



OPENHEARTED

Thesis Defense Fall 2019

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Illustration

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Megan Wood is a freelance illustrator, painter, and cartoonist from Portland, OR. She holds a BFA in Illustration from the Pacific Northwest College of Art. Wood is the recipient of the 2019 Illustration Merit Scholarship from PNCA, and 1st place in the Carey Life Drawing competition in 2018 and 2019. Experienced in a variety of mediums, from digital art to oil paint, Wood creates atmospheric images with expressive marks and vivid colors. She strives for inclusivity and diverse representation in her artwork. She was selected for the Wilburforce Art + Science Initiative to illustrate *Warming the West*, a book about the effects of climate change on the west coast of North America. She is also a contributor of *Postscript: an Unversed Comics Anthology*, self-published and crowdfunded by a group of 40 artists, available in January 2020 (www.unversedcomics.com). Her artwork has been shown at Land Gallery PDX and Gallery Nucleus Portland.

ABSTRACT

Openhearted is an anthology of sapphic poetry sourced from public domain authors as well as contemporary authors. I had an open call for poetry in May 2019, and directly contacted several poets whose work dealt with lesbian themes. A long editing process to narrow down the selection took place, and ultimately I settled on the 15 which I felt had the strongest thematical connections. In addition to the contemporary poems, I have included works by Sappho, Wu Tsao, Akiko Yosano, & Angelina Weld Grimké to bring an element of historical context and celebrate their contributions to the canon of queer poetry. I want to do right by my younger self, desperately needing lesbian representation but never able to find something in media that I could relate to. Hopefully, this collection will be what fills that void for someone else.

The poems are unified through several main themes: growth, self-acceptance, empowerment, tenderness, and finding beauty in the natural world. Using these themes, I designed illustrations to reflect the poetry's emotional tone and also taking into account it's place in the sequence of the book. I want to unify the words and images and design the layout to lead the reader through the poetry and include symbols that add depth to the work. The mood of the book is atmospheric and the color palette will reflect this by utilizing cool colors with pops of warmth for contrast. The book is 8"x10" and softcover, with a glossy finish. I have also designed a dust jacket, printed on translucent vellum, and a series of bookmarks featuring details from the inside pages.

Specifically made for the LGBT community - this project may be inaccessible to individuals with no connection to queer media. The book is marketed at young adults looking for representation in media and also the poetry community. The marketplaces I am targeting are queer-focused literary spaces and art book publishers. The work is a hybrid art-book and poetry collection, so it overlaps the two markets.



CREATIVE BRIEF

Project Vision

Openhearted is an anthology of lesbian poetry sourced from public domain authors as well as contemporary authors. I had an open call for poetry in May 2019, and directly contacted several poets whose work dealt with lesbian themes. A long editing process to narrow down the selection took place, and ultimately I settled on the 15 which I felt had the strongest thematical connections. In addition to the contemporary poems, I have included works by Sappho, Wu Tsao, Akiko Yosano, & Angelina Weld Grimké to bring an element of historical context and celebrate their contributions to the canon of queer poetry. I want to do right by my younger self, desperately needing lesbian representation but never able to find something in media that I could relate to. Hopefully, this collection will be what fills that void for someone else.

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Audience

Specifically made for the LGBT community - this project may be inaccessible to individuals with no connection to queer media. The book is marketed at young adults looking for representation in media and also the poetry community. Because it is a hybrid project, it could appeal to readers of graphic novels and poetry, as well as those interested in illustration or fine art.

Methods + Materials

Traditional mediums are utilized for their emotional properties: watercolor for softer & more ambiguous pieces, contrasted with pastel for roughness, gouache for graphic punch and clarity, collage and layering to simulate depth. Soft textural washes are used to add delicate, nuanced variation in fields of color. After creating various analog assets, I alter them and paint over them digitally to achieve a balance between activated and empty space. Particular attention is paid to edge control and the juxtaposition of sharp lines and messy

Comparative Media

There are two illustrated poetry books that are the closest to my project; Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey* and Gertrude Stein's *The World is Round*, illustrated by Clement Hurd. Stylistically, I find similarities in my work and artists such as Eliza Ivanova, Benjamin Bjorklund, Steve Kim, as well as illuminated manuscripts and embroidered textiles.

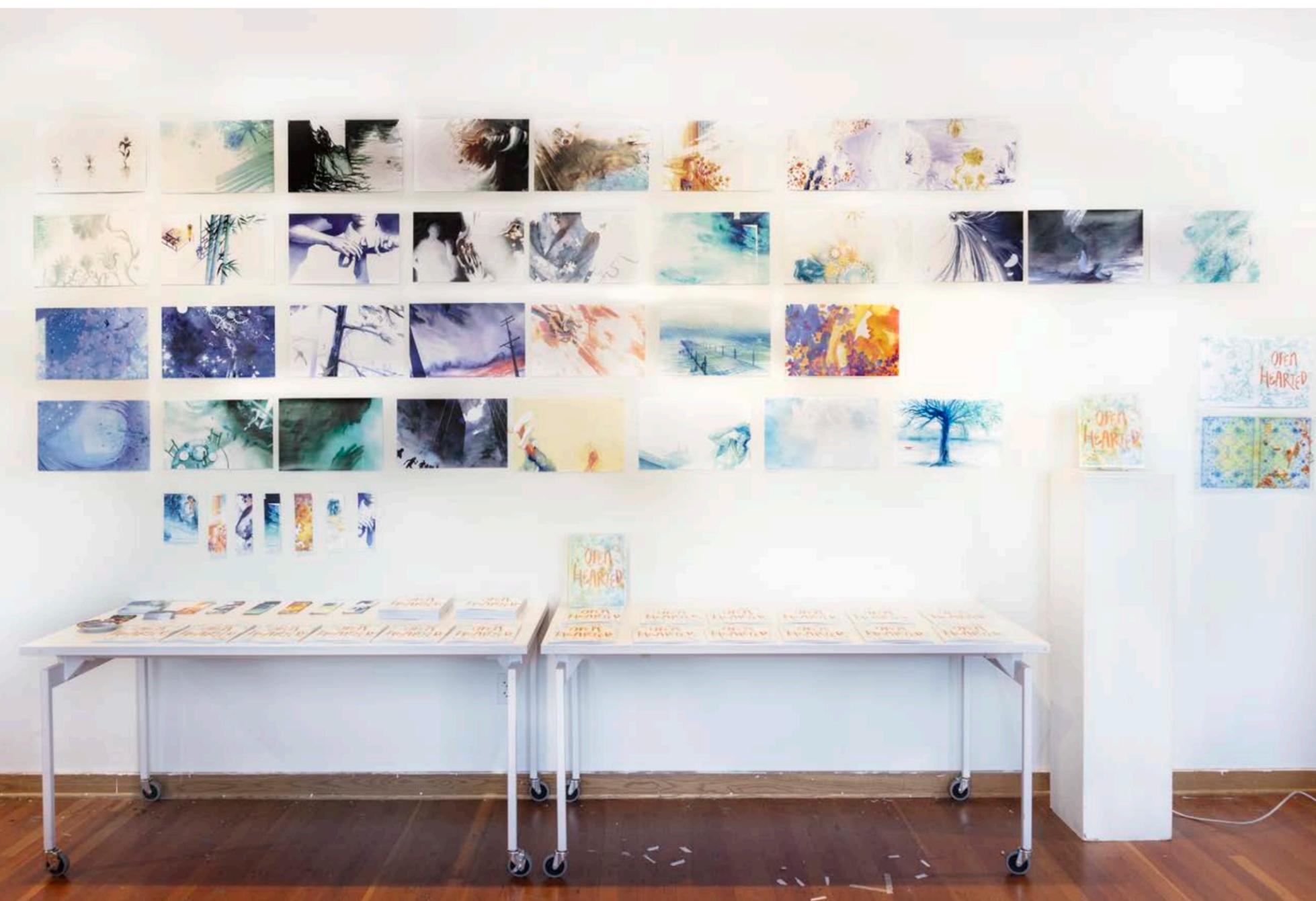
I have found no books with overtly lesbian themes and the inclusion of historical poets in addition to contemporary ones in the format I selected. However, in the *Lavender Review*, a periodical lesbian magazine, the editors curate art and poetry based on a chosen theme - and juxtapose poems and artwork by lesbian artists from history in every issue.

Marketplace Application

The marketplaces I am targeting are bookstores, online distributors, and queer-focused literary spaces, and lesbian publishing houses. Because of the interconnectivity of queer spaces on the internet, I expect that marketing on the internet would be the most. It will be sent to a number of art directors and agents in the hopes of being picked up for distribution.



DOCUMENTATION



FOR THE COURTESAN CHING LIN
WU TSAO, Chi'ing dynasty



On your slender body
Your jade and coral girdle ornaments chime
Like those of a celestial companion
Come from the Green Jade City of Heaven.
One smile from you when we meet,
And I become speechless and forget every word.
For too long you have gathered flowers,
And leaned against the bamboos,
Your green sleeves growing cold,
In your deserted valley:

I can visualize you all alone,
A girl harboring her cryptic thoughts.

You glow like a perfumed lamp
In the gathering shadows.
We play wine games
And recite each other's poems.
Then you sing, "Remembering South of the River"
With its heart-breaking verses. Then
We paint each other's beautiful eyebrows.
I want to possess you completely—
Your jade body
And your promised heart.

It is Spring.
Vast mists cover the Five Lakes.
My dear, let me buy a red painted boat
And carry you away.



EL BESO
ANGELINA WELD GRIMKE, 1909

Twilight—and you
Quiet—the stars,
Sore of the shine of your teeth,
Your provocative laughter,
The gloom of your hair,
Lure of you, eye and lip,
Yearning, yearning,
Languor, surrender;

Your mouth,
And madness, madness,
Tremulous, breathless, flaming.

The space of a sigh;

Then awakening—remembrance,
Pain, regret—your sobbing;
And again, quiet—the stars,

Twilight—and you.

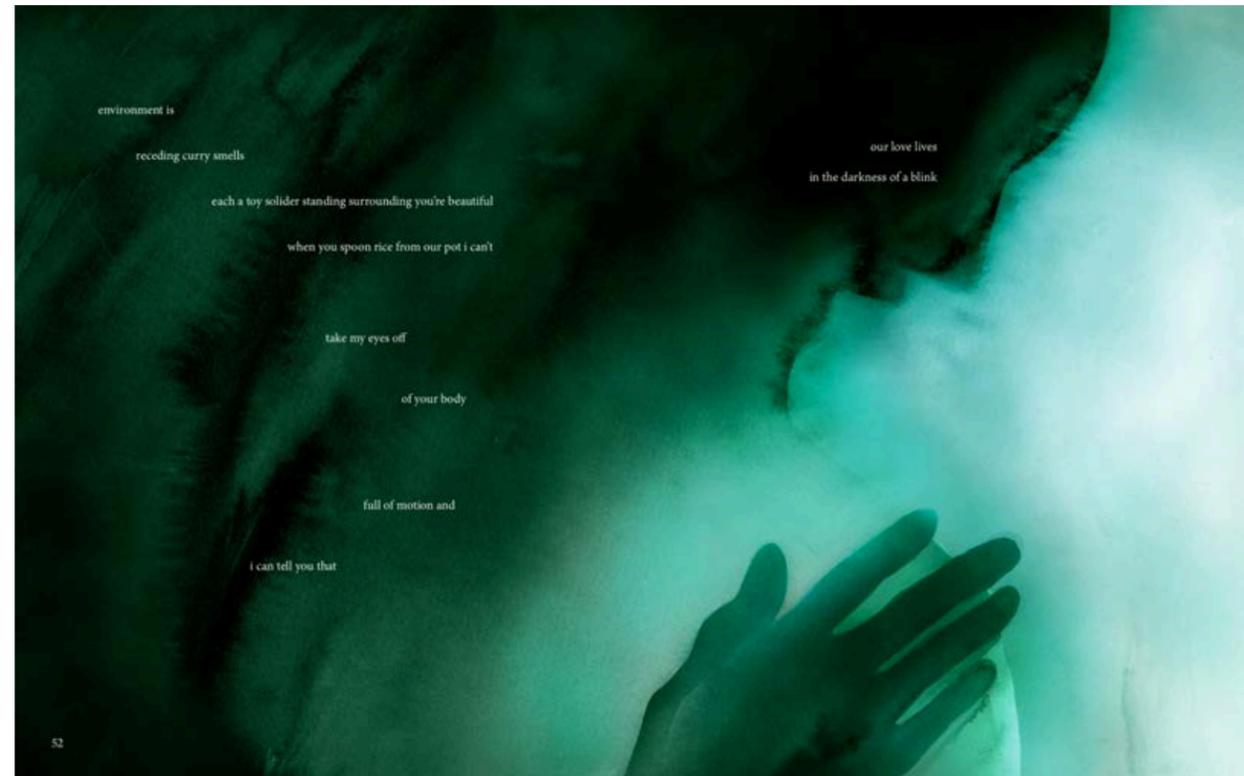


ENVIRONMENTS
LAURA BUCCIERI, 2017

environments like me
rub up against you
are systems of hairs standing up on skin plastered
on muscles tense when our hands hold the sweat in between
gazing down
movement we can still see
the tree shaking from the wind
i always shake a little within
environments like us worry worlds like this boy on girl on boy
on fists plunging into cereal boxes in search of a toy
who wins if it's free

trash bins are full
of superwoman action figures
thrown out
by every boy who wants a man for himself

environment is pre fall end of day coolness
running its fingers through the trees
move slow sensuality
you're across the room



environment is

receding curry smells

each a toy soldier standing surrounding you're beautiful

when you spoon rice from our pot i can't

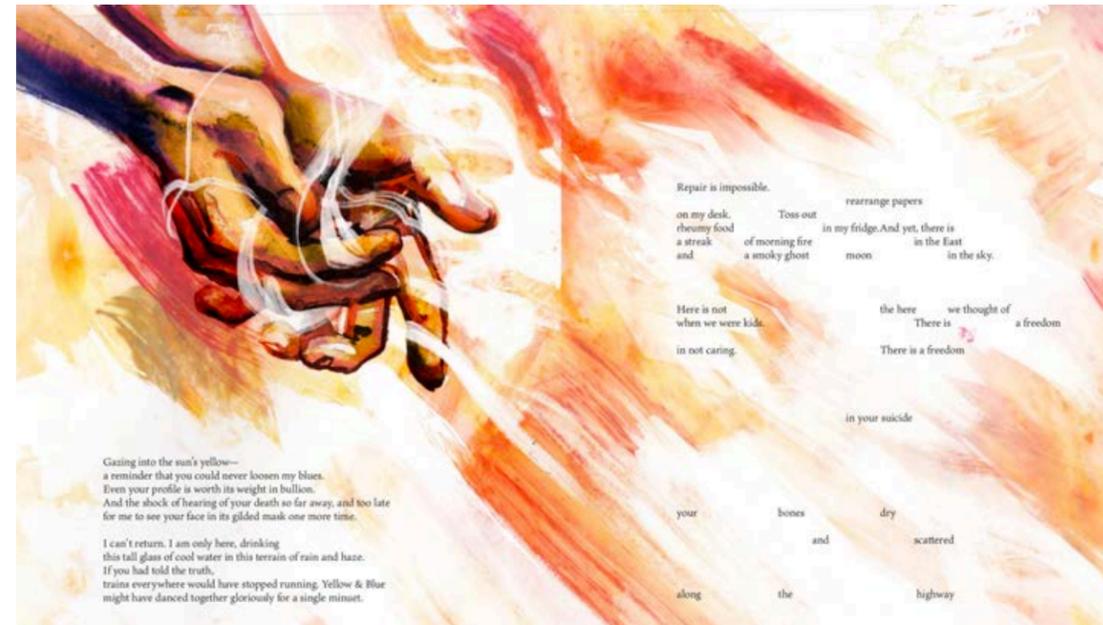
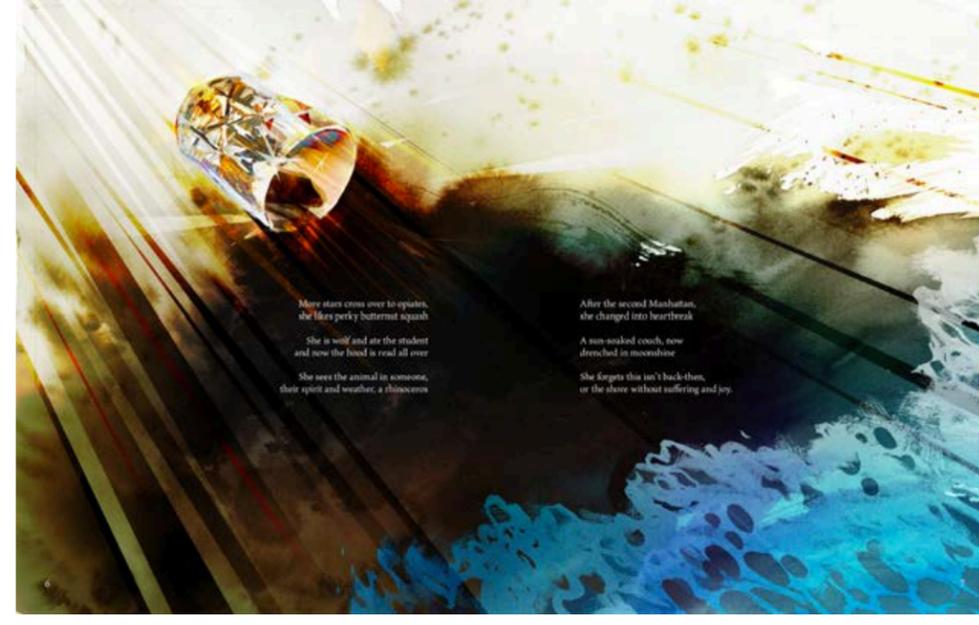
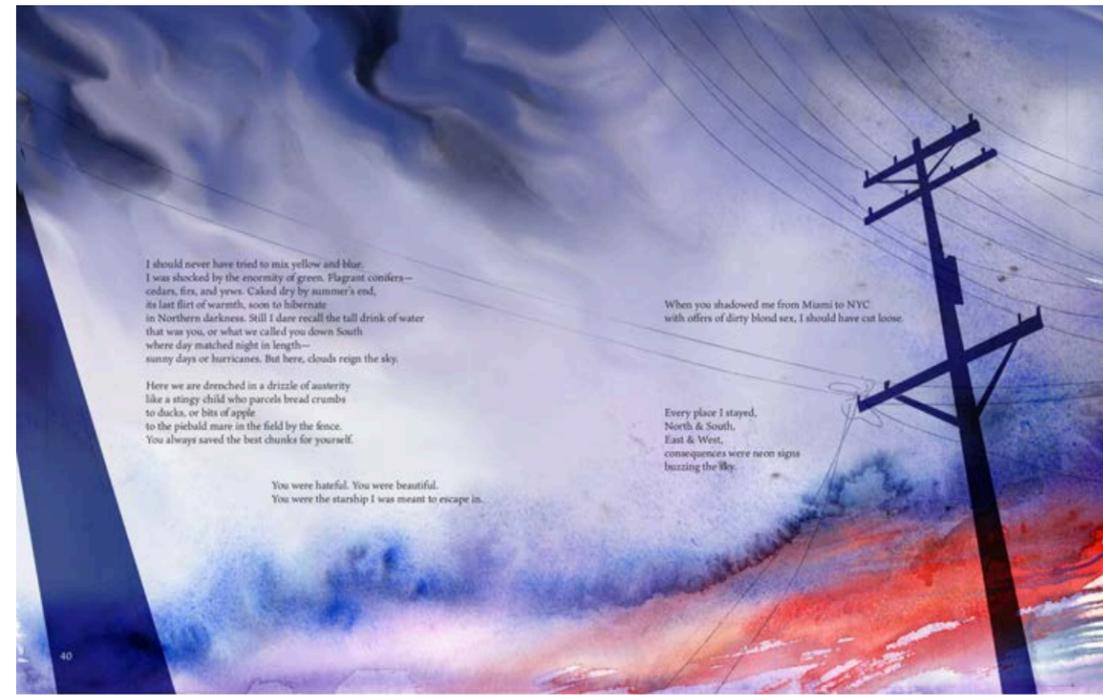
take my eyes off

of your body

full of motion and

i can tell you that

our love lives
in the darkness of a blink



THESIS DEFENSE

Fall 2019

Hello and welcome to my thesis defense. My name is Megan Wood, and I'd like to thank all of you for coming today. For my thesis I created an 80 page illustrated sapphic poetry collection, titled Openhearted. It is composed of 17 poems from a diverse grouping of writers organized into 4 sections that are unified through concepts and imagery.

In the year I spent working on this book, I found that I gained a deeper understanding of my own identity through the insightful conversations I had with my authors. I had never expected to learn so much about the legacy of queer poets, and I feel like a whole new world has opened up to me through my research. I also experimented with a variety of mediums and combined them in ways I had not yet before, and feel like the integrity of the marks can still be seen in the finished work, which is something that I have sought to achieve during my time at PNCA.

The broader narrative of the book is non-linear, but follows the general themes of longing, introspection, rejection/acceptance, love, grief, and empowerment. I intend to show positive representations of relationships that don't need to include men, and validate the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, non-binary, trans, and queer women through illustrating of these poems.

According to poet and critical theorist Susan Hawthorne, Story telling and word of mouth have been the primary modes of passing on lesbian culture. In written works, it is a well known fact that most lesbian romances tend to be tragic - this was in part due to historical censorship laws and societal pressure. However, if the only stories passed along through our community are tragic, what happens when we start to internalize these attitudes? Here is a quote from Hawthorne's book "The Butterfly Effect" which explains this phenomenon;

*"the tragedy of lesbian existence is the loss of memory
the repetitions of unrequited love
of passion for a thing that melts away.
in fear we pull out our hair
in grief go mad
commit suicide*

*we are pitied for our sunken sleepless eyes
reviled for our appetites
we are poor sisters our souls condemned to wander through forests and deserts
like hungry wolves....
I ask why is the measure of love, loss?"*

Openhearted became a collaboration project between myself and the authors. With 4 authors chosen from the public domain, and 15 from my submission process, I collected a grouping of poems I thought were well-written and could be presented together. I had to facilitate the submission process, contact writers individually, draft copyright paperwork, and create promotional materials in order to advertise my project. After this, I still needed to design, illustrate, and typeset the book. Most of these processes I have some limited experience in, but I can now appreciate how much effort goes into creating publications.

Initially, I had intended to create an even split between contemporary and historical poets, but after receiving too many inspiring submissions, I decided to prioritize the contemporary works have them be supported by these older works. The book ended up being 80 pages long - with some poems being 2 pages, and other spread out over 6 pages to account for breathing room in the illustrations. It is 8"x10" and soft-cover, with a glossy finish. I have also designed a dust jacket, printed on translucent vellum, and a series of bookmarks featuring details from the inside pages.

I specifically did not want to complicate this process with the addition of edits or back-and-forth conversations. I have worked with a group of scientists to illustrate Warming the West, a book about the impacts of climate change on ecosystems in North America. This was a very involved collaboration - with several rounds of edits and discussions about clarity of the concepts being depicted. My authors provided a bit of background information to inform the work, but left the content up for me to decide.

Wu Tsao, Akiko Yosano, Angelina Weld Grimke, and Sappho became the four historical writers which were chosen based on their poem's thematic coherence with the rest of the works. My contemporary poems were collected through an open call held in May of 2019, when I posted widely on my social media accounts, hung posters locally, and emailed my project to several poets and poetry organizations. I was surprised to hear back from several well-established poets who were excited to work with me. I had to reject around 15 poems which I'm interested in incorporating in a second volume.

It was very important for me to maintain a diverse mix of authors, in age, culture, and language to emphasize the universality of these themes. I also wanted to judge the work only on the quality of the writing, and not by the accolades of an author. I have poets who are librarians, professors, publicists and editors, as well as teenage writers, college students, urban planners, and fiber artists. They also come from different countries, like Canada, the US, England, China, Japan, and Ancient Greece.

I found that the wide variety of individual experiences created a very interesting juxtaposition in the poems. Having these many different life experiences presented in a collection was crucial for the book to be more universally relatable. I also specifically wanted authors from across time periods to show evidence of these relationships before the 1950's, and outside of America.

Metaphors of the ocean, light, color, and the natural world were common in the writing. It is not a story of one person, but a shared mythos. I wanted the finished art object to feel cohesive but not one-note, and achieved that through carefully planning out the flow of the illustrations - and repeating visual strategies (like watercolor bleeds, flowing lines, or salt textures) in each piece. The materials used in the book are also evocative of these metaphors, with the choice of limited color print on the cover of transparent vellum a delicate quality. Simplifying it down to primary colors allowed me to give the illusion of 4 color process.

The poems, varying in length, tonality, and subject matter, needed to be organized within this collection in a way that felt organic, so I began by identifying prevalent themes throughout. They were then ordered and re-ordered after being read in succession and after the artwork had started to develop. This order was crucial to determine the effectiveness of my page-turns and the overall design of the book.

My intention was to create something which myself as a young closeted lesbian would find helpful to read. I also wanted to use this project as an opportunity to educate myself on lesbian poets, self publishing, and queer theory, and make this content enticing to readers who may not seek out queer poetry. By producing this collection by sapphics for sapphics, I am endeavoring to make something which will have a positive impact on someone's life.

The value our community places on content for queer audiences is an interesting thing to question in the face of a huge explosion of queer media. The issues of tokenization and stereotyping will always be present in work dealing with minority groups, and I was mindful to avoid representations in my work that are outdated, binary, or exclusionary by abstracting or obscuring the figure.

I used a combination of analog and digital processes to create Openhearted. I found that bouncing back and forth between the two methods allows for a final piece that doesn't feel too unrefined or too overworked - I have the ability to push back detail if it becomes overwhelming. In addition, I was able to complete a large body of work in a short amount of time thanks to this process.

The illustrations are mostly watercolor, gouache, colored pencil, ink, graphite, all altered in Photoshop. I carefully selected mediums which I could manipulate to

create a variety of effects. I find that ink is one of the most versatile and efficient mediums for me; through my experience in figure drawing I am now used to doing quick ink studies in a variety of styles. I found this practice incredibly beneficial in that it made me more confident with the medium through experimenting with different techniques - like drybrush, dip pen, washes, bleeds, silhouettes, and splatters.

Firstly, I did ideation sketches for every poem in my thesis journal, with at least 4-10 sketches per. I composed the images by extracting the themes of each poem, writing them down on sticky notes and arranging them in order of appearance. I noted which ones recurred in the series of poems, and used those as my aesthetic guide while brainstorming imagery.

The first half of my summer was spent creating a conceptual map of the book through these themes, and finding places of cohesion and overlap I could translate into the artwork. This manifested in similar shapes, patterns, and marks being repeated - like the circles of the dandelion in Summer Love, the dinner table in Environments, and the sun and moon. The most powerful lines in the works were accentuated with my use of negative space - by pulling back from my art, I can make space for the writing to sing. The more open layout added a surreal and atmospheric mood to the images which I liked.

I storyboarded each poem and had to decide if it needed to be expanded to more pages to leave room for the art. I tried to push myself to come up with unexpected visual solutions for the spreads, like including more abstract pieces, allowing the realistic ones to have more impact.

After this point, I scanned and edited the thumbnails to create black-and-white value studies for each poem, beginning to see how the book would take shape. The cadence and rhythm of reading poetry is very specific, and I needed to carefully consider breathing room, so I found I needed to scale back and simplify many of the pieces so as not to overwhelm the text.

The second half of the summer, and the rest of the fall term was spent rendering the final spreads and compiling the work in InDesign, to prepare for printing in early November. I did not anticipate the amount of paper I had to purchase (over 100 sheets), but the process of illustrating each page went faster than I expected, leaving more time for me to scan and alter in Photoshop.

My color palette became inspired by several key pages in the book, as I wanted to have a blue-dominated palette, with a balance of warm and cool tones for visual impact. The bright, energetic orange and yellow is used to counterbalance the quieter blues and purples. The pages with green and turquoise sit in the middle, which I associate with growth and mystery.

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(Continued)



I took inspiration from my own life experiences while designing the illustrations - memories of my relationship were translated into the work. Specific moments, like laying together in a field, cooking together, watching the ocean, and staying up late talking are some of the happiest memories I have with my girlfriend. Even the more abstract pieces are still representations of these feelings, but shown through my formal aesthetic decisions. I hope that by carrying these positive emotions into the work, it feels more authentic to the reader.

I needed to approach each poem's layout design quite differently, and I had to at least partially follow the layout given to me by the poets. The book is prefaced by "What We Want", from Mary Oliver's *Blue Horses*, and is the only poem without an accompanying illustration. Behind the text is a light watercolor wash, a visual motif repeated throughout the rest of the images. Aligned very simply on the page, it functions as a primer for the more densely illustrated passages, allowing the reader to approach the poems after settling into a quieter mental state.

Text posed a challenge in that I wasn't sure if it should feel more artful or more poetic. Initially I was using a font created from my own handwriting, but after comparing it to a selection of 5 other serif fonts I had found, I felt that Ten Oldstyle has a refined and timeless look which would complement the art. As the poems span many centuries, it was important to select a font which was compatible with many eras and styles. I also had to scale down the font size many times, from 20 pt to 12 pt in order to fit everything on the page and avoid it looking like a children's book. I only slightly edited the text formatting to flow well with the illustrations, most notably in longer pieces like "Who Calls Love Red" on page 28. This poem, spread out between 6 pages asks the reader if love is red, blue, orange, or lilac, and lists different situations the author has connected with each color. The poem starts with 'Is love orange? A frill of clementine peel' which is a motif repeated over each of the pages.

However, 'It was a blue van that hissed at us to kiss for them' was a powerful line in this poem that made me choose to only use blue, and the poem's emotional shift is noted by the darkness of the middle pages. The final pages of the poem, with the line 'how could I have restricted love to only one color' is shown on a fairly empty page, adjacent to an explosion of textures, sparkles, and a peeling clementine. The sparkles used throughout this book are meant to give a sense of preciousness, delicacy, and childlike wonder to the illustrations.

Additionally, the decorative elements, like the swirling floral patterns featured on the cover, were inspired by antique textile designs with important symbolic meaning. For instance, "Poem for C. Tavernise" on page 26 shows a design appropriated

from a Buddhist marriage canopy. I used reference images from Sheila Paine's *Embroidered Textiles: A World Guide to Traditional Patterns*. The lotus flower and astrological patterns are rooted in ancient symbolism, but over time their complexity and meaning is altered. By using it in this new context, I can retain the magical properties of the design and apply it to content which, in the past, was deemed sinful or inappropriate.

The tree of life is one of the most common motifs in decorative arts, and is considered a protective symbol, signifying fertility or womanhood. In the back of the book, I included a tree illustration which references a line in Wu Tsao's poem on page 17; 'My dear, let me buy a red painted boat, And carry you away'. I wanted to show the changing of seasons by having half of the tree barren, and the other abundant with foliage, symbolizing the process of internal growth, and sense of peace gained when becoming comfortable with one's identity. I did this to create a quiet moment to reflect on the work.

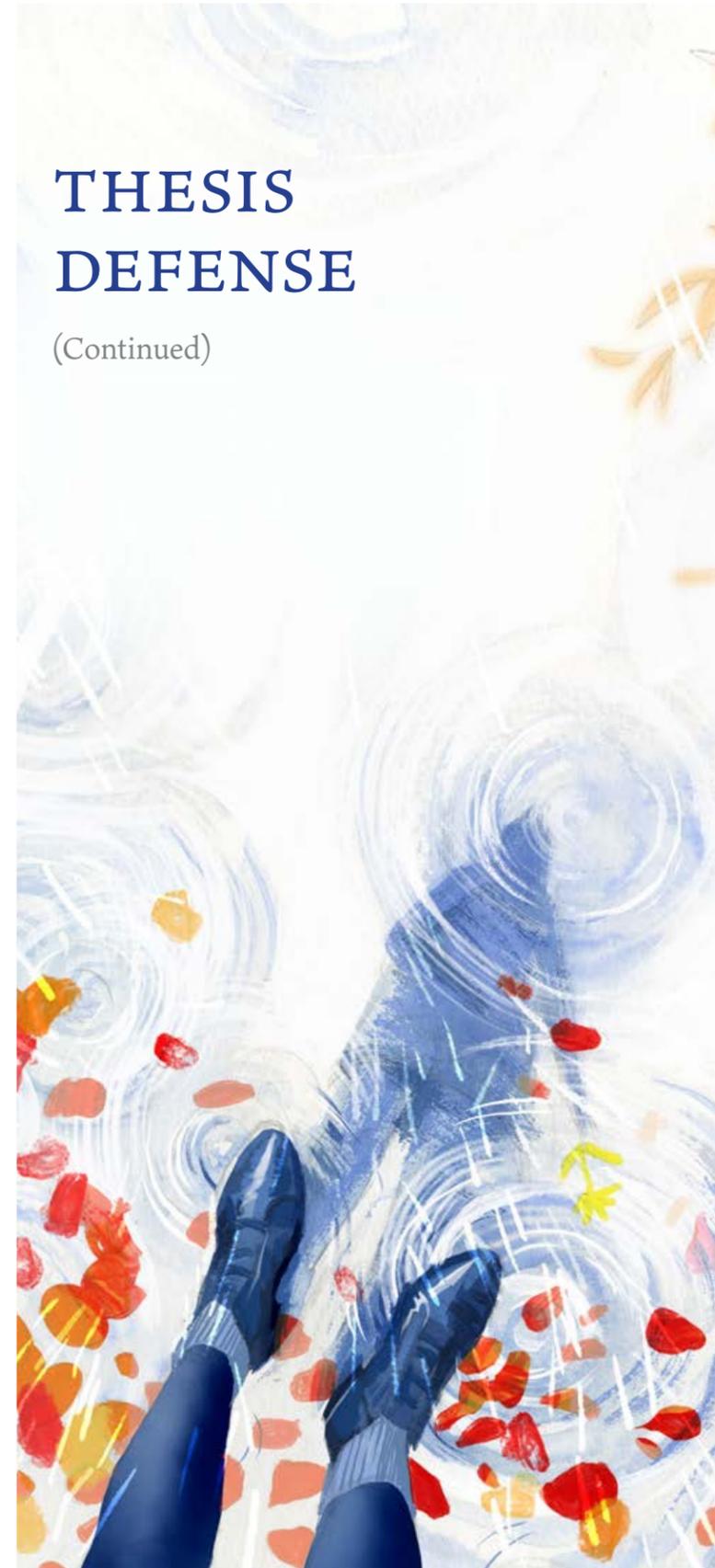
Similar to the decorative qualities of embroidered textiles are illuminated manuscripts. Each page of an illuminated book, like William Blake's famous *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, has an elaborate personal mythology that is known only to the illustrator. The writing and text exist on the same level of importance.

My inclusion of the sprouting plant illustrations in the front of the book, as well as the large tree in the final spreads, is mimicking this tradition of embellishment. However, I purposefully made the drawings messy to add visual interest and a modern feel. In several spreads, I used ink and Yupo watercolor paper, which prevents the ink from spreading and allows it to pool naturally on the surface. The transition page following *Summer Love* shows a floral design inspired by old tapestries, and the author biography pages, are accented with small spot illustrations taken from the cover.

Yellow and Blue, on pages 38 - 43, is an example of the varying levels of mess and cleanliness which I employed to evoke different emotional reactions. The poem is a reflection on the suicide of the author's partner. It begins with a loose ink drawing, featuring 'flagrant conifers, cedars, firs, and yews' in a limited blue/black color palette. The page turn reveals a stormy, fiery sky rendered in watercolor with prominent bleeds and brushstrokes, representing the 'streak of morning fire in the east'. It is reigned back with the inclusion of the sharper power lines in the foreground. The final pages of the poem are the emotional climax of the work, and I chose to emphasize this by layering an ink drawing of cupped hands with a texture made from acrylic, ink, watercolor, salt, and digital reworking. I chose to shift the colors of these pages drastically to a warm-dominated palette, referencing the drastic shift which occurs in

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(Continued)



the poem. The build and release of tension in the writing is reflected in the method in which I rendered the spreads.

The release of tension is also achieved through my use of break pages. Each of these spreads function as a way to transition from one mood to another by incorporating motifs from the poems preceding and succeeding. For instance, the transition spread on page 33 and 34 is comprised of textures sourced from the pages directly before and after. The background, a blue watercolor wash with salt crystals (referencing the stars in “El Beso”), is overlaid with puzzle pieces from “Do You Have a Boyfriend?”, the open door from “Rehoboth 2008”, the birds from “Yellow and Blue”, and the flowers from “Bouquet”. By re-using the assets from these poems, I can keep them visually cohesive while also creating a dialogue between each work.

I could only find a small number of illustrated poetry books to reference, most focusing on a single author, like Gertrude Stein’s *The World Is Round*, illustrated by Clement Hurd (known for *Goodnight Moon*), or Rupi Kaur’s *Milk and Honey*. Visually, Shaun Tan’s *Tales from the Inner City* has a similar aesthetic to what I’d wanted to achieve, but his atmospheric oil paintings were separated from the poems by page turns. Instead, I found that lesbian poetry and art journals like the *Lavender Review* were helpful in seeing how a queer publication uses imagery and text in conjunction with each other. By including works by lesbian artists (Like Jeanne Mammen, Hannah Hoch, and Catherine Opie) next to poetry, there is an opportunity for new connections to be formed for the reader.

The *Lavender Review* was an incredibly helpful source in identifying poets to contact in the beginning stages of my project. Additionally, after the completion of my book I noticed that two of my authors were in an issue of *The Lavender Review* from back in 2011, issue 4: Risa Denenberg and Eleanor Lerman.

A review left on the site reads “Any art from a marginalized group is first dismissed as necessarily trivial or lesser because it doesn’t value the same ideals as the mainstream. It is only through iteration and resilience that the markers used to keep us out become the elements for which we are prized.” So, the preservation of these spaces is something of concern for many queer people; having easily accessible, unapologetic lesbian art available for people of the internet is vital.

Stories like this are important, because younger people’s lives are shaped by what we read. Books help us learn what to fear and what to love, and having positive messaging connected to lesbian imagery is something I am very passionate about representing. Creating a book targeted towards queer women is difficult because I am always asking if it is accessible enough. However, I have to question what value our

community puts on this type of work.

There is a notable lack of lesbian publications overall, but even the few that do exist have trouble staying afloat financially without consistent sponsorship. The fall of the popular lesbian media website *AfterEllen* was, to one woman: “the ultimate proof that queer women’s media cannot be supported by advertising, full stop,” It is a fact that lesbian and queer women’s media has particularly struggled when it comes to ad revenue, with pervasive cultural stereotypes scaring away potential advertisers. This means queer women ourselves are financially responsible for keeping our cultural hubs running.

That same article also stated that “The lesbian market the truly untapped market in the United States” - which I find equally disheartening and encouraging. The fate of LGBT media is almost entirely decided by LGBT readers and consumers, and by elevating more voices from communities we are a part of and outside of, we can reach a broader audience. This is why diversity is such an important consideration for this project.

Interestingly, I had to shift how I described my book to other people after a discussion with one of my authors. At first, I was adamant about the project being a ‘lesbian’ poetry collection, in order to reclaim the word from its negative connotations of being sexualized. Also, many people use the term to describe their sexual identity or behavior, even if it is not their sexual orientation, or to easily associate things with ‘female homosexuality’.

Using the umbrella term queer was also not something I was comfortable with. According to *In a Different Light*, *Visual Culture, Sexual Identity, and Queer Practice*, “Queer has come to mean an attitude that is aggressive and anti-assimilationist.” While I acknowledge the power this word holds for some, I felt it was too general for my project, which aims to address lesbian erasure in specific.

So, with this in mind, here is part of the exchange I had with author Anna Swanson:

“Part of my hesitation is that you’ve framed the book as about lesbian identity, but I’ve never identified as a lesbian. And I’ve never particularly felt that lesbian was an umbrella term that included queer women (which is how I’ve identified), but rather that they were two different but related categories. (Actually, in my mind, queer women as an umbrella term includes lesbians, but I know not everyone sees it that way either.) I’m not against the term lesbian, even if it hasn’t been what I use, but I also realize it’s been complicated in relation to trans/non-binary politics (though I cer-

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(Continued)



tainly know trans women who identify as lesbians). It does seem like you're explicitly wanting to include trans and non-binary folks in the call. I guess I'm curious why you used lesbian as the over-arching descriptor, or whether that's changed.

Winning the Lambda under the category "lesbian poetry" was complicated for me, as a queer woman who also dates men and gender-queer folks, so I'm wanting to be intentional about this kind of thing going forward."

After receiving this email, I was conflicted. In my case, I'd consider myself an artist generally, but I'm a lesbian artist in this specific context. I felt it was important, for representations sake, and for me to reclaim part of this history that I am a part of. However, I wanted to find a term that encompasses all these shared experiences and be sensitive to my author's needs.

After this exchange, I did some research about labelling theory. In Queer Theorist Rictor Norton's essay, *A Critique of Social Constructionism and Postmodern Queer Theory*, he explained two prominent schools of thought: essentialism and constructionism. Constructionists claim that As David Halperin says: "sexuality' seems indeed to be a uniquely modern, Western, even bourgeois production" created mainly through medical discourse which constructed a strict heterosexual/homosexual binary". Essentialists, on the other hand reject the idea that meaning precedes experience, and assume that homosexuals existed before labels did. This is also called the 'common sense' view. There is an issue with all uses of labels - lesbian historian Dell Richards states "To impose today's standards on earlier eras limits our vision and our history." and I have to agree. I don't think I should limit my history. It's critical to remember these people existed but couldn't be visible in the way we are today.

With this in mind, I realized that the abstracted term 'sapphic' would be more fitting for several reasons. Firstly, it directly references Sappho, and connects this work with the canon of poetry. Secondly, the official definition of sapphic love is same-gender attraction, which is explicitly not limited to lesbianism. This was how I tried to reconcile my need for both specificity and inclusivity.

I had to accept that this project is perhaps not for everyone, but have that not be a limitation, but something which makes it even more special for my intended audience. I am still concerned about how this book could be discovered by people who are just questioning their sexuality and may not have been exposed to the term 'sapphic'. However, my primary concern is that readers seeking representation will find this work beneficial in some way. I get excited when I find out the author of something was

queer because it makes me feel like I am not alone, and I hope this project is exciting to others in a similar way.

I see this book as having more installments, much like a magazine or journal, rather than being a singular work. This is useful for me in defining my future intentions for this project - creating an annual or bi-annual illustrated sapphic poetry collection could be sustainable. I already have a large selection of poems from my earlier submissions, and other public domain authors which I am interested in including in the second volume.

Luckily, there are a number of small publishers specializing in this market. Headmistress Press, co-founded by one of the poets in my anthology, Risa Denenberg, specifically publishes lesbian poetry and art books. Additionally, Bella Books, Ylva Publishing, Sapphire Books, Artemis Press, Spinster Press, Desert Palm Press, Kore Press, Launch Point Press, Seal Press, are a few lesbian-centric poetry publishers that I could approach with Openhearted. I could also approach graphic novel and art book publishers like Drawn and Quarterly and Nobrow Press.

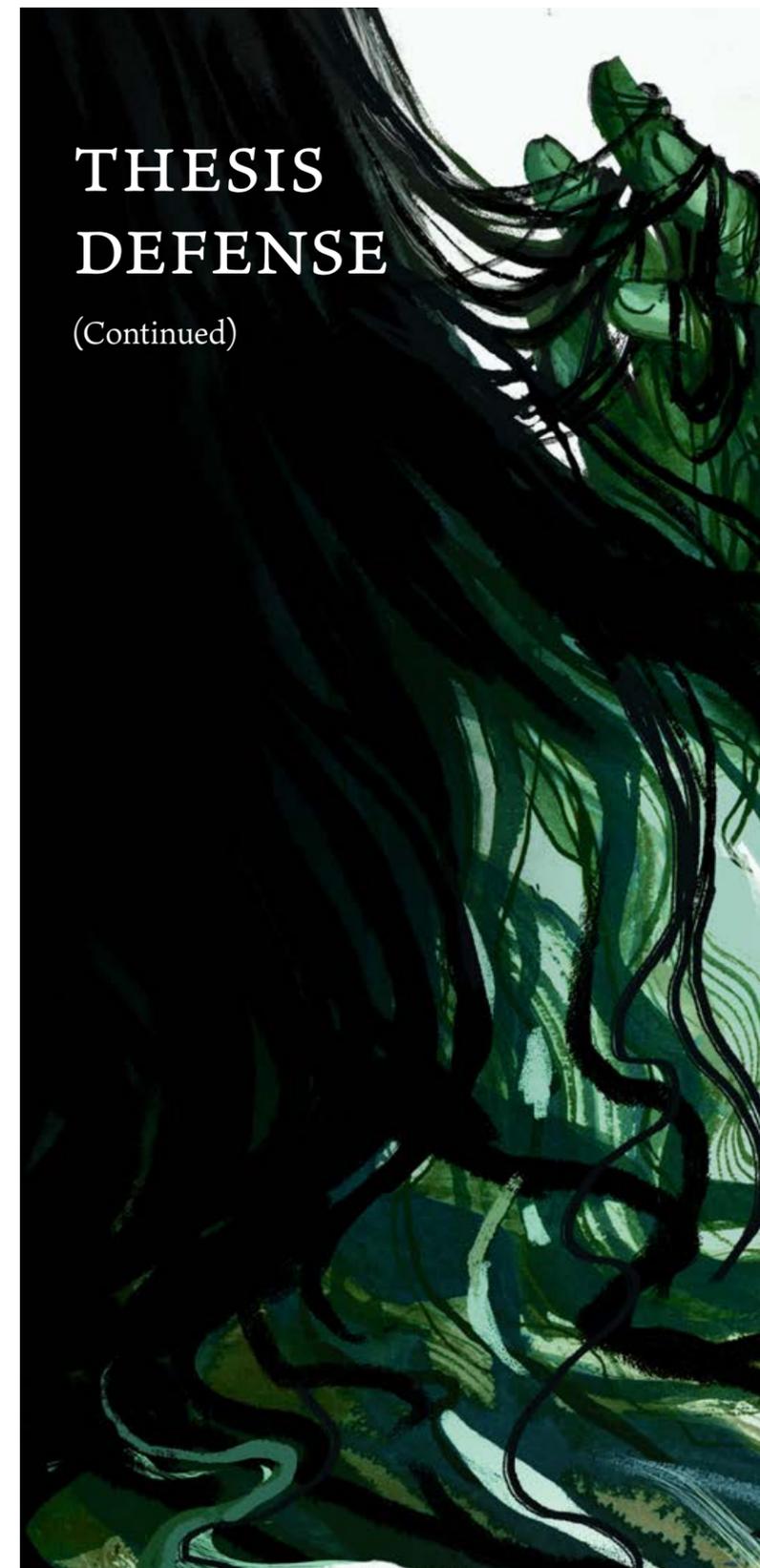
I felt it was necessary to list each of these publishers there are many people invested in this market. These small publishers come and go often, but I do find it's important to be aware that there is enough interest for it to be sustainable if there was enough financial support backing them.

The work has shifted in a few small ways since the start of the project. Initially, I intended to include up to 50 authors - but quickly realized that would be difficult to achieve in the time frame. I also was planning to incorporate comic panels but found they overwhelmed the writing. There are a couple small errors in the printed copy, which I will fix after the next print run. Through this process I have learned the importance of clear, prompt communication with a team of collaborators, and also to advocate for myself and my work. This manifested in self-promotion but also this project represents the most honest and complete body of work that I have yet to produce in my young artistic career. I learned to not show everything in the piece, and instead allow the negative space to have power in the compositions. At the beginning, I had no idea how the final product would look, I just wanted to create something I would be excited to share with other people. This book is the starting point for my creative practice in the future.

It evolved into something more abstract and ambiguous that connects more with my fine art practice than my previous illustration work. I feel more confident in my abilities to stick to a project for a long period of time. I also found that I love working with poets. They are able to conjure breathtaking visuals with their writing

THESIS DEFENSE

(Continued)



and communicate difficult concepts beautifully. They possess a skill that I could never hope to have. After sending my final draft to the authors I collaborated with, I was overwhelmed by the gratitude shown to me. I am mailing a copy of the book with a transparent vellum dust jacket as a special token of my thanks. This project couldn't happen without the 15 writers graciously allowing me to use their poems.

My next steps directly following the completion of the project are to send Openhearted to publishers for consideration. I don't feel comfortable profiting from this work at this moment, as I would like to split the profits between myself and my authors. I intend on running a Kickstarter project in order to fund future versions of the book and give a stipend to each poet and also fully control the distribution and printing process, something I have experience in through self-publishing Postscript, a comics anthology earlier this year. Crowdfunding a project like this would be ideal: through the internet, our community has a space to connect and support each other despite the lack of mainstream representation. Openhearted is a passion project that I feel compelled to keep working on, so I hope others will recognize that passion and want to support it moving forward.

I want to thank all my writers again for helping create this book, my mentor Zack for all his guidance, and my parents for always supporting my art. I'd like to end on a poem by Susan Hawthorne, from the Butterfly Effect;

*"We imagine a language invented by women
some of us write in it or we invent our own codes
our metaphors and images
we invent words for experiences common among us
but rare in other parts of society
we reproduce through language
heard and spoken
written and sung
our ears listening down through the ages
as distances as great as galactic space time
measured in light years."*

I hope you enjoy the work as much as I enjoyed creating it.

THESIS DEFENSE

(Continued)



“I remember trying to read between the lines of biographical statements in No More Masks and Rising Tides to figure out whether the author of a poem that moved me was a lesbian... Who was the “you” addressed in very personal terms in a poem - a woman or a man? Where was I in these books? Was there a “we” in them?” -Elly Bulkin

Awareness of the lack of visibility for lesbian artists and images stretches back to the early 60's. Before then, representation of lesbians in popular culture were mostly limited to prostitution and psychiatric textbooks that described homosexuality as a mental illness. The roots of lesbian self-representation began in underground magazines and journals, as documented by Harmony Hammond in Lesbian art in America. Lesbian-created imagery, which began to circulate more widely in the 70's, was empowering for members of communities who continue to this day to be misrepresented by mainstream media. Arts and activism often worked hand in hand, as seen in the formation of publication groups like Dyke Action Machine, who responded to lesbian misrepresentation with their satirical pamphlets. Censorship plagued lesbian erotic artists trying to exhibit their work in galleries, an issue that is rooted in homophobia and the over-sexualization of lesbians by men.

In this context, all lesbian art had a political undertone in its rejection of the heterosexual standard. Lesbian authors like Sappho, Gertrude Stein, and Audre Lorde became icons in the world of queer art and literature, but were often underappreciated for their contributions.

I wish to create a platform for showcasing lesbian-identifying poets as a means to share experiences from many different backgrounds. Using their writings as creative inspiration, I will create a fully illustrated poetry anthology, discussing lesbian identity, relationships, and self-discovery from contemporary and historical viewpoints.

The hybrid art book and poetry anthology, titled Openhearted, will be organized in three parts: childhood experiences, adolescence, and adulthood. This structure will make it enticing for younger readers seeking reassurance or guidance, while also being accessible to older readers through the complexity of the work and relatability within the lesbian experience. The illustrations will further be used as an entry point to those outside the LGBT community the community, who otherwise may not come across these poems.

The book's images will be my own interpretations of each poet's work with additional historical or cultural context when applicable. Overarching themes of the work are centered on growth, ornamentation, and reflection. The second is of particular importance: I am inspired by the work of golden age illustrators, fine artists, and illuminated manuscripts for the care and devotion given to the work. Juxtaposing delicate floral motifs with emotionally charged, messier drawings will bring a sense of complexity to the work and also tie the project back to art history. Reflection, in this sense, will mean finding concepts I relate to in the poems and showing that connection through my art. When presented together, they will form a collection of richly emotional and vibrant illustrations of lesbian life.

Growing up and discovering that I was a lesbian took a lot of informal research - I turned to graphic novels, TV shows, and movies to see where I fit in the world. Too often, depictions of lesbians were incongruent with my reality. Each time a romance between women was presented, it was used as voyeuristic eye candy for male viewers or ended in tragedy, and statistically, the most common depictions of lesbianism in art history are made by and for men. Stories featuring women of color and transgender women are grossly underrepresented. Even as queer media becomes more accessible, lesbian artists struggle to get recognition and support from the art community, as witnessed in the rejection seen during the 1970's. It is imperative for this project to feature voices of trans individuals and people of color to better reflect the diversity seen in the lesbian community, and utilize their perspectives to combat damaging stereotypes seen in society.

The past five years has brought about the second golden age of American political poetry, the first occurring in the 1960's when poets like Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde rose to prominence. There has been a tremendous resurgence of poetry for young adult and adult readers due to the accessibility of the internet, which helped popularize writers like Nayyirah Waheed, Rupi Kaur, Ocean Vuong, and Alok Vaid-Menon, among others. It is now easier than ever for people in marginalized communities to use their poetry to enact social change.

However, I find that illustrations, when included, are sparse and don't add much substance to the work. Full color illustrated poetry anthologies are harder to come by than strictly text-based works as well. This is an opportunity for experimentation and play that I think would compliment the emotional tone of my project. The free-flowing ambiguity of both poetry and art will complement each other, during this renaissance of political poetry, to create an engaging art object.

While not a graphic novel or zine, Openhearted will be presented as an 'artist book' to maintain full creative control. The book will have more pages than a zine, but not a linear storyline that would place it in the category of picture book. Instead, I want to play between the areas of anthology, graphic novel, and series of paintings to make a collection of 60 illustrations each based on a different poem.

Ideation will begin with word association to pinpoint what composition will benefit the poem. Then, using feelings experienced while reading the poems will be used to plan each spread for the thumbnailing stage. My process will rely on creating analog assets to collage together digitally. This method will allow me to create expressive marks with a wide variety of textures, while also reusing assets for cohesion and

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efficiency. After a period of media exploration, I will execute the final pieces digitally to adjust the placement of type and objects. Pages can be used as a means to express a short story, with a clear beginning, middle, and end, while others will present small moments or specific atmospheres depending on the content of each poem. My illustrations will not be confined to a standard graphic novel or picture book format; instead, I will use inset panels sporadically. This will be used as a visual device to show passage of time, or to juxtapose imagery and alter the rhythm of the book without committing to the format of a graphic novel. The placement of words on the page will be determined by the emotional impact and mood of the poem.

The finished project will be presented as a self-produced softcover 8"x10" prototype, with a wraparound cover design. I will use Blurb to print 3 copies of the physical book, and intend on submitting the finished work to publishers for consideration, self-published through Kickstarter (to pay the contributors), or post on the content sharing site Gumroad. It will be aimed towards both graphic novel and poetry publishers like Drawn and Quarterly, Nobrow, and Tin House books. The text will be created with Calligraphr with my own handwriting, ensuring the words and images feel cohesive. The finished work will be displayed visually as a wall of prints comprised of the book's spreads, with the physical book alongside them. After the completion of the book, I will donate 50% of all print sales associated with this project to the Gay and Lesbian Archives of the Pacific Northwest.

Selecting lesbian writers will be the most crucial starting point for the project. This outreach will begin on a local level (distribution of postcards and posters with tear-away contact info), but I will advertise the project online to draw a more diverse lineup of collaborators. As I wait for submissions to come through, I will start by compiling a list of historical lesbian poets. This will establish a sense of lineage and history. The proportion of contemporary to historical poems will depend on the volume of submissions and further research. After amassing 60 pages of content, I will begin to arrange it in a sequence which feels organic to the narrative setup of the project – showing a progression through childhood memories to maturation in adulthood.

The format of *Openhearted* will be influenced by illustrated poetry books like Rupi Kaur's *Milk and Honey*, with a more experimental layout as seen in the *Anthology of Concrete Poetry*. The rendering, unlike *Milk and Honey*, will be loose and expressive, with a raw, mixed media quality seen in works similar to Julie Delporte's *Everywhere Antennas*. Anne Carson's novels, like *An Autobiography of Red* contrast historical themes with contemporary settings, a conceptual method which I am inspired to use for this project. Visually, I am influenced by both fine artists and illustra-

tors such as Jillian Tamaki, Eliza Ivanova, Elly Smallwood, Steve Kim, Simon Prades, Kristin Kwan, and Jenny Saville. Historical examples include Gustav Klimt, Kaye Nielsen, and Aubrey Beardsley (a lesbian illustrator whose work was censored heavily in the early 1900's). Most of these artists work in the realms of figurative art, with embellishment and abstraction. I am drawn to large scale paintings and portraits, as I am interested in seeing the hand of the artist in the work.

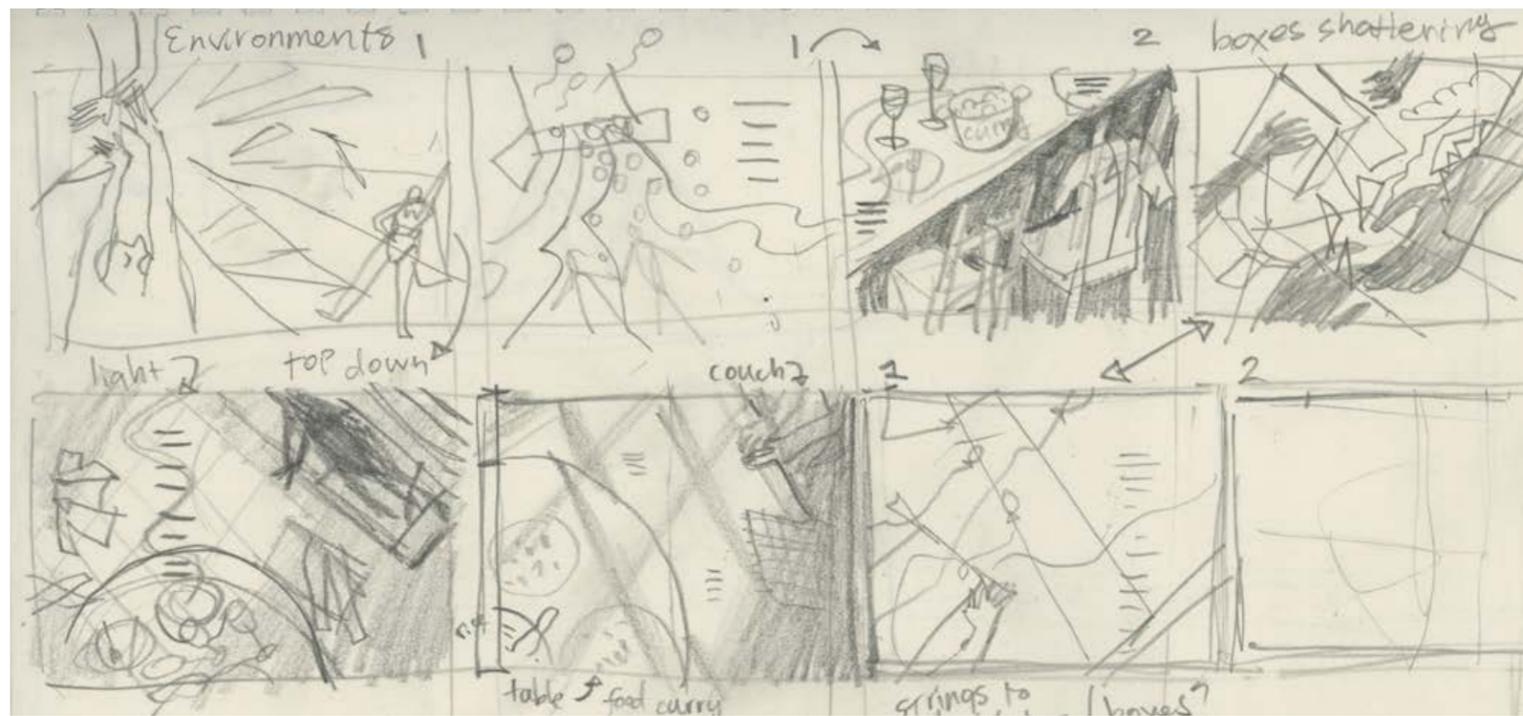
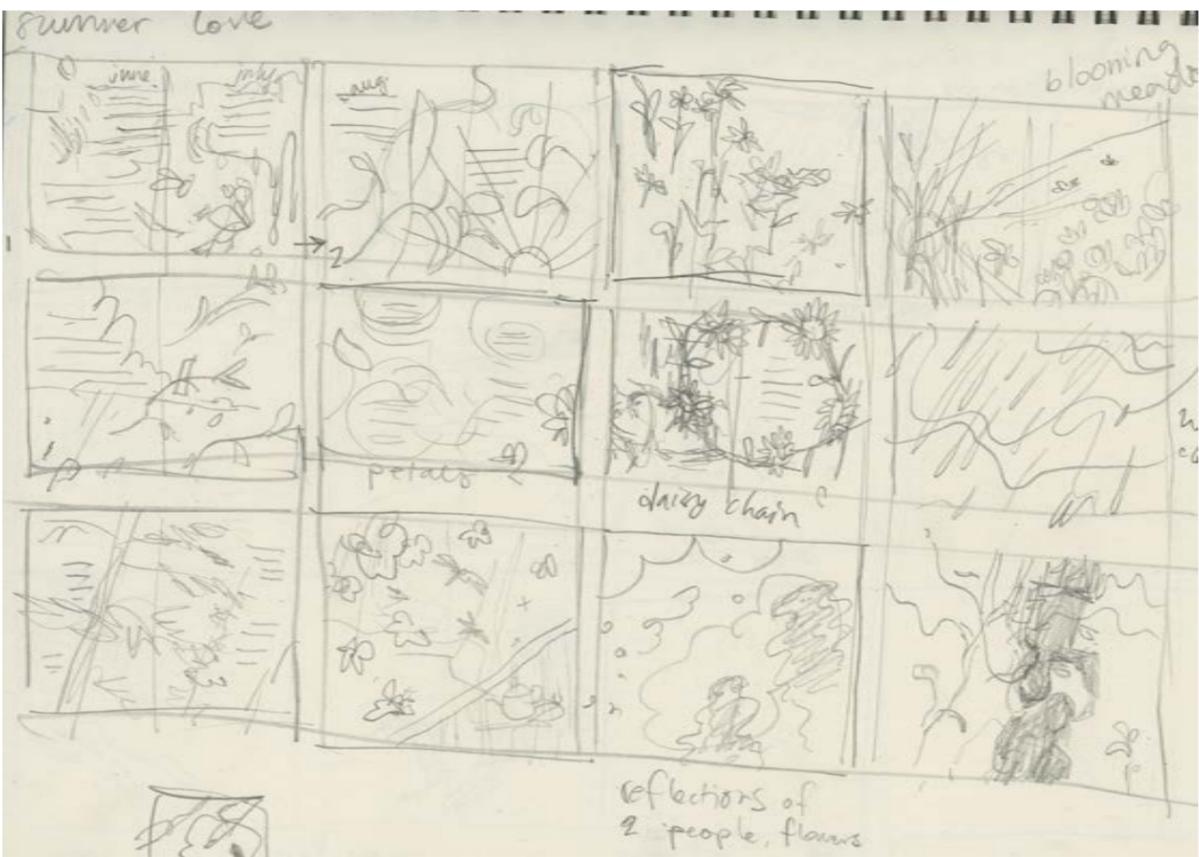
My portfolio as it is now is bright and painterly, with an emphasis on the human figure, expressive brushwork, and flowing lines. Although I work primarily in digital media, I use techniques which mimic analog mediums and enjoy the textural beauty of paint. I also make work for graphic novels and enjoy full creative control over my narrative. My goal is to bring awareness to topics that are close to my heart, like LGBT issues, environmentalism, and body positivity while also making aesthetically pleasing artwork.

I want this thesis project to offer an alternative means of accessing diverse lesbian stories for a wide audience and make a positive contribution to the queer community. As a child, I desperately needed stories where girls were shown liking other girls and reassurance that there wasn't something broken in me. I want my artwork to be something that fills that void, even in a small way. The final book will bring together writings to present a kind of archive of lesbian poets, and function as a symbol of growth and self-understanding. My end goal is to make an art piece that can be used as a point of access into lesbian authors, as a way to foster a sense of community between poets, and as a token of appreciation and tribute to the queer artists who came before me.

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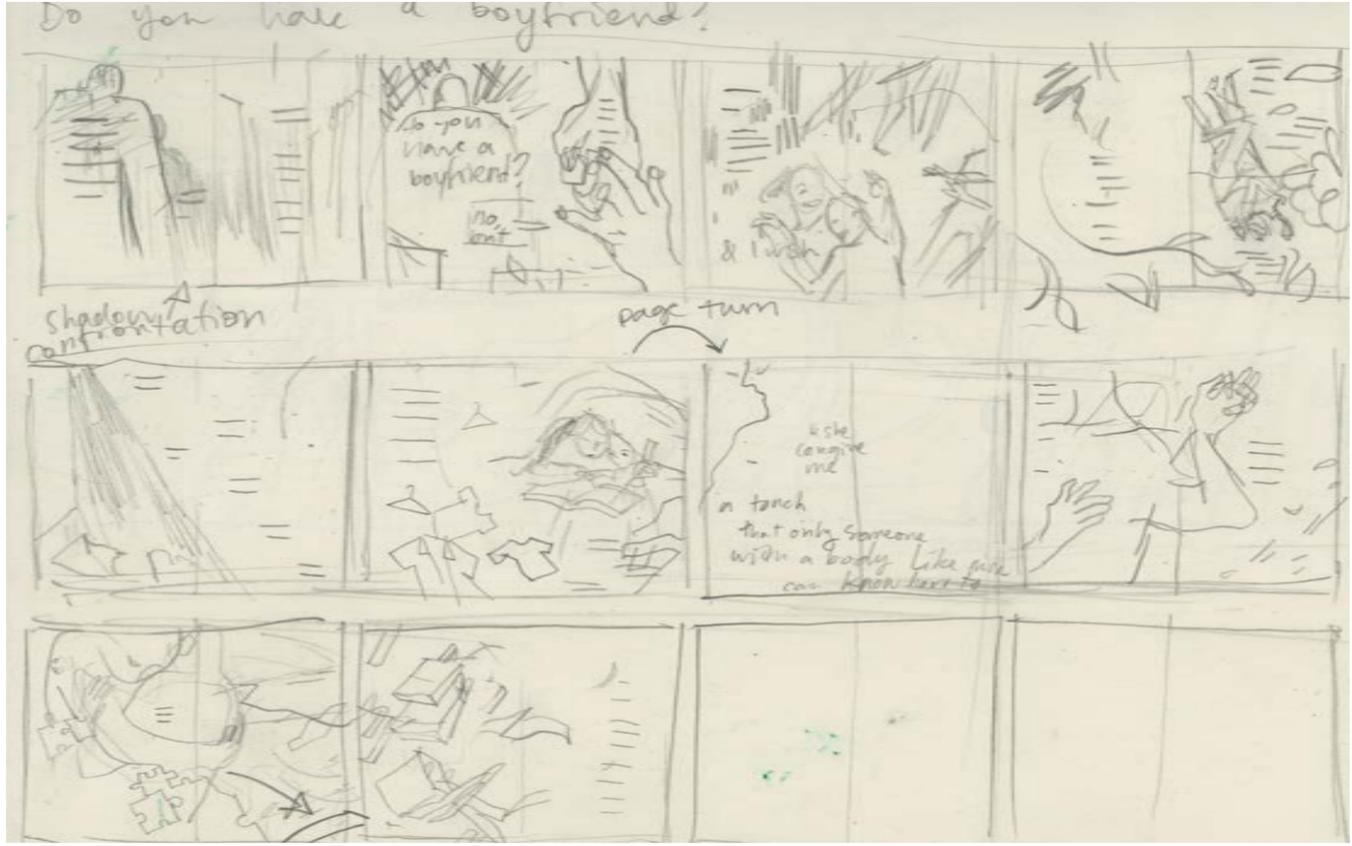
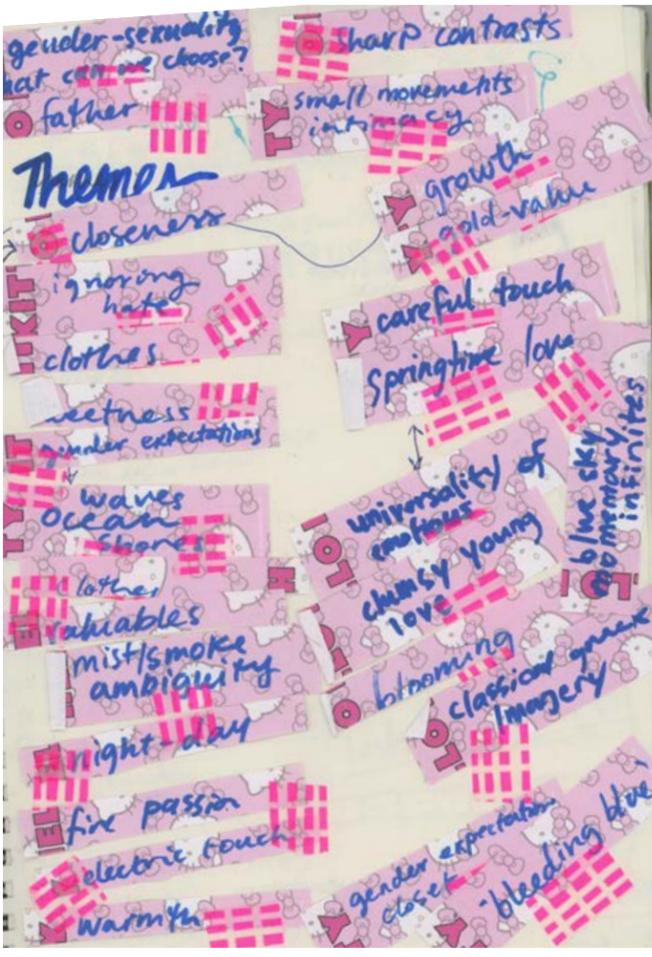
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