

ALPENGLOW THESIS DEFENSE

SARA MCCANDLESS

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ARTIST STATEMENT



HOWDY!

Sara McCandless combines humor and expressive shapes to imagine playful characters and scenarios. Her work is inspired by the ridiculousness in everyday life, and creates an unexpected juxtaposition between absurd and mundane.

Originally from a small town in Colorado at the foot of Pikes Peak, she often references the landscape of her upbringing with depictions of isolated mountainscapes, forest creatures, and quiet desert nights.

Alpenglow is a project aimed at self-discovery, keeping alive the desire to explore and create, and to give permission to wander aimlessly in the dark.

Also, she is definitely not two dogs in a coat, no matter what you may have heard.



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WRITTEN PROPOSAL

Page #1

May 2020

We're strange creatures who hoard strange trash.

I recently looked back at my collection of items that I did hold on to over the years. Surprisingly, out of all the things that I chose to keep, I chose relatively unimportant things. Things like take-out menus, parking stubs, brochures to places I'd never been, tickets to (forgettable) movies, the excitedly-torn envelopes from a purchase that came in the mail which I have already lost or forgotten about, games of hangman drawn on the back of stained receipts, etc. These things on their own were just trash, but they gave me an emotional attachment to the past when there was not much that I could reasonably keep. This trash acted as tangible mental bookmarks to flip through, hold, and remember: Who was I with? What was that day like? What funny thing happened? These objects effectively told my story of things that I had experienced, cherished, and found hilarious.

THESIS STATEMENT

Looking through the strange, useless, trash that I have held on to made me reflect on the importance of visual ephemera for memory and personal identity. In my personal collection of junk there is a narrative of the type of life I experience, the world I live in, and the things that I value. For my thesis, I will expand on this usage of trash ephemera to explore narrative by creating a 32 page museum catalog that explores a fictionalized world through the trash objects that exist on display. Through risograph printing, screen-printing, and digital work, I want to curate a collection of everyday "trash items" that are visually linked in aesthetics, palette, and humorous tone, as well as are cohesive together despite not being clearly connected by form. There will be loose narratives that add context to the items in the collection. My goal is to create an entertaining body of work that the audience can interact with to imagine a narrative in this fictionalized world.

CONTEXT

By creating a series of trash items, I am examining a personal experience that is important to me, and also exploring how it relates to narrative by asking the question: Who are we when we define ourselves by the weird things that we choose to hold on to? For me, most of the things that I chose to keep were things that I found funny, ridiculous, and had a good story, so I want to keep the tone of the fictional narrative consistent with this, and for humor to be a priority when executing the items.

Additionally, the idea of nostalgia is a primary factor for this project. This project

reflects a nostalgia for physical, tangible, keepsakes in a time where we can store 2,000 photos of our dog on a supercomputer that lives in our pockets (which we can also scream at to find us the best pad-thai in a 5-mile radius). The cultural shifts in how we communicate due to technological changes over the past 20 years is like incredible magic in so many ways, but also has moved so much of our lives into a non-tangible realm. I still don't know what the hell "the cloud" is. My audience, therefore, becomes people who connect with the nostalgia of mementos in a non-digital world.

PROCESS and how it relates to MY VISION

The process for this project will begin with research. Although this project remains incredibly personal, I've found that when discussing it that many people relate with the strange useless things that they also cherish. From a towering stack of hotel keycards, a massive ball of string that has been added on to for many years, or braids of hair, everyone has garbage that they love. I want to leave room for this project to evolve, shape, and grow from not only my own experiences, but also from that this is a shared experience to some degree. I want to reach out to gain insight into what strange things people hold on to and why before I begin production to see if something resonates more than other things. I'll be reaching out to people I know and strangers through various question/survey platforms such as Instagram and survey monkey. Ideally, I want to gather at least 50 responses from a wide range of ages and lifestyles, not just ones in line with my audience, just to see if there are any notable motivations for gathering trash items.

After research, my process always begins with pencil on paper. It's important to me that flaws and mistakes are embraced at this stage and that I am keeping an open mind that the final outcome may be different than what I am currently imagining. At this stage, I'm figuring out character, tone, texture, rhythm, and composition of the final deliverables without delving too far into the specifics of the final images themselves. I work primarily between pencil sketch, creating analog textures, and then combining everything together when executing the final images digitally. This process will be applied to all of my items before they are taken to final production.

Initially I planned the project to be displayed as an installation of a bedroom space, however this project is more focused on the items themselves than the space that they live in.

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TECHNICAL PLAN

First and foremost, this is a collection of object illustrations that connect together in catalog form. The catalog itself will be 32 pages, and 8 inches wide by 10 inches tall. I'd classify it as falling somewhere between a picture book, visual journal, and a zine, and I classify it as somewhere in between those of things because although I'm creating a mix of narrative and illustration, I don't see the work as needing sequential storytelling, or for the viewer to fully read the catalog in order to understand the context. This project is a way to add context for images that I would like to eventually make into a real physical product line, a way to explore refining my storytelling voice within my illustration practice, and an opportunity to test working in a 32 page picture book format in a new way.

The objects featured in the museum catalog will be determined throughout the process, but I will be pulling from items that are reminiscent of what I collected in my own experience. Items must fit the criteria of items that can inform on a character's lifestyle, relationships, or values, tell information about the world the object exists in, or inform on the function of the object.

INFLUENCES

I'm influenced by humor, playful imagery, and vibrant color, especially for this project. I'm looking at influences like Lisa Hanawalt's book *Coyote Doggirl*, Nathaniel Russel's incredible fake fliers and books, Jennifer Xiao's playful illustrations and product designs, Misaki Kawai's installations, and so much more. In addition to contemporary illustrators, I'm extremely drawn to the ridiculousness and creativity of medieval art, like illuminated manuscripts. I'm heavily inspired by the creative decisions that were made to solve problems with space and perspective, tone, and the format of a book in illuminated manuscripts from the 1500s. I also just love the opulence and chaotic splattering of decorative elements in them.

PORTFOLIO

I mainly work in high saturation, using warm and bold colors that remind me of the desert landscape that I grew up in, and I enjoy creating playful characters. A few projects in my portfolio helped spark this thesis work. First, a picture book dummy that I wrote and am in the process of illustrating, *Alpenglow*, explores a small cryptic community of ridiculous characters in a mountain town where everything seems to go wrong. This project allowed for me to emphasize ridiculous characters, explore world building and helped me

realize that I really enjoy building a narrative and combining text with illustration. Second, last semester I created a series of portraits that used a limited palette of 5 colors, and the project was formatted to mimic riso/screenprinting where layers of different colors could overlap to mix a new hue. This project made me realize that I love working on strange faces, and that I really connected with thinking like a printmaker when executing multiple layers of colors in this form. The portrait project additionally led into a 3 print risograph series of various objects that were organized by room to tell the story of the rumors of a mysterious manor on the Oregon coast.

While I want to reach as many markets as possible, these projects aim towards an emphasis on publishing, licensing, and product design. Short-term projects like editorials are exciting for me, but I do aspire to work on more long-form projects like picture books, graphic novels, and products, while forming my own personal collections for freelance, gallery shows, licensing, and tabling events like Crafty Wonderland that connect me directly with people who will enjoy my work.

CONCLUSION

We're all strange creatures who hoard strange trash, living in our own absurd yet mundane worlds. What I chose to hold on to when I could not keep much were the things that brought me joy, no matter how pointless and irrelevant the objects themselves were. I hope that this museum exhibition guide can bring that same joy to others that I felt when I found something useless and ridiculous, and that people will want to collect a piece of this garbage for their own hoards, in their own strange worlds.

WRITTEN PROPOSAL

Page #3

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PROJECT STATEMENT

December 2020

This project changed immensely from proposal to defense. I feel a strong connection to addressing burnout, perfectionism, and creative pressure when discussing this project. Throughout this process I often felt hopeless, lost, and it would take hours to just make one mark on a page. I hope that this project, and the research, time, love, and sometimes grueling forcing of myself to just simply create something, anything, can be helpful to others.

If I have learned one thing from Alpenglow, it is that getting an idea onto paper from an inside the brain is a feat to celebrate on its own, regardless of if we assign it a value of being "good" or not.

Create freely, experiment endlessly, and destroy your notion of perfection. Embrace your curiosity and unexpected joys, and allow yourself rest.

Safe travels, wanderer.

ORAL DEFENSE

Page #1

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Welcome!

My name is Sara McCandless. I'm really excited to show you the project that I've been working on for the past year.

First, I just want to say thank you to my mentor, Phoenix. She has been so patient and trusting of me with this whole process. Even when I was missing every single deadline that I was making for myself, and even when the project was changing dramatically week to week, she was nothing but supportive and helped me so much as I rambled in circles, trying to figure this project out.

I also want to say thank you to my amazingly supportive boyfriend, Jay, who at any given point has always asked, "what can I do to help?" Without the kindness and generosity of him and his loving family, who have been so kind to me over the years, I simply would not be able to be here doing this today.

So, let's get started and look at some dogs.

Welcome to Alpenglow. Alpenglow is an anthology book that follows three dogs throughout mundane and magical misfortunes in quiet evening mountainscapes. It is stylistically influenced by illuminated manuscripts, screen printing techniques, and groovy mid century aesthetics.

My goal for this project was to explore my artistic voice with a project that included environments, written component integration, and character design. The focus of this book is not the end result, but the journey along the way. I love mundane humor and magic, (and chunky dogs) and the goal of this book is not only to create a portfolio piece that reflects my interests more, but finding my artistic voice also means to re-examine my work process to be more sustainable, to find stylistic choices and imagery that I identify with, and to experiment endlessly.

If you saw my thesis proposal last semester, I originally pitched a museum guide within the town of Alpenglow. I've been working on this concept for a while, and wasn't really sure how this final project was going to take form. My original goal was to pair text and image to give context to products that I wanted to make – like patches, pins, shirts, etc. So the museum guide would have been a lookbook for the products, and what I thought would be a good opportunity to get like a small online shop off the ground, while also saying to potential employers like, Hey! Look! Look what I can do for you! But, with the obligatory pandemic mention, I had to accept that production of physical items was not a viable option for me in the foreseeable future and decided to reconstruct my project to be about the book as an object itself.

When I began to restructure my project to figure out what I actually wanted to get out of it, I realized a few things. One, I wouldn't be confident or happy with any product version of anything if I wasn't really connecting with the initial illustrations, and, two, that I was working myself so hard at the expense to my mental and physical health – all because I was only thinking about trying to get a job after school in art as fast as possible. Why wasn't I thinking about myself at all? Why wasn't loving to create a priority for me?

So, I had to slow down – whether I wanted to or not. I was struggling with the intersection of perfectionism and burnout and realizing that my entire process of how I create wasn't sustainable now, and that I was not going to be able to work in a sustainable way professionally at this rate.

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So, with this book of Alpenglow I was rebuilding my process from the ground up in a healthier way, while paying attention to what I love and enjoy, and, in short this project was about allowing myself the space to wander aimlessly in the dark while I figured everything out.

The book is 32 pages, with separate end pages, for a total of 40 illustrated pages. It measures 8 inches wide by 10 inches tall, and is full color.



Here is the work how it would have been displayed up on a wall if I was at campus. I'm just going to go through and talk about the anthology aspect a bit now, and a little bit about the decisions that informed each piece. Each section in this book feels a little different, and that's intentional. While I don't outright title anything, I used color, composition, font, use of text (or no text), symbols/icons, and value proportion to designate the different chunks.

First, I'll talk about the mushroom stew segment. Its pink and red, the dogs are the clearest here, there are borders with the text. This segment is about introducing the characters and really playing with character design and expression. There's a lot going on in this segment, I've put a lot of visual clutter here that defines it. I picked this line of text since this line of text has been with the project since the beginning and always seems to be a favorite - I've adapted it a few times and each time it's been really fun to see how it turns out.



Next, this section kind of has a story within a story. These four pages begin and end with a large tree holding together these really text-heavy spreads. Purples start to take over the pages, the dogs get smaller. I wanted a few breather moments of textless spreads in the book, because it serves as a way to let people pause, to just enjoy the image and slow the pacing down. Then, by contrasting it with these pages that are so self-aware that they are inside of a book in their layout, it creates a bit of strangeness as to where the viewer is placed, I think. That's what I love about illuminated manuscripts so much. They're so aware that it is a drawing in a book, and really take the book as an object into consideration. I just really enjoy that approach when I see it.

The page with the large tree and the city in the background is the direct center of the book and has a lot of contrast in it. It's also the most differently rendered. This spread is demonstrating the journey that we and the characters have made from the beginning of the book to where we are now. We began the story in front of the tree outside the city and by the time we reach this center spread we have moved through the city and are now behind the tree.

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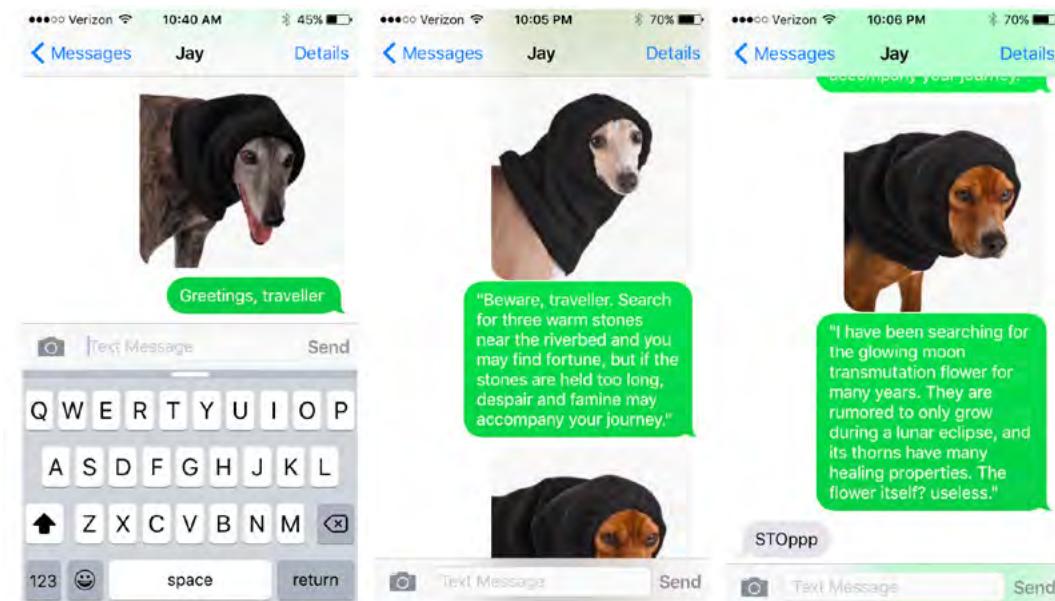
We're now in the cave segment, where the colors get darker and more blue as the dogs venture underground. I worked on the thumbnails for this a lot in a previous course. Keeping in mind the book as an object and treating an image this way where its two in one was such fun to problem solve.



And last, the mountain top section. These are the darkest pages, the most simple, and it felt like an appropriate, quiet way to end this book. It was like my mania with this idea was finally able to end! I finally felt like I explored my idea completely, and I was ready to be done with it. Which I cannot explain to you how satisfying that was after gruelingly obsessing over every little detail, which at this point, I learned, didn't really matter. It is not the last project I will ever make, and I had learned what I needed to from it.)

The end pages are the only pages that really get any yellows in the palette. I wanted to have that gilded, gold leafing feeling somewhere in the book, and I figured if this was ever printed I'd want my end pages to be metallic since I was so inspired by illuminated manuscripts throughout the process. I also wanted to make the end pages different to act as an entrance into and out of the twilight.

So, that's about all I have on the book itself. The rest is just going to be sort of informally going through my talking points about the process of this project over the past year, inspiration, and where the project goes next.



This project started many moons ago, all because I saw pictures of dogs in little hoods that made me laugh so hard that I cried. Which is a common experience for me. I started sending these to my boyfriend, with captions that I attached to them, and I found out that I couldn't stop sending these captions. A lot of the text from the book has come from these initial text messages.

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It wasn't until two semesters ago, when I had a cultural marketplace with Ryan Bubnis that I had a tapestry project, and my mind immediately went medieval. So I referenced a bunch of 16th century tapestries and started trying to lean into the stiff flatness that I enjoyed while also making it my own, and the Knight Dog was born. Later in that course I made the Byzantine Dog Zine, which referenced illuminated manuscripts and I tried out combining the images of medieval dogs with text. I didn't feel like the work was quite where I wanted it to be, but I was thrilled that other people in the class also enjoyed these creatures that I had brought to life.

That same semester, I experimented with working in a style that referenced block printing, and worked on letter-based composition environments that never made it to final for a small book project in Design and Image, with my mentor Phoenix. I loved the idea, but I wasn't sure where I wanted to apply this technique yet.

Then came along this 5-part series of a wizard dog on a hike that I made in Visual Vocabulary with Jason McNamara. This was the first time that I realized that I could enjoy making things wholly while I make them, and not treat everything as some academic expedition. This was the first like glimmer of seeing that I really wanted to explore my personal voice in the work that I make, and that's why these images stay so true to their originals in the final book.



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Last semester, I took advanced picture book with David Hohn and wanted to see if I could handle this idea in a long form project. I created a 32 page picture book dummy directed at the kids picture book market with my texts and upright walking wizard dog designs. I think you can really see what stayed the same between draft one to now. I will say that this version, version 1, is much better to pitch for a kids picture book than my final thesis project simply because there is so much more emphasis on readability out loud, and that I really focused on page turn experience.



Last, but not least, I also worked in the scripting course for comics and games with Jason again to learn about writing creatively, as I had never done this before. This taught me how to effectively plan out a book of any size and save myself time, work, and sleep - which I desperately needed. Alpenglow version 1 was written and organized before this class, and was not super strong in the aspect of three act structure. I ended up writing not for this book in that course, but for a story within the same universe directed at the kids book market.

So much coursework and time and energy and love has been poured into this, and again, I just want to say thank you to all of the professors who mentored me at each stage while I

tried to see this vision come to life.

Now I'll transition to just talking about inspiration. Every time I did deep dives into voice, I started doing inspiration spelunking - where I was making a lot of mood boards, making playlists, reading books with great art, playing games with similar aesthetic choices, scouring social media and online stores, I was trying to get my hands on anything I could in the digital realm. Then, just sketching while feeling inspired by those things, and just kind of seeing what starts to emerge onto the paper. I tended to gravitate to symbols and icons more than compositions in this process but it went all over the place.

I love games, I love anything with little tasks and seeing how people interact with each other in creative ways. And, since I found myself not being able to leave my house, (obligatory pandemic mention) I started to get into Elder Scrolls Online during this project since I had never played an MMO before and I'm a huge fan of the Elder Scrolls series. It became such a satisfying way to see how people are interacting with each other in online spaces when art is the main thing between them that it gave me like an unexpected joy. It's just so cool to see people interacting with art together, and when a little space can be carved out where people get to get transported briefly to this imaginary place that's been created! That's my dream! So yeah, when I got really into Elder Scrolls Online, I realized that I was experiencing that joy about people connecting with art again. And I just was thinking like "How do I lead people through a space? An experience?" A lot of progress on work came from inspiration from this game.

I hope Alpenglow invites people in where they feel like they briefly saw what the woods are like as a passerby. That's why there's no interiors in the book, and everything is at this voyeuristic distance. That's also partially why I chose a picture book to format this, because this felt a bit like a magic tome to me, or something that exists in a weird space in time - and I think those decisions that were informed by this like voyeuristic way of seeing the world, and not being able to leave my house, really added to the vibe that I wanted to get: it pulls you in, but keeps you at a distance, it's bright but flat, it's always this twilight night time space, the characters are never in one style or outfit, consistency isn't the focus, the page compositions for the most part glide left to right to pick up the next page. We're just passing through Alpenglow, and our position here is uncertain.

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I grew up in Colorado, and a big part of my childhood was seeing all of this ghost town abandoned mining equipment in these little mountain towns, and that always sort of stuck with me as being so surreal. I really referenced a lot of old photographs from Colorado mining towns. But the magic happened when I started collaging stuff. When I started playing with the photographs a bit and digitally altering them, I realized that using my hands to move them around and recontextualize them, I was making some really cool stuff that I would have never thought of compositionally.

I started diving into illuminated manuscripts again for version 2, and I was determined to go a bit further in this part of the process and incorporate collage as a way to generate unexpected ideas, and also to really get a feel for what I wanted to retain in my own work from the research I was doing.



Here's an example of the early collages that informed the city scenes in the book. I was fortunate enough to find a book that had a ton of illustrations from what (I'm assuming is) the same artist, and I just started stacking all these house shapes and seeing what they made. Letting go of control in this way often led to me thinking about getting more and

more ideas, and this was so beneficial to my process.

I also started trying to get more unexpected elements into my work, by trying to do dream drawing. just closing my eyes when I'm really tired and sketching on a page and seeing what came about in the morning when I woke up. That's where a lot of my plant shapes came in and why a lot is kept pretty undefined.

Here's some character designs I worked on this semester with Yer Vue, and just trying to imagine more characters in the world of Alpenglow. I was working with Over the Garden Wall as a style influence for these characters, and it was just so fun and refreshing to imagine stuff in a variety of ways from so many different areas.

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Illuminated Manuscript Resources:

<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminated-manuscripts/Results.asp?intPage=2>

<https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en>



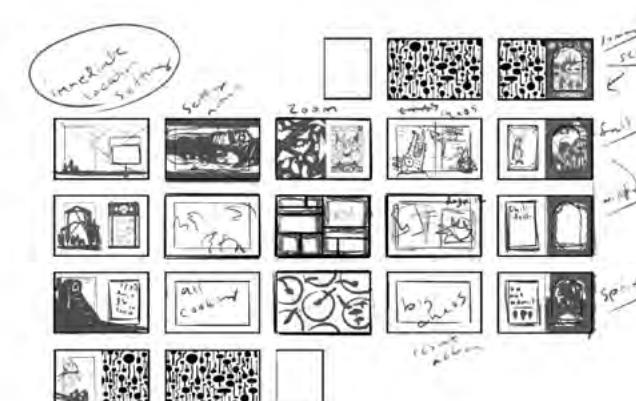
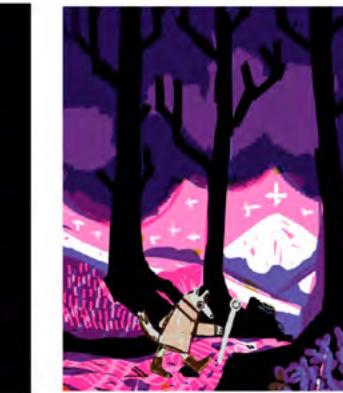
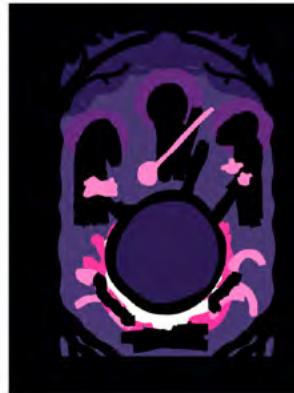
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Last for process related things, I just wanted to show like a bit of where my process is when it's super early. I keep most of my stuff super blobby pretty much until the final push. I change elements so much in my process that I don't really commit to too much besides value and silhouette until I've really locked something down. This is the part I still have to figure out the most.

(Look how blobby these are! I always forget how much work I've done until I go back and realize that at one point, this is all this idea was on paper. I think it's just good to remember that.)



Where do I see this project going now?

Finding my voice I see as essential before I delve into my favorite thing, product design. I'm obsessed with artists like Clarice Tudor, Wizard of Barge, Jen Xiao, Lisa Congdon, and so many more, who have created their own collections that are their voice. This is ideally what I want to do, and what I see Alpenglow as the basis for starting.

As where the actual book of Alpenglow goes next, I could see myself compiling a large book that is self-published at some point that's like an art book that includes sketches and process work, but I have no plans of doing it right now. Instead I want to use this book as promotion material on social media, and to use it to deconstruct my process further for myself once I've gotten a bit more space from the project and figure out what I want to take from here with me on my travels to the next one.

Last, I want to comment on what I learned from my own perfectionism.

1. Doing nothing but working on art will not make my art better. It actually did the opposite!
2. Let go of control. Embrace unexpected joy.
3. Its not always about reaching the great tennis ball in the sky. Its about the critters that make the journey with you.

Thank you, to all the students at PNCA who have been such admirable and inspiring peers. Thank you to the professors and faculty for your endless support and guidance. Thank you to Linda and everyone on the focus week team for making focus week work, and thank you all, for being here with me on this journey today. !

CREATIVE BRIEF

Page #1



Creative Vision

Welcome to Alpenglow.

Alpenglow is a 32 page, separate ended anthology book that follows three dogs throughout the mundane and magical scenery of an isolated mountain town.

The book takes place entirely in evening time, and explores storytelling through various paper ephemera like menus, magazine ads, and torn notes.

Alpenglow is stylistically influenced by illuminated manuscripts, screen printing methods, and groovy midcentury aesthetics.

CREATIVE BRIEF

Page #2

Creative Vision

My goal for Alpenglow was to explore my artistic voice in the tone of environment, written component integration, and character design.

This resulted in a process that resembled more of a visual journal approach where I was figuring stuff out along the way of combining image and text, rather than a planned out manuscript paired with illustrations.

I love mundane humor and magic, (and chunky dogs) and the goal of this book is not only to create a portfolio piece, but also just a reminder of the things that I love, enjoy, and want to keep taking into my practice in the future.

Creative Vision

Specs:

32 pages, separate ended

Page Size: 8.5" x 11" tall

Spread Size: 17" wide, 11" tall

Final Deliverables:

Completely finished PDF

and hopefully a copy that I have
bound myself (covid permitting)



CREATIVE BRIEF

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<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3718778/>

<http://www.welcometonightvale.com/>

<https://kids.scholastic.com/kids/books/goosebumps/series/>

Audience

I assume that my audience for Alpenglow most likely also enjoys media that is similar in the weird-but-fun tone, such as Over the Garden Wall, Welcome to Nightvale, or Goosebumps.



Methods and Materials

I'm working with a mix of analog and digital media. My images are composed digitally, and I am integrating ink and colored pencil textures as well.

The color palettes range from 2-5 colors per image, with the intention to be working in a way where I am setting up my files to reflect how a risograph or screen print would need to be set up.

Will Alpenglow be printed by riso or screen print? Probably not any time soon.

Do I love the idea of suffering like that eventually? Absolutely.



CREATIVE BRIEF

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<https://www.instagram.com/flesh.png/?hl=en>

<https://www.instagram.com/tilliewalden/?hl=en>

Comparable Media



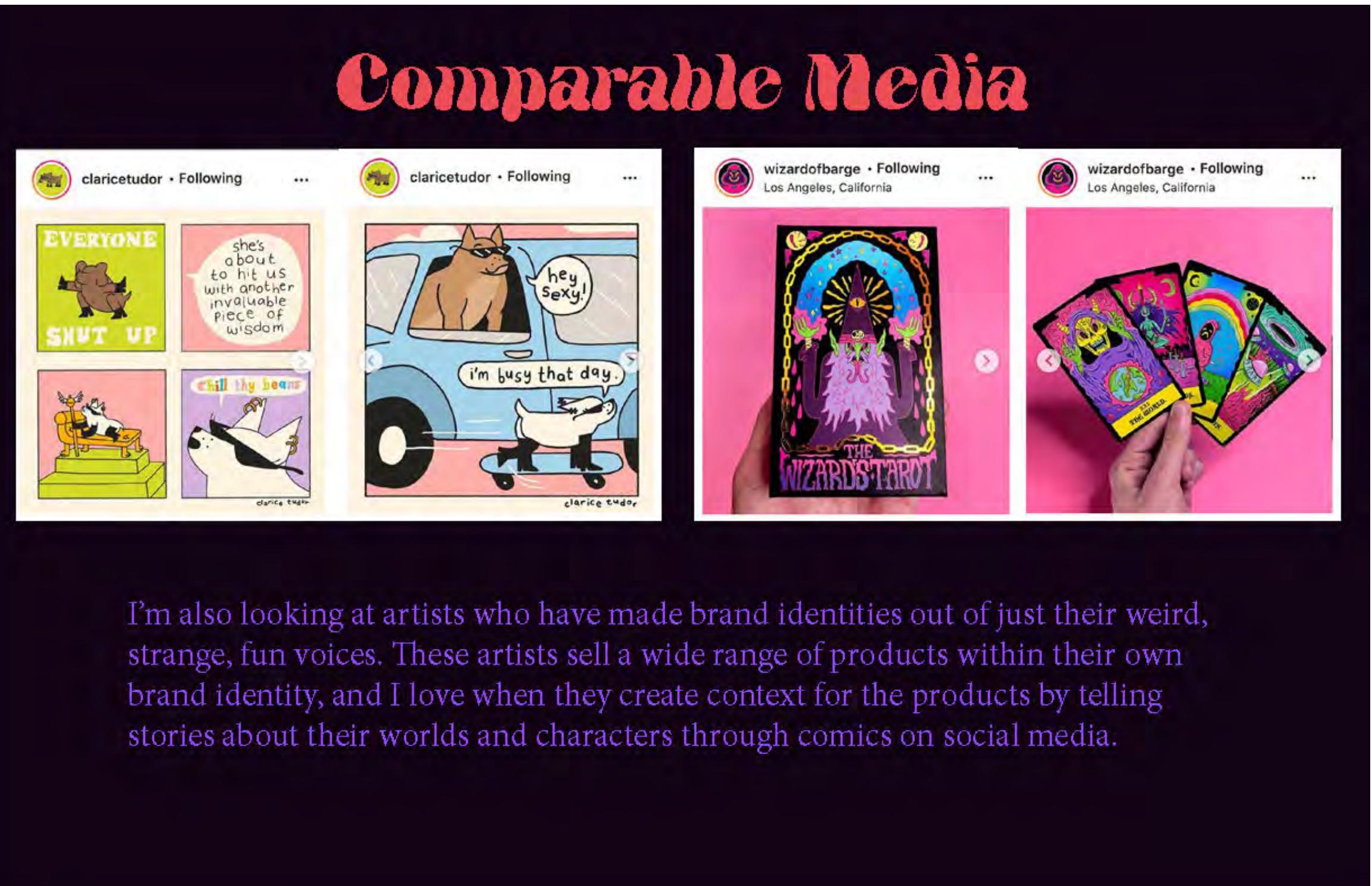
I'm very influenced by seeing art books from other artists that they are marketing and selling on their own. These books are often compilations of their voice and notes.

CREATIVE BRIEF

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<https://www.instagram.com/claricetudor/?hl=en>

<https://wizardofbarge.com/>



CREATIVE BRIEF

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Marketplace Application

This project's main function for marketplace application is to act as the beginning steps of building a personal brand identity.

By problem solving throughout this project in tone, environment, and character design, I feel that I could take the context of Alpenglow into making comics, printmaking, apparel design, stickers, stationery, etc.

I see this project continuing post thesis, where I am adding more and more into the wandering adventures of creatures in this magical world.

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e-codices - Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland. <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en>

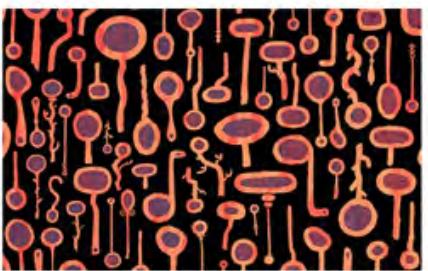
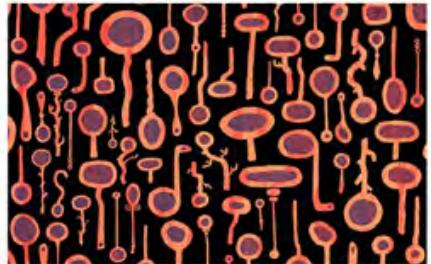
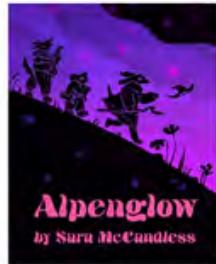
<https://www.elderscrollsonline.com/en-us/home>

Hollington, Sophy. <https://sophyhollington.com/>

Tudor, Clarice. <https://www.instagram.com/claricetudor/?hl=en>.

Xiao, Jennifer. <https://www.jenniferxiao.com/>

<https://wizardofbarge.com/>











Do not fear the
cave at the edge
of town.

For it may be damp,
and reverberate
your voice oddly,

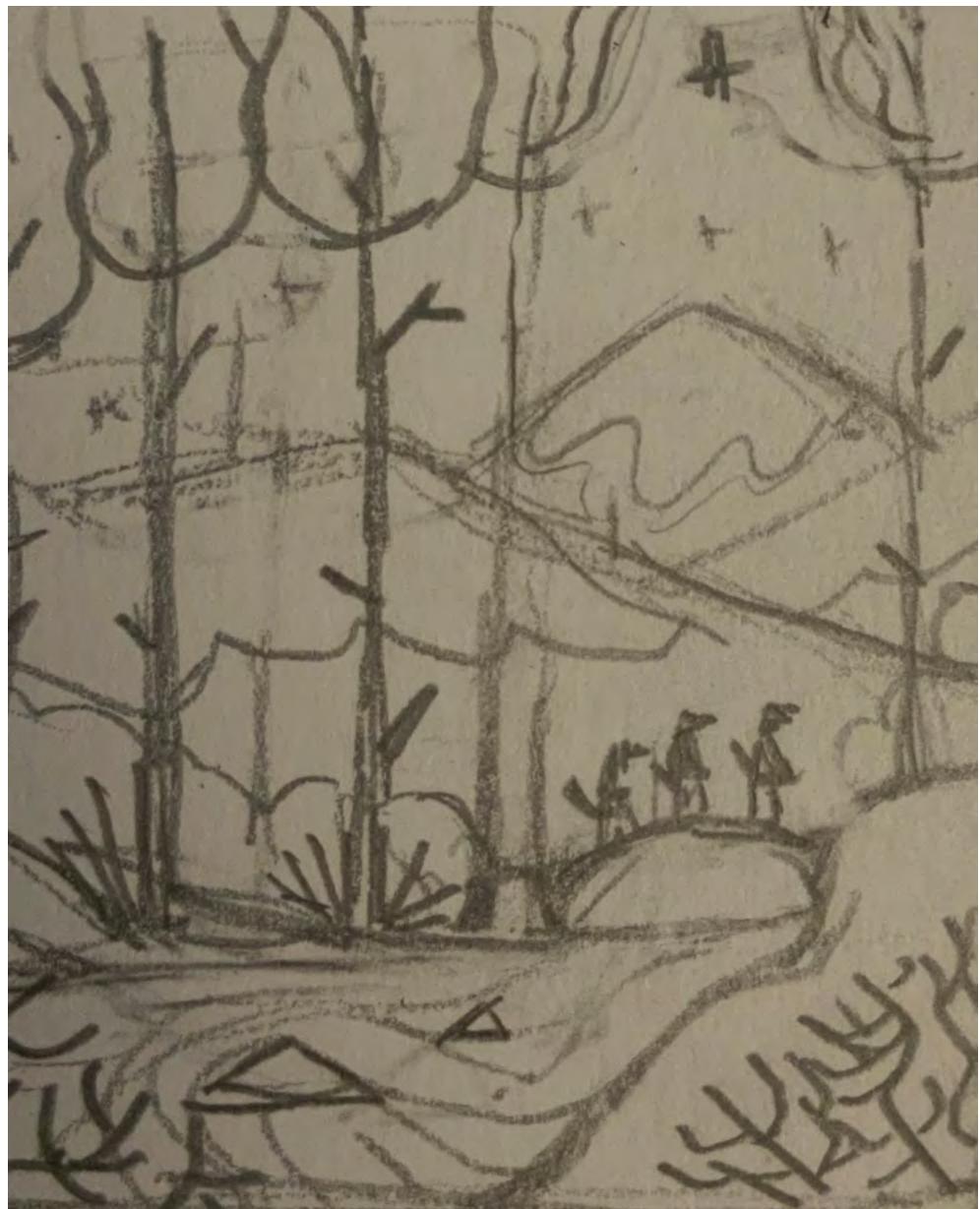
but . . .



The 4.5 star rating
etched into the wall
suggests that most
guests enjoy their stay.

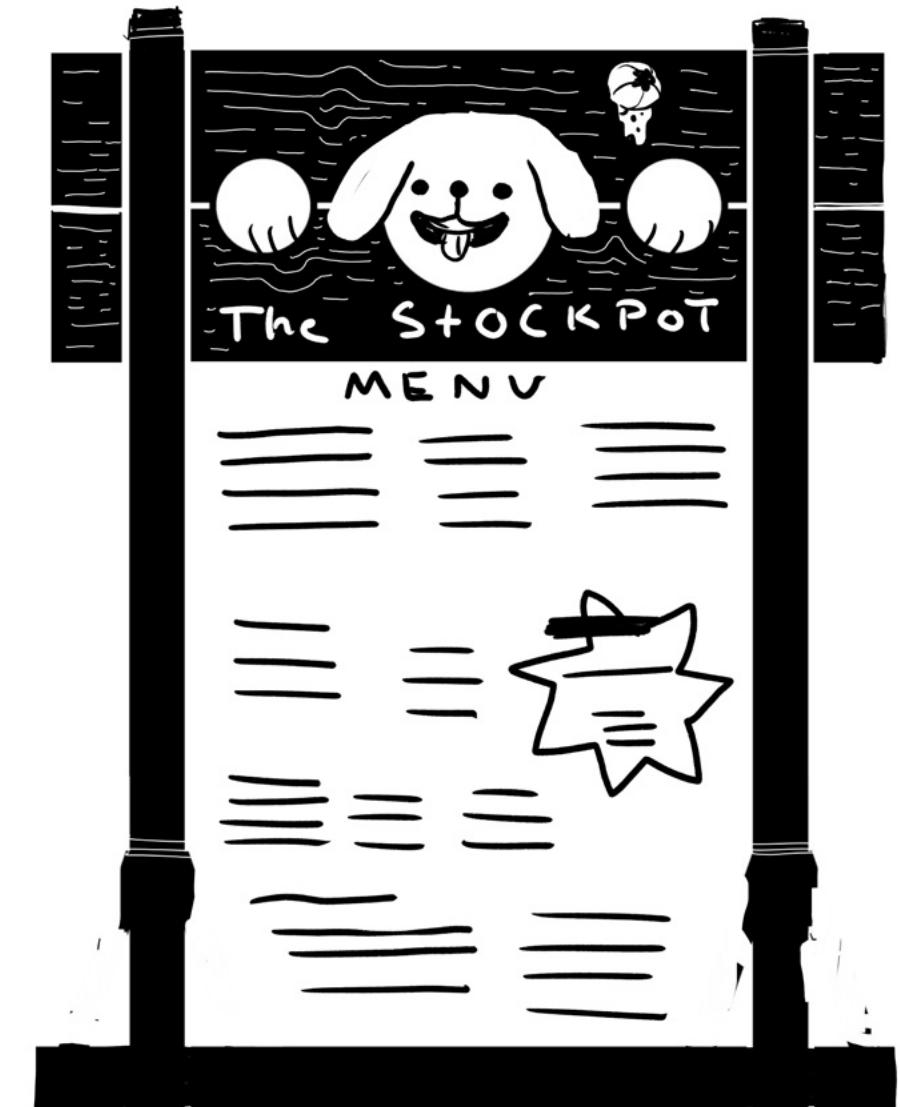
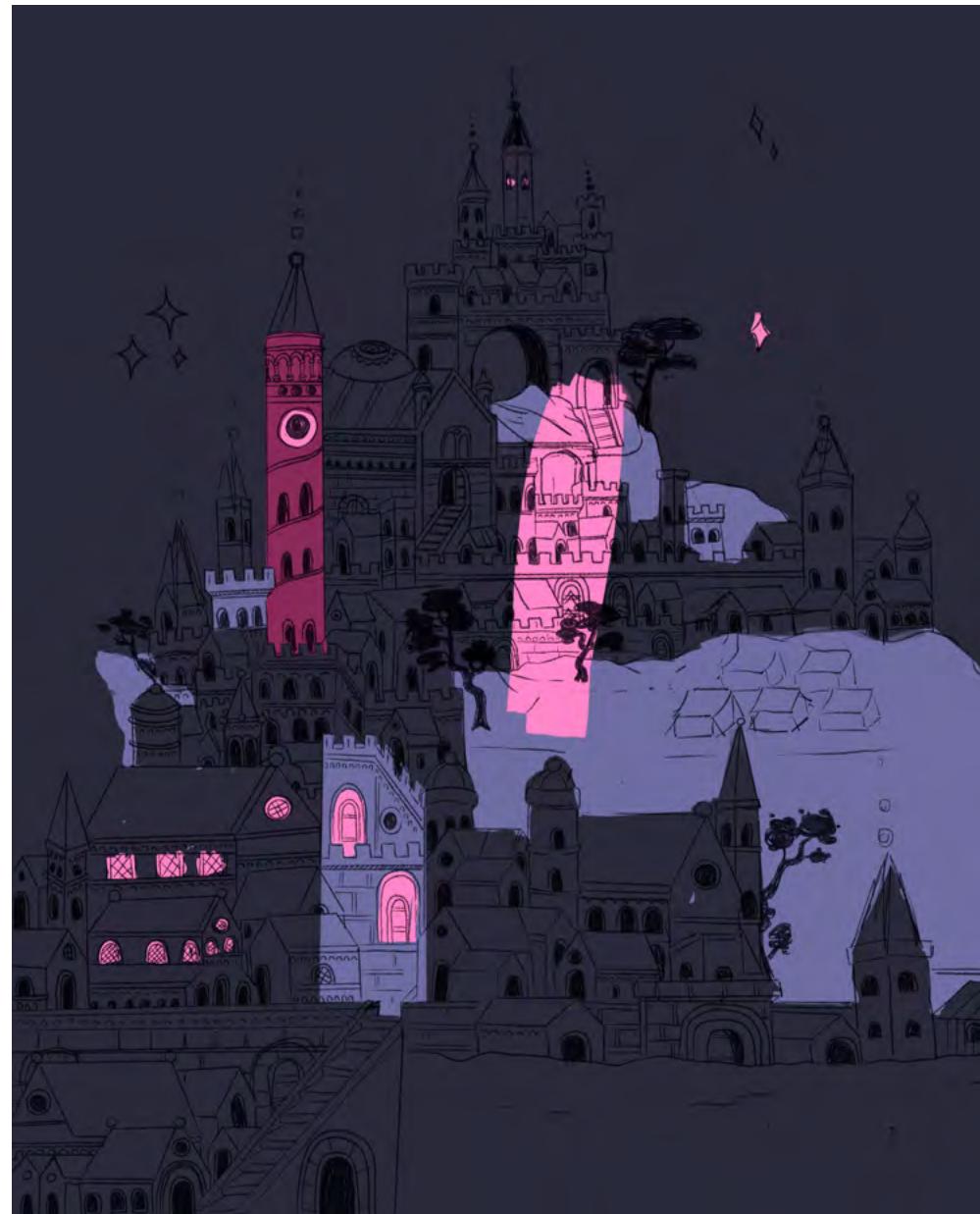
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Process Work



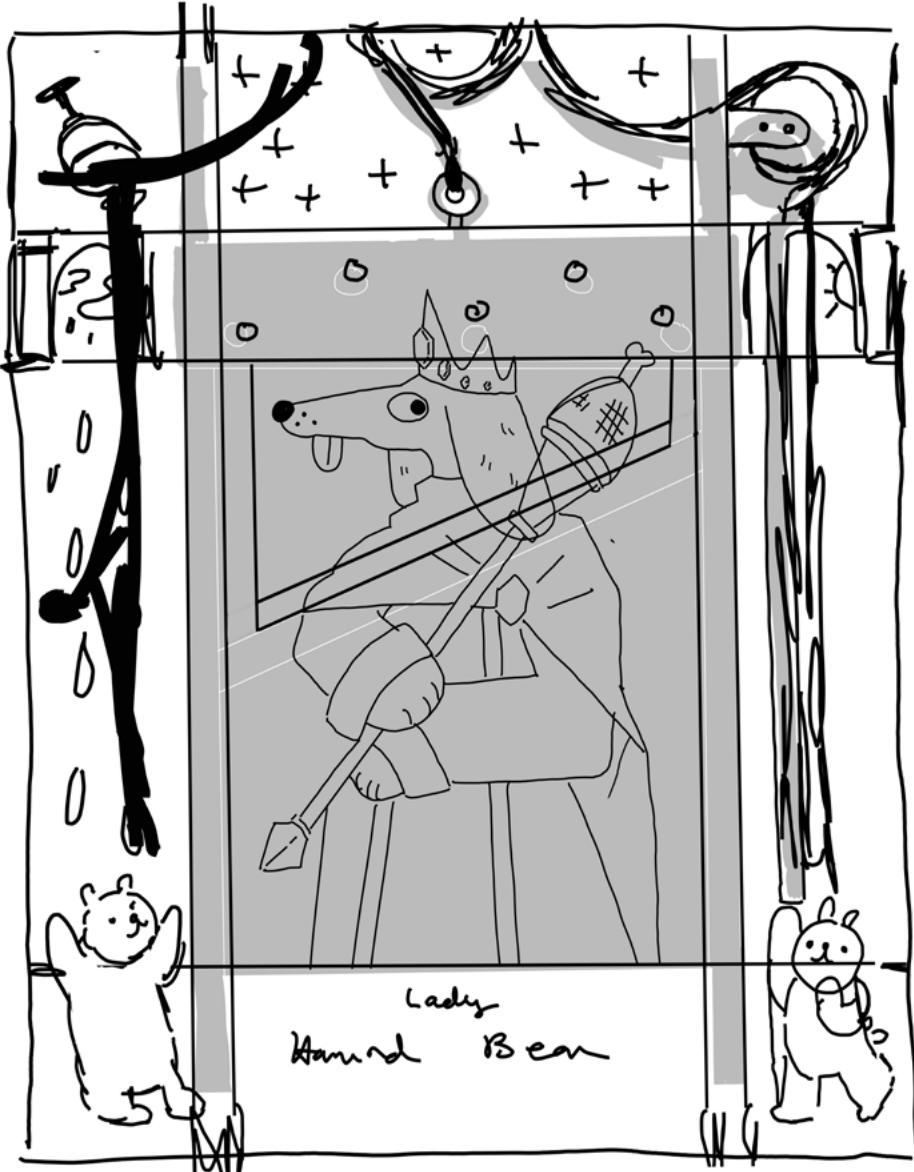
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Process Work



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Process Work





Alpenglow Version 1

