

# Many a mile

An animated investigation of the generational influence living in New Zealand has had on one family's relationship to their Romany ethnicity

Emily Ramsay



A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design  
2021 School of Art & Design

**Many a mile: An animated investigation of the  
generational influence living in New Zealand has had on  
one family's relationship to their Romany ethnicity**

Emily Ramsay

A thesis submitted to

Auckland University of Technology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Design

2021

School of Art & Design

## **Abstract**

This research explores how using a mixture of 3D animation, audio interviews, and other animated techniques can be applied to explore experiences as a New Zealand Romany (NZ Romany) in the form of a short film. This project focuses on experimenting with animation and narrative techniques to create an animated documentary-style short film that will address the effects of stereotyping and prejudice through three generations of a New Zealand-based Romany family. This short film intends to generate discussion and add a unique NZ Romany perspective.

**Keywords:** Romany gypsy, stereotypes, animation, documentary, New Zealand.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Attestation of Authorship.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Literature review.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>More than a word – What does gypsy even mean?.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>What role does stereotype play in the self-identification of Romany? .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>What does it mean to be NZ Romany in a New Millennia?.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Why Documentary?.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Why Animation?.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Animation and Documentary .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Research Design, Methods, and Methodology .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Documentation of process/techniques; Results/Findings .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Animated change .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Character and Asset Design .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>The Narrative .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Setting the scene.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Storyboard Development.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>54</b>



## **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Emily Ramsay

Date: 12/07/2021

## List of Figures

Figure 1 John with baby Emily. 1980. Family Photo. ....	8
Figure 2 Ramsay, Emily, Gypsy Gold, 2019, Digital Art, 2019. ....	11
Figure 3 Ramsay, Emily. Collection of Family Photos on a Rag Rug, 2019. Digital Art. ....	20
Figure 4 Ramsay, Emily. Stereotype, 2019. Digital Art. ....	22
Figure 5 Ramsay, Emily. Narrative Planning, 2019. Digital Art. ....	22
Figure 6 Ramsay, Emily. Romany Flag 1, 2019. Digital Art. ....	24
Figure 7 Ramsay, Emily. Romany Flag 2, 2021. Digital Art. ....	24
Figure 8 Ramsay, Emily. Labels, 2019. Digital Art. ....	25
Figure 9 Ramsay, Emily. Self Portrait, 2020. Digital Art. ....	26
Figure 10 Emily. Self-Representation, 2020. Digital Art. ....	27
Figure 11 Ramsay, Emily. Screenshots from animation tests, 2020. 3D Simulation. ....	29
Figure 12 Ramsay, Emily. Screenshot from Many a Mile, Witch in the classroom scene, 2021. 3D Animation. ....	30
Figure 13 Ramsay, Emily. Rubbish Dump Gypsy character ideation, 2021. Digital art. ....	31
Figure 14 Faceless Character inspiration, 2020. Mood board. ....	32
Figure 15 Ramsay, Emily, Little John Character Design, 2020. ....	33
Figure 16 Ramsay, Emily, Little John, 2020. 3D Character. ....	33
Figure 17 Ramsay, Emily, Beefeater Character Design, 2020. ....	34
Figure 18 Ramsay, Emily, Beefeater and Little John, 2020. 3D Character. ....	34
Figure 19 Violet Matthews' earrings, 2021. Photo. ....	34
Figure 20 Idea Sketch, 2021. Pencil sketch. ....	34
Figure 21 3D model, 2021. Digital art. ....	34
Figure 22 Ramsay, Emily. Vardo, 2021. 3D model. ....	35
Figure 23 Ramsay, Emily. Hills, 2001. Rag carpet. ....	35
Figure 24 Ramsay, Emily. Rag Carpet, 2021. 3D model. ....	35
Figure 25 Ramsay, Emily. Rag Carpet, 2021. 3D model. ....	36
Figure 26 Ramsay, Emily. Dolly Character Design, 2020. Digital art. ....	38
Figure 27 Ramsay, Emily. Dolly 3D Character, 2021. 3D model. ....	38
Figure 28 Ramsay, Emily. Little John version 2 character Design, 2021. Digital art. ....	38
Figure 29 Ramsay, Emily. Dolly Character progress screenshot, 2021. 3D Model. ....	38
Figure 30 Ramsay, Emily. Little John version 2 character with Vardo toy, 2021. Digital art. ....	39
Figure 31 Ragdoll model, 2021. Ragdoll. ....	40

Figure 32 Ramsay, Emily. Little Vi character design, 2021. Digital art. ....	40
Figure 33 Ramsay, Emily. Little Vi, 2021. 3D Character. ....	40
Figure 34 Ramsay, Emily. Little Vi face detail, 2021. 3D Character.....	40
Figure 35, Selborne Camp, Hampshire, Ketchers Field. Hop pickers for Lord Selborne on Blackmoore Estate. Family photo collection. ....	41
Figure 36 Rosena Keet and family, and the Light Family. Camping near Alton Selborne, Hampshire. Family photo collection. ....	41
Figure 37 Ramsay, Emily. Reading Vardo, 2021. 3D Model. ....	42
Figure 38 Ramsay, Emily. Camp Hut with Little John, 2021. 3D Model. ....	42
Figure 39 Henry, Billy, and Joe Matthews. Family photo collection.....	42
Figure 40 John Matthews with Sister Brenda at Hollywater campsite. Family photo collection.....	42
Figure 41 screenshot of 167 Hazelton Way, 2021. Screenshot from Google Earth. ....	43
Figure 42 Ramsay, Emily. 167 Hazelton Way, 2021. 3D Model.....	43
Figure 43 Ramsay, Emily. 167 Hazelton Way, 2021. 3D Model simulation tests.....	43
Figure 44 Britannia James' headstone. Family photo collection. ....	44
Figure 45 Britannia James and Matthew Keet, my great-great Grandparents. Family photo collection. .....	44
Figure 46 Ramsay, Emily. Recreation of the headstone, 2021. 3D Model.....	44
Figure 47 Wooden Bird. Family photo collection.....	45
Figure 48 Ramsay, Emily. Wooden bird plan, 2021. Digital art.....	45
Figure 49 Ramsay, Emily. Caged Bird, 2021. 3D Model.....	45
Figure 50 Ramsay, Emily. Still from Many a mile, 2021. 3D Animation.....	46
Figure 51 Ramsay, Emily. Still from Many a mile, 2021. 3D Animation.....	46
Figure 52 Ramsay, Emily. Storyboard from Many a mile, 2021. Digital art.....	49
Figure 53 Ramsay, Emily. Storyboard from Many a mile, 2021. Digital art.....	49
Figure 54 Ramsay, Emily. Storyboard from Many a mile, 2021. Digital art.....	50

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my family, especially my father John; this would not have been possible without you.

Thank you to Gregory Bennet, my supervisor; I would have certainly spiralled into directionless anxiety without you.

Thank you for your ongoing support and constructive advice to all my friends, family, and co-workers.

To Sean, Ethan, Erynn, and Violette, you are my heart and soul; thank you for being my rock.

To the Romany people, we stand together against discrimination towards our people.



## Introduction



*Figure 1 John with baby Emily. 1980. Family Photo.*

My father loves to tell people stories from his childhood. One of his favourite statements is “I grew up Gypsy.” I never gave it much thought as a child; I accepted it the same way I accepted my own Gypsiness, with the same knowing all Romany seem to possess, but as the years have passed and the negative stereotypes surrounding my race increase, what it means to be gypsy is a question I have spent more time pondering.

The Romany people of England are often referred to as Romany Gypsies and Travellers under British law; however, in recent years, there have been questions raised surrounding the term gypsy as a label for an ethnic group and its origin as a slur. This is a word that most of my extended family take for themselves, although primarily they use Traveller, and as such, I use it to refer to my ethnicity alongside Romany, and the word Romanichal, which refers to Romany from the United Kingdom.

Decades have passed since I concealed my racial identity. Now living in a different country, New Zealand (I was born in the United Kingdom), I have the confidence to claim it. I acknowledge that there is still a significant divide between the Romany and everyone else, one that has been wedged open since the beginning of their history, when they first left their

ancestral lands in India around the 12<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>1</sup> by discrimination and the *othering*<sup>2</sup> of my people. This line of inquiry into self-identity has led me to my research question:

***How can animation be used to evoke a sense of identity of what it is like to be of Romany descent living in New Zealand?***

Through my research, I use animation to explore stereotypes and their effects on three generations of Romany people who call New Zealand home. By taking a personal approach to the investigation that starts with my family, my practice will take the shape of an **animated documentary** with mixed media animation.

My research investigates and discusses the following context:

- How the way Romany have been treated has affected how we identify with our culture today.
- What role does stereotyping play in this self-identification?
- What does it mean to be New Zealand Romany in a new millennium?
- Why animated documentary is the best method to deliver my message.

This project implements practice-based research methods to explore how using 3D animation, real-life objects, and audio interviews can be applied to express the experience of my family's ethnicity of Romanichal Romany after emigrating from England to New Zealand. It takes the form of a short animated documentary that addresses the effect that stereotyping and prejudice towards Romany has on my family by drawing on my family history and current lifestyle. This film intends to generate discussion and add a unique NZ Romany perspective.

Using animation to express this story lends freedom to bend rules that govern real-world storytelling and poignantly communicate a small portion of our lived experience.

My childhood was a stark contrast to my Romany Gypsy father's, but despite living a *housed existence* since the age of 12, my Dad's desire to travel never left him. When I was 14, we immigrated to New Zealand, which changed everything and nothing at all. In England, we

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Gypsy Roma Traveller History and Culture', The Traveller Movement, accessed 24 June 2021, <https://travellermovement.org.uk/about/gypsy-roma-traveller-history-and-culture>.

<sup>2</sup> Kaori Yoshida, 'Animation and "Otherness" : The Politics of Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Identity in the World of Japanese Anime' (University of British Columbia, 2008), n. Yoshida defines 'Otherness' through the process of recognising one's self, contrasted against societies that are viewed a different, <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0067003>.

never spoke of our Romany roots, it was not a written rule, but we instinctively knew that the people who attended my middle-class school did not expect to be living next to a Gypsy. People in New Zealand were a lot more accepting of my heritage, but the fabricated idealism of my race had reached the children I was now to grow up alongside.

My life experience underpins my research and the desire to create an understanding of what it means to be of Romany descent.

## Literature review



Figure 2 Ramsay, Emily, *Gypsy Gold*, 2019, Digital Art, 2019.

### More than a word – What does gypsy even mean?

My Dad grew up ‘rough’, with parents who felt it their duty to educate him about the world’s intolerance. When a barely five-year-old John came home crying that “other kids were bullying him”, he was not allowed back inside the caravan until he had beaten the other kids, to the point the other parents came banging on John’s family door. So yes, he grew up ‘Gypsy’.

My upbringing is a stark contrast to this; whitewashed, uniform, semi-detached, middle-class suburbs. My ‘Gypsiness’ was never in question; I always knew that my Dad was ‘Gypsy’, and by extension, us children too. This was not something I spoke about in school. No one ever told me not to mention it; I just knew, the same way you learn not to put your hand into an open fire. It wasn’t until I started this journey that I stopped to analyse how my children identified with our ethnic roots.

The discourse analysis in the academic article by Simon Goodman and Lottie Rowe, “*Maybe It Is Prejudice ... but It Is NOT Racism*”: *Negotiating Racism in Discussion Forums about Gypsies*,<sup>3</sup> has been insightful in terms of considering the way people talk about those of Romany ethnicity in settings where it is assumed they can freely speak their thoughts. Goodman and Rowe suggest that people feel less guarded in online communities and more

---

<sup>3</sup> Simon Goodman and Lottie Rowe, “‘Maybe It Is Prejudice ... but It Is NOT Racism’: Negotiating Racism in Discussion Forums about Gypsies.’, *Discourse & Society* 25, no. 1 (January 2014): 32.



likely to use discriminatory language.<sup>4</sup> Conversations assessed in this paper show a lack of understanding and tolerance for those perceived as gypsy, using the word as a racial insult. Contention over the ownership of the word ‘Gypsy’ with New Zealanders is further highlighted by the commentary in the newspaper article written by Laine Moger, *‘Facebook Cracks the Whip on Kiwis Using the Term “Gypsy”’*.<sup>5</sup> Moger refers to a statement made by Massey University Professor Paul Spoonly, who comments that the word ‘Gypsy’ is problematic but then condemns the tourists without addressing the issues surrounding the stereotyping of Romany. Moger’s commentary reads as poorly researched, repeating comments from outraged Facebook users after being banned for participating in the racist conversations regarding Gypsies without providing a counterbalance of Romany voices. News media’s minimal understanding of why Romany have taken offence to the misuse of stereotyping and misappropriation of the word ‘Gypsy’ has influenced how I have constructed my animated documentary’s narrative, as articles such as these undermine Romany efforts to disentangle themselves from stereotyping.

These texts have aided in positioning my research project in a socio-political framework. The personal narrative I have crafted for my animated documentary (although not focusing on an explicit political message) underpins the social context of my ethnicity and the lens through which others view it.

### **What role does stereotype play in the self-identification of Romany?**

I observe many misconceptions have come from the concept of ‘knowing’, like the knowledge of being a gypsy without any scientific proof to back it. I look in the mirror, and a white girl looks back. My Dad looks like many other balding middle-aged men, at least until you peel back his sleeves to reveal his faded arm tattoos similar to many other Romany.

The theme of identity and how we classify ourselves Romany is a topic of interest in my area of research. The PhD Thesis *‘Animation and “Otherness” : The Politics of Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Identity in the World of Japanese Anime’*, by Yoshida Kaori, has been an

---

<sup>4</sup> Goodman and Rowe.

<sup>5</sup> Laine Moger, *‘Facebook Cracks the Whip on Kiwis Using the Term “Gypsy”’*, *Stuff*, 3 February 2019, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/110310307/facebook-cracks-the-whip-on-kiwis-using-the-term-gypsy>.

instrumental text for framing my thoughts surrounding how we build the identities we construct for ourselves.

Historically, ethnicity is presented in a heavily white-centric, Western-dominant way, with minority races depicted from a white person's perception of non-white race;<sup>6</sup> in the case of Romany, an entirely fantasied version. Yoshida refers to the representation of ethnicity in media as having the capacity of constructing identities in which the viewer, either the depicted minority or another race, may absorb into themselves and become part of their understanding of that ethnicity.<sup>7</sup>

The construction of my Romany ethnicity has long troubled me since first watching the depiction of the Gypsy character Esmeralda charming crowds in Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.<sup>8</sup> Reconciling my first-hand knowledge of my Romany family's culture to the perceptions of my non-Romany peers has always been perplexing. When I disclose "I'm Romany", it's often met with blank stares until I clarify, "as in Gypsy". More often than not, I am asked if I can read their palm, tarot, or tell their future in tea leaves.

If "you are what you consume", as Yoshida suggests,<sup>9</sup> then how can I use my animated documentary to support a realistic representation of my people? How can I use it to encourage accurate depictions of my ethnicity that do not rely on overused tropes? This framing for my practice will help ensure that I construct a narrative that connects with the viewer, giving them something within the story that they recognise and assimilate.

---

<sup>6</sup> Yoshida, 'Animation and "Otherness"', 16.

<sup>7</sup> Yoshida, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Animation (Walt Disney Pictures, 1996), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116583/>.

<sup>9</sup> Yoshida, 'Animation and "Otherness"', 17.

## What does it mean to be NZ Romany in a New Millennia?

My version of Romany is different from my father's and even more distant from my grandparent's. Each generation removed from living in a Vardo<sup>10</sup> or Bender<sup>11</sup> has become, to my sense, more 'Westernised'. My Dad may have lived in a house since he was 12 years old, but one thing has never left him, his desire to travel. He calls this his 'itchy feet' and potentially part of why we immigrated to New Zealand when I was 14.

Living half a world from our family, many of whom still live on campsites, has alienated us even further from our ethnicity. In many ways, I now know more about Maori culture than my own. Along with losing a unique way of life, we have also lost our language, the language my father was born speaking. When I asked him about this, he shrugged and said, "Who would you talk to?"

This question permeates my mind, flipping it over while thinking about the reasons behind what motivates Jean-Michel Kibushi's animation and his desire to preserve his Congolese oral histories.<sup>12</sup> Callus speaks of how Kibushi travels to remote villages to collect stories and bring critical socio-political messages regarding economic, social development and democracy. Yoshida speaks of the need to create positive ethnic representations and that when the content is reinforced with a political message, it is likely to reach more people.

Yoshida also refers to *The Reversed Gaze*, which he defines through the use of "strategic essentialism", where people consciously construct and articulate the identity they think most useful for political purposes.<sup>13</sup>

Paula Callus's article '*Animation as Socio-Political Commentary: An Analysis of the Animated Films of Congolese Director Jean Michel Kibushi*' makes excellent points on animation in Kibushi's filmmaking and the authenticity his techniques lend to the preservation of his traditional culture. To create an animated documentary that viewer's receive as genuine requires considering how best to tell the perspective of the NZ Romany. I have to contemplate how much weight to give traditional Romany art styles, contrasted with

---

<sup>10</sup> Vardo is the Romany word for the horse-drawn caravan.

<sup>11</sup> Bender is the Romany word for a makeshift tent. A Bender is made from supple tree branches and covered with blankets or other easy to find material.

<sup>12</sup> Paula Callus, 'Animation as Socio-Political Commentary: An Analysis of the Animated Films of Congolese Director Jean Michel Kibushi', *Journal of African Media Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 2010): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.2.1.55/1>.

<sup>13</sup> Yoshida, 'Animation and "Otherness"', 38.

my non-Romany upbringing while reflecting upon the influence of having lived my life in New Zealand and awareness of sacred Maori culture.

My work takes the same approach as Kibushi: talking to my family about their experience as NZ Romany's, weaving their experiences into my animation in a way that gives significance to my Romany heritage and my identity as a New Zealander.

### **Why Documentary?**

Authors C. Brylla and M. Kramer refer to documentary in their book '*Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film*' as a highly malleable form of communication, providing the scholar with flexibility not available in other audio-visual forms.<sup>14</sup> Employing a poetic mode of filmmaking, I can take the anecdotal memories of my family and the experience of living as NZ Romany and develop these stories into a narrative. This approach is akin to the poetic mode of filmmaking, used as an entry point to connect the viewer to the content in an emotionally charged way, as referred to when the authors are speaking about the work of Ostergaard and their filmmaking style, memory and imagination are linked. Documentary can take reality and turn it into an art form, which suits my practice style of 3D animation and my interest in visual tactility.

Documentary is about real people, and I am in a unique position to interview my own family and obtain an unguarded account while still respecting my family's privacy and ethical boundaries that have been stretched in the past. Bill Nichols in '*Introduction to Documentary*' speaks of documentary's ability to lend more realism to a subject than it might credit, especially in terms of 'reality TV', shows such as '*My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*'<sup>15</sup> which blurs these boundaries and reinforces the stereotypical view of Romany and Travellers. Nichols accredits this technique to the show's creators.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Catalin Brylla and Mette Kramer, *Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film*, *Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film*, 2018, 4, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90332-3>.

<sup>15</sup> *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, accessed 16 September 2018, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1836351/>.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Third Edition* (Bloomington, UNITED STATES: Indiana University Press, 2017), 7, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=4813367>.



Further, Nichols speaks of how documentary adheres to no set form or style, making animation an excellent platform to tell my story, fitting well into Nichols ascribed modes, expository, poetic, reflexive, and performative. Nichols states:

This sense of the affective tone of lived reality takes considerable prominence in animated documentaries, many of which have strong poetic qualities even if they also address a specific event or type of experience.<sup>17</sup>

Documentary gives me the most appropriate platform for my film, enabling me to speak for ourselves, our own lived experience as Romany, and immigrants to New Zealand.

### **Why Animation?**

I love animation, but my choice to use it as a medium for my practice goes beyond my passion for the animated. Rules that govern animation differ from reality. With animation, I have the power to create my own rules in a world of my creation, to articulate my own distinct story, and impart knowledge regarding my ethnicity.

The structure of the visual aspects that embody my animated documentary is influenced by animator Laura Yilmaz and her autobiographical mixed-media animation *'Places other people have lived.'*<sup>18</sup> Yilmaz's film centres on her family's experience of selling their childhood home. Yilmaz's use of materiality through the medium of stop motion, photography, and pencil drawings intrigues me due to the authenticity it lends to her animation. This has aided in shaping my thoughts surrounding how my animation will look and feel.

In Jeremy Blair's journal article *'Animated Autoethnographies: Stop Motion Animation as a Tool for Self-Inquiry and Personal Evolution'*, he discusses how useful ethnography is when applied within the animation framework. Blair states that animated autoethnography provides a platform that encourages the development of personal stories that:

---

<sup>17</sup> Nichols, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Laura Yilmaz, *Places Other People Have Lived*, 2011, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2124019/>.

Provoked viewers to broaden their horizons, reflect critically on experiences, enter empathically into the lives of others, and actively participate in the dialogue regarding the social implications encountered.<sup>19</sup>

This method of structuring personal narrative fits ideally with my autobiographical animation, inspiring me to embrace my Romany ethnicity's imperfection, reconciling what I know with what I learn. With this practice, I can pick apart thoughtful self-reflection to create something genuine.

Personally, I wanted to tell the stories of my people to my people. From the very beginning, I conceived my work as a means to conserve oral storytelling, secular and popular, and making it known to the youngsters who frequently are displaced from their own culture.<sup>20</sup>

– Jean Michel Kibushi, Congolese Animator

Animation is capable of creating many connections, with the power to pass along my reflections on Romany ethnicity. The quotation above from Kibushi sums up my desire to preserve the history of my culture for my children, who are raised completely displaced from a nomadic horse-drawn existence.

Without people actively working to preserve the authenticity of our heritage, my family's journey would be replaced with myth and fantasy. Focusing my research around the meaning and ownership of the word 'Gypsy' and working to make sense of the extent of its use and misuse in New Zealand will aid in separating the expression from my ethnicity. Discovering what roles stereotype plays in the lives of Romany will provide me with the mechanism to challenge the way media portray Romany. By investigating this context, I will conclude what it means to be NZ Romany and strengthen why animation is an appropriate medium to deliver my message.

I have to consider animation's link to fiction, as discussed in '*Conflicting realisms: animated documentaries in the post-truth era*' by Nea Ehrlich. Ehrlich speaks to Disney's history of using animation as a medium for fictional storytelling. In recent times animation has been

---

<sup>19</sup> Jeremy Michael Blair, 'Animated Autoethnographies: Stop Motion Animation as a Tool for Self-Inquiry and Personal Evolution', *Art Education* 67, no. 2 (March 2014): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2014.11519259>.

<sup>20</sup> Jean Michel Kibushi, 2003. Quoted in Callus, 'Animation as Socio-Political Commentary', 56.

utilised in experimental ways, and in turn, viewers are becoming accustomed to seeing animation as a medium that can represent the real.<sup>21</sup>

## Animation and Documentary

Animated documentaries have appeared as far back as the earliest moving images (pioneer animator Winsor McCay's 1918 film *The Sinking of the Lusitania*<sup>22</sup> is considered the first animated documentary). Audiences may not perceive animated characters as the best choice to narrate a true story, but its malleable versatility makes it an ideal platform to tell 'true' stories.

Annabelle Honess Roe, in their book *Animated Documentary*,<sup>23</sup> posits that the viewer finds truth in the delivery of testimony using their innate understanding of human interaction and behaviour and then asks the question, 'what happens when the body is no longer present?'<sup>24</sup> How the authenticity of my narrative will be received is a question worth asking myself while creating my animated documentary.

To do justice to my story, I cannot include every anecdote told me by my father; however, with animations' ability to communicate metaphor, I can weave the visuals with additional aspects, layering the story on top of the audio narrative.

When animation is paired with words, I can efficiently communicate our family's complex relationship with our Romany identity to the viewer; as Honess Roe claims, 'Animation, as image rather than word, encourages viewers to imagine, and empathise with, that which is spoken.'<sup>25</sup>

Since there is a lack of video footage from my father's time spent in the camps, and photography has a limited ability to communicate my father's feelings, using animation to

---

<sup>21</sup> Nea Ehrlich, 'Conflicting Realisms: Animated Documentaries in the Post-Truth Era', *Studies in Documentary Film* 15, no. 1 (March 2021): 20–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2019.1663718>.

<sup>22</sup> Winsor McCay and Winsor McCay, *The Sinking of the Lusitania*, Animation, Short, War (Universal Film Manufacturing Company, 1918).

<sup>23</sup> Annabelle Honess Roe, *Animated Documentary* (London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1249631>.

<sup>24</sup> Honess Roe, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Honess Roe, 110.

express and symbolise his narrative provides a passage for the viewer to access and connect with our family experience.

As stated by Honess Roe, 'Animation functions in these types of autobiographical animated documentaries as an alternative way of 'accessing' the past.'<sup>26</sup> Which is why I include family photographs within my animation. While the indexical nature of photography captures a moment in time, they alone cannot recreate a more comprehensive connection to our identity.

In the future, I look to build upon what I learn during my master's research and further develop ideas of how post-colonialism has influenced the way people think of and interact with Romany. As an academic and a NZ Romany, I feel a sense of obligation to preserve the oral histories of my race and contribute positively to the generation of knowledge that provides a balanced counter representation of the Romany people. While I know I do not speak for everyone, I can diligently preserve something of my family for the benefit of everyone and perhaps even inspire those who watch my animation to turn their thoughts inward and examine their own internal biases.

For many years my Dad has asked me to ghostwrite his life story; he certainly has enough material for several novels. I told him I'm not sure I am cut out for writing the saga his life would generate, but Dad can help me create a true story of his childhood contrasted with our life now with my animation. Through this, I hope to show that my children are growing up as gypsy as him, just with fewer fistfights.

---

<sup>26</sup> Honess Roe, 142.



## Research Design, Methods, and Methodology



*Figure 3 Ramsay, Emily. Collection of Family Photos on a Rag Rug, 2019. Digital Art.*

My project is an autobiographical animated documentary that explores how stereotypes and racism have shaped the way Romany identify with their ethnicity and the method in which this has introduced others to our culture. I have used a mixture of 3D animation and audio interviews with intergenerational anecdotes to construct and present my short film narrative.

This short film intends to provide insight and a way for the viewer to connect with the social context of issues that affect Romany.

This exploration has been conducted using the overarching methodology of autoethnography to allow for self-reflection, alongside autoethnographic research that has enabled me to examine my own family's Romany perspective. I have also used hermeneutics to investigate how New Zealand media and society view the Romany race and practice-based research, a structuring framework underpinning the creative process and associated technical pipeline required to complete my animation.

Material cultural study and visual connoisseurship have been helpful to break down how other animations are fashioned, such as the short film '*Places Other People have lived*'<sup>27</sup> by Laura Yilmaz, in which she explores the relationship between memories and places. This research approach aids my understanding of underlying social structures and serves as a linchpin for weaving these results throughout my animation using semiotics. Qualitative research methods have enabled me to conduct case studies of reading material. I have been focusing on 'otherness' while also assessing other animated investigations on social commentary. Using semi-structured interviews with my family members, I directed my research past my tacit knowledge and compared and contrasted the intergenerational difference between my father and my children.

These investigations have formed the basis for my design practice and have aided in constructing my animated documentary's narrative. The results of these interviews revealed insight into my own experience as a NZ Romany. By comparing these interviews with my tacit knowledge, I have shaped these conclusions into a narrative to share my findings of the effect that stereotyping can have. From these findings, I have created a record that evokes a visceral response in the viewer, intending to connect them to how we feel about how our ethnicity is perceived from the outside.

---

<sup>27</sup> Yilmaz, *Places Other People Have Lived*.



Figure 4 Ramsay, Emily. Stereotype, 2019. Digital Art.

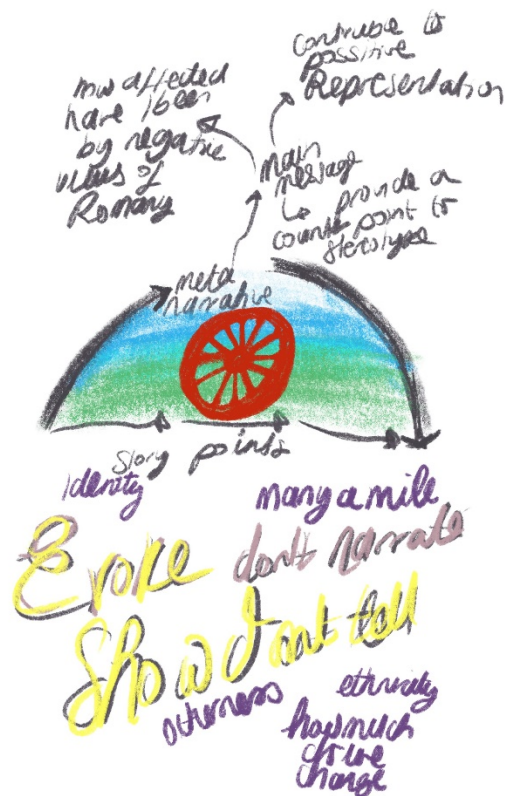


Figure 5 Ramsay, Emily. Narrative Planning, 2019. Digital Art.

Autoethnographic and ethnographic methodology encompasses qualitative methods such as case studies, interviews, observations and tacit knowledge and is well suited to constructing my animated documentary. Jeremy Blair writes of his use of autoethnography in his stop motion animation, paraphrasing from various sources, including Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, stating: “*Autoethnography is a method of qualitative research that merges autobiography and ethnography*”.<sup>28</sup> This combination offers a balance of methods that are best suited to creating an autobiographical animated documentary. Blair states how autoethnography can aid in the critical reflection of experiences. The viewer can empathetically and actively participate in the conversation surrounding the social implications that animation addresses.<sup>29</sup> I want to ensure that my short film will do more than

<sup>28</sup> Arthur P. Bochner and Carolyn Ellis, *Evocative Autoethnography : Writing Lives and Telling Stories*, Writing Lives: Ethnographic Narratives: 17 (Routledge, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Blair, ‘Animated Autoethnographies’.

inform the viewer of the facts; it will evoke a response in the audience, inspiring them to question and evaluate their own biases towards the Romany Ethnicity.

Gjoko Muratovski writes in their book *Research for Designers* that ethnography is an in-depth study of sub-cultures, social interaction, beliefs, motivations, and perceptions, and to effectively carry out this research, you must ‘value[s] the idea that to know others, one must do what the others do.’<sup>30</sup> To further this line of inquiry, I have taken inspiration from Jean-Michel Kibushi, an animator from the Republic of Congo. His short animation ‘*Septembre Noir (Black September.)*’<sup>31</sup> centres on socio-political messages, using the drawings from children who lived through the 1991 military coup. The method Kibushi chose to share these children’s stories is relevant to my work and what I want to achieve with my short film. My visual approach may be different, but drawing on the experiences of those who lived through it lends genuine authenticity.

### **Additional Methodology**

I needed a multi-dimensional solution to craft a short film as layered and complex as the relationship to my ethnicity. Anastacia Kurylo states in the introduction of her book, ‘*Negotiating Group Identity in the Research Process: Are you in or are you out?*’: “If your only tool is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail.”<sup>32</sup> With this in mind, I have also drawn from the methodologies of hermeneutics and practice-based research. Visual research methods, such as visual culture, visual connoisseurship, and material cultural study, are integral to interpreting the written and visual resources I am collecting. Practice-based research ensures that my animated documentary remains the focus of my research. When testing my concepts, I have employed action research by drawing feedback from my family, as this is a personal journey that includes all of us. Through my research, I have discovered why my father’s family were moved into a housed existence and gained insight into the effect that harmful stereotypes and media attention have had on us.

---

<sup>30</sup> Muratovski, *Research for Designers*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Michel Kibushi, *Black September in Kinshasa / Kinshasa, Septembre Noir*, 1991, <https://www.africanfilmny.org/2012/black-september-in-kinshasa-kinshasa-septembre-noir/>.

<sup>32</sup> Anastacia Kurylo, *Negotiating Group Identity in the Research Process : Are You In or Are You Out?* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016),

<http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1372771&site=eds-live>.

Several other research paths have supported my thinking and enriched my practice, such as exploring how Gypsies are portrayed in media and film, which has aided in discovering how these beliefs are received by the general public here in New Zealand.



*Figure 6 Ramsay, Emily. Romany Flag 1, 2019. Digital Art.*



*Figure 7 Ramsay, Emily. Romany Flag 2, 2021. Digital Art.*

To summarise, I am using the methodological approach of autoethnographic research to investigate and better understand my family's position as Romany New Zealanders. The sub methodologies of hermeneutics and practice-based research have accounted for the investigation of how other animations portray such social commentary and how I can use my animation to evoke a response in the audience. As a Romany and a New Zealander, I feel a sense of responsibility as an academic to positively contribute my Romany voice. Still, part of this journey has been learning where to set a limit to the scale of my inquiry. Some of what I want to achieve has been far too big for the scope of a master's project.

For this reason, I am focused on my own experience and that of my family, and leaving the broader questions for future research goals. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the mountain I need to climb, I am enthused and excited about the animated documentary I am shaping and hopeful that it can make some small shift in the world and the predisposition towards the Romany people. Part of what will ensure the relevance of my project is sharing my perspective of being a New Zealand Romany. In a country made up of diverse backgrounds and as the mother to three young Romany, I keenly feel the importance of preserving my own ethnic identity, ensuring that the history and culture that make us a unique people are conserved for those that will come after me.



## Documentation of process/techniques; Results/Findings



Figure 8 Ramsay, Emily. *Labels*, 2019. Digital Art.

Throughout my master's practice, I lost count of the times I reinvented the research question. In the first months, I felt like I was constantly uncovering new ideas and pathways forward. Then as the spread of Covid grew, the faith in my practice diminished until I was no longer sure in which direction I should travel.

I generated iterations of ideas by continually bringing my focus back to my prescribed research methods and practice. I stretched the limits of my creativeness by not limiting myself to just the things I felt I was good at doing.

Because I did not want to limit my practice, it led to creating many unsuccessful ideas. Embracing the concept that 'there are no bad ideas', I illustrated all the conceptions that flew through my brain. This included drawings that I generally wouldn't show anyone. I found that working through ideas stopped them from being trapped in my head, so even when they went nowhere, at least I had proof of this. I tried different versions of representing my identity, such as what it means to 'be a kiwi' and what it means to 'be Romany' and what kinds of things people think when they hear certain words about my ethnicity. I am particularly interested in communicating that we are more than the assumptions people make about being Romany.

From this idea flowed more art to do with identity and representation.



*Figure 9 Ramsay, Emily. Self Portrait, 2020. Digital Art.*

I asked myself some questions. What would it look like if we all walked around with our labels on the outside? Would it change how we treated each other? When analysing the representation of Romany ethnicity, I also have to view the othering that goes along with it. We all carry around parts that make up our whole, some are easy to see, like skin colour, hair, or a physical disability, but other factors are hidden, like my own ADHD and anxiety, for example. These have a significant effect on me, but for the most part, the casual observer won't see it or will perceive it as part of something else, like how some people might see facets of ADHD as a person being forgetful or lazy. While this might not seem connected to being Romany on the surface, these thoughts have led me on a path towards what I will include in my animated documentary.



Figure 10 Emily. *Self-Representation*, 2020. Digital Art.

My relationship with my ethnicity feels a bit like this: I've lived in New Zealand for 27 years, and to hear me talk, I sound as 'kiwi' as the next person who grew up here, but when I comment on my British born roots most people are surprised and say "You don't sound English." I feel 'kiwi', but I also feel like an imposter. I grew up straddled between two worlds, the middle-classed family of my mother and the Romany family my father is from; this wasn't something I have always been conscious of, but it's a feeling I have always felt: 'I don't fit in.'

'Fitting in' is a sentiment that I have bought into my work as I plan my animated documentary because, for Romany, we have always existed on the outskirts, separated from the people we share a country with.

When my father was young, the Hampshire council worked hard to funnel Romany families from a life on the road into encampments. They did this by gradually closing down the stopping places until they had nowhere else to go. They used academic writings as a basis for deciding that a nomadic lifestyle was detrimental to their families and left them with no choice. Thomas A. Acton speaks of this in their paper, 'Scientific racism, popular racism, and the discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society.' When discussing the councils' reasoning for shutting down the caravan sites and their use of academic Dora E. Yates' opinion on the living conditions of Romany families that lived in the area, particularly their opinion that families they planned to rehome were not Gypsies.

"Hampshire reacted angrily to a memorandum by myself and Fr. Eltin Daly accusing them of racism, saying they were not racist as the rehoused families were not Gypsies.



When, however I visited Hampshire at their invitation, the official who took me round was unable to take me to a single family who whom I could not *rocker Romanes* (Speak the English Romani dialect).”<sup>33</sup>

Yates conducted what they felt to be adequate research by going amongst the Travellers in the New Forrest and judging themselves that the local school pupils were not of Romany descent. This study directly affected my family and their way of life. While this essay touched on what happened to the Travellers, citing their forced move to the mud floor huts, it lacks the personal voice of the Romany and their experience of this internment.

Eerie Camp, the area that my Dad’s family ended up in, had once been used as a detention centre for Canadian prisoners and was located next to a rubbish dump. Dad refers to this place as ‘The huts’, which had dirt floors, no heating source and no plumbing. Romany families were used to hard living, but here they were stripped of their caravans and deprived of the ability to follow the seasonal work many Traveller families depended on to survive.

When they were forced into a sedentary life, most families ended up on the same housing estate. Growing up, two sets of aunts and uncles lived on the same block along with my grandparents, and all my cousins went to the same school. They didn’t need a label on the outside to authenticate their ‘*gypsiness*’ - everybody knew who they were.

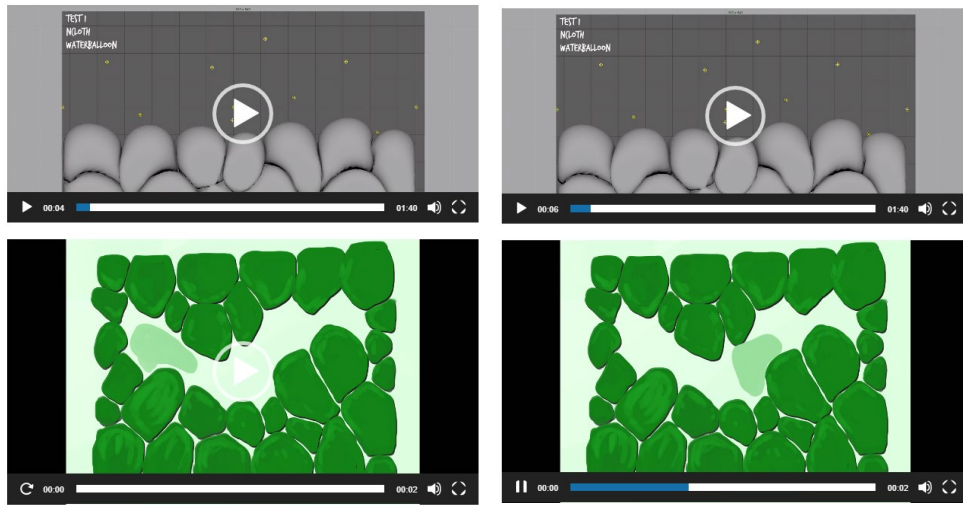
I grew up in middle-class suburbia; my nearest relative was a 30-minute walk away. We only knew our immediate neighbours. In contrast to the way generations of travellers had lived, we moved in when I was two and stayed until my family immigrated to New Zealand in 1994.

It has taken a long time to understand why I always felt out of place. There are many reasons for this, but for my master's research, I have focused on the complicated relationship with my ethnicity. We are a sum of all our parts, there isn’t one label that seems more important than others, but there are certainly some that have obscured my vision.

From this line of enquiry, I sought to visualise this feeling that I was having, concerning being Romany, and used 3D Animation software programme Maya and 2D animation to bring to life the concept of trying to fit in with a society that has a very rigid view of what a Romany is.

---

<sup>33</sup> Thomas A. Acton, ‘Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society’, *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 39, no. 7 (June 2016): 1187–1204, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1105988>.



*Figure 11 Ramsay, Emily. Screenshots from animation tests, 2020. 3D Simulation.*

I wanted to communicate how it feels for me to be Romany, a Kiwi, and Gorgio (Romany word for anyone non-Romany). I tried to convey that I never quite felt like I fitted in with my Romany family. Still, I never felt like I was Gorgio enough to fit in with the children I went to school with, and having to merge this with how I feel now, trying to own my ethnicity authentically while still feeling like a fraud. I have had to ask myself challenging questions like how much discrimination can I claim at this point in my life? How much disadvantage has it put me at?

When I was a teenager at high school in New Zealand, there were girls who made fun of me, called me a Gypsy Witch, even dramatically throwing themselves into lockers when I walked past so they could ‘escape’ the supposed curses I would put on them.



*Figure 12 Ramsay, Emily. Screenshot from Many a Mile, Witch in the classroom scene, 2021. 3D Animation.*

But now I have reached my forties; I can't say my gypsiness has disadvantaged me because I don't have much left. My Dad moved us away from his family and the stigma that went hand in hand with being a Traveller. But with that move and all the privilege it afforded us, I lost the chance to learn the Romany language and be part of the Traveller community in a way that popping in once a week never afforded us.

I have spent a lot of time thinking about how I can incorporate symbolism into my work by asking myself what kinds of thoughts come to mind when you ask the everyday New Zealander what they associate with Romany culture. How do we explain our culture to other people? What kinds of descriptions do we need for others to understand where we have come from?

Asking myself these questions led me in a new direction for my research, redefining what I am focusing on and refining my animated aesthetic.

After spending weeks considering what voice I wanted to use and what story I wanted to tell, I finally recalled an audio recording I made of my Dad a few years back when he asked me to ghostwrite his autobiography. It was in this audio I found the first thread to pull for my animated documentary.

To start, I narrowed down the 30 minutes recording, highlighting one segment that I felt illustrated how my father truly felt about his family being forced into a sedentary lifestyle.

As a child, my father recalls this time fondly, remembering how enjoyable it was to be with other children his age, he speaks of one time when toys were donated to the camp, and the children could have their pick of what was in the wardens back yard. But on reflection, when he starts to explain how they lived and where the camp was situated, it became apparent he

hadn't considered how terrible the living conditions were and how wrong it was for the government to decide this way of life was better.

The adverse effects of forcing Romany into a sedentary lifestyle far outweighed any perceived rightness of the act. The work families relied on to feed their children dried up, with so many with the same skillset stuck in one place, it caused many to think creatively to provide for their families. For my father, being a young boy, the reality of the situation was hidden from him, and my grandparents worked hard to conceal how hard this new way of life was. They did their best to ensure that their children felt safe and secure, while the reality was a stark contrast.

### **Animated change**

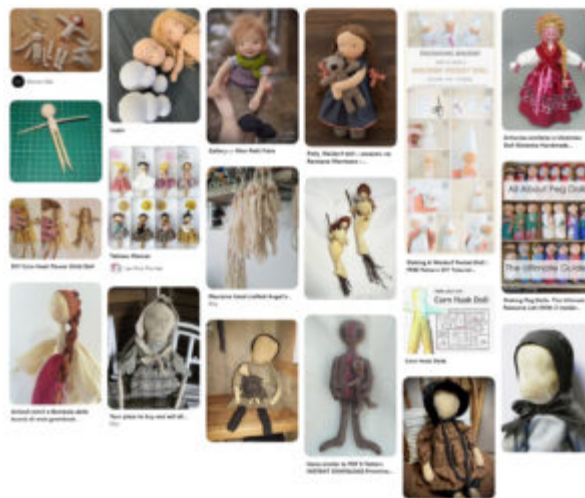
After piecing together my 30-second sequence from my father's story, I worked on the sound design. With my father's story being the central point, I wanted to emphasise what the viewer will hear. It is from here that I launched my ideation of the look and feel. I knew that I wanted to use 3D animation, however, not in a conventional way. I want my film to appear tactile and dingy in a way that reflects the ex-prisoner of war camp my family were moved to. I want to capture the despair of having the autonomy over your life taken from you while also capturing the closeness of family ties.



*Figure 13 Ramsay, Emily. Rubbish Dump Gypsy character ideation, 2021. Digital art.*

It was apparent to me that from this point on that I could not rely on any of the 3D character rigs I have available to me (both paid and free rigs). I need my animation to maintain its authenticity, so all the characters should be my creation. Above is the first iteration of my Romany family, based on photos of family members. To capture this textural landscape, I want all the characters to have the feel of a handmade toy, something that Romany children might have made and played with.

## Character and Asset Design



*Figure 14 Faceless Character inspiration, 2020. Mood board.*

I am investigating the idea of dolls without faces; my reasoning for my characters in this sequence having no mouth is symbolic of having their voice taken away from them. These travelling families had no choice but to move into the camps. The government worked systematically to close down campsites. These were places that Romany had used for generations as they followed work around the country. The government made it more difficult to find places to stop until they were all funnelled into the same camps. There was no way for them to speak out against how unjust this was. Couple this with the general mistrust of travellers; they genuinely had no voice to counter the argument for the sedentary mandate. The representation of Romany and Travellers is still very present today, in social media, news media, entertainment, academia, and in our own homes. There is even misunderstanding within my race, which is bound to happen when we have all been labelled under one umbrella term, despite our diverse histories, so my characterisation here is essential.

I am looking at the history of dolls such as the Waldorf Doll, The Haudenosaunee ‘No Face doll’, Hayao Miyazaki animated character Kanoshi (No face) from Spirited Away,<sup>34</sup> and Motanka, Traditional Ukrainian Doll as a foundation for my own no face doll.

From this, I have created my first version of my character, *Little John*. This is the first iteration, and with each version made, I came closer to what I envisioned in my head. I have used Autodesk Maya to create the base 3D geometry mesh and Pixologic Zbrush (a 3D modelling tool) to create the textural detail. I have used a combination of bump and displacement maps to create texture and add a layer of reality to the model. I can convey a layered and complex character that looks as if it genuinely would exist outside the medium of 3D.

The second character created was a wooden Beefeater. I needed to create a representation of the English council that decided that Romany should no longer live a nomadic lifestyle. I decided on reflection of my first iteration to include eyes with my Romany travellers. They are silent observers of what is happening to them.

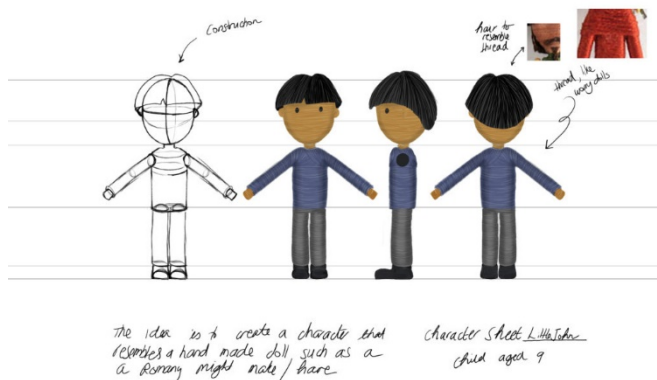


Figure 15 Ramsay, Emily, *Little John* Character Design, 2020.



Figure 16 Ramsay, Emily, *Little John*, 2020. 3D Character.

<sup>34</sup> Hayao Miyazaki, *Sen to Chihiro No Kamikakushi*, Animation, Adventure, Family (Tokuma Shoten, Studio Ghibli, Nippon Television Network (NTV), 2001).



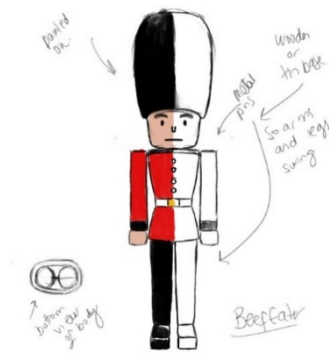


Figure 17 Ramsay, Emily, Beefeater Character Design, 2020.



Figure 18 Ramsay, Emily, Beefeater and Little John, 2020. 3D Character.

I played with the concept of somehow incorporating traditional Romany art styles, such as the painted wagons called Vardo in the Romany language. This led me to create my Vardo using 3D modelling techniques within Autodesk Maya, crafting the wagon base, then using Pixologic Zbrush to craft carved wood panelling in keeping with similar style caravans. To create a Vardo close to one that my grandmother lived, I consulted books on the different styles of wagons to reproduce my version as faithfully as possible. I crafted the wood panelling based on the sketches I made inspired by the gold earrings that my Grandmother gave me. These are the earrings that my grandfather gave to her when they were courting.



Figure 19 Violet Matthews' earrings, 2021. Photo.



Figure 20 Idea Sketch, 2021. Pencil sketch.

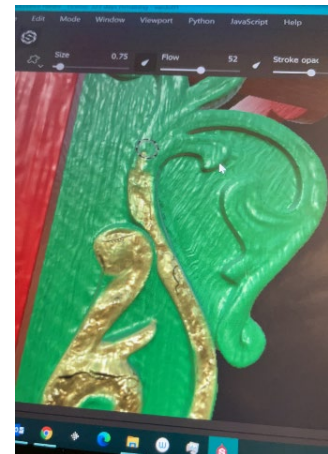


Figure 21 3D model, 2021. Digital art.

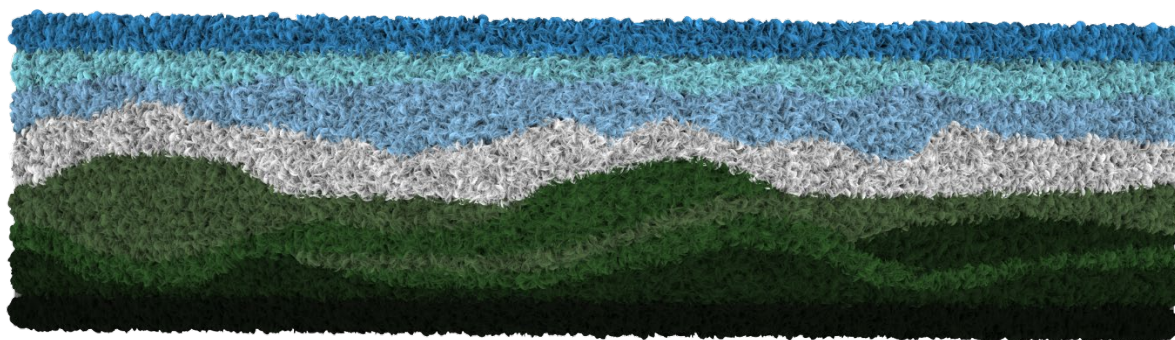


*Figure 22 Ramsay, Emily. Vardo, 2021. 3D model.*

Another object that I was keen to reproduce and use in my work are the rag carpets that my granny taught me to make. Romany heritage is often an assortment of cultures, much like how offcuts from rags are bought together to create something beautiful. I felt that using items such as these adds to the themes that I have woven through my narrative, using it as an overarching metaphor throughout my work.



*Figure 23 Ramsay, Emily. Hills, 2001. Rag carpet.*



*Figure 24 Ramsay, Emily. Rag Carpet, 2021. 3D model.*





*Figure 25 Ramsay, Emily. Rag Carpet, 2021. 3D model.*

It was leaning into this creative process and trusting that it would lead me in the right direction. By breaking my animated documentary down into segments, I could dive right in without becoming overwhelmed with the scope of what I was trying to achieve.

I narrowed my vision to focus on a section of my audio interview with my father that I felt spoke to the research I conducted surrounding the English government's forced sedentary action they took against the travellers. The following extract sent shivers down my spine, and I knew I had found my lynchpin:

“They moved us all into ex-army barracks, which was Eerie Camp. It was actually an old prisoner of war camp and still had all the old dungeons, and what they done was turn it into a dump. It was a massive great big dump that they were landfilling to be able to build on. So, while they were doing that, now you imagine, dump trucks coming tipping rubbish everywhere, and then they put us, gypsies, there (pause) next to a dump. (Pause) and when I look back on it now, it was bloody disgusting.”

John Matthews

From the few photos I had seen and the description from my father, a picture started to form in my head, one vastly different from the usual family stopping places. I still want to create my animated documentary with 3D animation, but it is vital to veer the visual aspects towards a tactile and textured landscape.

Due to my desire to create my characters, I have begun to research children's toys and particular ways toys have been animated. I wanted to avoid the 'crisp' feel of Pixar's *Toy*

*Story*<sup>35</sup> or Warner Animation Group's *Lego Movies*.<sup>36</sup> I desire my animation to have a darker feel, more in the vision of stop motion animated films by the Quay Brothers's 1989 '*Street of Crocodiles*',<sup>37</sup> Henry Selick's 2009 animation '*Coraline*'<sup>38</sup> and the 2009 Czech film by Jirí Barta and Vivian Schilling '*Toys in the Attic*'.<sup>39</sup>

A significant theme that links these animations is stop motion. I think I am drawn to stop motion because of the link between the animator and the medium. Stop motion is a hands-on art form, where the animator's hands are closely linked to the model and the appearance of motion.

Stop motion is a method of animating in which a camera takes a series of single frames, moving an object incrementally between each frame so that when played in sequence, the inanimate object has the appearance of motion. I am also drawn to the materiality of this medium, and that stop motion uses real objects versus digitally generated ones. Creating my characters allows me greater creative freedom to sculpt a cast that best reflects the message I am trying to portray. As my sequences develop, so does my characters, and with this development, it means giving them a mouth and a voice of their own.

While I was developing my animated characters, the look and style of what I was achieving started to take shape through an iterative design process. Once I had moved on to the third character, 'Dolly', a distinct look emerged.

---

<sup>35</sup> John Lasseter, *Toy Story*, Animation, Adventure, Comedy (Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios, 1996).

<sup>36</sup> Christopher Miller and Phil Lord, *The Lego Movie*, Animation, Action, Adventure (Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, RatPac-Dune Entertainment, 2014).

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Quay, Timothy Quay, and Weiser Quay, *Street of Crocodiles*, Animation, Short (Atelier Koninck, British Film Institute (BFI), Channel Four Television, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> Henry Selick, *Coraline*, Animation, Drama, Family, Fantasy, Thriller (Focus Features, Laika Entertainment, Pandemonium, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Jirí Barta and Vivian Schilling, *Na Pude Aneb Kdo Má Dneska Narozeniny?*, Animation, Family, Fantasy, Thriller (Bio Illusion, At Armz, Česká Televize, 2009).

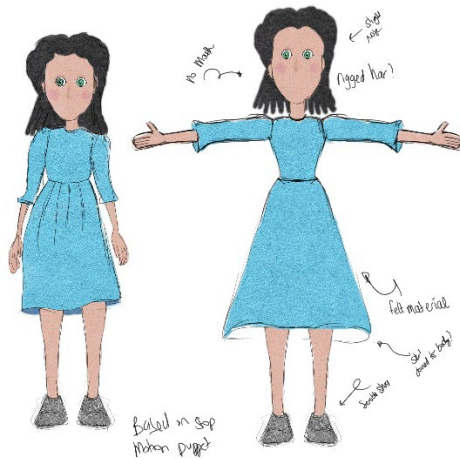


Figure 26 Ramsay, Emily. Dolly Character Design, 2020. Digital art.



Figure 27 Ramsay, Emily. Dolly 3D Character, 2021. 3D model.

This version of my character ended up having a mouth. However, when I started designing this asset, I had no intention of using the inability to talk as a narrative device. Once I had seen ‘Dolly’ completed in 3-D space, I returned to that idea, so this version of Dolly I painted a mouth onto her, but still didn’t give her the ability to speak for herself.



Figure 28 Ramsay, Emily. Little John version 2 character Design, 2021. Digital art.



Figure 29 Ramsay, Emily. Dolly Character progress screenshot, 2021. 3D Model.

The final iteration of my character 'Little John' came about while continuing research into ragdoll types. I drew the new Little John's new body keeping in mind the range of motion I would need him to perform in my animated documentary.



*Figure 30 Ramsay, Emily. Little John version 2 character with Vardo toy, 2021. Digital art.*

This version of Little John includes eyes that can move and blink and a mouth that can change shape and speak for himself as my narrative grows.

The decision to create a mouth for Little John was inspired after speaking with my daughter about her experience as Romany New Zealand. I realised that while Romany of the past had no say in being removed from living a nomadic lifestyle, we now have a platform to speak of our experiences, and how we are perceived affects us.

When I was creating the first iteration of Little John, I felt like the character did not hit the mark with what I wanted to convey in my documentary. While it did serve the stylised imagery I am aiming for, it lacked versatility when animated. After interviewing my daughter, I felt that I needed to create an additional character for her. Violette is incredibly articulate, and I wanted to capture this in my work in a way that demonstrates how thoroughly she has embraced her Romany heritage.

From this idea, I found a doll with the characteristics I wanted to imbue my animated character with and based 'Little Vi's' 3D self on this.





Figure 31 Ragdoll model, 2021. Ragdoll.



Figure 32 Ramsay, Emily. Little Vi character design, 2021. Digital art.



Figure 33 Ramsay, Emily. Little Vi, 2021. 3D Character.

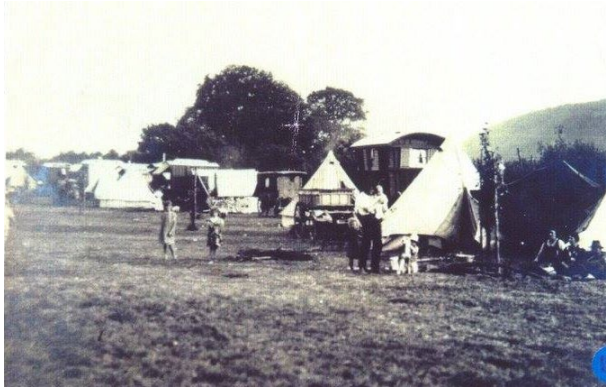


Figure 34 Ramsay, Emily. Little Vi face detail, 2021. 3D Character.

Little Vi includes features that will ensure the character can act out a range of expressions and give voice to this part of the narrative, including eyes that can close and a mouth that can be used to animate my daughter's voice.

The different living situations the Romany of my family have had over generations are woven into my documentary narrative. When the Romany first left northern India sometime between

the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, they did so on foot. Romany did not adopt wagons until the 1850s.<sup>40</sup>



*Figure 35, Selborne Camp, Hampshire, Ketchers Field. Hop pickers for Lord Selborne on Blackmoore Estate. Family photo collection.*



*Figure 36 Rosena Keet and family, and the Light Family. Camping near Alton Selborne, Hampshire. Family photo collection.*

In the early 1960s, the Hampshire council in the UK passed an ordinance for the regularly used stopping places for the travellers to be closed down and made it difficult for the farmers who would regularly offer field space to families to continue doing so. Travellers could only use designated areas to stop, and most families were forced into camps. As already discussed in this document, Thomas A. Acton discusses how academia has played a part in reinforcing harmful stereotypes and the systemic romanticised view of Romany Culture.<sup>41</sup>

The importance of the living situations are a pivotal plot point in my work, and to demonstrate this point, I have recreated the living situations in my animated documentary.

---

<sup>40</sup> 'Gypsy Roma Traveller History and Culture'.

<sup>41</sup> Acton, 'Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society'.



Figure 37 Ramsay, Emily. Reading Vardo, 2021. 3D Model.



Figure 38 Ramsay, Emily. Camp Hut with Little John, 2021. 3D Model.



Figure 39 Henry, Billy, and Joe Matthews. Family photo collection.



Figure 40 John Matthews with Sister Brenda at Hollywater campsite. Family photo collection.



I modelled the house I lived in England based on my memories rather than a faithful reconstruction. As my animated documentary deals with memories, the creation of my assets aligns more to the way things can be altered in our minds when we look back on things.

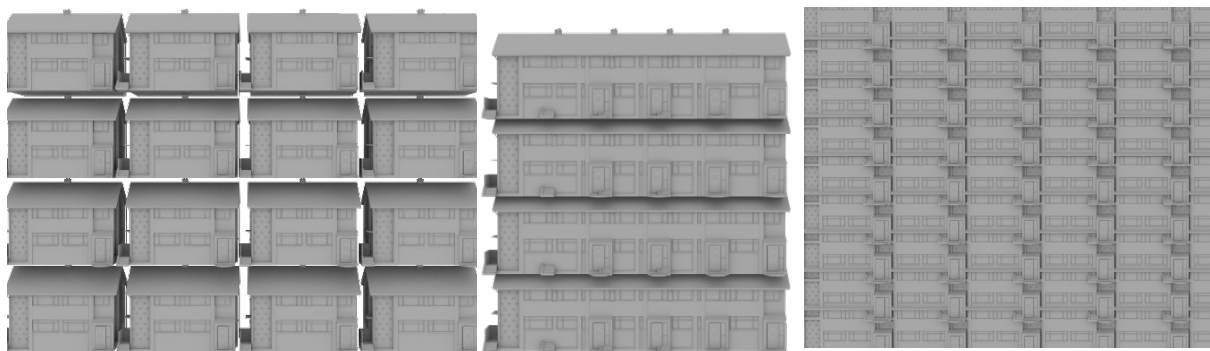
I am using these dwellings as a place where my narrative is set and part of the main plot, using the reproduction of the brick housing, divorced from nature and vastly different from the Vardo.



*Figure 41 screenshot of 167 Hazelton Way, 2021. Screen shot from Google Earth.*



*Figure 42 Ramsay, Emily. 167 Hazelton Way, 2021. 3D Model.*



*Figure 43 Ramsay, Emily. 167 Hazelton Way, 2021. 3D Model simulation tests.*



Throughout the iterative production and design process, I have had to remind myself to trust in the process itself and the conclusion it will take me to. These are the times where my research methods have become paramount in the process. Data analysis is valuable in describing the data I have collected, categorising where this fits, how I can interoperate it, and where I can apply it in my documentary. Working on this in a ‘timely manner’,<sup>42</sup> as suggested in Gjoko Muratovski’s *Research for Designers*, using my online journal to take my notes, has helped shape the ongoing process.



Figure 44 Britannia James’ headstone. Family photo collection.

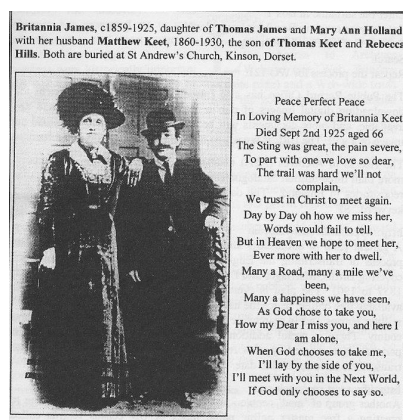


Figure 45 Britannia James and Matthew Keet, my great-great Grandparents. Family photo collection.



Figure 46 Ramsay, Emily. Recreation of the headstone, 2021. 3D Model.

Part of my story speaks of my great-great-grandmother Britannia Keet, and in particular, her headstone. The poetry that adorns her grave marker is poignant and speaks of both the loss her husband Matthew felt after her passing, the hard life they lived together, and the joy that came from lifelong love. To illustrate this, I recreated a grave marker for my documentary.

I had a dream where my granny gave me a bird in a small cage; when I woke up, I wrote this dream down and then re-created the bird and cage using Maya and substance painter. I used the bird, the Pied Wagtail. It is also known as the ‘Gypsy Bird’ as it is said it has a nomadic lifestyle, much like the Romany people it was named after.<sup>43</sup> I made the bird a wooden pull

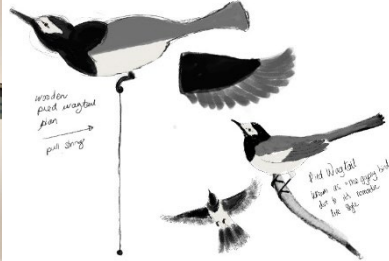
<sup>42</sup> Muratovski, *Research for Designers*.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Pied Wagtail...The Gypsy Bird’, accessed 24 June 2021, <https://www.novareinna.com/romani/wagtail.html>.

bird, like the birds given to my brother by my Romany grandfather. They once hung in my brother's room; they now hang in my daughter's room.



*Figure 47 Wooden Bird. Family photo collection.*



*Figure 48 Ramsay, Emily. Wooden bird plan, 2021. Digital art.*



*Figure 49 Ramsay, Emily. Caged Bird, 2021. 3D Model.*

## Discussion



Figure 50 Ramsay, Emily. Still from *Many a mile*, 2021. 3D Animation.



Figure 51 Ramsay, Emily. Still from *Many a mile*, 2021. 3D Animation.

Even when my thought process seemed blocked, I continued to do the one thing: stay active and engaged in the Romany community. Through various social media channels, my eyes opened to the different lived experiences of Romany across the globe. As vastly spread out as Romany are, the one subject that underpins our culture is the portrayal of our people in media.

The inability to explain my heritage without resulting in overused tropes started to bother me in a way that is hard to articulate even now. I am a fortunate person in many ways, both in the luck of birth and the country where I live. The crux of my problem that I have struggled with is how I do service to a people who have such different lived experiences but essentially suffer from the same negative stereotype.

The internet, this invisible highway, connects us in a way our ancestors could never comprehend. It has been a tool that has reconnected us to the family we left behind. It has created a lens through which I can see the difference between the life we had there and how we live now. (A gilded cage is still a cage) When my father's family were corralled into a sedentary lifestyle, removed from their homes on wheels and funnelled into a housing estate, 'for their own good,' he said it was like they had their legs cut off.

Any time we have our way of life removed from us, it causes resentment and anger. These feelings do not go away overnight, they take generations to dissipate, and even then, they

leave us with this remnant of inherited trauma. When you belong to a race with the longevity of the status 'most discriminated' ethnicity, it results in a lot to sort through.

All Romany are Rom, but not all Rom are Romany. Not all Romany are travellers; not all travellers are Romany. Sometimes I feel like I have to shoulder the responsibility of speaking on behalf of my entire race, which is ridiculous as it sounds. How can I speak for people I feel I am not a part of? How much of this discrimination applies to me? How much of the negative media attention that being Gypsy garners causes me to suffer?

As it applies to me right now, the short answer is: It does not; unless I open my mouth and tell people about my heritage to people who already carry preconceived notions of what a Gypsy is.

## **The Narrative**

One thread I have struggled with was creating work that was authentic, a story that would teach the viewer something about our own lived experience, leaving them to question their own constructed ideals about the Romany people while at the same time not trying to provide answers. The discrimination that Romany face is widespread. We all have different lived experience. Romany and travellers across the globe have differing opinions on the word gypsy and the systemic problems that face their communities.

I am left very satisfied with the interviews I conducted with my father and daughter. With techniques learned during the early stages of the master's process, I talked with my family members in a way that engaged their own inherent storying telling ability, without my voice eclipsing their own.

Starting from the interviews, I conducted with my father, I worked out the narrative structure. The audio inspired the idea to use the voices of three generations of our family, juxtaposed to the narrative from my father and developed to express to a broader audience our relationship to our Romany identity.

The final iteration of the audio focused on two points, my father's family being moved into housing and three generations of school experience. I chose this way of composing the story to emphasise the message I want to tell my viewer. While it meant cutting anecdotes that

have meaning and value for our family, they would have distracted from the central message of my animated documentary.

### **Setting the scene**

Throughout my research, my final animation has filtered through many stages. At the start, my relationship to my ethnicity was vast, much larger than the scope of a Masters project. I have honed my narrative with time and the iterative design process, condensing it down to the most critical aspects I want to convey.

The primary visual point that has been upheld is the use of tactile texturing within the 3D medium. Considering my assets have been paramount, both in terms of stylistic value and authenticity, my story needs to portray our lived experience honestly.

To truly set the scene for a viewer and imbue that story with truth, I started with the narrative for the audio. It was tempting to include every anecdote captured from my father and daughter's audio interview. For the sake of clarity and ensuring that our story has the maximum impact, I cleared a path for the important narrative themes to shine, arranging the voices of our three generations in a way that complemented and reinforced how negative stereotypes and discrimination have affected us all.

### **Storyboard Development**

Once the narrative for my animation was complete, I applied myself in earnest to creation the accompanying visuals. As discussed by Bill Nichols, slotted into the different modes of documentary storytelling lends itself to three distinct storytelling methods.<sup>44</sup>

My father's commentary is acted out by my 3D character Little John, in which Little John acts out his part of the story as if he is living my father's life when living in the old army barracks.

---

<sup>44</sup> Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary, Third Edition*.

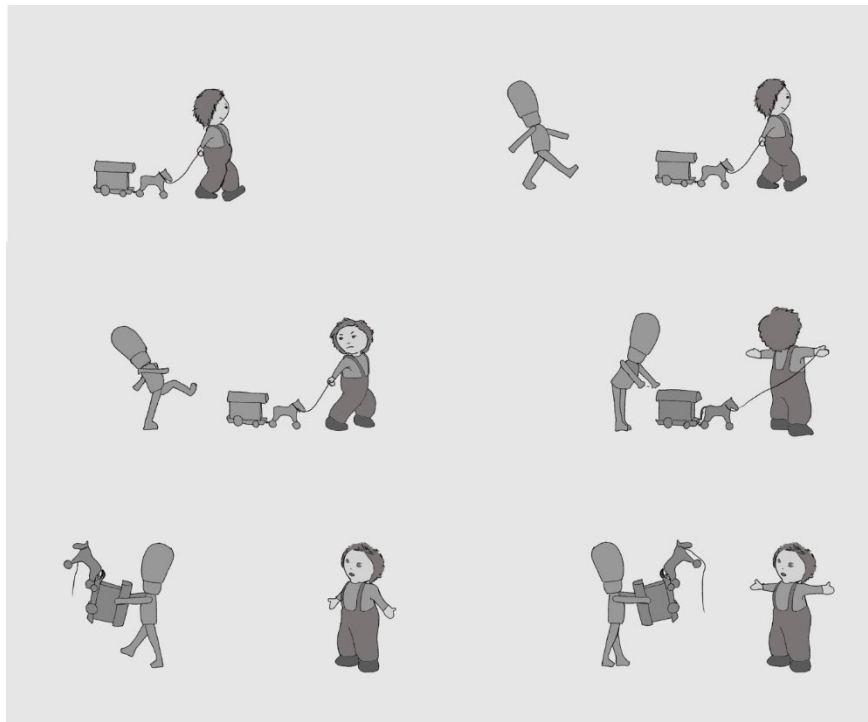


Figure 52 Ramsay, Emily. Storyboard from *Many a mile*, 2021. Digital art.

I choose a poetic theme for my documentary's overarching narrative, experimentally incorporating my voice without using a 3D effigy of myself.

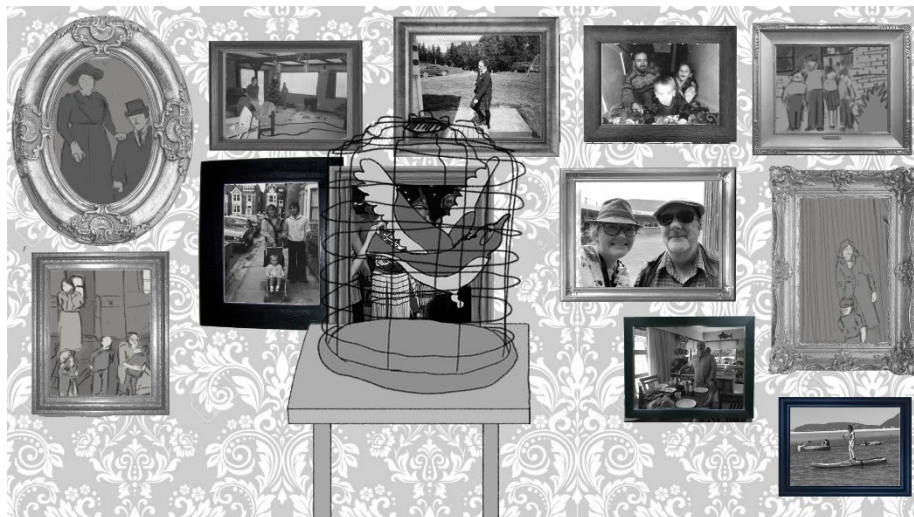
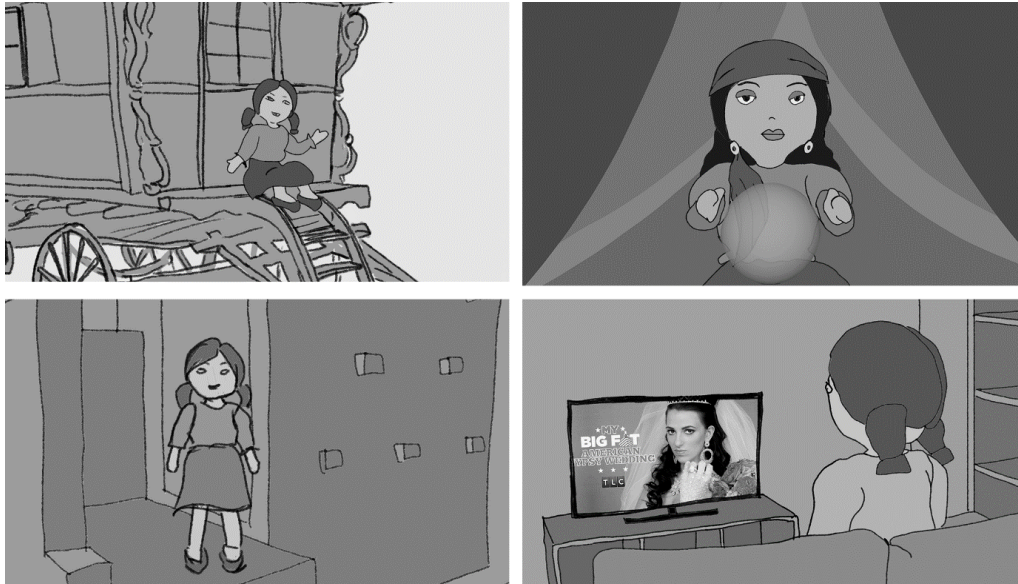


Figure 53 Ramsay, Emily. Storyboard from *Many a mile*, 2021. Digital art.



To portray the voice of my daughter Violette, I am using the character rig I have created called ‘Little Vi’. As articulate as Violette is, I knew her character needed to talk directly to the audience, which is why I ensured the character design was versatile enough to be able to speak.



*Figure 54 Ramsay, Emily. Storyboard from Many a mile, 2021. Digital art*

## Conclusion

The journey to the end of my master's research felt like it mirrored any journey a Romany might venture on. While the animation I imagined at the start has the same essence, the result is vastly different and improved because of learning along the path.

I set out to investigate how animation can evoke a sense of identity of what it is like to be of Romany descent living in New Zealand. I intended to use my family's lived experience to underpin the effects of romanticised notions and negative stereotypes on three generations. Through my research and reading, I concluded that the most effective way to deliver my story would be in the form of a documentary, using the writing of Bill Nichols to help guide the narrative construction. I discovered it was not simply just a matter of asking my Father questions and laying it under some animations. To create a film that would stay with people, the message had to be concise and structured in a way that would lead the viewer to learn a

perspective they most likely had not considered and leave them asking themselves how they might shift their preconceptions.

At the end of my masters, I finally understood the value of practice-based research. It is easy to get lost reading research papers, but the real magic happens when you construct something tangible. I felt uplifted when I played the final audio track for my animation for friends and family, especially those who have no first-hand experience of what it means to be of Romany descent. Using autoethnographic research methods has enabled me to connect to our story in a way an outsider never could.

The saturation of '*reality TV*', those of interest featuring travelling families, have generated plenty of negative media attention. The methodology of hermeneutics was a valuable method of assessing these resources in terms of the effects they have on my own family.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks I encountered was maintaining the scope of my project. There is so much discourse surrounding Romany and Travellers and so many avenues to follow. I had to constantly pull myself back from spilling out into more complex issues facing Romany communities. I cannot say this was wasted research, or time, as it has opened up avenues to other much-needed research. Romany people have been subjected to others best intentions and often ended up worse off. It is vitally important that we encourage more Romany scholars to create discourse and generate content that creates discussions that benefit our ethnicity positively.

I would like to think that my work has added to academia positively and the way we are perceived. I would like to envision a world where we do not need to resort to stereotyped notions of what a Gypsy is when we explain we are Romany. I want to live in a world where Romany has its own ethnicity box and does not have to be accompanied by an explanation.

I may have travelled many a road, many a mile, but there is still much further to go. For now, I can direct enquiring minds to my animation and say this is a small slice of what it feels like for us to be Romany living in New Zealand.



## References

- Acton, Thomas A. 'Scientific Racism, Popular Racism and the Discourse of the Gypsy Lore Society'. *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 39, no. 7 (June 2016): 1187–1204.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1105988>.
- Barta, Jirí, and Vivian Schilling. *Na Pude Aneb Kdo Má Dneska Narozeniny?* Animation, Family, Fantasy, Thriller. Bio Illusion, At Armz, Česká Televize, 2009.
- Blair, Jeremy Michael. 'Animated Autoethnographies: Stop Motion Animation as a Tool for Self-Inquiry and Personal Evolution'. *Art Education* 67, no. 2 (March 2014): 6–13.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2014.11519259>.
- Bochner, Arthur P., and Carolyn Ellis. *Evocative Autoethnography : Writing Lives and Telling Stories*. Writing Lives: Ethnographic Narratives: 17. Routledge, 2016.
- Brylla, Catalin, and Mette Kramer. *Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film*. *Cognitive Theory and Documentary Film*, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90332-3>.
- Callus, Paula. 'Animation as Socio-Political Commentary: An Analysis of the Animated Films of Congolese Director Jean Michel Kibushi'. *Journal of African Media Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 2010): 55–71. <https://doi.org/10.1386/jams.2.1.55/1>.
- Ehrlich, Nea. 'Conflicting Realisms: Animated Documentaries in the Post-Truth Era'. *Studies in Documentary Film* 15, no. 1 (March 2021): 20–40.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17503280.2019.1663718>.
- Goodman, Simon, and Lottie Rowe. "'Maybe It Is Prejudice ... but It Is NOT Racism": Negotiating Racism in Discussion Forums about Gypsies.' *Discourse & Society* 25, no. 1 (January 2014): 32.
- The Traveller Movement. 'Gypsy Roma Traveller History and Culture'. Accessed 24 June 2021. <https://travellermovement.org.uk/about/gypsy-roma-traveller-history-and-culture>.
- Honess Roe, Annabelle. *Animated Documentary*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=1249631>.
- Kibushi, Jean-Michel. *Black September in Kinshasa / Kinshasa, Septembre Noir*, 1991.  
<https://www.africanfilmny.org/2012/black-september-in-kinshasa-kinshasa-septembre-noir/>.
- Kurylo, Anastacia. *Negotiating Group Identity in the Research Process : Are You In or Are You Out?* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016.

- <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1372771&site=eds-live>.
- Lasseter, John. *Toy Story*. Animation, Adventure, Comedy. Walt Disney Pictures, Pixar Animation Studios, 1996.
- McCay, Winsor, and Winsor McCay. *The Sinking of the Lusitania*. Animation, Short, War. Universal Film Manufacturing Company, 1918.
- Miller, Christopher, and Phil Lord. *The Lego Movie*. Animation, Action, Adventure. Warner Bros., Village Roadshow Pictures, RatPac-Dune Entertainment, 2014.
- Miyazaki, Hayao. *Sen to Chihiro No Kamikakushi*. Animation, Adventure, Family. Tokuma Shoten, Studio Ghibli, Nippon Television Network (NTV), 2001.
- Moger, Laine. 'Facebook Cracks the Whip on Kiwis Using the Term "Gypsy"'. *Stuff*, 3 February 2019. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/110310307/facebook-cracks-the-whip-on-kiwis-using-the-term-gypsy>.
- Muratovski, Gjoko. *Research for Designers : A Guide to Methods and Practice*. Sage Publications, 2016.
- My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*. Accessed 16 September 2018.  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1836351/>.
- Nichols, Bill. *Introduction to Documentary, Third Edition*. Bloomington, UNITED STATES: Indiana University Press, 2017.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aut/detail.action?docID=4813367>.
- 'Pied Wagtail...The Gypsy Bird'. Accessed 24 June 2021.  
<https://www.novareinna.com/romani/wagtail.html>.
- Quay, Stephen, Timothy Quay, and Weiser Quay. *Street of Crocodiles*. Animation, Short. Atelier Koninck, British Film Institute (BFI), Channel Four Television, 1989.
- Selick, Henry. *Coraline*. Animation, Drama, Family, Fantasy, Thriller. Focus Features, Laika Entertainment, Pandemonium, 2009.
- Trousdale, Gary, and Kirk Wise. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Animation. Walt Disney Pictures, 1996. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0116583/>.
- Yilmaz, Laura. *Places Other People Have Lived*, 2011.  
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2124019/>.
- Yoshida, Kaori. 'Animation and "Otherness" : The Politics of Gender, Racial, and Ethnic Identity in the World of Japanese Anime'. University of British Columbia, 2008.  
<https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0067003>.

## Appendices

Appendix A: Research output, animated documentary.

Title: Many a mile

Dimensions: 1280x720

Materials: Autodesk Maya, Pixologic ZBrush, Adobe Substance Painter,  
Adobe Audition, Adobe After Effects, Adobe Premiere, Adobe Photoshop,  
Maxon Redshift.

Duration: 7.21m

Date: 11/08/2021