

Charles Blackman: Stop Motion Animation

Charles Blackman (1928-2018) was an Australian modernist painter and member of the Heide circle. He is most noted for his *Schoolgirls* and *Alice in Wonderland* series.

Blackman painted the *Schoolgirls* series between 1952 and 1955, depicting imaginary scenes of school girls in uniform, often with wide brimmed hats, and placed in lonely urban settings as a metaphor for innocence under threat. The imagery also reflected the isolation that Blackman felt upon moving to Melbourne in 1951 and trying to find his way as a young artist in an unfamiliar environment.



Charles Blackman
The Shadow 1953
enamel paint and tempera on cardboard
59.2 x 75.4 cm
Heide Museum of Modern Art
Purchased from John and Sunday Reed 1980
© Charles Blackman

In *The Shadow*, Blackman uses the **convention of composition**. The horizon line sits approximately one third of the way down the painting, with the figure standing to the right of centre. Her shadow leads the viewer's eye from the foreground up to the horizon line. This creates a triangle that encourages the viewer's attention to travel around the painting. Can you see this triangle? This also demonstrates how artists can use the **principle of movement** in their work.

Blackman has also used the **art elements** of **colour** and **contrast**:

Colour Blackman has used a limited colour palette.

How would you describe the colours he has used?

What do they remind you of?

What does this colour palette tell you about the setting?

How does this colour palette make you feel?

Contrast The bold dark outlines and the shadow of the schoolgirl figure create a strong contrast against the orange foreground.

What could this symbolise?

In our animation, we drew heavily upon the original **composition** of Blackman's *The Shadow*. The figure is in the same position, but the horizon line has been lowered slightly to accommodate the action in the animation.

We used the same **colour** palette for the setting, but the **contrast** created by the shadow and the dark outlines has been removed to brighten the animation. New colours have been added to the schoolgirl figure and additional characters and objects.

Compare and contrast Blackman's *The Shadow* with our animation.

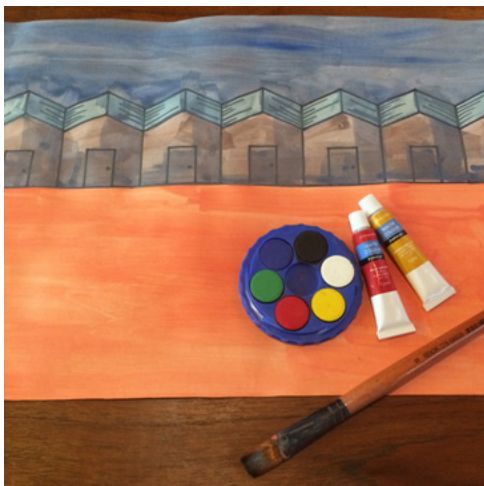
How do you think conventions, elements and principals convey mood in each?

Create a Charles Blackman-inspired stop motion animation



Materials

- 1 or 2 pieces of A3 paper for your background
- Additional paper for cut-out components
- Lead pencil
- Coloured pencils, textas, crayons and/or paint
- Scissors
- Eraser
- Blu-tack
- Smart phone with camera
- Tripod or furniture to secure camera
- Animation app such as Stop Animate (optional)



Step 1 Create a background

To create a static background, draw or paint a background image on a single sheet of A3 paper.

Only draw or paint items on the background that you do not want to move independently, as these will all remain stationary.

To create a scrolling background, do the same, but join two pieces of A3 paper together at the short side to make the background twice as long. This will allow the imagery in your background to change as your character/s move through your setting.



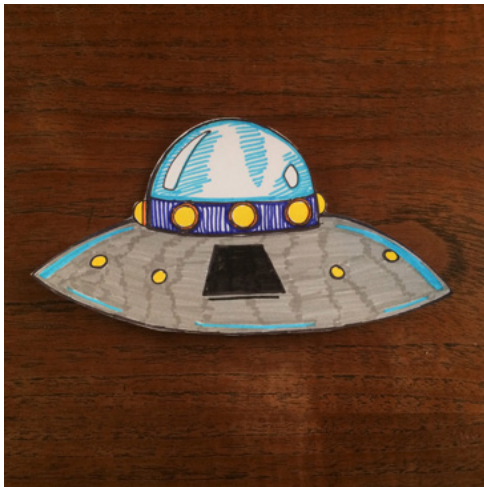
Step 2 Create characters and objects

What characters and objects will your animation contain?

These will be the moving components in your animation.

Draw or paint your characters and objects and cut them out individually.

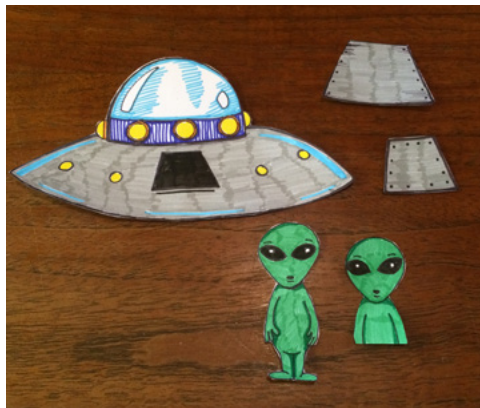
Use the guidelines below to help you create your components:



Components that move but do not change appearance

For single components that move but do not change in appearance, such as the spaceship in our animation, create and cut out one version of the object.

Be mindful that if you want any part of this to move, such as the door, it will need to be drawn or painted separately and cut out as an individual component.



Movable components on objects

Any parts of objects that you want to appear to change or move need to be created separately. These are used as overlays on top of other objects during the animating process. You can see, for example, that the door of the spaceship has been cut out separately, as has the ramp. These are used in different photos during the animating process.

We created two aliens; one shown in full and another showing only its head and torso to create the illusion of an alien popping out of the spaceship.



Create a wiggle effect

Some components of your animation can 'wiggle' or move slightly to give the impression of motion. An example of this is the flames of the spaceship. To create a wiggle effect, simply draw three versions of the same component. To create very subtle movement, draw the three versions very similarly. To create more dynamic movement, draw the components with more variation. The flame on the spaceship in our animation appears to flicker because three different versions of the flame were used each time a photo was taken, which created the illusion of fire.



Create a walk cycle

To animate a character that walks like a person, you can use a four frame walk cycle as shown in the school girl example below. Notice that in each version of the figure, the position of the legs has changed, reflecting the different stages in the human stride.

You may wish to create a more complex walk cycle to animate four-legged or fantasy creatures' motion.

Use the same colour and tone in each figure so that they will appear as the same character in your animation.

By shading both the legs black, the viewer cannot tell whether the right or left leg is in front. This means that you only need four frames to create a walk cycle.

If you would like your legs to be another colour, you will need to draw more frames in your walk cycle showing the other leg in front.

It can be useful to label your characters (e.g. 1-4) on the rear of each, to help you to place them in order in your animation.

Step 3 Animate your scene

The magic of animation is created by taking a series of photographs and playing them back in sequence to give the illusion of motion. At least one component in the frame should remain in the same position, in contrast with components that change. This tricks the viewer into seeing movement when watching an animation.



Here is the process we used to create our animation, but you can use any of these techniques and experiment with your own ideas.

- Open an app such as *Stop Animate* on your iPhone or smart phone and place it on a tripod. If you do not own a tripod, you can tape your phone or a camera to the back of a tall chair or wedge it on a shelf between some books. The aim is to keep the phone or camera completely still for your photographs. If you are unable or do not wish to use an app, you can take a series of photographs and upload them to a Gif creator online.



- Place your background (one or two sheets of A3 paper) on a table and position your character in the first frame of their walk cycle. Use a piece of tape with an arrow on it and place it out of the camera's view to determine where to place the figure for each photograph.
- Take a single photo.
- If your background is stationary, on one A3 paper, leave it where it is. If you are using a scrolling background, move it about 1cm to the right.
- Replace the character with the second frame in the walk cycle in the exact same position in the frame, in line with the arrow.
- Take another photo.
- Repeat this process until the background has moved completely across from left to right.
- Once the background has moved as far as it can, swap the character to one in a stationary pose to demonstrate her stopping.
- Use blu-tack to attach the door of the spaceship. Introduce the spaceship into the frame a tiny bit at a time, alternating the three flames and taking a photo each time the flame is moved.
- When the spaceship is at ground level, remove the flame and the separate door component to give the illusion that the door has opened. Take another photo.
- Move the alien, the half-alien and the ramp in and out of different photos to tell the story of the alien disembarking from the spaceship.

Remember that unless you're a professional animator, animations rarely work out *exactly* as you planned, but sometimes you can discover some really exciting 'accidents' that can transform your stop motion animation into a work of art!

Send us your stop motion animations to programs@heide.com.au for us to share with the Heide community.