



SIRIN & ALKONOST

PORTFOLIO:

Masters Project

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Project Statement:

The project is based on the Slavic myth of the Sirin and Alkonost birds, two divine beings who embody opposing yet interconnected forces. According to legend, one bird descends from heaven while the other rises from hell, and once a year they meet upon an apple tree that stands between worlds. When they sing, their voices shape the fate of the living: the Alkonost's song brings joy, blessings, and harmony to nearby villagers, while the Sirin's cry spreads sorrow, disease, and misfortune. Despite their contrasting powers, they are reflections of one another, dual expressions of a single essence. Together, they represent the coexistence of creation and destruction, light and darkness, life and decay. The Alkonost, radiant and free, is often depicted with human arms and a bird's body, a symbol of vitality, spiritual liberation, and the boundless capacity for transformation. The Sirin, by contrast, is armless, trapped within her own body, unable to move or act upon the world. She embodies stillness and despair, the weight of matter and the paralysis that follows loss or corruption. In this project, I merge these two mythic entities into a single hybrid figure, portrayed through two costume and one performance. The dual bird becomes an allegory for cycles of death and regeneration, a continuous process of decay, renewal, and reconciliation between conflicting forces. The costume acts as both a vessel of transformation and a landscape of meaning, tracing the bird's journey through contamination and healing. We first encounter the character in her Sirin state, a form weighed down by the remnants of human industry. Her body is coated in a hardened, toxic residue, a sculptural skin resembling an oil spill that has dried over time. This layer not only binds her physically but also symbolically: she becomes a manifestation of ecological trauma, reminiscent of kingfisher birds found trapped and motionless beneath slicks of oil. The costume restricts movement, producing a slow, strained choreography that evokes both suffering and endurance. Gradually, through subtle gestures and deliberate effort, the bird revives herself. She begins to peel away the toxic crust, revealing beneath it a vibrant, iridescent surface, a rebirth inspired by the kingfisher's luminescent feathers. As she regains mobility, her movements evolve into fluid, dance-like sequences that mimic the lightness and grace of flight. Her body becomes a celebration of life restored, echoing the Alkonost's liberating song. In the final stage, the bird rediscovers the very waste she has shed. Instead of rejecting it, she interacts with it anew, transforming it from poison into texture, from residue into memory. She envelops it into her world, acknowledging its presence while no longer being bound by it.

List Of Characters:

And Their Role In This Interpretation Of The Myth

-Sirin (Oil Spill Cocoon):

The Sirin embodies the corrupted immortality of nature. An eternal cocoon born from pollution, preserving the memory of life through decay.

-Alkonost (Kingfisher Bird):

The Alkonost represents the youthful purity of nature — a radiant bringer of joy whose descent into the human world turns her song of blessing into a sorrowful echo of its corruption.



-Gamayun (Short-Eared Owl):

The Gamayun serves as a prophetic guardian, dwelling among the remnants of industrial decay to warn humanity of the environmental destruction it has caused and its consequences.

-Bereginya (Sandpiper Bird):

The Bereginya represents the primordial mother of nature, embodying both creation and destruction as she governs the balance between land and sea, rewarding harmony and punishing environmental disruption.

In this project, I explore the themes of contamination, ecological trauma, and the Anthropocene through the image of a kingfisher bird emerging from an oil-spill cocoon. Contamination marks the starting point, as the bird's body is encased in a hardened, toxic layer that reflects the impact of human industry on the natural world. This state embodies ecological trauma, echoing authentic images of birds trapped beneath oil slicks. Through contemporary myth, the story of Sirin and Alkonost becomes a modern allegory for survival.

Concept Themes Board:

Human And Non-Human Systems



Bednarz, Machinery Maintenance, 2015

Symbiosis



Simon, Plastitar, 2022

Natural Cycles



Attenborough, Fantail Pigeons, 1998

Anthropocene



Sassoon, Oil Spill in Dalian, 2010

Resilience



Forshaw, River Kingfisher, 1991

Ecological Trauma



Beltra, Still Life in Oil, 2013

Contemporary Myth



van Herpen, Roots of Rebirth, 2021

Contamination



Beltra, Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, 2013

Filmmaking Visual References Board:



Jan, *Holoscenes*, 2016



Ptushko, *Sadko*, 1953



Abrahami, *Rusalka* Opera Production, 2023



Weiss, *Ennoia*, 2002



Kaklea, *The Birds*, 2025



Sadykova, *The Legend of the Decembrist*, 2020



Meisel, *'Water & Oil' Editorial*, 2010



Meisel, *'Water & Oil' Editorial*, 2010

My film draws from a constellation of visual, theatrical, and performative works that merge mythology, ecology, and transformation. Its earliest inspiration came from Aleksandr Ptushko's *"Sadko"* (1953), whose theatrical staging of Slavic folklore shaped the film's mythic tone and compositional language. The visual atmosphere was further informed by Steven Meisel's *"Water & Oil"* (2010). Reworked images from his editorial were projected during filming and combined with dynamic lighting effects to create a fluid, immersive environment reminiscent of Lenio Kaklea's *"The Birds"* (2025), where light and movement merge into a shared natural landscape. Abrahami's 2023 production of *"Rusalka"* profoundly influenced the conceptual framework of my work; her ecological reading of the Slavic myth inspired this film's own interpretation of the Sirin and Alkonost legend as a commentary on environmental degradation and rebirth. Additional connections to Lars Jan's *"Holoscenes"* (2016), Weiss's *"Ennoia"* (2002), and Sadykova's *"The Legend of the Decembrist"* (2020) extend the project's dialogue with themes of endurance, transformation, and the mythic feminine as both witness and force of nature. Together, these works inform the film's portrayal of the Sirin and Alkonost characters as a single, evolving being.

Location, Lighting & Backdrop Reference Board:

Initial Filming Location References:



Buryakovsky, Thames Beach, 2025



Buryakovsky, Thames Beach, 2025

Stills From Created Projection Videos:



Sirin World - Projection #1



Sirin World - Projection #2



Alkonost World - Projection #1



Alkonost World - Projection #2

Initially, I intended to film the *Sirin* and *Alkonost* costumes at Thames Beach near the Millennium Bridge, drawn to its atmosphere of decay and industrial nature, which visually echoed the project's themes of contamination and renewal. However, due to poor weather conditions and delays in costume completion, the shoot was relocated to an indoor studio. To recreate the same sense of a contaminated natural landscape, I employed video projection and lighting techniques inspired by Lenio Kaklea's "The Birds" performance and Pipilotti Rist's "Sip My Ocean". For the final film, I combined coloured LED lighting with generated video projections of ecological catastrophe and a misty seaside environment, referencing Steven Meisel's "Water & Oil" (2010) editorial as a visual foundation for the atmosphere of environmental collapse and transformation.

Projection And Lighting References:



Rist, Sip My Ocean, 1996



Kaklea, The Birds, 2025

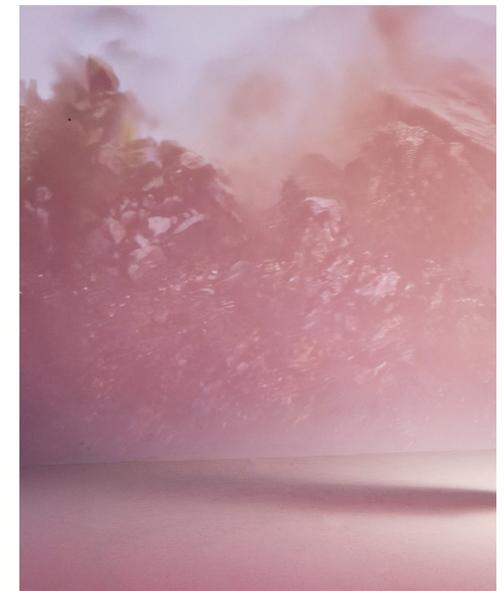


Kaklea, The Birds, 2025

Final Filming Projection And Lighting Set-Up:



Final Alkonost World Filming Backdrop



Final Sirin World Filming Backdrop



Vrubel, Lilacs, 1900



Beltra, Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, 2013



Jarrett, The Dead Kingfisher, 2025



Heretherebespiders, Kingfisher, 2015



Woodfall, Common Scoter in Oil, 2023



Patchett, Murderous Millinery, 2012



Jobson, North Sea Oil, 2016



Holloway, Failure Mechanisms, 2020

The Sirin world is a mirror of our own—a reflection of the Anthropocene reinterpreted through myth. It is a realm where nature and industry have fused beyond separation, where the organic has absorbed the metallic. Once radiant and free, the bird's paradise has curdled into a suffocating ecology of waste: a landscape coated in oil, its air heavy with chemicals. The soil is slick and iridescent, pulsing faintly as if alive, yet poisoned at its core. This world is not entirely dead. It mutates, digests, and reshapes itself, feeding on its own collapse. The Sirin Cocoon, born from contaminated sediment and industrial debris, becomes both monument and organism: a body of the Earth fossilising in real time. Within it, beauty persists only as corrosion. Here, the myth of the Sirin transforms into a commentary on human excess, where the line between progress and decay has dissolved.



Holden, Oil Industry, 2020

Sirin World Materiality

Sirin World Board:



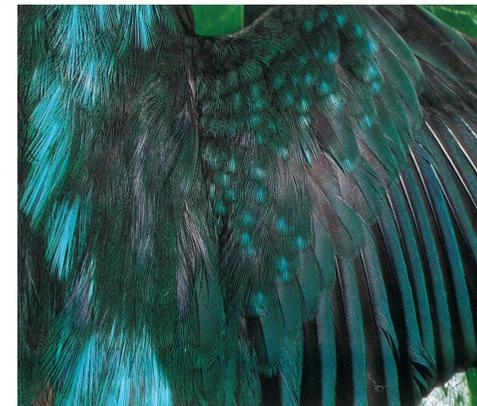
Perrins, Fairy-Wren, 2003



Perrins, Comb-Crested Jacana, 2003



Perrins, Mourning Dove, 2003



James, Adult Kingfisher Feathers, 2009



Perrins, Sandhill Cranes, 2003

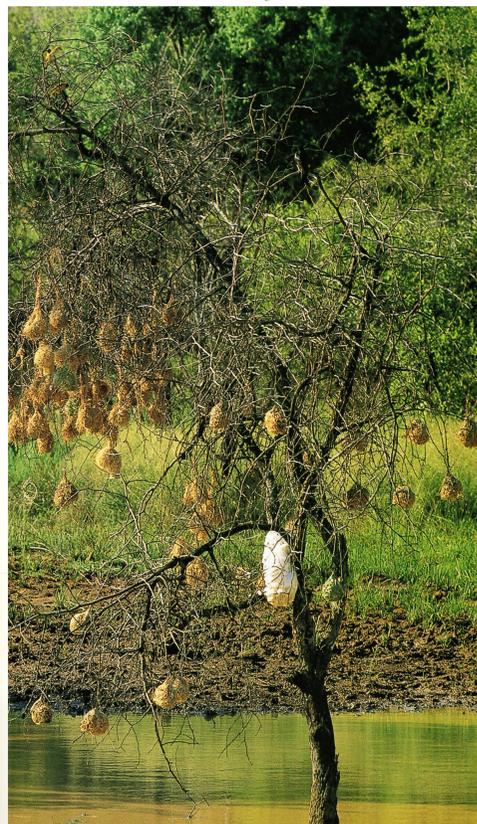


Forshaw, Kingfisher, 1991



Perrins, Wandering Albatrosses, 2003

The Alkonost world exists as the counterpoint to Sirin's realm — a vision of harmony between humanity and the more-than-human world. In this project, the Alkonost world is primarily presented through birds and their habitats, whose beauty and adaptability become symbols of ecological balance. Yet this world extends beyond avian life — it reflects an environmental paradise for all living forms, where coexistence replaces hierarchy and fragility becomes a shared strength. The Alkonost world represents not an untouched wilderness but a conscious ecology, and in contrast to Sirin's decaying dystopia, it envisions regeneration as a collective act.



Perrins, Southern Masked Weaver, 2003



Alderton, Green Broadbill, 2004

Sirin Character Board:

Oil Spill Cocoon

In this iteration of the myth, the Sirin Bird is no longer a singular being but a state of existence, a corrupted evolution of the once-pure Alkonost Bird, transformed by human industry and pollution. The Sirin Cocoon represents a liminal, eternal organism capable of disintegrating into fragments of oil-slick matter and reconstituting itself by fusing with another living form. This cyclical process of decomposition and rebirth mirrors both immortality and contamination, nature's endless persistence through decay. The Oil Spill Cocoon is the embodiment of ecological collapse: a suffocating shell that imprisons organic life, devoid of hope for regeneration. It stands as the ultimate manifestation of nature's despair, beauty turned to ruin, and vitality trapped within toxicity. Formed from oil-contaminated soil, decomposing sediment, and remnants of industrial machinery, the Sirin Cocoon's surface glistens with a sickly iridescence. "The Sirin's cry spreads curses and decay."
(Kulturologia, 2017)

Painted Oil Spill
Fabrics For Costume

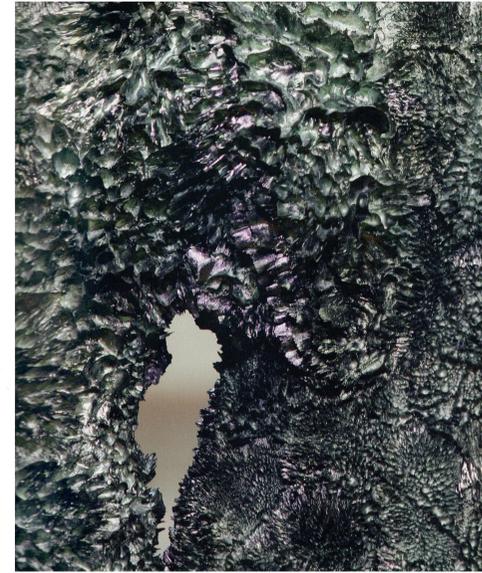
Trapped Inside
The "Sirin" Oil Spill
Cocoon Costume



Back View



Front View



van Herpen, Wilderness Embodied, 2013



Wouter, Deform, 2015



Augustyn, Oil Spill, 2025; Balakrishnan, Rescued Kingfisher, 2024



Vrubel, Girl with a Wreath, 1910

Alkonost Character Board:

Kingfisher Bird

In this interpretation, the Alkonost is the youngest and most innocent of the mythological bird-women. Though eternal, she embodies the naivety and luminosity of youth. Her name derives from the Greek Alkyone, meaning "kingfisher," symbolising transformation through love and grief. Her form mirrors the bird itself: iridescent feathers in shimmer as she moves through air and light. Her divine purpose is to bring health, harmony, and joy to humankind through her celestial song. Yet this benevolence exposes her to a threat, as every descent into the human world subjects her to pollution and corrosion. When trapped in the Sirin Cocoon, she begins echoing the pain of a planet suffocating under human neglect. Composed entirely of blue and purple-toned iridescent feathers, she glows with a natural shimmer that seems to refract the sky itself. Her form embodies the fragility of beauty and nature. "The Alkonost's song brings blessings to the human population." (Kulturologia, 2017)



Perrins, Kingfishers, 2003



Dyed, Frayed,
And Digitally Printed
Feathers For Costume



Barrett, Blue-Winged Kookaburra, 2005



Dupont, Woodland Kingfisher, 2014



van Herpen, Sensory Seas, 2020



Perrins, Red-Backed Kingfisher, 2003



Front View



Back View

Alkonost's Costume
After Escaping
The Oil Spill Cocoon





Dahiya, Ambarnaya River, 2020

Gamayun's Costume



Painted Oil Spill Fabrics
And Dyed Feathers
For Costume

Short-Eared Owl

Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, 2013

The Gamayun Bird, unlike the youthful Alkonost, bears the gravity of timeless wisdom. Depicted as part owl, she possesses a solemn, austere beauty, her piercing eyes reflecting centuries of foreknowledge. She is neither young nor old in mortal terms, but ageless Gamayun inhabits rusted oil platforms and derelict sea structures, remnants of human exploitation rising from polluted waters. Her presence among them transforms these ruins into sacred warnings. She exists to speak of the horrors humanity has wrought upon its world, voicing truths that few dare to hear. Though deeply empathetic, she carries the bitterness of one whose prophecies have been ignored for too long. "The Gamayun bird is a prophetic being - the herald of the gods." (Dagpravda, 2009)



Perrins, Short-Eared Owl, 2003



ABS Group, Jack-Up Drilling Rig, 2025



van Herpen, Micro Dress, 2012



Champot, Cape, 1895

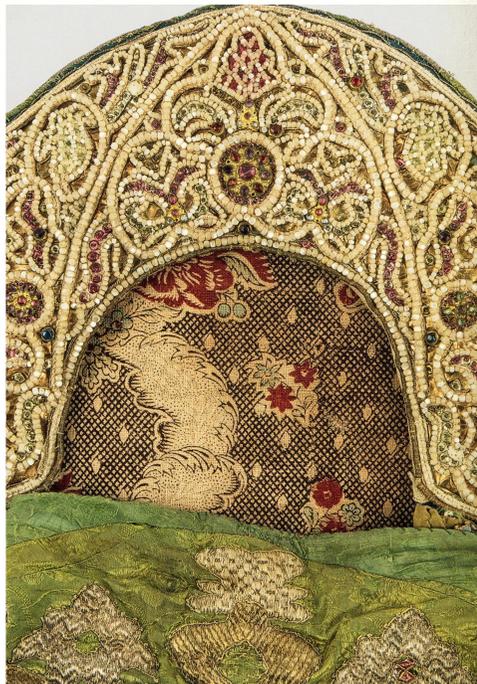


Vasnetsov, Gamayun the Prophetic Bird, 1898

Gamayun Character Board:



Perrins, Buff-Breasted Sandpiper, 2003



Madlevskaya, 18th Century Kokoshnik Kostroma Region, 2022



V&A, Bodice, 1639



Vrubel, Princess Volkhova, 1900



van Herpen, Roots of Rebirth, 2021



Perrins, Bar-Shouldered Doves, 2003

← Bereginya's Costume



Bereginya, also known as Stratim, is the eldest of the mythological bird-women, the foremother of all avian beings and the ancestral goddess of the Rusalki, the Slavic water spirits. She governs the dual elements of air and water, embodying both the celestial and the terrestrial. Although she is by nature the embodiment of all birds, Bereginya was created in the likeness of the sandpiper, a creature that dwells at the threshold between land and sea. The sandpiper's ceaseless movement along the water's edge mirrors Bereginya's divine duality: both nurturer and destroyer. She is the archetype of motherhood. Bereginya governs the eternal cycle of life, decay, and regeneration. To those who honour the natural order, she brings healing and abundance; to those who violate it, she answers with the cataclysms of the Earth (tsunamis, earthquakes, and floods). She is formed of feathers, water droplets, and fine pebbles that swirl and reshape around her continuously. Her form is never static; it breathes, flows, and transforms "Bereginya is a goddess of nature — a union of nurturing strength and untamed ferocity." (Ivanov, 2025)

↑
Dyed, Frayed, And
Flocked Feathers
For Costume

Sandpiper Bird

Bereginya Character Board:

Process Page 1:

Initial Exploration Of Sirin And Alkonost's Character Costumes Through Collage



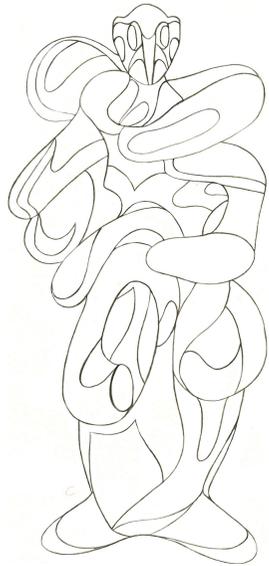
Alkonost Trapped Inside The 'Sirin' Oil Spill Cocoon Costume



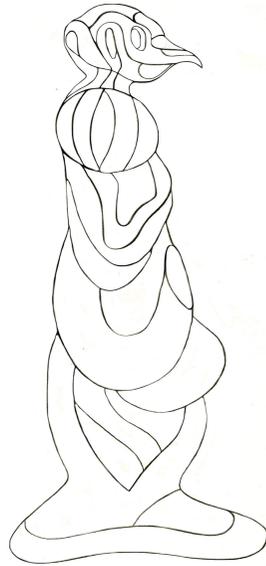
Alkonost After Escaping The 'Sirin' Oil Spill Cocoon Costume

Process Page 2:

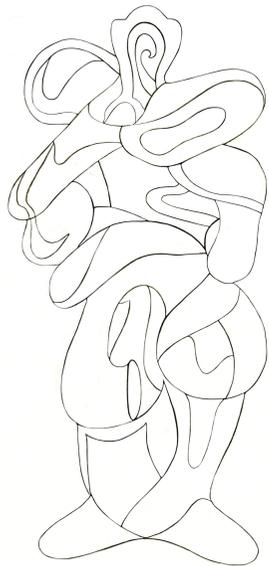
Initial Sketches Of Sirin And Alkonost's Costumes



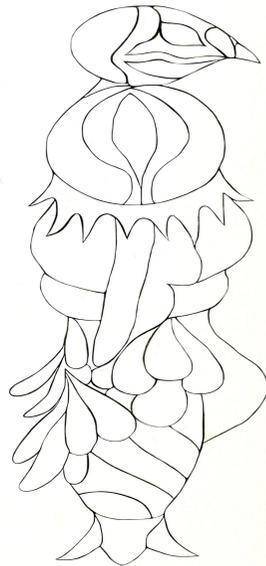
Initial Sketch Of Sirin Costume - Front



Initial Sketch Of Sirin Costume - Side



Initial Sketch Of Sirin Costume - Back



Initial Sketch Of Alkonost Costume - Side

Sketch of Final Sirin Costume



Sketch of Final Alkonost Costume



Process Page 3:

Secondary Character Costume Sketches

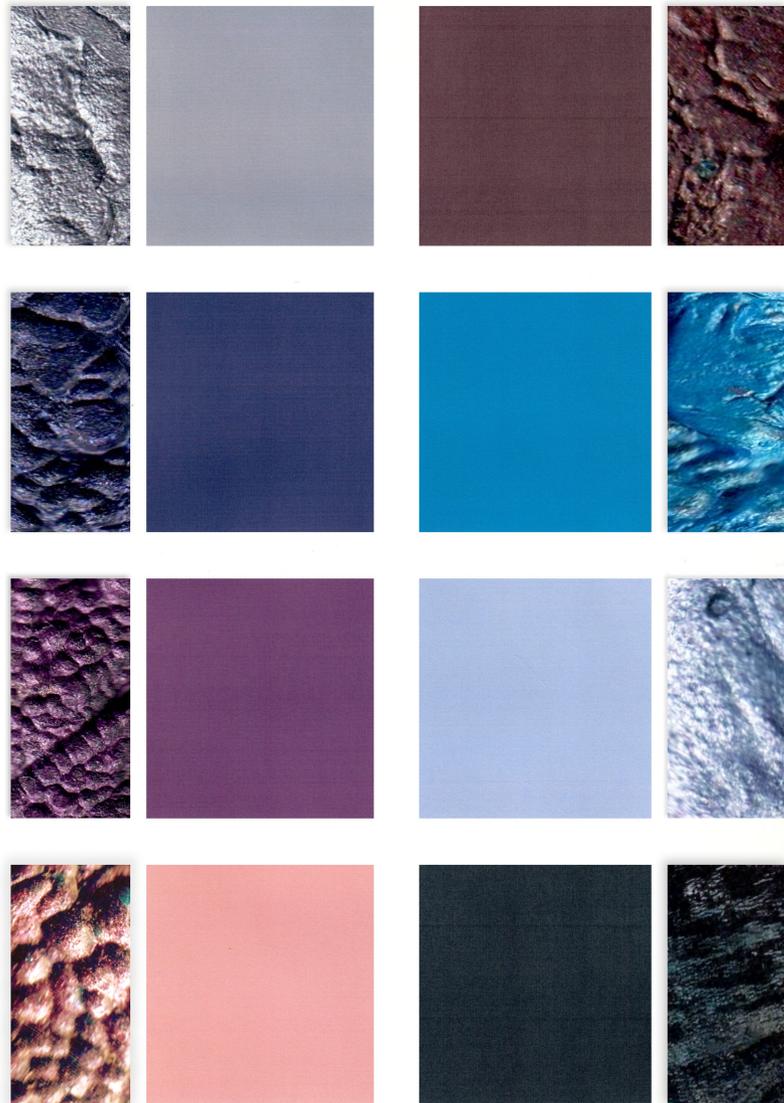


Bereginya (Sandpiper Bird)



Gamayun (Short-Eared Owl)

Painted Puff Binder Textured Fabric To Colour Match With Sirin's Costume Colour Palette



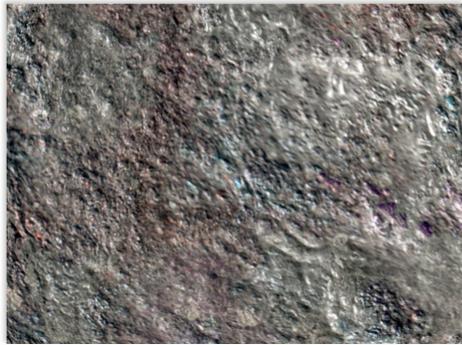
Dyed Crystal Organza To Colour Match With Alkonost's Costume Colour Palette



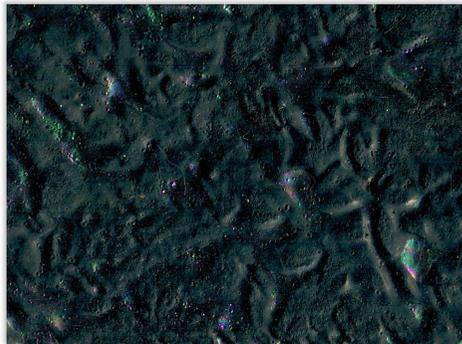
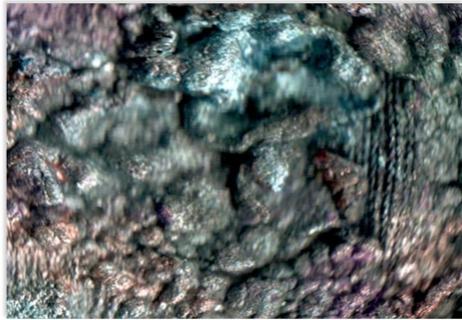
Sirin And Alkonost Costumes: Colour Palette Development

Process Page 4:

Initial Latex And Puff Binder Oil Spill Fabric Samples



Initial Dyed And Flocked Feather Fabric Samples



Initial Silhouette Design For Sirin Costume



Initial Silhouette Design For Alkonost Costume



Initial Samples And Silhouette Designs

Process Page 5:

Trapped Inside The 'Sirin' Oil-Spill Cocoon - Movement References:



Gilliland, Ailing Duck, 2020



Bettmann, Bird Coated with Oil, 1967



Wouter, Deform, 2019



Wouter, Deform, 2015

Alkonost After Escaping The Oil-Spill Cocoon - Movement References:



Perrins, The Dance Of The Japanese Crane, 2003



Perrins, The Dance Of The Japanese Crane, 2003



Perrins, Black Redstart, 2003

Dance Rehearsal - Process Of Transformation Out Of The Cocoon:



Transformation - Stage 1



Transformation - Stage 2



Transformation - Stage 3



Transformation - Stage 4



Transformation - Stage 5



Transformation - Stage 6



Transformation - Stage 7



Transformation - Stage 8

Dance Rehearsal - Symbiosis With The Remnants Of The Cocoon:



Symbiosis - Stage 1



Symbiosis - Stage 2

Through the rehearsal process in the calico toile of both the oil-spill cocoon (Sirin) costume and the released kingfisher (Alkonost) costume, it became possible to solidify the narrative development of the story — the kingfisher becoming trapped within, and then released from, the oil-spill cocoon, ultimately reaching a state of symbiosis with it by the end of the performance. These rehearsal stages allowed me to observe how the costumes transformed and interacted with the performer's body, noting changes in silhouette and fit. They also provided an opportunity to refine construction details: I adjusted the fastening placements on the oil-spill cocoon to make the "breaking free" sequence more dramatic, shortened the trousers of the alkonost costume, and resized the wings for better balance. The rehearsals further helped to consolidate my choreography references, which included birds in mid-flight with wings in various positions, as well as documented footage of birds trapped in oil spills. By reworking these references collaboratively with my performer, we developed a single cohesive narrative — the kingfisher's journey of transformation.

Movement References & Choreography Rehearsals:

Process Page 6:

Scene 1:



1. The kingfisher is trapped inside an oil-spill cocoon



2. The bird is both protected and imprisoned



3. Very slowly, it begins to emerge from the cocoon



4. At last, one wing slips through the first crack in the shell

Film Storyboard: Act 1

Scene 2:

Act 1, Scene 1

Setting: The film opens within a misty, contaminated landscape - the Sirin world

Plot: Introduction of the Alkonost, trapped inside the Sirin oil-spill cocoon

Lighting: Red LED lights combined with a projection of a polluted landscape

Emotion: Defeat

Sound: Water dripping inside a cave

Act 1, Scene 2

Setting: The contaminated terrain of the Sirin world

Plot: The Alkonost bird escapes the Sirin oil-spill cocoon

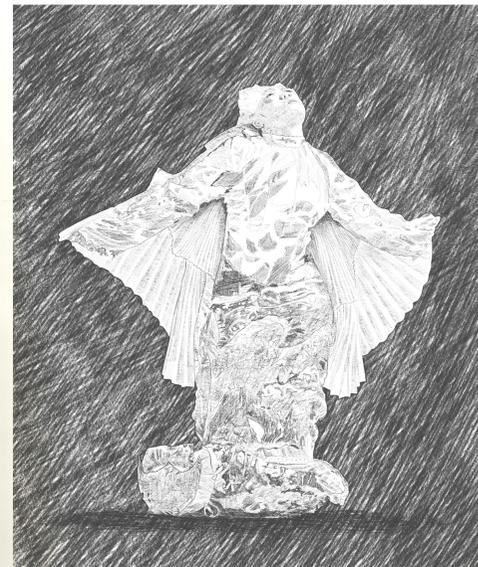
Lighting: Red LED lights combined with a projection of a polluted landscape

Emotion: Hope

Sound: Water dripping inside a cave



1. The kingfisher starts to move more actively



2. It stretches its wings wider and gradually rises upward



3. The cocoon layers slip off one by one

Scene 1:



1. The kingfisher begins to move like a bird again



2. It must relearn how to control its body, and beat its wings



3. After such long confinement, it struggles to adjust to this new state of being, uncertain of how to embrace freedom

Film Storyboard: Act 2

Scene 2:



1. Gradually, the kingfisher grows bolder



2. Spreading its wings, it starts to circle more confidently

Act 2, Scene 1

Setting: The bird-habitat utopia of the Alkonost world

Plot: The Alkonost learns to integrate back into the natural world

Lighting: Blue LED lights

Emotion: Hesitant joy

Sound: Gushes of wind and birdsong

Act 2, Scene 2

Setting: The radiant, bird-habitat utopia of the Alkonost world

Plot: The Alkonost reconnects with joy and freedom

Lighting: Blue LED lights

Emotion: Delirium

Sound: Gushes of wind and birdsong

Scene 1:

Act 3, Scene 1

Setting: Return to the contaminated landscape - the Sirin world

Plot: The Alkonost rediscovers the discarded shells of its former Sirin oil-spill cocoon

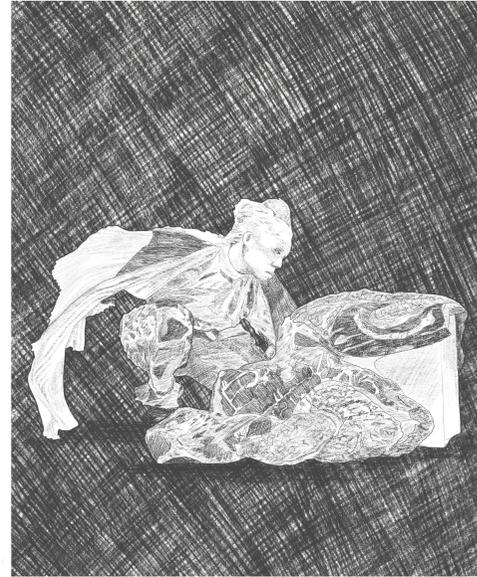
Lighting: Red LED lights combined with a projection of the contaminated landscape

Emotion: Curiosity

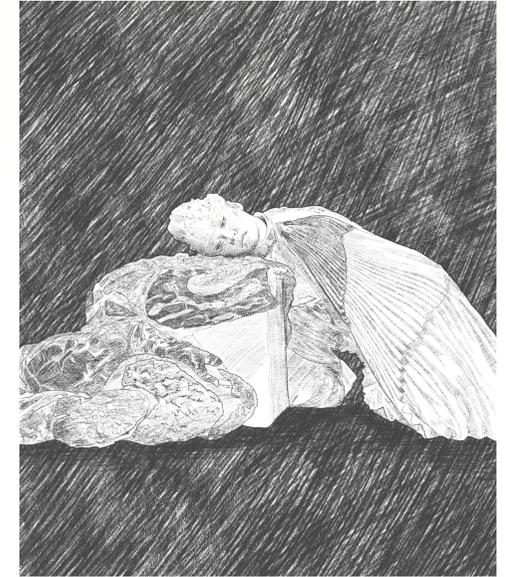
Sound: Gushes of wind, birdsong, and dripping water



1. The kingfisher begins to explore its surroundings



2. It stumbles upon the discarded shells of its former cocoon



3. Curious, it approaches them, and even plays with them

Film Storyboard: Act 3

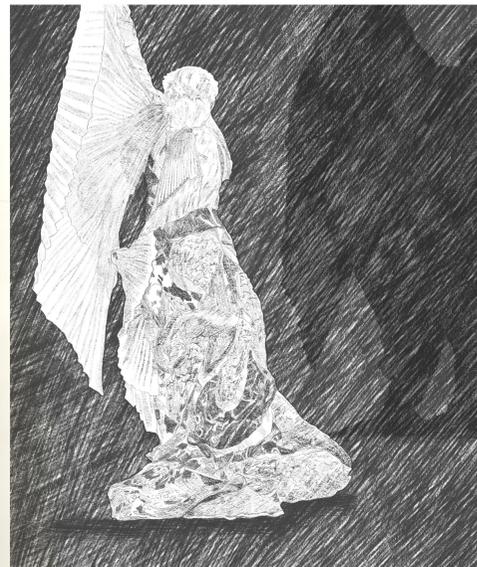
Scene 2:



1. The bird decides to place the fragments back onto its body



2. With this new armour, it prepares for flight into a new life



3. Final shot: the bird soaring upward into the sky

Act 3, Scene 2

Setting: A space between the Sirin and Alkonost worlds

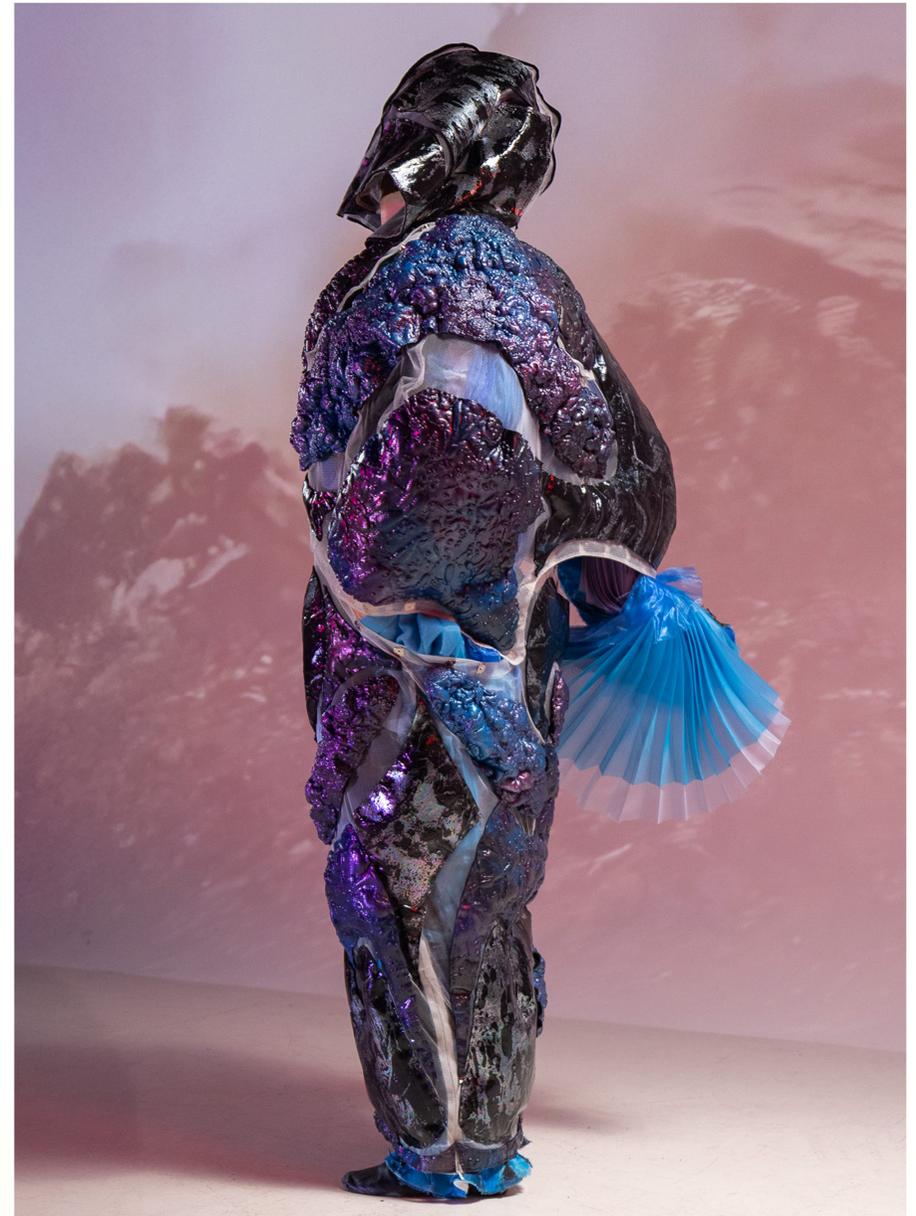
Plot: The Alkonost merges sustainably with the discarded Sirin oil-spill fragments, achieving harmony

Lighting: Red LED lights combined with a sunrise projection

Emotion: Peace

Sound: Gushes of wind, birdsong, and dripping water

Realised Film Storyboard 1: Act 1, Scene 1

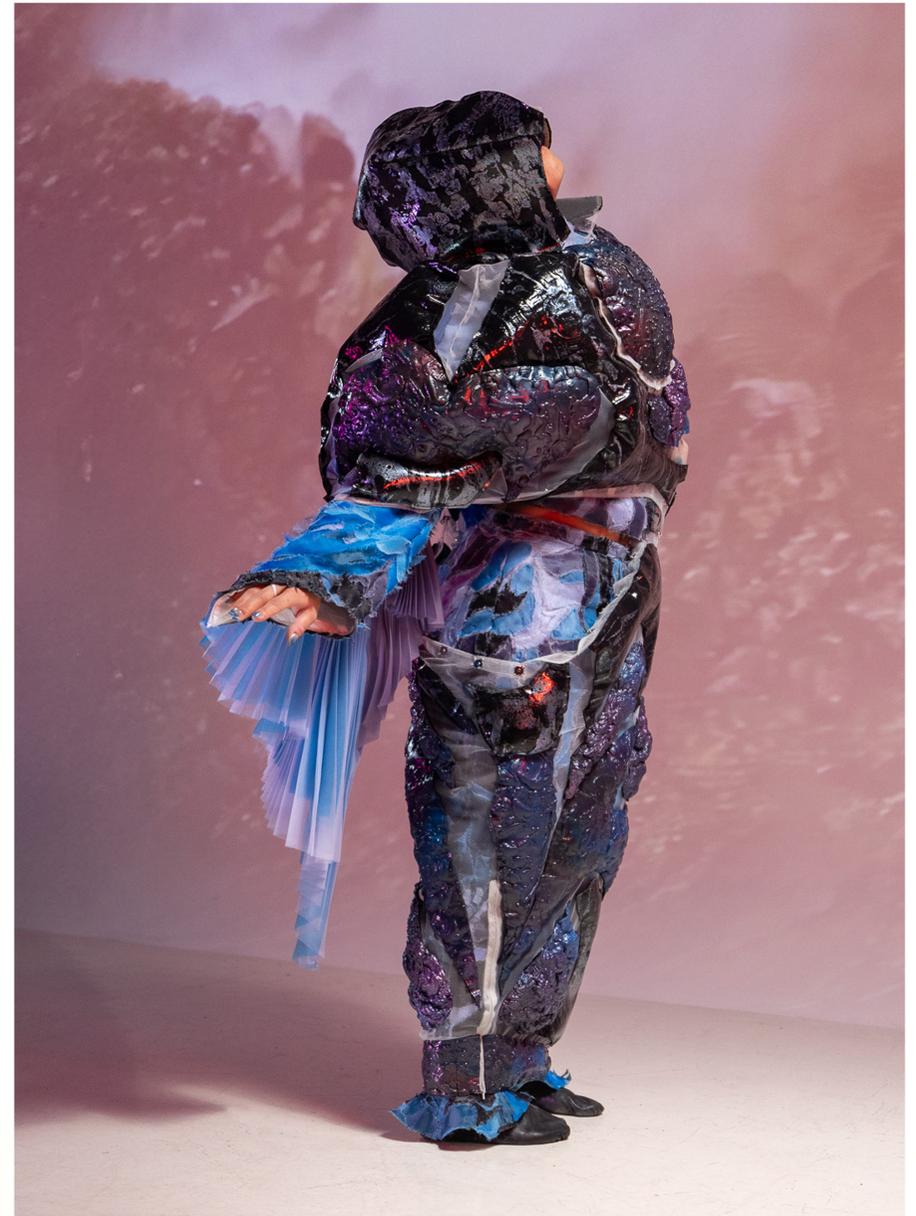


Trapped Inside the Oil-Spill Cocoon

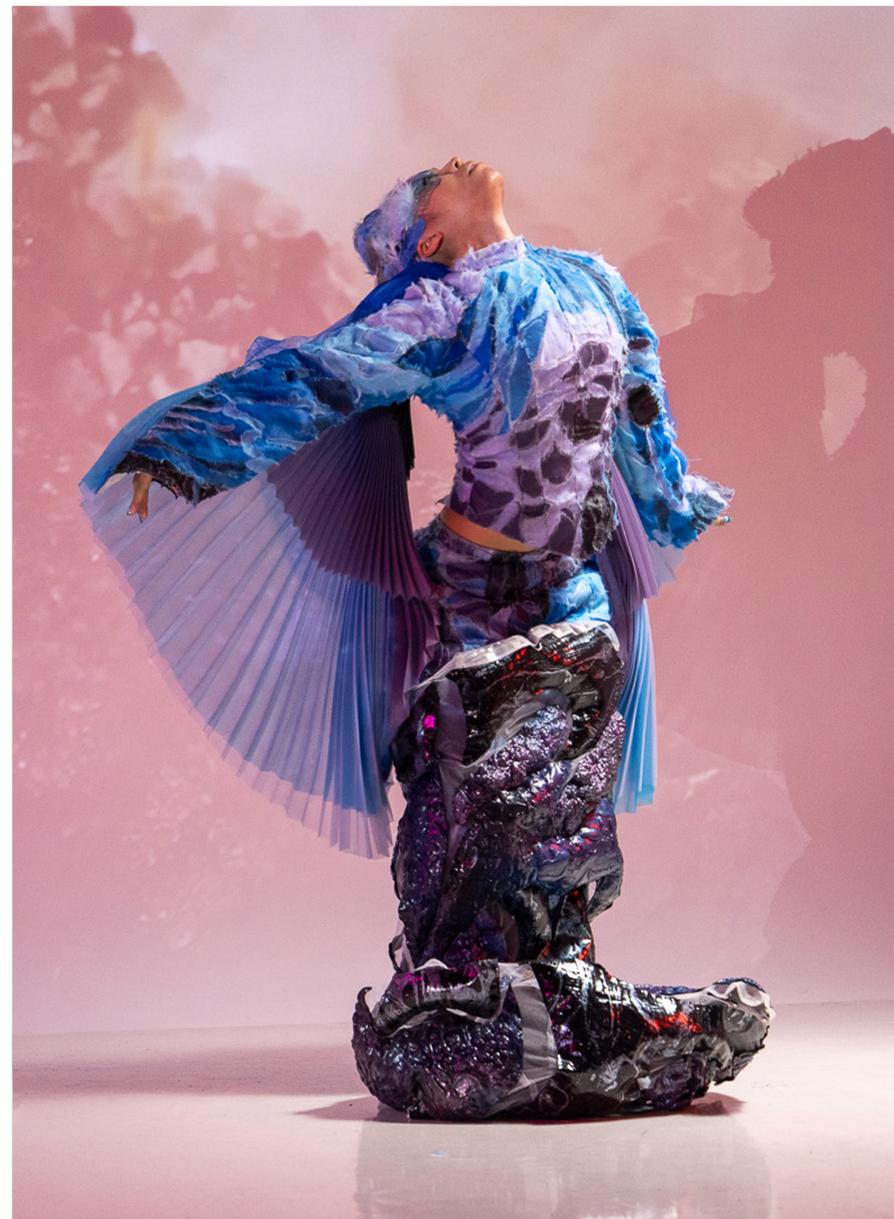
Realised Film Storyboard 2: Act 1, Scene 1



Trapped Inside the Oil-Spill Cocoon



Realised Film Storyboard 3: Act 1, Scene 2



Escape from the Oil-Spill Cocoon

Realised Film Storyboard 4: Act 1, Scene 2



Escape from the Oil-Spill Cocoon



Realised Film Storyboard 5: Act 2, Scene 1



Return to the Natural World

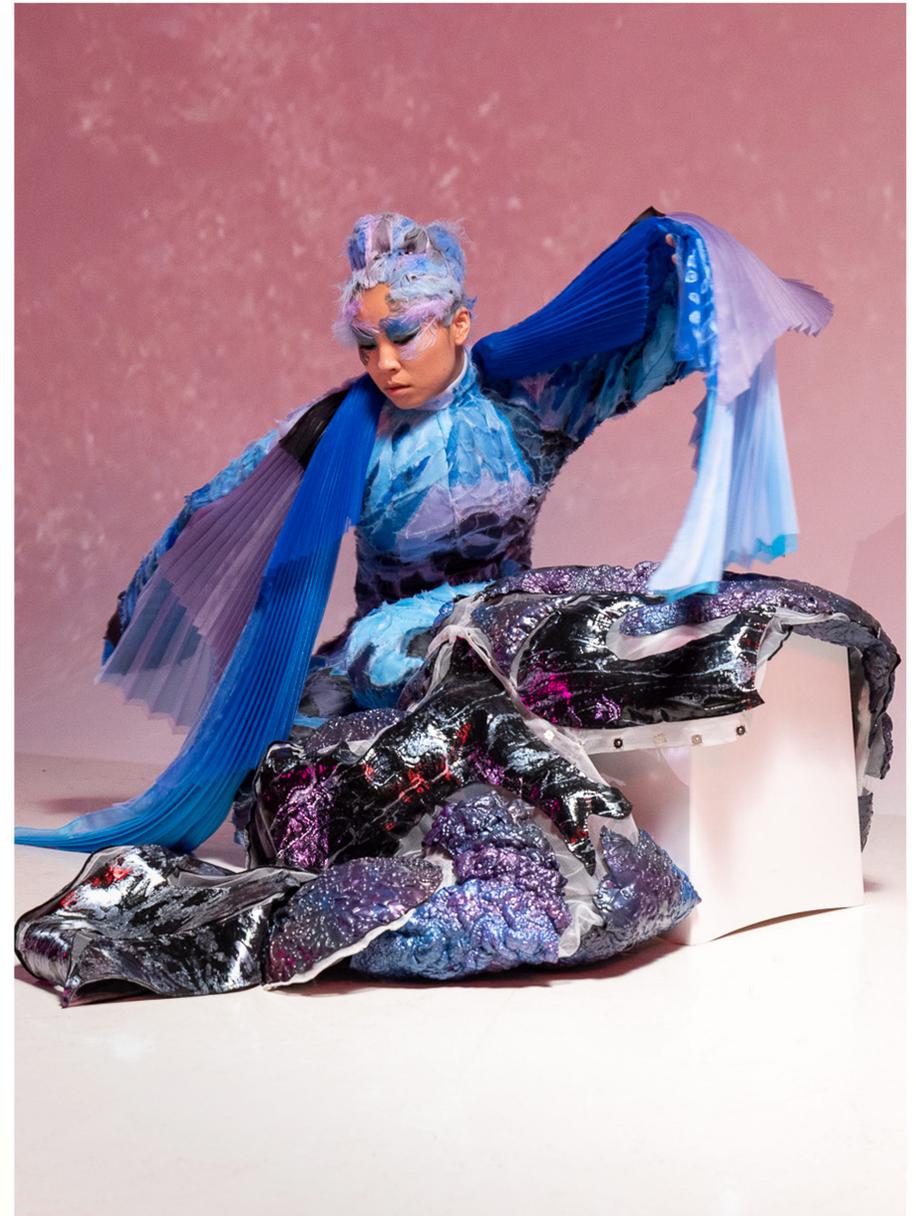
Realised Film Storyboard 6: Act 2, Scene 2



Newfound Freedom



Realised Film Storyboard 7: Act 3, Scene 1



Rediscovery of Former Oil-Spill Cocoon

Realised Film Storyboard 8: Act 3, Scene 2



Symbiosis with Oil-Spill Fragments



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