

Urban Loneliness

Project 05-09

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Objective

The main idea of our project is to highlight the irony in our current, modern society where despite the numerous masses of people, there is no interaction at all. We depict this through shots of intimate, yet often overlooked and forgotten sights around us.

Basing around the theme of “Shields and Barriers”, the already fine line between the modernity of a country, a shield meant to offer protection, and the barrier which prevents people from exploring or reaching something, which in this case is emotional connection, is further blurred.

Artist Inspirations

American Painter

Theme- Edward Hopper

Considered one of the most prolific artists whose works deal with a clear and intense mood of urban loneliness, Edward Hopper was one of our artistic references. His use of saturated colors against a lifeless scene, the subject matter's restless form and posture, and effective use of negative space in his compositions helped us understand how to better depict the feeling of urban loneliness and was thus one of our artistic inspirations

Hopper's contrast of saturated, often lively and warm colors like oranges and yellows with cooler, neutral colors inspired us to discover how colors could connote urban loneliness, such as grey and blue



Early Sunday Morning, Edward Hopper, 1930



Office in a Small City, Edward Hopper, 1953



Nighthawks, Edward Hopper, 1942

Artist Inspirations

Photography & Aesthetics- Harry Gruyaert

Dutch Photographer

Known for his use of colors in his photographs, some of his photographs convey a sense of desolation and isolation through the use of high contrasts in the background, as well as high contrasts between the background and the subject matter. The harsh desaturation and treatment of the subjects strip it of life and makes it a silhouette, and the use of empty space and angles further convey the sense of loneliness



Las Vegas airport, Nevada, USA, 1982, Harry Gruyaert, 1982



COOL COLORS

Harry Gruyaert

Ostend, Belgium, 1988

Ostend, Belgium, 1988, Harry Gruyaert, 1988

A person wearing a face mask and glasses is sitting on a staircase, looking out a window. The person is wearing a dark tank top and has their arms crossed. The staircase is made of concrete and has a metal railing on the left side. The background is a bright window, and the overall scene is dimly lit.

Ideation Process

Overall experimentation

Preliminarily, to explore the idea of urban loneliness, our group did some experimentations regarding ideas on it, consisting of the background and medium

Background

We tried experimenting with multiple different forms of backgrounds. These included fantastical, abstract and realistic backgrounds to try and test out the moods each of them created

Ultimately we went with realistic backgrounds as they are the most accessible and recognizable as urban loneliness to better convey our theme. The fantastical background may help contrast liveliness with lifelessness but may turn our artworks into a depiction of loneliness instead, and we disliked the appearance of more abstract backgrounds as they felt harder to relate to with viewers



Medium

We had tried using multiple different mediums to depict our scenes. These primarily included copic markers, charcoal, fineliners and colored pencils for the depiction of main subject matter. We decided to use watercolors for the background due to its more transient feel to it.

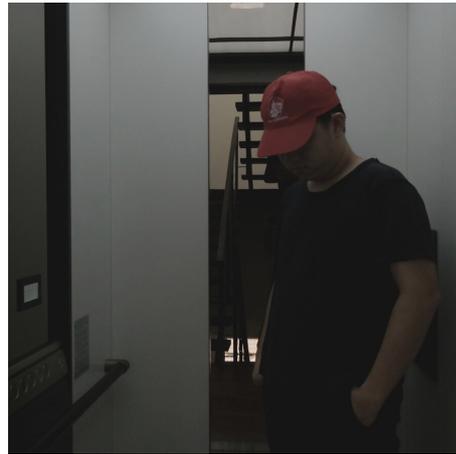
We eventually decided to stop using colour pencils as we wanted to make our subject matter desaturated in comparison to the colored background. Charcoal seemed unfeasible as it would smudge heavily with watercolor.



The initial idea

The making of a quadriptych

At first, our group wanted to create a quadriptych to present daily societal scenes of urban loneliness. We wanted to make the quadriptych such that it could be viewed as a set of individual works, but also a loose narrative of the way back home. The locations planned were from a void deck, to a lift and two scenes at home



This was our chosen draft as a quadriptych to be sketched. The darker tone and desaturation adds a mood of desolation and loneliness to the photographs, and the panels zoom closer and closer to the subject matter to make it more visceral which we felt made the panels effective and appropriate

Sketches

These were some of the preliminary sketches that we did in the preparation of our quadriptych, using a mix of watercolor and fine liners, and watercolor and copic markers respectively. These were the depictions of the scene at the void deck and the kitchen at home respectively.



Scene at the void deck



Scene at the kitchen of a home

Consideration

While the quadriptych was an appealing initial idea, we eventually decided to scrap it due to a number of reasons:

- While there are multiple demographics depicted which makes urban loneliness seem universal, we decided that it was still unable to capture the gist of it due to each panel only being 30 centimeters by 30 centimeters and is less immersive
- The depictions were not realistic enough as compared to other mediums like photography. Realism and reality is a must in our artwork, in order for our viewer to be able to empathise with the subject matter well

Subsequent idea

Photography

Our second idea was to create a website featuring photographs that we have taken to display them as either a collection categorized by locations such as at home, staircases, eateries and public transport, or as a photo-narrative to let the stills tell a mini story about urban loneliness in a city

We had created mood boards to feature the overall aesthetic of our website as well as the mood of photographs we were aiming for



This was a mood board we had created to feature urban loneliness and convey it through colors and composition

Consideration

We ultimately decided to weigh the pros and cons of the idea of a photo-narrative or a collection

Pros:

- The medium of photography was able to capture reality and societal scenes effectively to make the mood of urban loneliness effective
- The photographs could be conveniently edited to enhance its appearance and make it more immersive

Cons:

- The idea of a collection of photographic stills seemed too plain or mundane
- There was an idea around a photographic collection being 'low-effort' or simply taking pictures
- A series of photographs may not tell a story effectively and do not seem as 'man-made' as drawings
- We did not feel an overall inclination or connection towards featuring a series of photographs as they may be immersive, but too much of them may take the novelty away and desensitize viewers to urban loneliness

Therefore, while we liked the idea of a photography series or photographic narrative at first, we decided to try and search for a better medium

Final idea

Film

The final idea that we made and stuck to was that of creating a film depicting urban loneliness. We decided to shoot a loose narrative of the life of a student, starting from the morning to night as there would be ample opportunities to explore urban loneliness not only in private spaces but also in the school campus

We felt that a film could accurately portray reality and time, an aspect photography lacked. This helped make the artwork more immersive and engaging

Shots and ideas

We wanted the film to depict urban loneliness from a myriad of locations, making it seem constant throughout a home, public transport as well as in school, as well as make the film start and end with a same scene to make the urban loneliness seem like a never ending loop and a repeat of the same processes

We first created a shot-list to ideate possible scenes:

1. Shot of person waking up
2. Hallway to classroom
3. Classroom in the morning
4. Classroom in the afternoon
5. Hallway to canteen
6. In the canteen eating
7. At bus stop waiting
8. Walking home
9. Put bag down at home
10. Lie down on couch
11. Walking up stairs
12. Cooking a meal
13. Dining
14. Lie down on the bed, look into the sky
15. Shot of person waking up

Apart from the shot-list, we also had certain ideas for transition scenes such as:

1. Plain scenery
2. Bleak architecture
3. Structures, natural or manmade, juxtaposed against vast sky
4. Actor in a large area

These aimed to make an overall mood of loneliness while diminishing the presence of the actor

Storyboarding

We created a rough storyboard of the main shots in our film

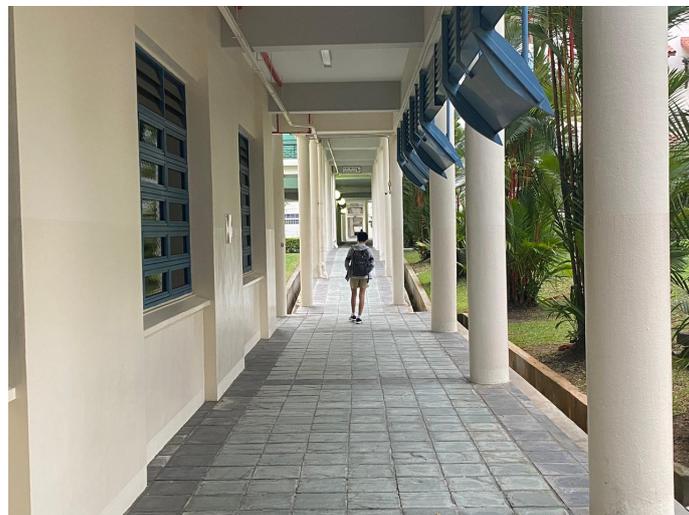


Location scouting

We went around our school campus to try and search for possible locations to film in which connote a strong sense of loneliness



Searching for filming locations in the canteen



All three of these shots were eventually scrapped

Composition and colour

We tried out different shot sizes, such as close-up shots or wide shots, as well as shots of different angles, some were normal angle while some were top-down. We also tried different white balances and lighting to see how different colors may affect the feel of the shots



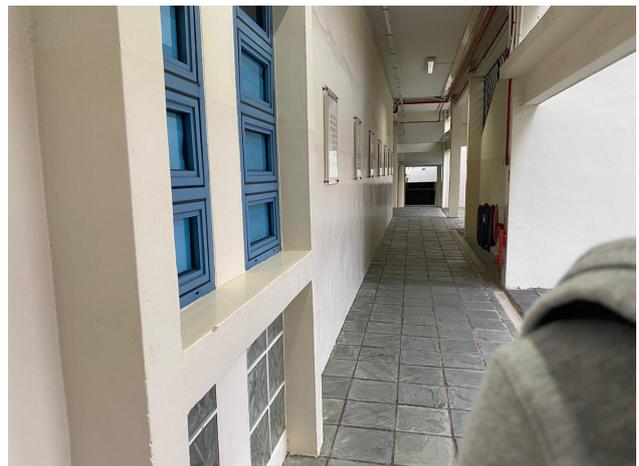
Top down shot in the classroom



Close-up shot in the classroom



Front shot in a hallway



Over the shoulder shot in a hallway



Close up, low angle shot in a hallway



Wide angle shot in a hallway

Challenges

Some challenges we faced included having to retake certain shots due to an incorrect look of it, which could have been a result of colour gradings that looked weird, a poor choice of background as well as too much distractions or lighting in the background

Certain shots were even scrapped



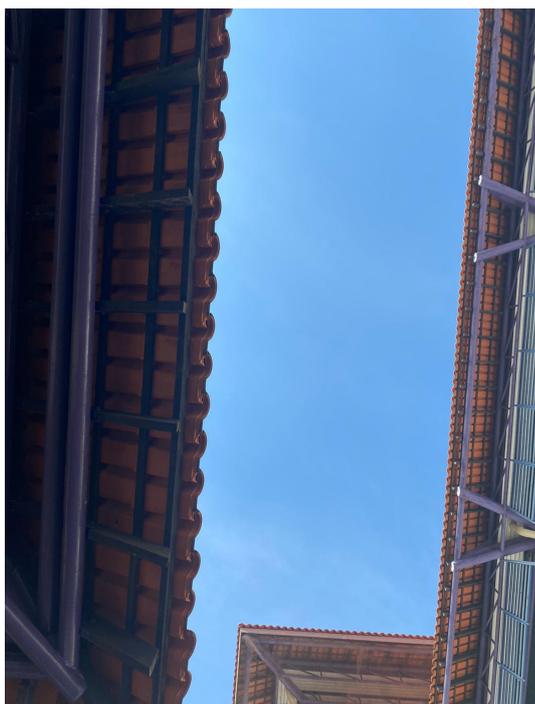
This shot had to be edited in post-production using colour grading. The ISO at the time of taking it was too low which resulted in the shots being too dark, therefore it lacked clarity

On top of that, certain shots were deleted on further brainstorming as a group. These shots were namely:

1. Actor taking a shower to change into uniform
2. Actor brushing his teeth

These shots were scrapped as we felt that they did not help in depicting urban loneliness

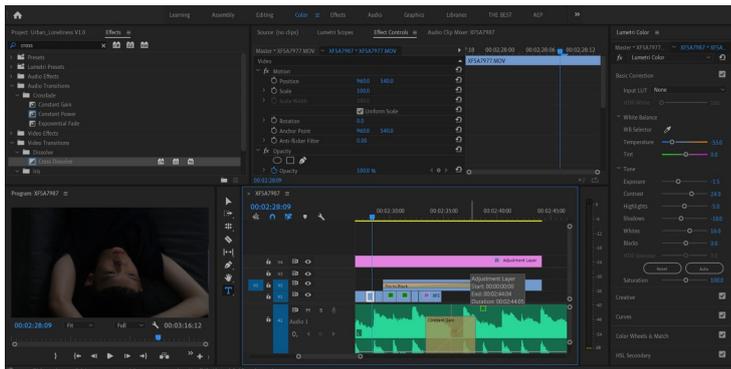
We also decided to remove and forgo the shots of scenery and architecture in the film as they created too huge and jarring a contrast with the overall film



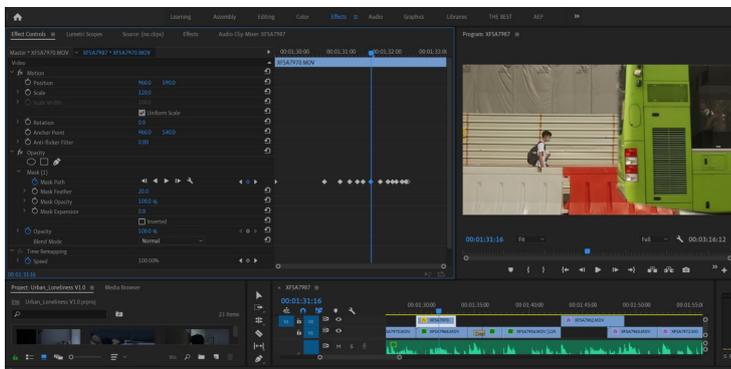
These were certain pictures of architecture and scenery in the school grounds

Post-production

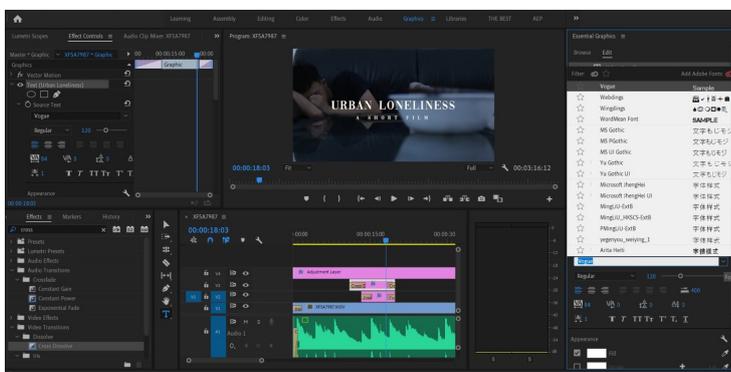
Our post-production editing process was divided into three main portions. We first linked the shots to make our full film before colour grading certain shots so they match clearer moods of urban loneliness or looked clearer. We also used colour grading so certain shots appeared more coherent in terms of warmer or cooler colors. Next we masked a certain series of shots of the main character heading home which made the shot looked like it was taken in one shot from one location to the next with the presence of transportation like a bus and lorry to help transition the shots from one to another. Last but not least, we also decided on a font to use to display our title. In our discussions, we wanted the font to look sleek and modern to bring an urban feel to it



Color grading shots so there is greater contrast between the subject matter and background for visibility



Masking the two shots for a smooth transition



Choosing a suitable font for our title

A photograph of a person sitting on a wooden chair, viewed from the side. They are wearing a dark, patterned top and a necklace. A large, patterned bag is draped over the chair's back. In the background, a window with a dark frame looks out onto a bright outdoor scene with trees and a building. To the right, a white wall with a decorative pattern is visible. The overall lighting is soft and natural.

Reflections

Personal reflections

Oftentimes, I tended to do my artworks alone where I depicted my own thoughts and feelings, but this project was enriching in its chance to let me collaborate with three other groupmates. We often had the opportunity to bounce ideas off of each other and compromise while communicating to figure out how to get out of any troubles we may be facing, such as difficulties in ideating or expanding our current motives for the work, as well as how to improve our artworks as a whole when we listen to each other's honest feedback and opinions. Additionally, I also had to manage my time better from this project by balancing my other responsibilities.

- Wei En 3i4 (13)

Coursework was an interesting experience. I used to only do art alone, however, coursework forced me to work together with my group members. We had to learn to communicate well with each other to come up with new ideas and solutions to problems. As coursework is done in a group, it was harder to find a time when all 4 of us were available to shoot. As a result, I had to better manage my time for this project and my other commitments. I also had to set priorities on what I would spend more or less time on.

- Bingqi 3i1 (29)

I found that this coursework was a very fresh experience for me. I have always done art by myself rather than as a project work, and certainly a fresh experience for me. Because of all the other commitments that we all had, such as HRP and exams, we found it very hard to pull out time to actually work on our project. As a result, I had to make a lot of sacrifices and work on what really were the more important things I was working forward to. In this way, not only did it help to make clear what my goals were, it also helped me to develop resilience and better management skills. It also gave me a lot more opportunities to keep in touch with my artistic side and become more creative with the work I was doing.

- Jonas 3i4 (16)

Coursework was a very different art experience as a whole. Going from working alone to working as a team meant that sacrifices and compromises had to be made. No longer could I follow my own schedule; instead I had to work and communicate with my teammates well in order to find collective free time. I had to learn how to create art as a team: delegating preparation work, sticking to concrete deadlines to get things done, and putting together each other's strengths together to create the best product. All in all, this experience, albeit challenging at times to keep up with work, was very enlightening and enriching. It taught me that the expression of self or one's feelings is not just in the artwork, but also in the art-making process.

- Joshua 3i1 (21)

Group reflection

As a group, this coursework has been really enriching for us. Other than helping us learn more about each other's strengths and weaknesses as well as how to work with others, we were able to expand more on a medium we had exposure to before through filmmaking. The journey was also equally important to us due to the evolution of a quadriptych of drawings to a short film, we were able to experiment more with different drawing mediums to visually represent urban loneliness as well as make use of different ideas and concept to gain a deeper understanding of it. While we gained more experience with using materials and mediums we were less used to like charcoal and copic markers, we simultaneously discovered how these different mediums may affect the mood and portrayal of the piece, thus affecting its effectiveness in portraying our main aim of urban loneliness as a daily phenomena.

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