Jenny Bai
New Media
Professor Beaudoin
3/1/2022

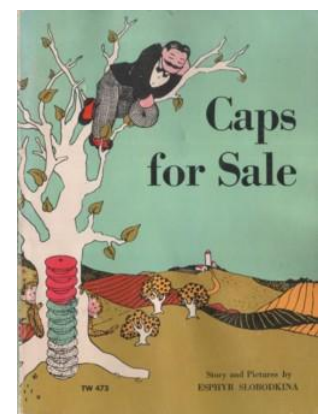**Makey Makey Interactive Art:**

A Celebration of the Chinese New Year

Research Questions:

This interactive project addresses the translation between Chinese and English as well as an overall introduction of the Chinese New Year using the Makey Makey box. The primary aim of this project is to show a celebration atmosphere of the New Year and to translate the Chinese poetic couplet, a tradition that Chinese people do during Spring Festival. Is the drawing interesting enough to create the festival spirit and lure the audience to touch? Can the recorded sounds create the feeling of celebration? Can the translation convey a good understanding of the Chinese couplet?

Domains:

My interactive drawing has two aspects that aim to amaze the audience: the delicate design of the Procreate drawing itself and the touch-sound effect on different areas of the drawing. Because this piece serves as an educational purpose for the audience to learn some Chinese, I chose to illustrate the Chinese New Year in rich colors and flat styles. The whole project serves like a child book that allows the audience to interact with it. It is similar to artists Esphyr Slobodkina's work, a children's picture book, like Caps for Sale (Figure 0). Her read-aloud book was very popular because children can speak the repetitive lines and join the storyline. Due to the time limits, my work wasn't as complex as her book but in a similar domain.

Figure 0

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Summary:

The project, "A Celebration of the Chinese New Year", is rooted in my homesickness for the Chinese Spring Festival. For this winter break, I am unable to go back home to celebrate with my family for New Year because of the international flight limitation and Covid-19 restrictions. So I want to design an interactive drawing that draws out my understanding of what Chinese people do during the Spring Festival, such as lighting the firework at midnight to celebrate the transition of a new year and translating traditional Chinese couplets for the audience to understand the meaning of them.

The audience of the project is anyone interested in Chinese or Chinese traditions. The drawing gives them a good sense of festival atmosphere and teaches them the translation between Chinese to English. The technology of this piece is Makey Makey. Makey Makey is a basic controller that connects the computer programming and the drawing itself to create an interactive element. For my project, the audience can hear the fireworks as well as the couplet translation in both Chinese and English when they touch the corresponding area on the drawing.

Process:

I am enrolled in a course called New Media, which is an upper-class/sequential course of Digital Art Studio 1. This project is our second project for this class and its aim is to create an interactive work of art using Makey Makey. During class, Professor Beaudoin showed the class various way of using Makey Makey, such as an interactive drawing, instrument, or video. One end of the Makey Makey is connected to the

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computer, and by using the alligator clips attached to the conductive material, we can

create a closed circuit to control the keyboard of the computer, such as the space bar and

arrow keys. Because of my background as a Chinese international student, I want to do

translation work between Chinese and English. I am also good at digital drawing on

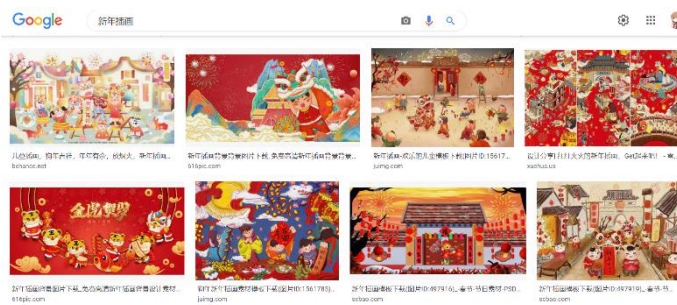Procreate, so I decided to use my IPad for drawing.

Figure 1

I browsed through many Chinese New Year drawings on google to get a general

sense of the popular style (Figure 1) and started to design my own drawing (Figure 2).
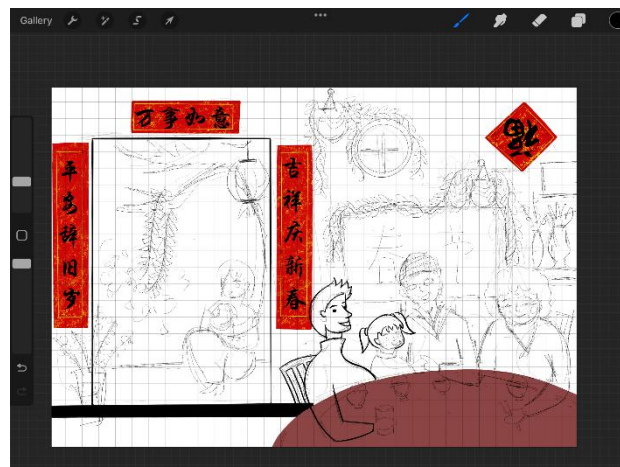

Figure 2

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I took 5 hours in drawing the Procreate drawing (Figure 3). After I finish the
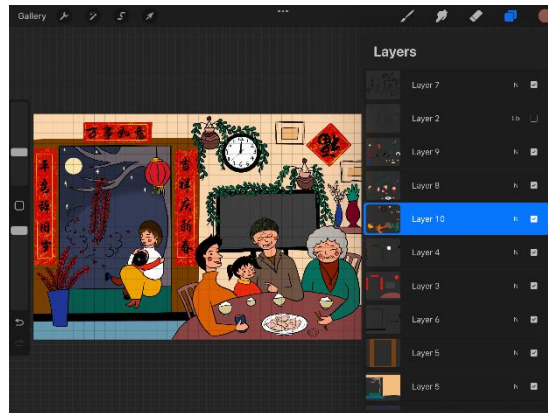
drawing, I printed it out.

Figure 3

After I had the printed drawing, I found a big cardboard and cut it to the size that matches

my printing (13'*19'). In order to create a closed, I attached a big sheet of foil using

tapes (Figure 4).

Figure 4

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And then I had cut out some holes according areas that I want to have the touch-sound effects. I also used conductive aluminum stick on the back of my printed drawing (Figure 5). This step is to make sure every components have conductive materials so that the Makey Makey would work.

Figure 5

After I finish setting up the physical project, I have to go to my computer and program the scratch (Figure 6). The computer programming contains my recording for the translation of English and Chinese as well as the firework sounds.
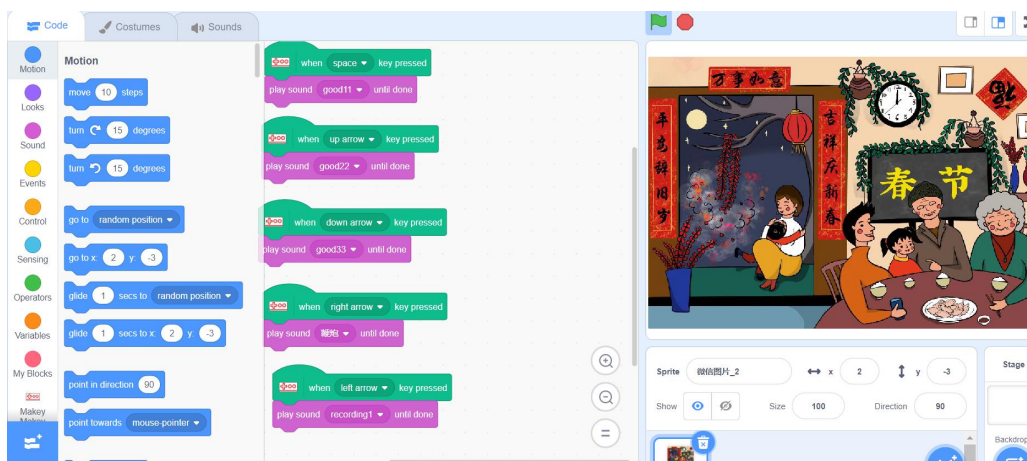

Figure 6

Finally, I just need to attach all the alligator clips to the right place. The whole piece is finished (Figure 7)! The audience now can touch the areas of the fireworks and Chinese couplet and hear the translation sounds to learn something new out of it!

Figure 7

Related Work:

I am interested in Julie Appel's work Touch the Art, a children's book series. I think the concept of her book series is intriguing because it aims to let the children touch and feel board books and introduce to them to famous artists. She is also a supporter of arts education for children of all ages. I think her direction is similar to the direction of my work, which is educating people about culture via art media. Another artist Esphyr Slobodkina has a book called Caps for Sale. Her book is also interactive because it allows the reader to repeat the scripts and get involved in the story.

Evaluation:

The strength of my project is that I have a strong visualization of my drawing that immediately draws the audience's attention. The scale of the drawing is also big enough

to grab everyone's attention to see. My drawing also has rich colors and a flat style. The firework sound I included adds the celebration mood of the Spring Festival and the translation between Chinese and English allows the audience to learn more about Chinese culture.

The weakness of my project is that I didn't tell the audience where to press so the sounds will appear. So maybe an instruction sheet or something physical that pops out from the drawing is good for the audience to have the interest to press areas I want them to press. But I think it is also interesting for the audience to explore by themselves where to press.

In the future, I think I will work on including more translation and sound effects in the drawing so that the audience can interact with this drawing more. Another thing I can do is to draw more drawings to form a storyline as a book so people can see more Chinese traditions. I also want to work on improving the sense of touch for this interactive drawing, such as having something physical and visually appealing on the side and leading the audience to press on them.

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