I spend every night the same. I hold my children close to me and insure them we will be okay. With every gust of wind that passes through the house, I hold them tighter. In the distance I can hear the faint rumble of shelling knowing, they are getting closer, knowing that tomorrow I will wake up to another story of death, hurt, and destruction. We have already lost an abundance of lives. Once the children have fallen asleep, I walk to the window and stare into the dark streets. I'm scared most of the night. Not knowing what's out there is frightening. I barely get any sleep night after night.

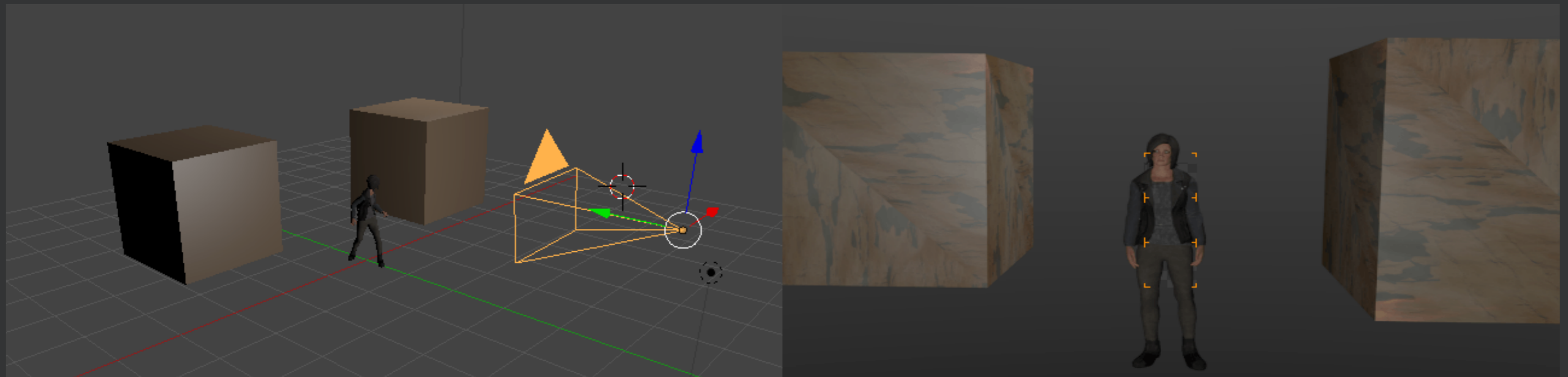
CHILD

EXPERIENCE OF REFUGEE CAMPS

When I arrived I was scared. We walked for hours and I just wanted to sleep. My bed here is uncomfortable and cold. I stay awake at night listening to the rats that run around our tent. Mum says I will start school soon and make new friends who I can play with. But I don't want new friends. I want my old ones. The ones I left behind at home. Every morning I walk with my father to try to get food, water, and clothes for my brothers and sisters. The camp is huge. There are so many children like me here, but some with no families. Soon my father will look for work and won't have to live in the camp anymore. I hear my mother crying with my father sometimes. She is worried we will never get our home back or that we will never find safety. I try to comfort her.

Installation Development

I knew from the beginning I was challenging myself with this project. I had never used Blender before this project. To begin I decided to test to see if my idea would work out. I made objects and projected onto them. I then imported a character and animated her. It all seemed to work very well so I continued with the project.



Character Animation

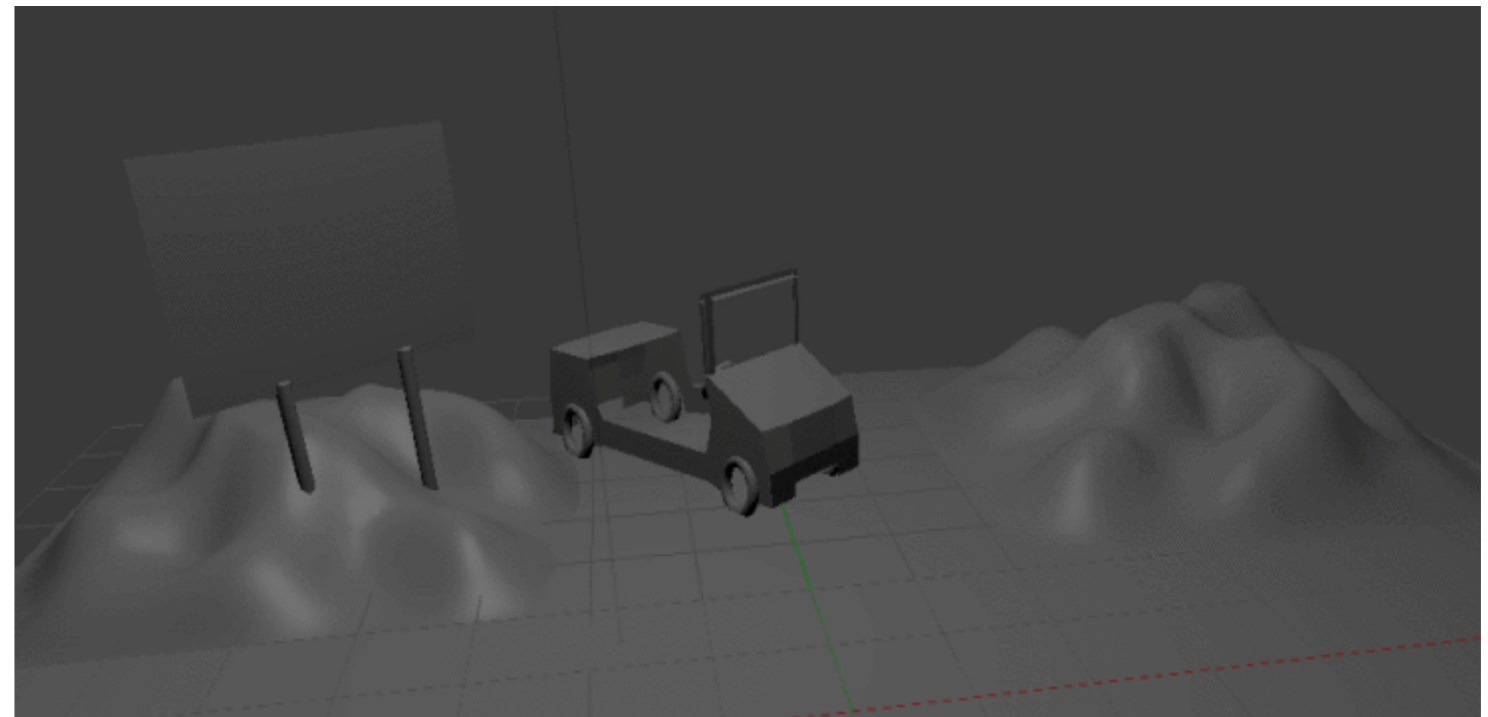


As I was new to Blender I decided to make my characters in Adobe Fuse and animate them in Mixamo.

This made the process much easier for me. I was able to upload my character to Mixamo and export them as fbx files straight into Blender. In order to change the location of the animations I removed all the location points in the Action Script. I could then easily apply the animation to my character.

Environment Development

I decided to make four scenes. In each scene there would be different objects that would relate to the story being told by the characters. I started with buildings. I then made a car, a boat, a beach and a refugee camp. I was really happy about how these worked out. I then projected onto each object. These projects related to the experience character had faced whether that be war, water or a refugee camp.





This is the first scene we see in the project. We are introduced to Rima. She speaks about what is it like to live in the city of Homs in Syria during the war.

The second scene is on a beach. Here we are introduced to Jamal. She recalls the terrible experience she encountered on a boat crossing the sea.



In the third scene we are introduced to Yusuf. He is a young boy in a refugee camp in Greece. He speaks of the conditions in the camp and how he misses his old life at home in Kobane, Syria.





In the final scene we are introduced to Karam. He is a young man looking for safety for his family. He hopes he can find somewhere safe to stay and then send for them.

Audio



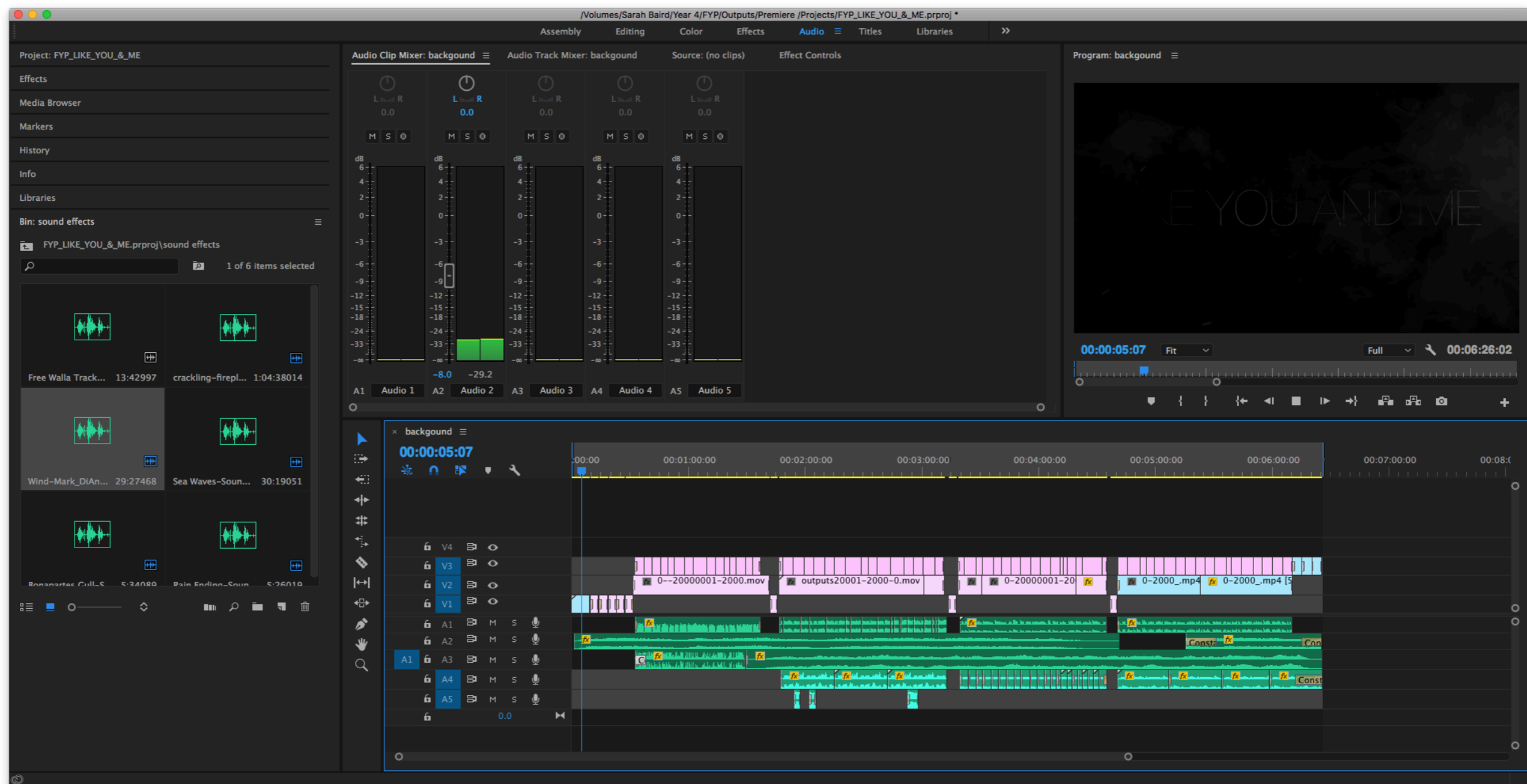
Originally I wanted to have the voice over read in English with a Syrian accent. This was near to impossible as there are not many Syrian people that I could find that could help. I decided that I would get voice actor that would speak the script in Arabic and I would add subtitles to the end project. Even though this is plan B it is actually more effective. I got paid voice actors from the online service called [fiverr.com](https://www.fiverr.com). There I was able to pick from a very large selection of voice actors.

I wanted the music for this project to be subtle but effective. I used the site freemusicarchive.org. I have used two tracks in my project which work really well together. Originally meditation music, I feel they add great atmosphere to my project and reflect the mood I wanted to achieve. On top of the music I added sound effects that related to the story being told. This also adds great atmosphere.

Editing

Once I had all my scenes rendered out I brought them into Premiere Pro. Here I added the titles, voice overs, music and sound effects to the scenes. It was here where it all started coming together and I could see the end product.

As the voice overs are in Arabic I had to apply subtitles in Premiere Pro too. This was a simple process as I already had the scripts. I had to add a small drop shadow to the text as it was in white and was hard to read in places.



Conclusion

Creating “Like You and Me” was by no means easy. When picking this project I wanted to challenge myself. I had never worked in Blender before or even worked in 3D environments. At the beginning I was very worried that I didn’t have the skill set to make this project happen. I have learn’t so much over the last couple of months and each and every part of my creative digital media skills were tested. Whether that be in Premiere Pro, Reaper or Blender. There was a challenge at every corner.

Not only did I learn new technical skills but I learn’t a huge amount about the Syrian people and how much they go through to be safe. The aim of my project is to increase awareness for the Syrian Refugees and I hope that everyone who watches the project learns something new about the traumatic and terrible journeys these people have to face.

I do not regret my decision to pick a project that I had no skill set for in the beginning. If I was to do this project again I would start my rendering sooner as I did not allow for render errors and it became a bit stressful near the end.

Overall, I have learn’t so much. This project has been a real journey, in every sense as I found out that I am much more capable than I thought. I hope my project reflects the time and effort I have taken to achieve the end result, which I hope in some small way helps the Syrian Refugees.