

Games Art

Final Major Project

Element 1 - Research journal

Visual novel game

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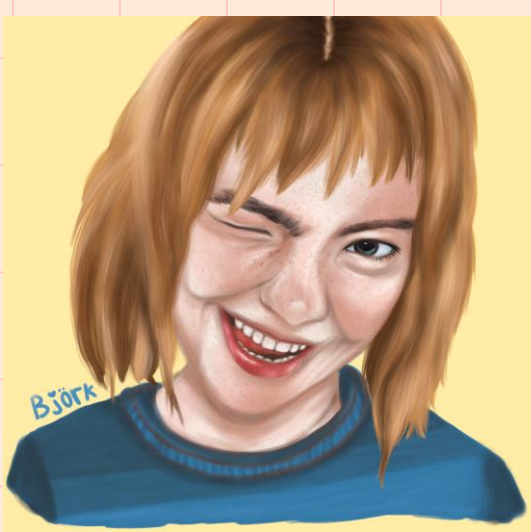
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Summer work



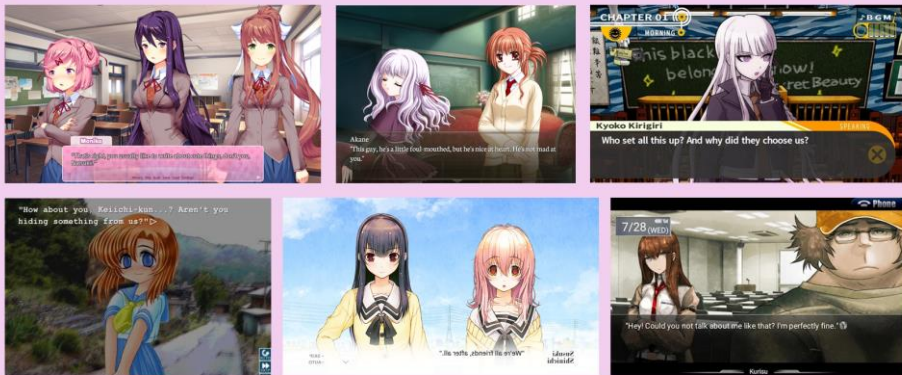
During the summer, I worked on a group live brief with the Museum of Brands to create an animation focused on the history of the building as the London lighthouse. I created an illustration in Procreate which I animated to pan-down, including the movement of leaves and petals, using Adobe after effects. Although animation is not my specialty, I have found myself using the after effects program more often and I have been learning and improving on this, and I enjoyed animating in this project.



I also worked on some of my own personal illustrations during the summer. These are two fan art pieces that I drew in Procreate. One is a realistic portrait piece, which I do not usually do but I found it to be a fun challenge. The other piece is in my own art/ rendering style.

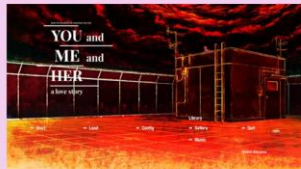
3x3 Proposal

I came up with three proposals for the final major project. They are all focused on 2D character art, as that is my artistic specialism. I was excited at the possibility of creating any of these projects, and I knew I wanted to focus on a horror theme.



My first idea is to fully create a short playable visual novel game, including characters, backgrounds, GUI assets and a start/ end screen. This would follow 3-4 characters through a short narrative story with dialogue, as well as 3-4 simple backgrounds. As the story is uncovered and secrets are revealed, the characters/ backgrounds change to reflect the story themes.

My second idea is an artbook of 2D character art and designs, particularly focusing on showing how the characters degenerate through body horror during the hypothetical games story progression. This would include 3-4 characters and their design iterations according to the story.



My third idea is a series of 4-5 game loading screens for an RPG/ story game, including splash art of characters, assets and environment backgrounds. The loading screens would change in theme and tone as the hypothetical game progresses.



Idea generation

I chose to continue with my first idea and create a **visual novel game**. This was definitely the idea that included the most work and deliverables needed to get to my desired outcome - of a playable visual novel. However it is also the most exciting to me, as I am a huge fan of the visual novel genre and I have thought about creating my own game of that type for a while, so I am happy that I have the opportunity to do so for my FMP and am excited to take on the challenge.

As this idea includes the need for a narrative story, I felt it was important to have a clear overarching theme for the project. I was debating between a mental health or cyberspace theme, and I settled on mental health and psychology. This is something both interesting to me and something that I personally enjoy being covered in media. It also gives me the opportunity to incorporate a **psychological horror** theme, which is my favourite genre in games and movies. Along with this, I wanted to include some kind of story twist, as this is essential within the psychological horror genre, and I decided to implement this through a character with a split personality. I was particularly inspired here by the movies **Black Swan** and **Perfect Blue**, which follow split personalities.

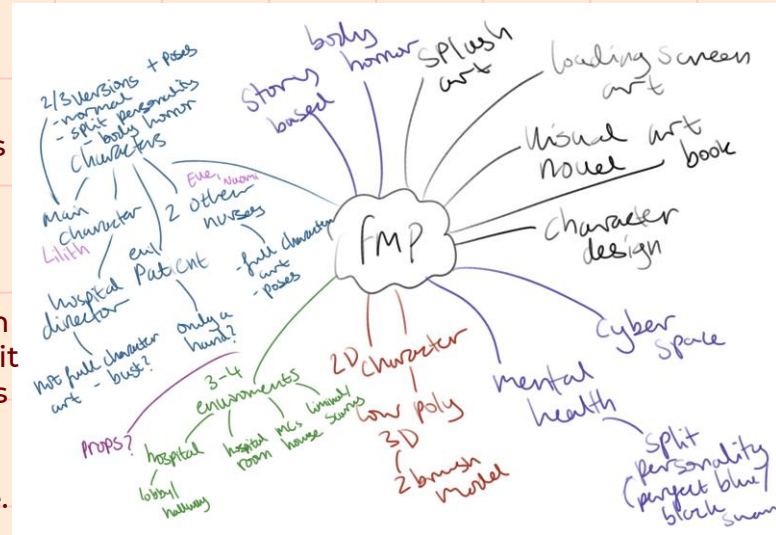
Following this, I decided that I wanted the story to follow a character in a high-stress environment that causes a mental break, leading to a split personality. I chose to focus on a medical setting, where the characters are nurses working at a hospital. I was also led here by the idea of creating nurse character designs, which seemed exciting and a good chance to explore a **medical horror theme**, which I haven't done before.

Themes

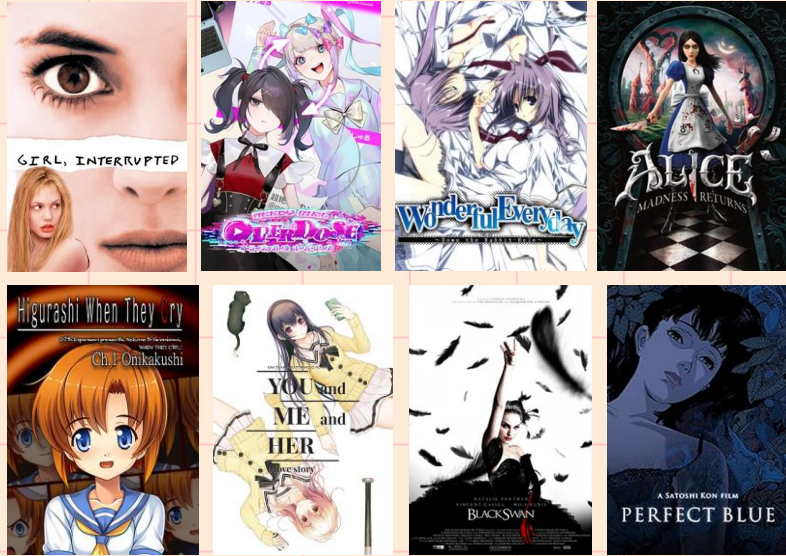
- mental health/ psychology
- cyberspace
- my take on black swan/ perfect blue storyline
- split personalities

game setting ideas

- hospital - mc is important doctor/ nurse under a lot of pressure
 - group of nurses and mc is under more pressure (favoritism from hospital director/ strange patient does something to her - the substance/ she gets corrupted and her other personality does something bad to patients, the other nurses need to figure out what's happening to the patients and uncover that its mc other personality.
- university - mc is lecturer? student under a lot of pressure
- entertainment industry - mc is famous performer/ something in public eye and under a lot of pressure to be perfect - creates other persona
 - mc performs as another persona and as a normal person she is different/ less glamorous, more shy, etc
- art/ game studio - mc is under pressure for work deadlines
- journalist



As a big fan of visual novel games, I know that a large portion of them follow dark horror themes and I wanted to encapsulate the feel of these original **denpa** (Japanese horror game subgenre focusing on mental illness) games. I am aiming to do this both through the story and the game asset art that I create. I had a lot of inspiration for this project from various games and movies that present female characters and mental illness.



I am planning to initially create a welcoming experience in my game, aesthetically warm and friendly, which then turns to something unsettling. Representing the characters mental state through both the character and environment design. This is also a trope often used in psychological horror media, so it will aid my story concept, as well as allow me to show different iterations of my design.

hospital/ nurse idea

- setting is in a hospital, following group of 3-4 nurses
- the mc has a lot of pressure on her due to favoritism from hospital director, jealousy from other nurses, long work hours, hereditary mental illness
- A strange patient tells/ gives something to her and this causes her complete mental break and pushes her off the edge.
- the mental break causes her split personality and she starts acting strange (doing something to the patients/ to herself/ to the other nurses)
- the other nurses discover what she's been doing and the split personality is revealed (with some jumpscare at the end)
- some kind of realisation/ something to learn about mental illness at the end.
- the patient that corrupts mc is a metaphor for something... stress/ trauma/ self-hate/ pressure from others/ feeling like you have to be perfect

Project scope

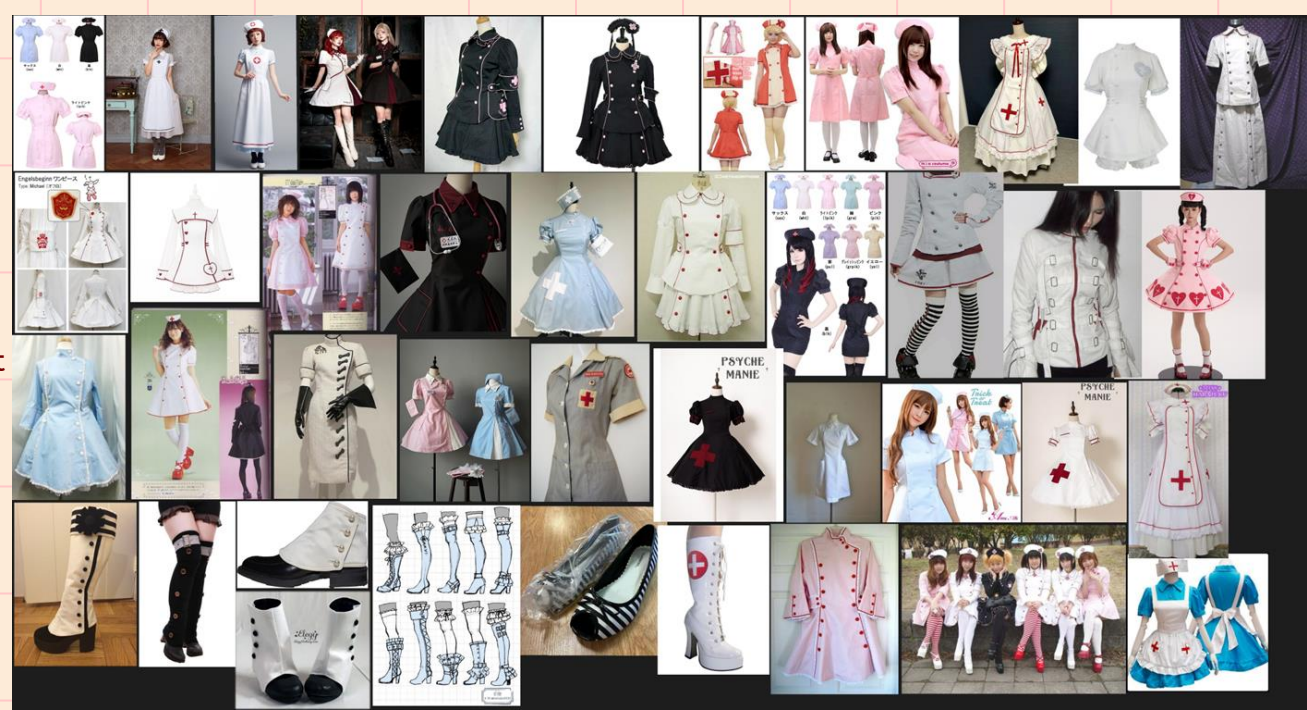
I am going to create a playable visual novel including:

- Three fully designed characters with variations of poses and facial expressions.
- One semi designed character (bust).
- Up to five simple backgrounds.
- A start menu including character splash art.
- An end menu including character splash art. (Stretch goal)
- GUI assets (dialogue box, buttons/ icons, etc).
- 900-1500 words of dialogue and narration (5-10 minutes of gameplay or shorter)
- Using the **Ren'Py** visual novel creation software.
- Set in a hospital following a group of nurses.

Secondary research

To start my process on this project I first created a Pinterest board to gather inspiration for all of the assets needed for my game. I compiled this mood board specifically for the character/outfit design. I wanted to aim for a vintage uniform feel to the characters outfits, also with influences from Japanese **lolita fashion** and **cosplay**. I also knew that I wanted to have all of the characters in different uniform designs that represent their personality within the story. And it would be more visually interesting to have a varied outfit design.

During my research, I found a website that provides character sprites from games, so I compiled some sprites from visual novels for further inspiration of character poses and expressions.

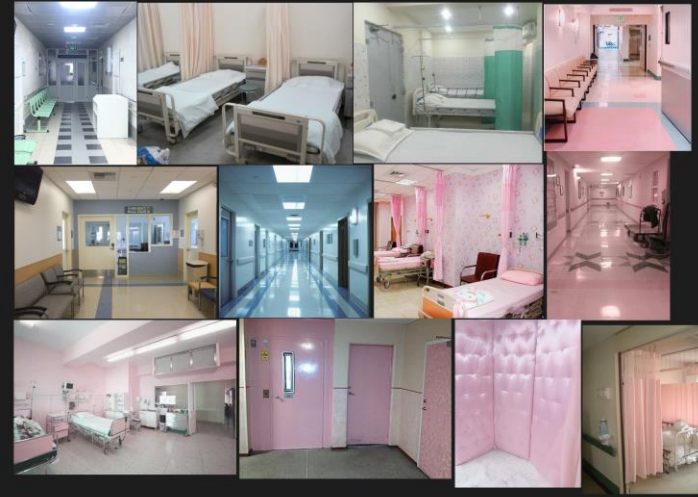


I also created mood boards for the environment/ background design. I compiled images both from games and real pictures of hospitals for designs of the first backgrounds. I also included unsettling horror environments, as I want to create different iterations of the backgrounds to change during tense moments in the game.

background



real life hospital background



horror background



I aim to create an unsettling feeling during the game through the changes to the background that reflect the characters mindset. This made me think specifically of the game **Omori**, as there are often unexpected things popping up, even subtly in the background to reflect the thoughts and feelings of the main character, which help to create a disturbing tone throughout the game.

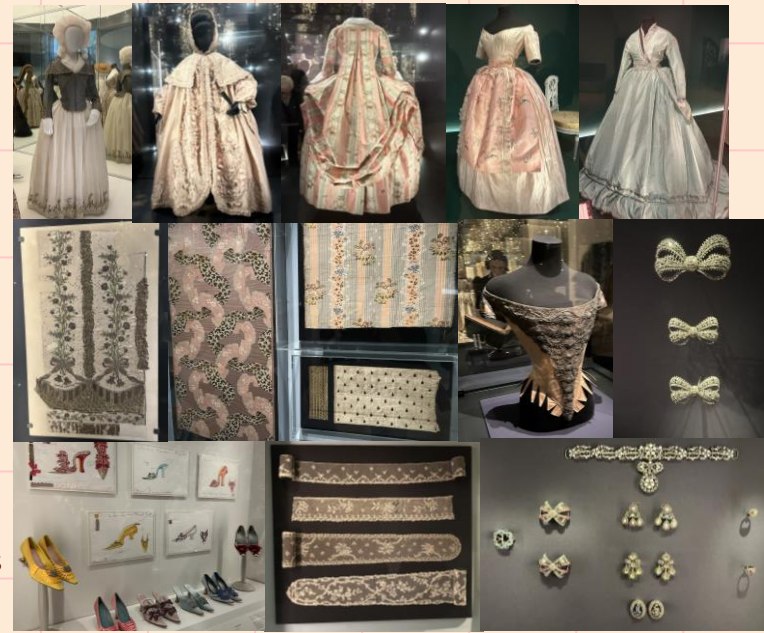


Primary research

During my E1 production , I visited two exhibitions that helped with my ideas and inspiration for this project. I took a lot of photos of the works there.



This exhibition was based around the production of Guillermo del Toro's **Frankenstein** movie. It included a lot of concept art and physical displays for costumes, environments and models that were created for the film. This was a great exhibition for me as Frankenstein is a medical horror and so I gained a lot of insight into the genre here to use for my own work. I really enjoyed seeing the medical models and they gave me ideas of how to add aspects of horror into my own work.



The second exhibition was centred around the fashion of Marie Antoinette, including her own clothing and jewellery items and those that were inspired by her. I also found this exhibition very insightful for my characters outfit designs, especially as I wanted to have a vintage feel to my nurse uniform designs. Particularly the displays of lace and jewels were quite inspiring as this kind of feature helps to evolve outfit design.

Asset list

🌸FMP asset list ~

Character	Poses	Expressions	Outfits	Variation		Poses	Expressions	Outfits	Variation
Lilith	Neutral	neutral	nurse uniform	normal	Naomi	neutral	neutral	nurse uniform	normal
	shocked/ distress	happy	home clothes	evil personality		laughing	jealous/ mean		evil hallucination
	angry - arms up	crying		merged		cowering	laughing		
		angry		eldritch			scared		
		scared							
Eve	neutral	neutral	nurse uniform	normal	Hospital director	bust	neutral	suit + lab coat	normal
	laughing	jealous/ mean		evil hallucination		3/4 bust	creepy		evil hallucination
	cowering	laughing							
		scared							
Background					Sound				
Hospital room	normal hospital space				background music	neutral/ peaceful music - piano, tense music			
Scary hospital room	horror version				sound effects				
MC house/room	bedroom (unsettling or comforting?)								
Liminal space	empty, unsettling area								
horror bg	hallucination - blood, eyes, gore, scary								
UI									
Start menu	splash art + options boxes								
End screen	splash art + text								
Dialogue box	stylised (maybe changes at dark/ tense moments)								
Narration box	stylised (maybe changes at dark/ tense moments)								
Buttons/icons	stylised (medical theme)								

Following my research I took to creating an asset list in Excel to show what I need to create for my desired outcome of a visual novel game. As I am a 2D character artist, the character designs are the most important aspect of this project, as well as the splash art I will use for the game menus, which will also feature character art. I want to make the backgrounds quite simple so that I can focus the most on character. And for the sound, I am planning on outsourcing this from elsewhere. My tutor also suggested voice acting for my game, which would be a great outcome but I need to think about this and see if it is possible.

First iterations

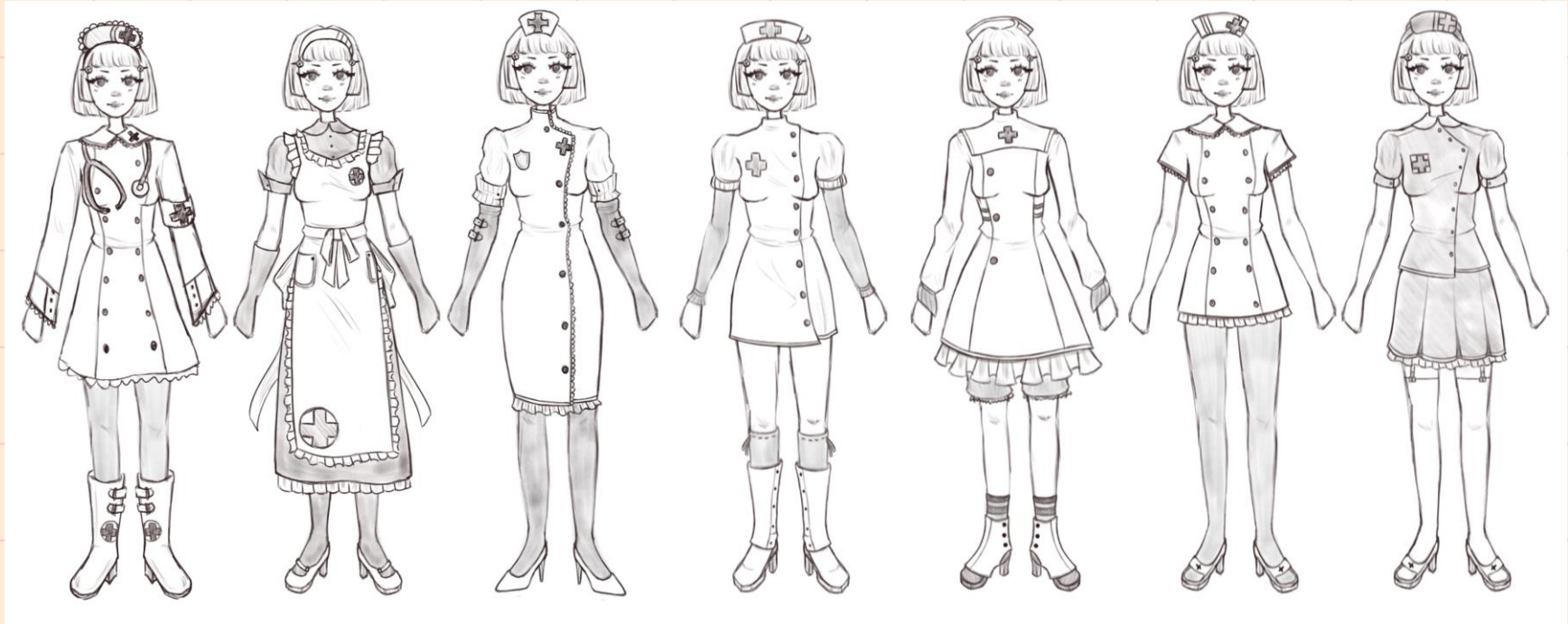


Firstly I took to figuring out the design for my main character Lilith. I wanted her to appearance to match her timid personality. I experimented with different hairstyles and faces, and settled on giving her long dark hair. I also did some studies of expressive faces that will be shown in the game. I then drew an example of her split personality body horror iteration.



Here I was experimenting with the hair and face designs of the supporting characters Eve and Naomi. I also matched these with their personalities. Naomi being cheerful with bouncy curly hair and Eve being stoic with glasses and sharp, short hair. My process with this is to look at some hair references and chose a main style to build off of and create different iterations to find the desired look.

Outfit thumbnails



Next, I started designing the nurse uniform outfits whilst using my mood board for inspiration. As I previously stated, I wanted to make the uniforms match with the characters personalities, so I designed multiple uniforms with different feels to them – like more reserved or more simple. Regarding the horror aspect, I felt like adding long gloves to the outfits expressed some discontent and mysteriousness. I wanted to make sure to include the cross motif in all of the designs as it is a strong identifier of the medical field, as well as being a cute symbol to me. For the vintage aesthetic I felt that lace and frills captures this nicely - as well as also being an aspect of lolita fashion.

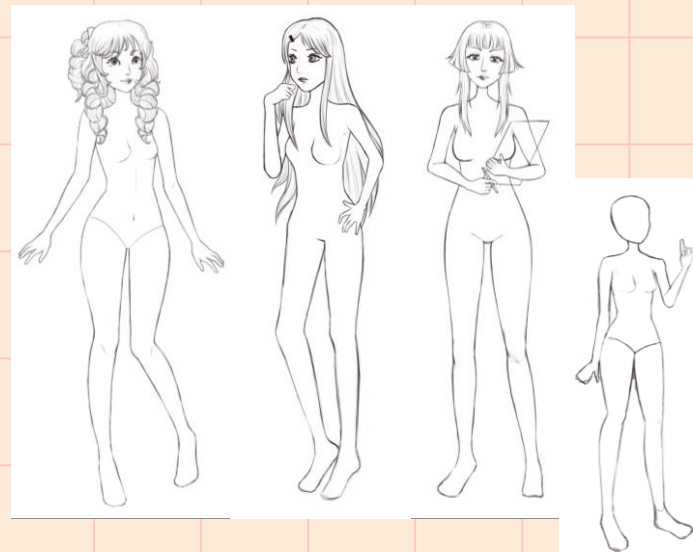
Proof of concept

With advice from my tutor, I gathered reference images from games with art styles that I enjoy in order to analyse and compare them to develop the art style for my project. It was a good idea to explore a new art style for this project to show my range in character design. I chose to follow a similar art style to the Atlus games **Persona** and **Catherine**, as I really admire the style. This style features tall, slender characters with semi-realistic facial structure. I then drew a study of Lilith in this style and thought it worked well. For the final outcome of my characters I want to include a thin line art and simple cel shading – as per the Persona style.



I also created a rough storyboard of a fake screenshot from the visual novel. Showing the game layout and including characters, background and UI of the dialogue box.

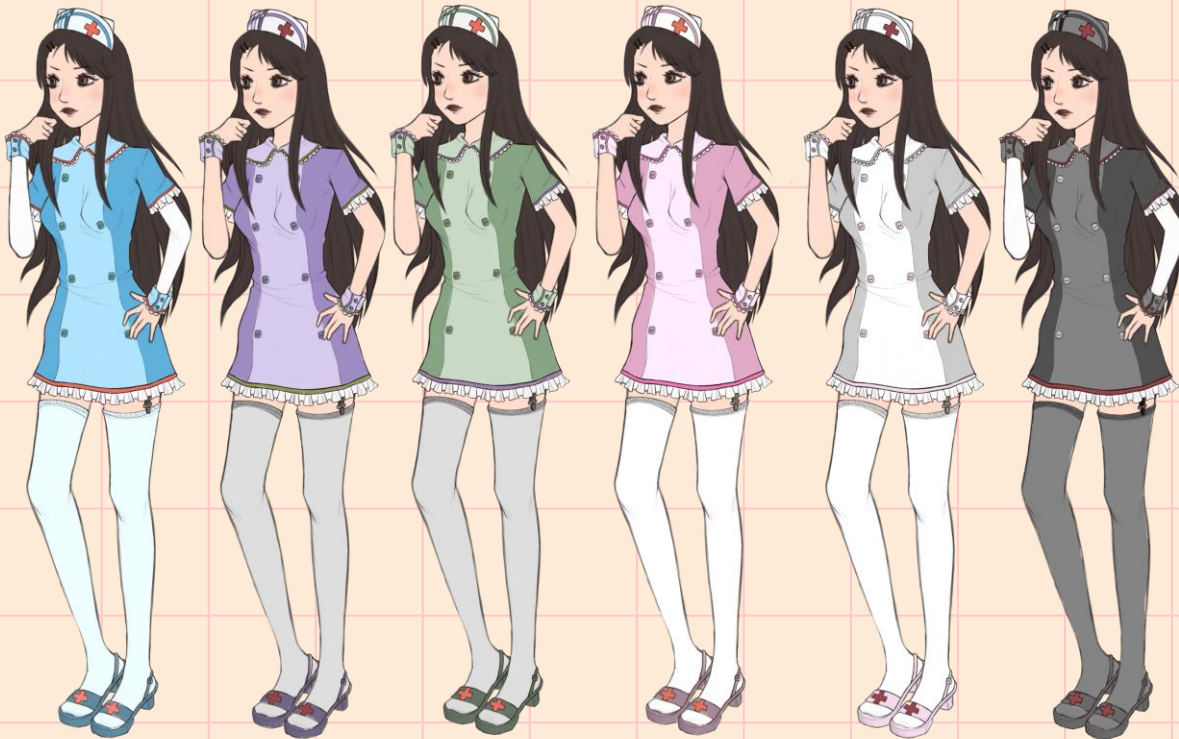
Character design



Next I began finalising the designs of my three characters. This included putting hair and outfits together from my thumbnails and improving on some aspects of those designs. First I decided on the poses for the characters, which reflect their personalities. As I am going to be creating multiple poses for my game, these designs are for a neutral pose and facial expression. I included two versions of Eve here with and without the clipboard, so the rest of the outfit is visible. My workflow here is to roughly sketch out a pose and then go in and sharpen it up for neat line art. Then drawing on the outfit, hair, etc over the top.

Colour trials

For the colour trials of my characters I wanted to explore all of the most recognisable colours for nurse uniforms to see what looks best, both vibrant colours and monochromatic. Whilst also including the red cross to express the medical theme. Below are the colour trials for Lilith.



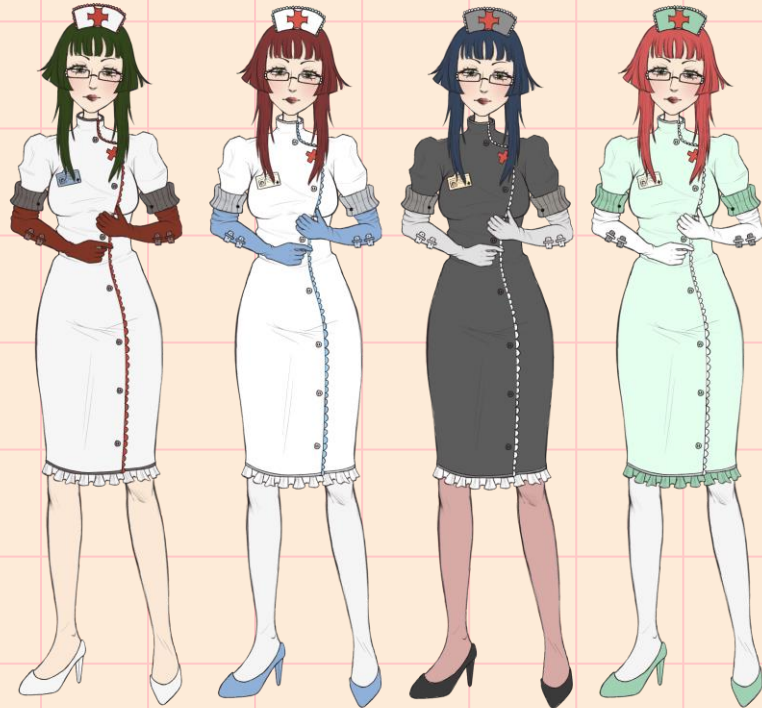
This is a reference image from my mood board that I found particularly helpful for the colour ideas.



Although I have gotten the basic colour layout of my characters, I would like to experiment with and explore other patterns like tartan, as well as more detailed lace designs for them in the future.

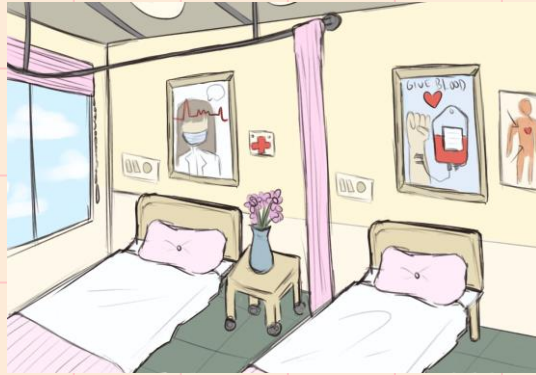
The continuation of my character trials for Eve and Naomi, I also wanted to match the colours of their uniforms to their personalities. Naomi has pastel colours and for Eve I wanted to avoid too much bright colour. I chose to again include a monochromatic look for both of them too.

The process of my colour trials was to colour a couple of different iterations, and then to adjust hue, saturation and brightness for the desired effect.

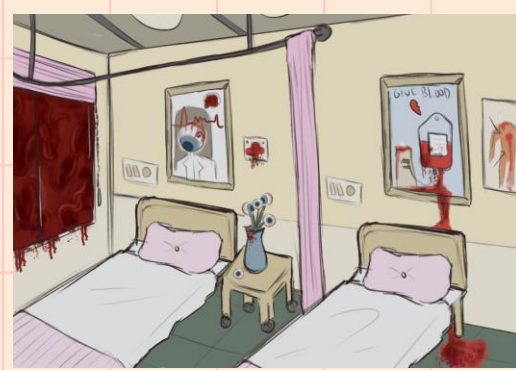


Background design

For the environment/ background design, I created one concept of a hospital room where the game will take place, using reference images from my mood board as inspiration. As I am not too well versed in environment art and especially showing perspective this was a little challenging but I enjoyed the process and am happy with this concept. I experimented with different adjustments on the background like gaussian blur, halftone and chromatic aberration. As the character will be in the foreground, it is a good idea to blur the background.



Next, I created another iteration of this background featuring horror aspects, that would incite shock at a quick switch during the game. My tutor advised me to keep the blood and gore to a minimum and to show terror subtly. I also experimented with adding noise, glitching and chromatic aberration to these in order to show unease.



Critical appraisal and next steps

My project is creating a playable visual novel game, comprised of multiple character and background assets - including a short narrative story and dialogue between the characters. I am drawing all of the assets and creating the game in the visual novel engine Ren'Py. I have been heavily inspired by multiple visual novels and other games for this project, this experience of the genre has enabled me to have a solid idea of what I want to create and what my desired outcome will look like.

Overall, I am happy with my progress in this project during Element 1 and I am excited to see where it takes me as I progress through the weeks, and the idea of ending up with a finished playable game is very compelling. I feel as though all of my work during my time at university has led me here to create something based on my specialism of 2D character art but that is also out of my comfort zone. I am glad that I have taken the route to try something new with the asset creation and the use of a new software. I am confident that I will be able to create attractive final assets for my game for Element 2 and that I will have a strong project to add to my portfolio.

I feel that my main struggle in this project are time management, as I have a lot of assets to create as well as the game creation, however I am sure that by sticking to my Gantt chart and production schedule I will be able to bypass this issues. Of course my other worry is the game creation itself as I am using an unfamiliar program. So far the use of Ren'Py has been quite simple but I know that with additional assets being added the process will become more complicated. But I know that the best way to ensure success is to allow more time for this and to consult the online tutorials available for the software.

My next steps in this project are to firstly think of a name for my game. Following feedback from my peers, I want to develop and finalise the outfit designs of the characters, which will enable me to complete their various pose and expression iterations. I would like to explore more details like patterns, as my peers expressed that the solid colour outfits may end up looking quite plain.

As well as this I will be designing the remaining character of the hospital director and the other backgrounds that will be used. Finally the splash art for the title screen will be created, and it will all be put together in the game engine. This seems like a lot of work but I am aware of the scale of the project and following my Gantt chart and the RAG rating of tasks will definitely enable me to complete all of the jobs that I have to do for my desired outcome of this project.

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- FMP Pinterest board <https://pin.it/65pTnejHd>
- Character sprite resource <https://www.spritters-resource.com/>