

Hiraeth

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Intro

Two non-binary kids travel from their desolated home to retrieve a magic orb of life with the power to restore life to the farmland their town depends on, traveling through the magical realms in a series of illustrations and GIFs. Environmental backgrounds visualize ecological desertification and the negative effects of humankind on nature, allowing these complex issues and concepts to be accessible to kids, teens, and adults. The style focuses on using shape based design, areas of flat color, selective use of line, gestural marks and color to create visual depth, atmosphere, tone and mood. Both traditional and digital mediums are utilized, and the journey is further brought to life through animated GIFs placed alongside illustrations on an online display.

Context

Hiraeth's main characters, Moira and Zephr, both non-binary (they/them), grapple with the consequences of centuries of environmental abuse committed by the generations of people who lived before them and struggle to undo the damage that has been done to the ecosystem. While the environmental contamination mirrors the destruction found in the real world, aspects of fantasy separate the two, most notably with the existence of the orb of life, a magical object that has the power to restore environmental health in mere minutes.

Over the last 20 years the environment I've grown up in has undergone immense change as droughts, fires, storms, and human damage destroy it little by little. I grew up in the portland/vancouver area and spent a lot of time around Mt. Adams visiting my grandparents who live there. Over time, the forest became a type of sanctuary for me where I can go to relax and ground myself, along with getting inspiration for my artistic practice. The last 10 years have been difficult as there have been several large forest fires on Mt. Adams as well as the devastating Eagle Creek fire that burned in the Gorge in 2017. On the mountain, the lake where my dad's side of the family met each year burned. Areas I'd gone backpacking in for years burned. Some places that had been burned just a few years before burned again. I watched as our local environment changed from drought, fires, storms, and from human impact and began to try to understand how climate change is affecting the areas right around me.

This last summer's (2020) long fire season saw forests, homes, and towns burning along the west coast. I think we can all remember too well when September came around, wind conditions caused the air to become heavily polluted with smoke from the fires, making it unbreathable and resulting in those nightmarish two weeks where going outside was not possible. With the consequences of environmental contamination affecting our daily lives, it has become clear that climate change is not something that can be ignored and needs to be talked about, and to me, it's become something I want to use my art to address. The setting of my thesis starts off in a small, partially abandoned town where the local farms have struggled to grow crops due to intense ecological desertification from human environmental abuse. My intent is to start a conversation about climate change and human involvement alongside educating my audience on the very real existence of areas where desertification has occurred. While it is not possible to find a magic orb to solve our environmental problems in real life, there are areas of desert which have been successfully restored to healthy ecosystems so there is very real hope out there.

Taking a step back from the environmental side, I have also made it a priority to break away from the standard gender binary with each character I design. Coming from someone who is trans, the transgender representation in mainstream media is... horrible. It has gotten better over the last few years, but trans characters are still very rare, and trans characters and plots that reflect real life trans experiences are even harder to find. However, when there is a well written trans moment, I think about how my own experience could have been changed if I had been exposed to transgender characters as a kid, and that motivates me to create my own content where it is normal and accepted to be trans. More and more content about being transgender is being introduced to the public each year; there have been kids books published where the main storyline follows a transgender kid, transgender characters on TV shows, and shows and movies about someone who is transgender. However, despite the representation increasing, a lot of these characters and plots are written by someone outside the trans community and there are abundant inaccuracies regarding actual lived trans experiences. I am using my thesis project to provide greater representation for transgender identities and normalizing the deconstruction of the gender binary, making content with the representation I want to see and using it as an opportunity to expose children, and adults who are unfamiliar with the trans community to gender shown as a spectrum rather than a binary defined by the sex you are assigned at birth.

Process

Over the years I have worked with both traditional and digital mediums and have found I can best express my intent through a mix of the two. Digital apps like procreate have added fantastic textured brushes that can mimic their real life counterparts so I'll be able to bring traditional textures into digital animation. Since the narrative focuses on bringing things to life, taking still illustrations and adding movement and life to them through animation will strengthen that aspect of the narrative. I will be using a mix of illustration and animation to build a world that is fantastical yet resembles our own through a style that emphasizes shape, depth, and color. My overall color palette includes a mix of jewel tones and neutral tones, the more saturated tones adding a more magical feeling to the work along with creating a bright, positive mood throughout the journey. The comforting color palette and curved edges keep things lighthearted and magical, pushing it further from reality and from becoming too dark and grim, while also making the content more accessible to a younger audience.

The overall plot that I have developed over the last 12 weeks follows two kids who set out from their hometown on a quest to retrieve a magic orb of life from the distant Forest to save their home from desertification and starvation (restore crops, stabilize food supply). They begin by traveling through the Dead Forest, a desolate landscape dotted with twisted, burned remnants of trees, a cursed place where the only life that exists is toxic and inedible. Their path then takes them through the Fall Woods, an area where it is always autumn, life is always in the process of slowly dying in preparation for a winter that never comes. The closer the two get to the Forest, the more edible plants begin to pop up as vegetation grows healthier and more dense. Halfway through the Woods, they come across a strange house and meet the Mage, a strange, reserved character who has spent their whole life researching and studying orbs of life and the magical, life-giving Forest that creates them. Once the

characters reach the Forest, they are able to retrieve the orb from its resting place without difficulty. However, as they begin their return journey, the orb acts as a beacon, at first only illuminating peaceful ghostly spirits, but as the pair leaves the Forest, twisted creatures with half-lives are drawn towards the orb's life giving power and the two must face them to survive.

Despite the hardships the two characters endure due to ecological desolation and the difficulties they encounter while on their journey, they do succeed in restoring life to their home and the hope they carried with them throughout wins.

As a young queer adult, most of my friends, colleagues, and audience are concerned about our future. Conversations about the reality of our situation can get so dark and hopeless because of how little we can do to stop the result of decades of human-caused environmental damage. I personally used the creation process of this project as a form of escapism and built the narrative around the ability of the younger generation to “undo” the damage or heal the earth. I would like to use this project to connect to a wider group of young people to hopefully inspire them and serve as a reminder that there are still ways forward that lead to positive outcomes.

Technical Plan

Materials: Procreate, traditional materials (bristol, gouache, colored pencil, scanned in textures), After Effects, Photoshop, and Clip Studio Paint.

Development work: A storyboard for each gif, 2-3 character design sheets, 3-4 world development sheets (one for each biome), additional creature design and key object reference sheets, color palette/color keys, texture exploration, and the written plotline.

Dimensions: Default size of illustrations will be 11x8.5”. Gifs will be 1080x1920px.

Amount: Number of illustrations: 3-5, number of gifs: 3-5. Total: ~8-10 pieces.

I have worked extensively with animation tools in Procreate, Photoshop, Clip Studio Paint and After Effects on projects including an animated short film. Within my traditional practice, I have gravitated towards gouache, watercolor and colored pencils.

World and character development starts with a moodboard which I use as a reference for world and character design spreads. Each design sheet is done in Procreate and identifies key elements of plantlife, clothing, and stylization.

My process for each illustration starts traditionally with thumbnail ideation on paper before moving onto a digital rough sketch in Procreate. From here, I take it to the first draft using Procreate or traditionally by printing the sketch out on 8.5 x 11” bristol paper and working overtop of it with gouache, watercolor, and/or colored pencils. Any traditional work then gets scanned in 300 dpi or higher and is combined with digital edits and additions.

The process for animation is similar, I start out with traditional storyboard thumbnails, put them into Procreate to turn them into the first draft of the storyboard, and then review my draft, make edits, work out timing and apply color keys. Once I know the assets I need to make, I make the background and any additional static assets using a

condensed version of my illustration process. I then use Procreate or Clip Studio to animate the moving elements and use Procreate to add color or textural details. Next, I bring everything into After Effects and make a separate comp for each moving section and combine everything in a final comp.

Ideally, I would like to have some of my illustrations printed out to display, but due to Covid-19 and thesis presentations being virtual, the gifs and illustrations will be displayed in an online web format with the viewer clicking or scrolling through and gifs playing automatically for a smooth transition from static to animated images.

Spring 2021 timeline:

- 1: Continue to refine plot, secondary character and world development
- 2: Thumbnails of key narrative moments, decide which will be static and which will be gifs, bring illustrations to sketch stage and gifs to rough storyboard stage
- 3: Storyboard gifs, final sketches of illustrations, color palette selection and color keys
- 4: Animatics for gifs, final sketches of illustrations #1-3
- 5: Gif asset sketches and flat colors added, final drafts of illustrations #1-2
- 6: Gif assets complete, final drafts of illustrations #2-3
- 7: Key frames animated, final sketches for illustrations #4-5
- 8: Begin coloring animations, final drafts for illustrations #4-5
- 9: Flat colors in animations complete, set up display
- 10: Gif animation complete, illustrations complete
- 11: Gifs compiled in aftereffects, exported.
- 12: Upload and finalized digital layout of illustrations and gifs on online display

Influences:

Studio Ghibli (Princess Mononoke):



I was influenced greatly by the -ecological themes and highly detailed painted backgrounds of the forest present in Princess Mononoke.

Cartoon Saloon (Secret of Kells, Song of the Sea):



I'm drawn to the stylization, extreme detailing, composition, complex animation, character expressions, the mix of familiar landscapes and magical elements, and the watercolor texture.

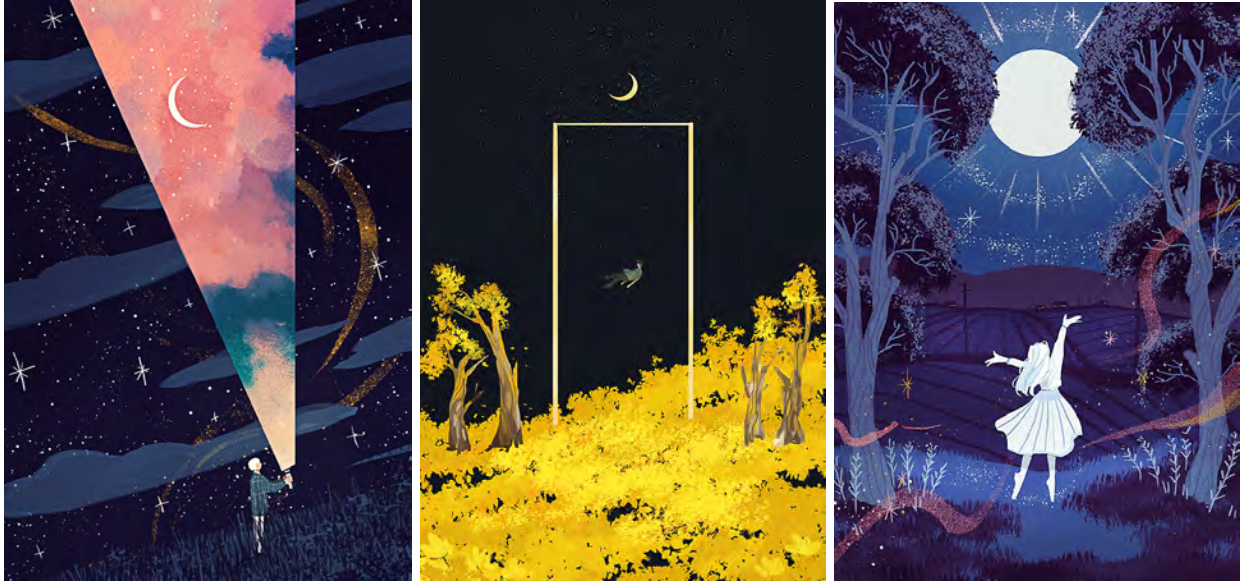
Choi Jaehoon:



He's a digital & traditional artist who works as an animator, comic artist, graphic designer, illustrator, and art director. I found his use of black and white, line, and attention to detail really interesting. I was most inspired by the way he implements movement expressed through strange shapes and linework, creating extremely surreal, strange creatures, and an eerie tone.

Twitter users:

@9Jedit:



They are a digital artist who uses brushes and gestural marks to paint foliage and environments with dynamic color palettes, creating normal landscapes with surreal elements added. The mood is overall fantastical and playful with lots of stars and sparkle marks and simplistic line/sketches for small details that I plan to use in my work.

@sanhomaydraw:



They work as a gouache/colored pencil artist using black and red as the most prominent colors in the pieces and creates surreal scenes. Their process-uses colored pencil with gouache laid down overtop.

@RiikaPaints:



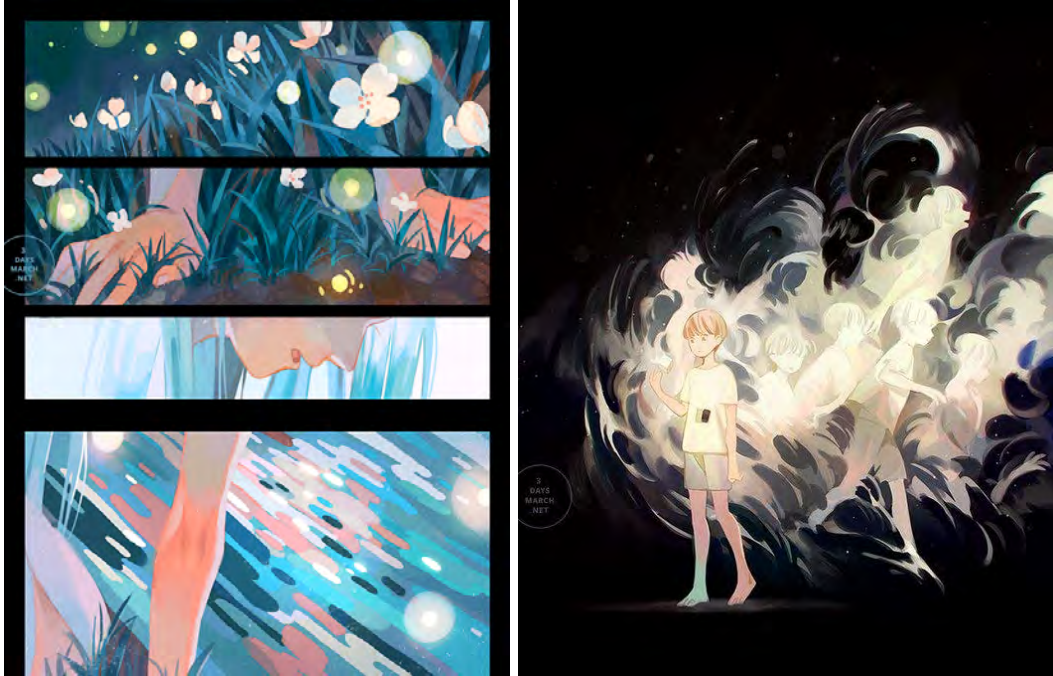
The watercolor texture and use of gradients over color flats is what drew me to their work, as well as the character expression and stylisation which all together creates depth within the pieces.

@_elibaum:



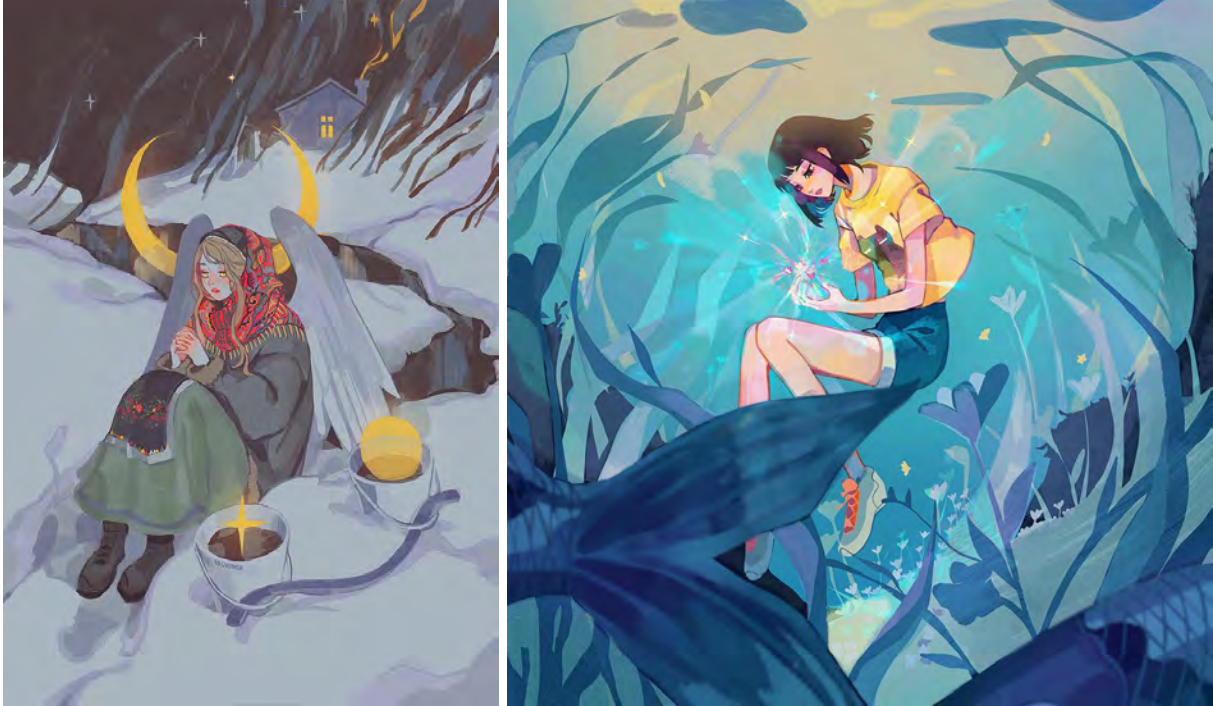
They are a digital artist who does comic work. Their work tends to implement the use of gestural marks to make foliage, dark colors paired with light for depth and emphasis, delicate character detailing, and the selective use of line to add detail.

@loika:



They are a digital artist who also works in comics using loose marks to express gesture and movement, warm and cold colors in the same palette, in a shape based style with extremely limited line where textured brushes and erasers give added details.

@vaccum_chan:



They work as a digital artist using slightly surreal elements in the environment, areas of flat color, and mix between smooth painting texture and pencil texture to create depth in their pieces.

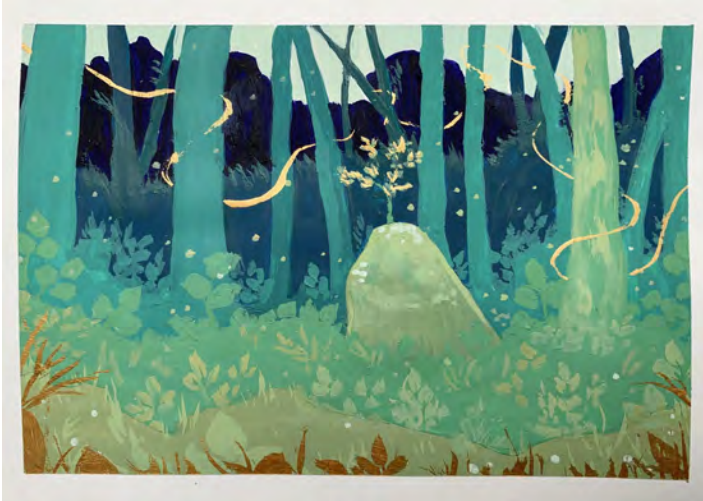
@colockoo:



They are a digital artist who also does comic work and their style is a mix of painting with gradients over flats, and line used to add detail, creating surreal environments with strange creatures.

My Work:

My work goes between animation and illustration. I was an animated arts major until FA19 and I switched to illustration to pursue storyboarding and general illustration. My portfolio can include character designs, gifs, animation clips, and illustrations, all from the last two years. However, I have grown tremendously as an artist over the last few years and see thesis as an opportunity to update some portions of my portfolio. I would like to add more storyboards to my portfolio as well as more high rendered gifs, I have been working on integrating stronger color palette choices and traditional textures within my digital work over the last few years and creating a strong illustration series using both of these to my advantage will give my portfolio an added boost.



Conclusion:

The main characters, who exist outside the gender binary, grapple with the consequences of centuries of environmental abuse committed by the generations of people who lived before them and struggle to undo the damage that has been done to the ecosystem. By including non-binary characters and real-life environmental challenges I aim to provide trans representation and educate young teens on the human impact on the natural world while emphasising hope, for change is still possible, we just have to actively fight for it.

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Hiraeth

Midterm Review Creative Brief:

Project Vision:

I want this project to be able to tell a story, to enthrall my audience, and to allow other people to connect with these two characters like I have. Displaying this project online gives me the benefit of being able to reach anyone in the world as long as they have internet. Within my portfolio, this project adds to my storyboarding and animation portfolio while also giving me additional strong illustration pieces with character design, landscape and world building components. The story told in Hiraeth could be the first in a series of projects following Moira and Zephr's adventures, possibly told through graphic novel work or animation.

Audience:

Social media users, pre-teens - young adults.

I would like to use this project to connect to a wider group of young people to hopefully inspire them and serve as a reminder that there are still ways forward that lead to positive outcomes.

Methods and Materials:

Over the years I have worked with both traditional and digital mediums and have found I can best express my intent through a mix of the two. Digital apps like procreate have added fantastic textured brushes that can mimic their real life counterparts so I'll be able to bring traditional textures into digital animation. Since the narrative focuses on bringing things to life, taking still illustrations and adding movement and life to them through animation will strengthen that aspect of the narrative. I will be using a mix of illustration and animation to build a world that is fantastical yet resembles our own through a style that emphasizes shape, depth, and color.

Materials: Procreate, traditional materials (bristol, gouache, colored pencil, scanned in textures), After Effects, Photoshop, and/or Clip Studio Paint.

Dimensions: 1080x1920px.

Comparative Media:

Animated films such as Secret of Kells (Cartoon Saloon) and Princess Mononoke (Studio Ghibli) combined with still illustrations.



Marketplace Application:

Illustrated gifs have a place in advertising, editorial work, website design, etc. if it is being posted online, it could be an illustrated gif. Animation and game design, concept illustration, and online publications all involve the intersection between illustration and animation.