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Thesis Proposal  
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In a 48-page book with a loose narrative structure, I will explore themes of life, love, and transience through moody, vivid autobiographical moments and snapshots. A combination of breezy traditional illustrations and hand-lettered prose will give the book a personal and genuine feel, while a strategic blending of picture book and minimalist graphic-novel-style layouts will create an organic, contemplative flow. I hope that with a balance of intensely specific memories, relatable beauty and emotions, and an innovative sequential format, these moments can strike others as they struck me. My book will explore what I feel is an increasingly important need to slow down, sit with reality and let it resonate.

Starting about three years ago, when I was an unhappy sophomore at MICA in Baltimore, I began noting down moments. I would notice a period of silence, or a lonely or peculiar headspace influenced by my surroundings— striking falls of light, ambient sounds, smells, the feeling of the air, all tangled up with my own internal feelings. I would pause and describe that moment as vividly as possible, trying to capture its beauty and emotional charge.

I now have twelve dense pages of these moments from the past few years. When I read back through, I can put myself in my past shoes, and I've realized that in a fragmented, unfinished way, I have been working on a tale of life, love, and the transience of both.

In translating my moments into a visual format, I want to make sure that the vividness of the real-life experience shines through, and that the emotional context retains its impact. Much of this will come through in illustrative technique. I've become very attached to a primarily analogue way of creating art, or at least to using analogue mediums as a base for everything. I feel more connected to the piece I'm making when I'm more physically involved in the process, and aesthetically I'm drawn towards the textures and what I see as grounded imperfections in traditional media. For me, traditional mediums add spirit and sensitivity, and because of the personal nature of this project, it's important to me for the marks of mediums to be genuine rather than emulated digitally.

To give a foundation for how my process will work for this project, here's a short excerpt from my journal:

*Damp settles in the neighborhood. Headlights halo, then beam through the mist. Trees and houses fade like blotted watercolour into grey. Only orange house lights pierce through, they float, welcoming, like elven lanterns in the murk. Sounds of my footsteps and the spring peepers echo and quickly fall flat.*

The sensitivity of traditional mark making will serve scenes like this well. I'll start with a loose, impressionistic base layer of acrylic paint to block out shapes, like those of the trees and headlights. I'll then layer defining lines and marks for prominent elements like house lights and a foreground figure, either in ink or colored pencil. These I'll scan in separately and compile digitally. This way, I can get all the immediacy of traditional mediums, while taking advantage of digital editing capabilities. It will also allow me to experiment with how elements layer and interact and with how much of each is needed. Most importantly, I've found that this stylistic approach speaks to the themes of movement and transience in my work, as foreground textures sort of dance in and out of the "space" of the painted background.

The pacing and structure of the book is also vital to its impact. I chose the graphic novel/picture book hybrid because I want many moments to be taken in slowly, so they can sit with the viewer in all their vibrancy. Some, however, need to be more fast-paced and frantic, or take up less literal time. This moment might have its own page, but with plenty of white space around it to allow its stillness to settle. Two panels could comprise it: one showing headlights in the mist, and one showing the larger scene with the house lights.

Because the content originally exists in prose, I want to retain the integrity of the words and emotions I chose at each time, as well as the immediacy that comes in a personal journal. The captions won't state anything that the images already convey; I'll pick out sentences that elaborate upon the sensations, smells, thoughts, et cetera, that go deeper than the illustration on its own. For this moment, the caption would serve minimally to add sound to the scene, and maybe some thought about how the house lights feel like lanterns. Other scenes from my journal will rely much more on internal musings, with imagery as a compliment.

I've begun mapping out the moments I have written down to get a feel for flow and pacing from page to page. I've also started thinking about where it makes sense to use text versus image, and want to try out different combinations and ratios. I'll research page dimensions and printing specs. Though I know what direction I want to go with the illustrations, style tests will be very important so I can play with how my traditional layers might interact. Once I have the flow of the book mapped out, completing the art should be straightforward. I think my biggest challenges will be pinning down the style so it matches the soul of the project, and making sure that the book is comprehensible and engaging to readers since I'll be exploring with new narrative formats.

I've always felt strongly attached to storytelling. My early influences include J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, which showed me how stories can be immersive and grand. Studio Ghibli films showed me the beautiful and relatable, and David Mitchell's book *Cloud Atlas* struck me as incredibly significant and inspired my work thematically with the scope it achieved by weaving together smaller vivid, disparate stories into one tale. More recently, Andre Aciman's *Call My By Your Name* showed me how compelling and rich the internal world can be.

Most of these influences still follow a classic narrative structure; history is where I have found the incentive to venture outside of that. The most interesting parts of art history concern the experimentation and mold-breaking that leads to an expanding understanding of what art can do. The impressionist movement as well as neorealism in film both inspire me because of how they find new ways to depict reality. Impressionism prioritizes the ambiance, movement, and *experience* of existing in a moment, which I strongly appreciate in relation both to my project and my art style. Neorealism rejects the Hollywood-driven need for narratives to be dramatic, escapist, and specifically structured in order to hold interest or significance for audiences. Cesare Zavattini, the pioneer of neorealism in Italian cinema, wrote that a scene "will become spectacular not through its exceptional, but through its normal qualities; it will astonish us by showing so many things that happen every day under our eyes, things we have never noticed before." Zavattini's thoughts resonated with me because I realised that I have always felt

pressure to fit my ideas into a certain kind of exciting or marketable structure. I am finally able to accept that it feels the most right to let these moments sit and “resonate” for themselves.

My book’s focus on the resonance of reality gives it a relevant place in current culture as well. The pandemic has caused a widespread attention shift towards everyday lives, on what people are experiencing at home and in the world dealing with the virus. Because we’ve had to so drastically shift how we operate, the contrasts of “now” versus “then” have been highlighted. We have been forced to fully confront the banality of everyday life during quarantine, as well as the realities faced by those on the front lines of today’s crises. Escapist media remains hugely popular for good reason as well; but I have seen that new media in these past few months has shown a necessary shift towards acknowledging and processing reality.

This project is personally significant not only due to its autobiographical nature, but because it pushes the boundaries of what a good story has meant to me historically. When I first started recording bits of my life, I thought it would just be nice to read and relive them. Then, I thought I could use them to inspire scenes in some fictional narrative, allowing me to insert some electric reality into a fantasy. Now, I’ve finally accepted that I can let my descriptions speak on their own, and that they don’t need to be strung together with a more dramatic or magical context in order to create a beautiful tale.

From Lord of the Rings to Zavattini to my own experiences with how time, place, and emotion fit together, I’ve found a type of narrative that feels immediately right and real. I see now that there are vivid and relatable stories everywhere, in tiny moments and changes. With this project, I want to not only share the inspiration I’ve found in these moments, but show others how the wondrous, the intricate, and the special exists in their everyday lives.

## Bibliography

Carrasco, Freddy. *Gleem*. Peow, 2019.

An Afro-futuristic graphic novel that plays with the abstraction of time in frenetic, montage-like panels as well as minimalist pages.

Cesare Zavattini, 'Some Ideas on the Cinema,' *Sight and Sound* 23:2 (October-December 1953), 64-9. Edited from a recorded interview published in *La rivista del cinema italiano* 2 (December 1952). Translated by Pier Luigi Lanza.

A short manifesto-of-sorts in which Zavattini introduces neorealism, a new theory in film responding to the brutality of life following World War II. Zavattini explains the importance of depicting the beauty and intricacy of normal, unrepresented everyday life.

Evens, Brecht. *The Making Of*. Drawn and Quarterly, 2012.

A graphic novel with an unusually expressive or "fine arts" style which uses some visual cues unusual in popular comics.

Kaufman, Ruprecht von. "Ruprecht Von Kaufman." Instagram, [www.instagram.com/ruprecht\\_v\\_kaufmann/](http://www.instagram.com/ruprecht_v_kaufmann/).

An oil painter who creates dreamlike, uncanny scenes and obscures characters' faces in interesting and graceful ways.

McCormack, Patrick. *Patrick McCormack*. Instagram, [www.instagram.com/patrick.mccormack/](http://www.instagram.com/patrick.mccormack/).

A New England-based photographer who creates a distinct nostalgic feeling with eerie ambient light in suburban settings.

McGuire, Richard. *Here*. Pantheon Books, 2014.

A graphic novel that just sits on one location, showing how it changes throughout time, starting in the age of dinosaurs.

Mitchell, David. *Cloud Atlas*. Random House, 2004.

A speculative magical realism novel telling the stories of six different characters from very different places and time periods ranging from a ship in the 18th century to post-apocalyptic Australia. Gradually, connections between each nesting story are revealed.

Miyazaki, Hayao. *Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind*. Tokuma Shoten, 1982.

A multi-volume graphic novel by the co-founder of Studio Ghibli. The book follows a young, passionate princess in a post apocalyptic world plagued by a toxic jungle, who fights for peace both between warring nations and between humans and nature. The illustrations are done with fine ink cross-hatching and involve intricate backgrounds of both forests and machinery.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings Trilogy*. Allen & Unwin, 1954.

An extremely influential fantasy trilogy about a monumental and dangerous quest, set in a fictional realm with deep and elaborate lore, histories, languages, and social dynamics.

Warburton, Holly. "Illustration." *Holly Warburton*, [hollywarbs.com/](http://hollywarbs.com/).

An England-based illustrator who has a very soft, impressionistic style, but with modernized scenes, colors, compositions, and digital techniques. She often adds small animations to further bring her illustrations to life.

## Creative Brief

### **Project Vision**

About three years ago, I began a journal of moments. I would notice a period of silence, or a lonely or peculiar headspace influenced by my surroundings— striking falls of light, ambient sounds, smells, the feeling of the air, all tangled up with my own internal feelings. I would pause and describe that moment as vividly as possible, trying to capture its beauty and emotional charge. I ended up with twelve dense pages of these moments from the past few years, and they became the inspiration for my thesis. I realised that when I read back through, not only did the descriptions intensely transport me to pieces of the past, but I could chart a poignant emotional journey threaded together in snapshots. Unaware, I had written a story. With everything going on lately in the world and in my life, it felt right to turn inwards, to delve into the scenes I had already set, and to use the visualization of my journal as both processing and communication. My proposal goes as follows:

In a 56-page illustrated book (still untitled), I will explore themes of love, transience, and belonging through moody, vivid autobiographical snapshots. Breezy traditional illustrations and hand-lettered prose will give the book a personal and genuine feel, while a combination of full-bleed spreads and small panels will create an organic, contemplative flow. I hope that with a balance of intensely specific memories, relatable beauty and emotions, and an innovative sequential format, these moments can strike others as they struck me. My book will explore what I feel is an increasingly important need to slow down, sit with reality and let it resonate.

### **Audience**

The audience for this book is broad, as I think most adults or young adults could relate to the feelings that come with internal reflection, as well as finding a sense of belonging in relationships and places. My focus has been on exploring storytelling strategies that feel compelling and comprehensible, and also true to the flow of my original writing. This book *is* made to communicate feelings to an audience---that being said, the subject matter is very personal, and the format doesn't necessarily fit with the popular narrative graphic novels that are on the market. The audience drawn to this book will likely be those who want to feel, reflect, and sit with something they're reading, and for people who are interested in exploring storytelling formats that are off the beaten path.

### **Methods & Materials**

Illustrative technique has been very important to me in translating my moments into a visual format. I wanted to make sure that the vividness of the real-life experience shines through, and that the emotional context retains its impact. I'm attached to a primarily analogue way of creating art, or at least to using analogue mediums as a base for everything. I feel more connected to the piece I'm making when I'm more physically involved in the process, and

aesthetically I'm drawn towards the textures and grounded imperfections in traditional media. For me, traditional mediums add spirit and sensitivity, and because of the personal nature of this project, the act of physically creating feels important as well.

To give a foundation for how my process works, here's a short excerpt from my journal:

*Damp settles in the neighborhood. Headlights halo, then beam through the mist. Trees and houses fade like blotted watercolour into grey. Only orange house lights pierce through, they float, welcoming, like elven lanterns in the murk. Sounds of my footsteps and the spring peepers echo and quickly fall flat.*

First, I'd use a pencil to sketch the defining lines for prominent elements like house lights and a foreground figure. Then using a light table, on a separate layer, I'd lay an impressionistic ground of acrylic paint to block out shapes and light, like those of the trees and headlights. These layers I scan in separately and compile digitally. This way, I get all the immediacy of traditional mediums, while taking advantage of digital editing capabilities. It also allows me to experiment with how elements layer and interact and with how much of each is needed. Most importantly, I've found that this stylistic approach speaks to the themes of movement and transience in my work, as foreground textures can sort of dance in and out of the "space" of the painted background.

### **Comparative Media**

When I began this project, it was a very personal endeavor, and I wasn't aware of comparative media in the marketplace. This is part of what made the project so exciting to me; the idea that I was doing something new. But I also felt the importance of knowing who has similar ideas so I could be inspired by (or steer away from) their execution. My mentor, Molly Mendoza, gave me some great recommendations of graphic novels that she knows similarly play with time or sequential format in an unconventional way. Among these are Richard McGuire's *Here*, Freddy Carrasco's *Gleem*, and Brecht Evens' *The Making Of*. Though they have quite different subject matters and visual approaches, all of these books ask for a contemplative reader, and all create a fully unique experience of time and space. The personal nature of my project also makes it unique; it's not as informal as a sketch diary, of which I've seen a good few on bookstore shelves. It's almost closer to an illustrated poetry book, with explorative descriptions and rich visuals joining to create an internal, immersive experience.

### **Marketplace Application**

My plan is to self-publish. My hope is that many of the illustrations I create for the project will be strong individual portfolio pieces. Though it isn't a direct-to-market pitch, I also hope that the book will demonstrate to publishers my storytelling skills and act as a bump towards getting hired for future sequential projects.

In terms of where it fits in the marketplace for audiences, I think that its focus on the resonance of reality gives it a relevant place in current culture. The pandemic has caused a widespread attention shift towards everyday lives, on what people are experiencing at home and



in the world dealing with the virus. Because we've had to so drastically shift how we operate, the contrasts of “now” versus “then” have been highlighted. We have been forced to confront the banality of everyday life during quarantine, as well as the realities faced by those on the front lines of today’s crises. I have seen in myself, in those around me, even in the professional world and in media, an inwards shift of attention, and a compulsion to acknowledge and process reality. This processing looks different for everyone, but I hope that my own version, through this project, might relate to and inspire others’.