Animal Cut-Paper Animation

The Process

Objective: Create a cut-paper, stop-motion animation in After Effects

Roseate Tern
Maggie Ma
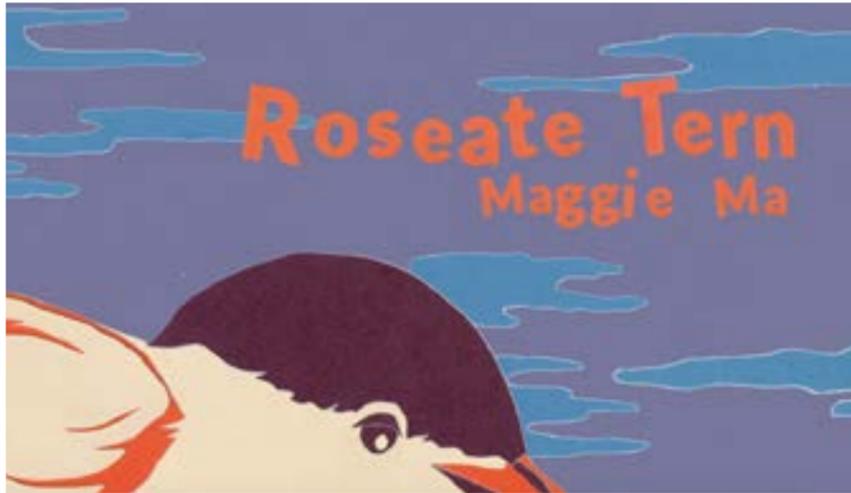
Scene 1: Closeup of Barry

Elements:

Barry turns head and looks around the ocean.

Barry calls out with beak.

Barry dips head to catch fish while title appears.

Barry lifts head with fish.

Research + Storyboarding

I created a storyboard to explore the basic plotline of my animation. I knew I wanted to include three scenes each at different scales: the first scene would be a closeup of Barry's head, the second scene a full body shot of Barry in his environment, and the third scene a zoom out of two roseate terns flying off together.

For my research, I watched dozens of videos, examined pictures, and even studied videos of other terns/seagulls to better understand Barry's behavior.
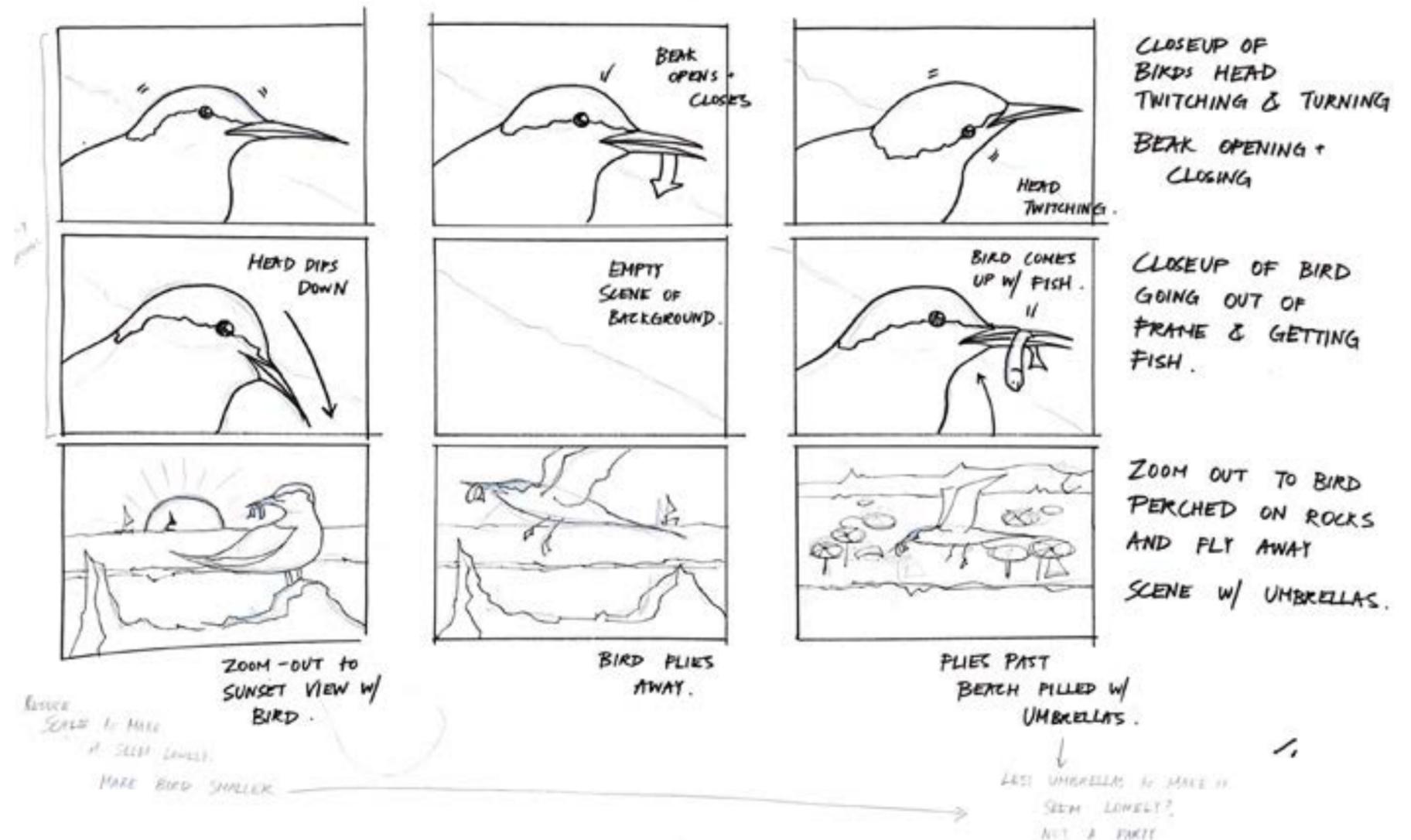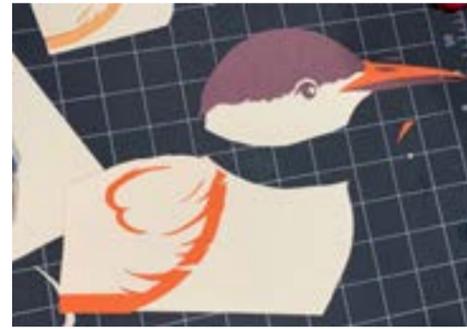
Cutting the Paper

The Head

For the movement of the head, I cut one base body and wing, and four heads—each a different perspective to mimic the rotation.
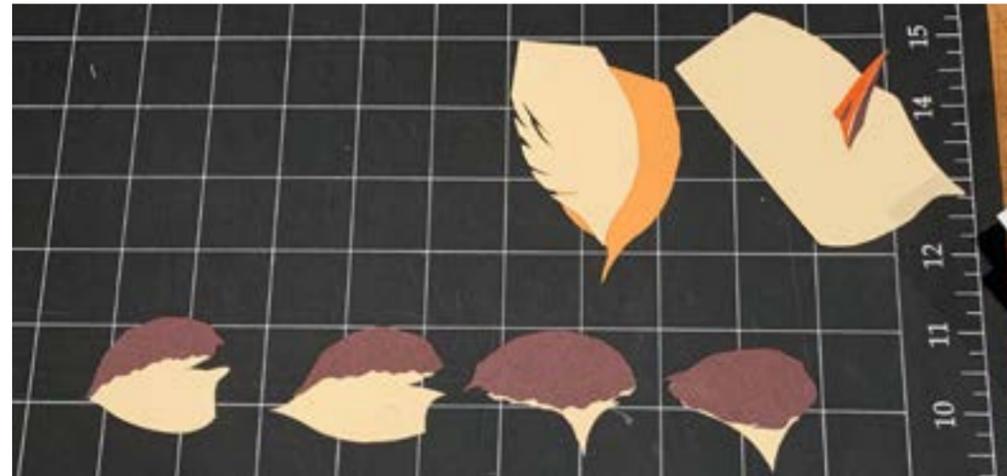
I initially cut Barry out on a much smaller scale, however, I was scared that the scans would be pixelated in the final animation, and so I re-cut the parts at a much bigger scale. I found working at a larger scale was easier when moving, cutting, and capturing details.

The Waves

I wanted the waves to shift back and forth in a loop of three cutouts. I drew the first waves on tracing paper, traced them onto the construction paper, then freehanded the variations. I cut out seven waves each in sets of three.
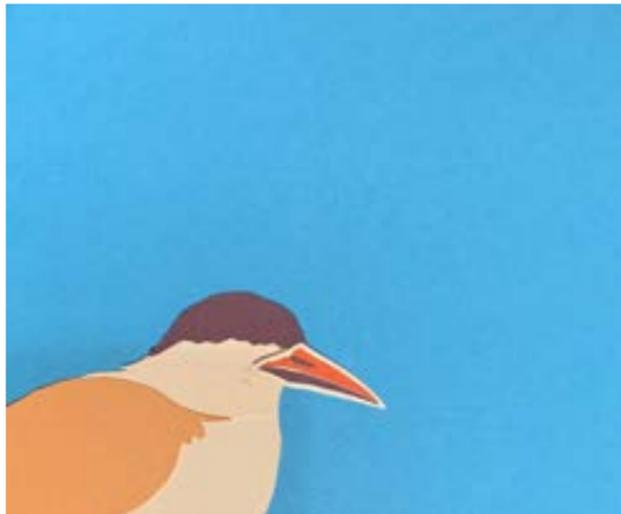
Choosing a Background

I tested various colors for the background, and ultimately chose a teal, turquoise color. After creating the second scene, however, I decided to change the color palette of the ocean. I switched the vibrant teal color for a more muted purple (second image going horizontal).
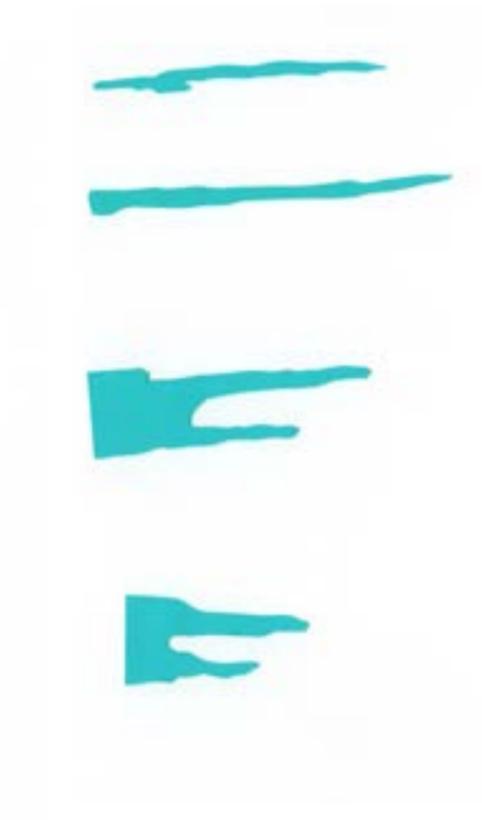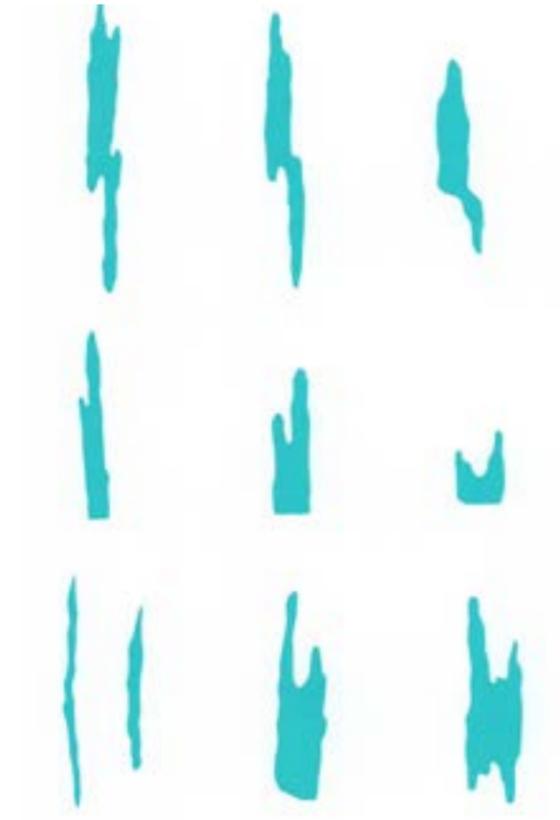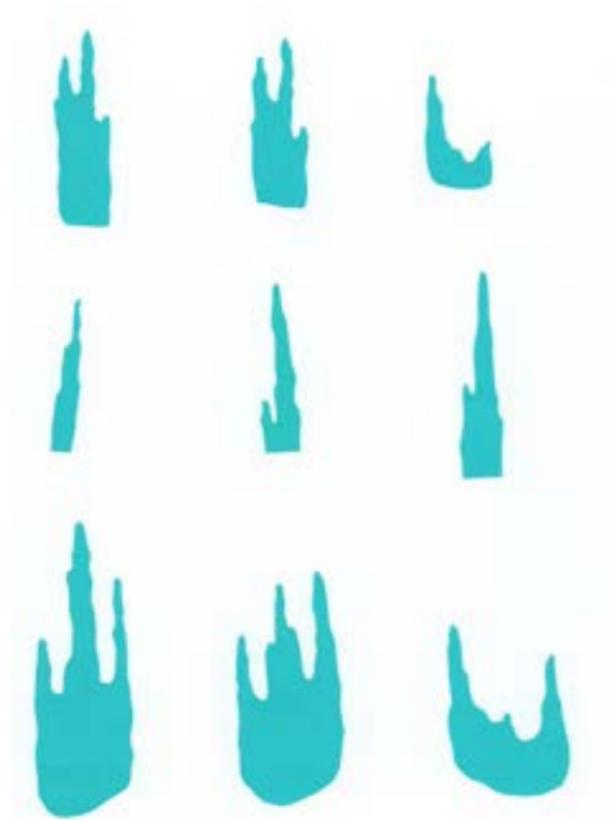
Scene I Scans

I. Cream: Bird head + body
II. Purple: Bird cap + details
III. Orange: Title + beak + wings
IV. Blue: Waves
V. Light Blue/Purple: Ocean

R o s e a t

r n

M g i

Scene II: Barry's Environment

Elements:

Barry on the rocks in the ocean.

Barry opens wings and calls out.

Research + Sketching

Scene II was the most difficult to animate. In my original storyboard, I wanted Barry to fly off from the screen. I studied how the wings transitioned from a closed to an opened position, as well as the flapping motion. For a smooth transition, I cut out dozens of wings from various perspectives. When I tried to put these pieces together in After Effects, however, the result was choppy, awkward, and definitely not bird-like.

Therefore, I changed the story so that instead of taking off in flight, Barry would simply spread his wings and let out a call note. This way, I could re-use some of my wing cutouts as well as demonstrate the stunning motion of the wings opening.
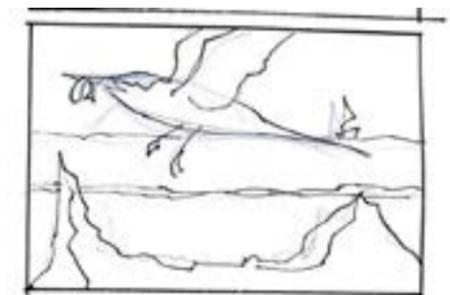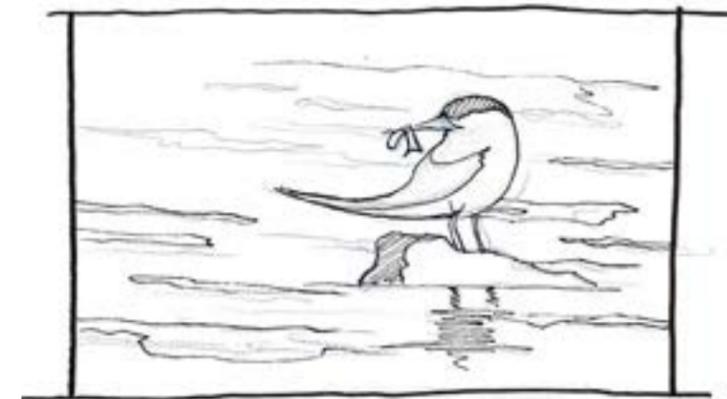
Selecting the Colors

For the composition of this scene, I took inspiration from my illustration from Part 2 of this project. I simplified the foreground but made minimal revisions on the bird. I created compositions in Adobe Illustrator to test different color palettes. I was the most satisfied with the color palette in the image to the left. The muted colors create a sense of loneliness and peacefulness.

Cutting the Paper

To cut out the pieces of the environment, I printed out my digital illustration, cut out each element, and then traced this "template" onto construction paper.

In the image on the left, I cut out various wing shapes in motion, however, I would only end up using about half of the cutouts. In After Effects, I realized the transitions were much smoother when utilizing the puppet tool. In the image, you can also see that I cut out three bird bodies. These cutouts were intended for when the bird takes flight.
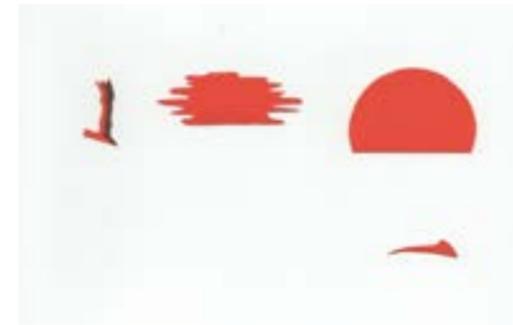
Scene II Scans

I. Cream: Bird body + underneath of wings
II. Purple: Bird cap
III. Orange: Top of wings
IV. Red: Bird feet
V. Light Purple/Blue: Ocean

Scene III: Sunset

Elements:

Barry and his friend fly off into sunset.

Two pieces of paper conclude the animation.
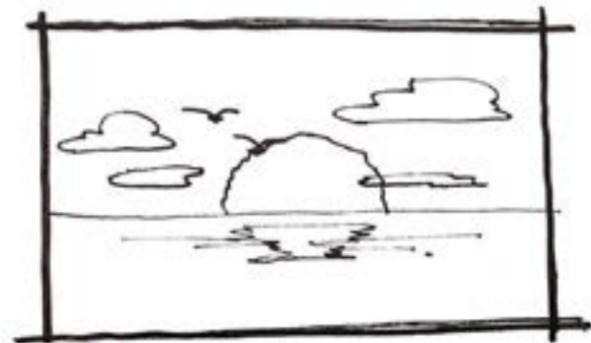
SUNSET W/ JUST CLOUDS
↳ CLOUDS → TOO DISTRACTING
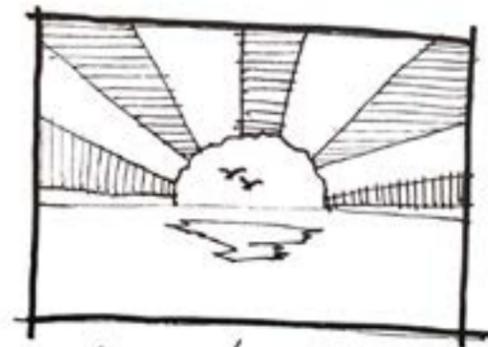
SUNSET W/ RAYS
↳ EMPIRICAL JAPAN?
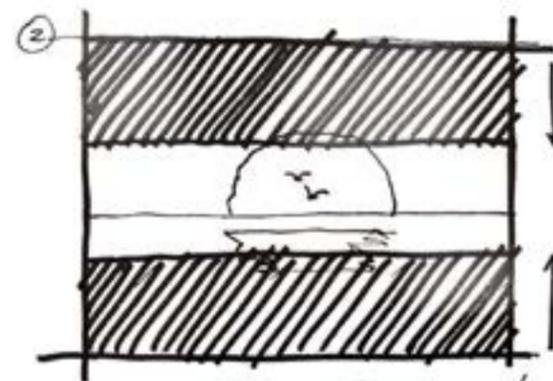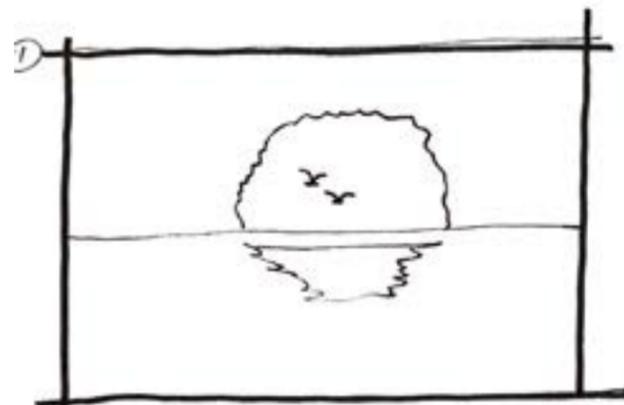
SCENE CLOSES W/ TWO DARK BLUE SHEETS MOVING to MIDDLE.

Research + Sketching

For the last scene, I wanted the scale to continue zooming out—Barry would simply be a silhouette flying into the sunset with his friend. Therefore, I didn't focus on the details of the wings, feathers, and body.
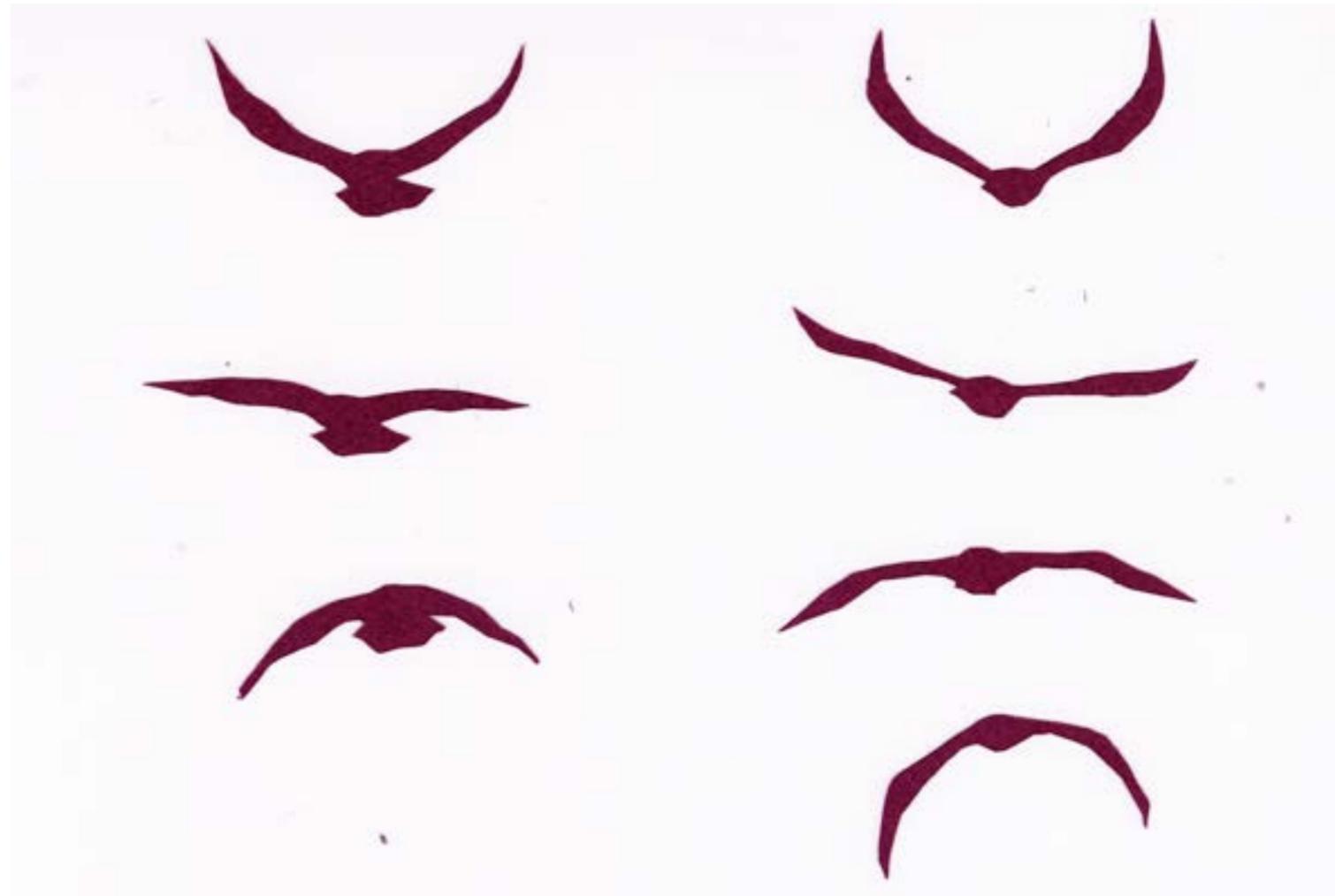
Scene III Scans

I. Cream: Sky

II. Purple: Bird silhouette

III. Red: Sun

IV. Light Purple/Blue: Ocean

When animating, I first created a loop of the wing motion, then used the Position and Scale tools to add depth as the birds flew further away.

Final Video
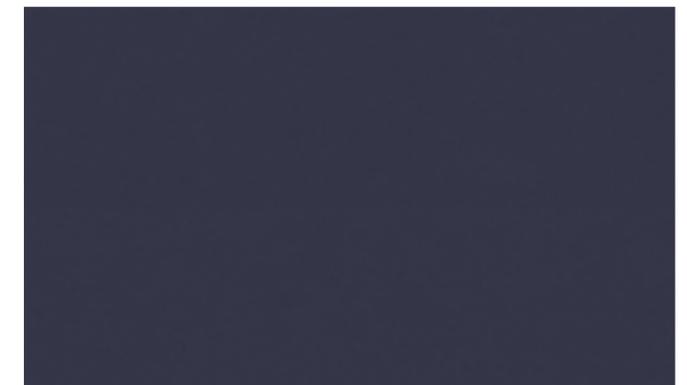
Reflection

I was extremely intimidated by this project because I had never used After Effects before. The learning process for After Effects was definitely a challenge, however, I am happy to say that I'm extremely satisfied with my final video. I learned the importance of adaptation and flexibility— I had to continuously alter my storyboard, color palette, and paper cut-outs as I progressed through the animation. In my video, I wanted to maintain the choppy and raw nature of stop-motion animation, while also incorporating the fluidity and smoothness of an After Effects animation. I'm also content that through my animation, I was able to give Barry a little more personality and character.