Kendall Carnell

Thesis Speech

November 2024

Hello, everyone and thank you for coming. My name is Kendall Carnell, I also go by my artist name, Kenjay C. I'm an illustration major here at PNCA. My project, *Café Mocha*, is a young adult graphic novel series. I have created the opening twelve page chapter of this graphic novel series. Now, you may be thinking “tell me she didn't really make an entire comic about a chocolate coffee drink?” and to that I say jokes on you, it’s not about a coffee drink (well, not really).

Cafe Mocha is the story about Moka and Kohi navigating through everything young adulthood has to throw at them. After moving to a new town for college, Moka, our kind yet nervous bundle of joy, struggles to adjust to her new surroundings and make new friends. That is until she meets and falls in love with Kohi, the town’s most eccentric inhabitant. What makes him eccentric? Oh you know, he’s just a bit of an obsessive compulsive boy who doesn’t understand basic boundaries. Thankfully, Moka can see through his social awkwardness and find the good in him; while Kohi learns to let go of his bad habits as he develops a healthier relationship with his new girlfriend. On top of dealing with college, jobs, friendships, and romance; I’m sure everything will work out just fine.

Written and visual forms of storytelling have always been something I gravitated towards; though I’m a bit biased towards visual storytelling. I personally have a hard time focusing on reading a prose novel unless I am really invested in the story. So, for me, comics combine the best of written and visual storytelling.

I initially came up with the idea of Cafe Mocha to enter into the Sac Anime short story contest. What a great experience, right? Nope, I lost. But I had such fun working with these characters that I wasn’t ready to say goodbye.

There are so many reasons why I needed to make a story like this but I’ll narrow it down to the three main ones. First, I wanted to make a story about young adulthood and how people get through it. Like most of us, I was thrown into it and felt unprepared. I wasn’t given a warning label or a manual. So in a way this comic is

preparing folks for some of things that will come their way.

Second, I wanted to play with my favorite character trope in anime, the yandere, which is basically a person so in love with someone else it becomes dangerous. Usually those stories lean towards the horror or suspense realm. I wanted to poke fun at it and make it light hearted. But also, I wanted to weave heavier topics into the light heartedness, so that the message mallet isn't hitting you over the head. My intention was to make a comic that anybody could pick up and enjoy but that it might, if I do my job right, give you something to think about when the story is over.

Lastly, A lot of crazy things seem to happen to me on a daily basis and I'd always go back and tell my mom these stories. Like the time I got lost on my way to a band signing because I hopped on the wrong bus. Technically the right bus but it was going the wrong direction. The bus driver was shocked to see me at a stop no one used. Thanks to the generosity, and patience, of that bus driver I eventually made it to the signing, and I still have the signed CD to show for it. My mom encouraged me to take these experiences and turn them into a story and just, you know, change the names and tweak endings for dramatic effect. What better way to capture these stories than through a comic? Also, because I need someone to know of my ongoing battle with public transit.

As I began working on *Cafe Mocha*, some parts of my work process changed. I realized that I had to actually plan out the comics, not just sketch them. I had to prepare a script for dialogue, make a beat sheet, that is, make a plan for what happens on every page, and make a lot of thumbnails. I experimented with different layouts to make sure everything flowed well and certain parts of perspective made sense. Since I was telling a complete story in 12 pages, getting the pacing right was critical. I couldn't make it too fast or else I would lose the emotional character work,

and I didn't want to make it too slow to avoid readers getting bored.

When it came to actually making this, I decided to mix two of my favorite mediums; digital and watercolor, to produce these 12 pages of sequential comic work. I've also mixed elements of photography for some parts of the background. I am acquainted enough with Clip Studio Paint that I can bring unique materials into the comic book pages.

For example: the backgrounds on pages 1,9 and 11 are watercolor and edited to be a bit cleaner. The backgrounds on pages 4 and 10 utilize photography and are edited to fit the style of the comic. The pages are intended to be printed in a final 6 x 8.5 printed graphic novel.

One of the many reasons why I created Cafe Mocha was because I wanted a story where the main character was like me, a young plus size Black woman. Though now we're seeing a lot of diversity in characters, when I was growing up, I didn't see a lot of Black main characters in comics. The few characters I do remember are Static Shock, Blade, Black Panther, Luke Cage, and Miles Morales Spider-man. Along with that, you really don't see a lot of plus size characters in comics and if you do they tend to be the joke character. Or my other favorite (I mean that in the most sarcastic way possible) plus size character who loses weight is now seen as attractive. So, I felt the need to have a comic that had a main character that younger me would have loved to see.

A lot of my inspiration came from anime and manga. My mother can probably attest to the amount of times I've checked out the same "How to Draw Anime" book from the library (yes, the really unfortunate one that didn't actually teach you to draw anime characters). A big inspiration for *Cafe Moka* is the anime *Hyouka*, a slice of life mystery series that follows high schoolers as they solve mysteries around their school. The main inspiration I took away from Hyouka was the self contained stories for each episode and the color palette, which leans on the warm, cozier side. Studio Ghibli, obviously, was another major inspiration, specifically the older

films like *Kiki's Delivery Service* and *Spirited Away*. I was mesmerized by the painterly style of the backgrounds and how well they blended together with the animation.

To no one's surprise, I am heavily inspired by coffee shop culture. And I'm not talking about your Starbucks or Peet's coffee, I'm talking about your neighborhood ma and pa, local cafes with quirky decor, homemade pastries and the really good coffee. I guess you can say more so the colors and cozy aesthetics inspire me to make something wholesome.

Working on *Cafe Mocha* gave me an excuse to start going through some of my collection of manga and graphic novels I've put off reading for a while. Not only did I get a lot of insight on layout and panel but also got a good idea about how to make a self contained story work.

One of the manga I used as reference was *Mr. Villain's Day Off,* a comedy manga about a Power Ranger type villain that takes his day's off very seriously. Each chapter is a self contained story following Mr.Villain and the other characters featured. On top of giving a good laugh, I mainly referenced this for pacing purposes.

I also took some time to revisit a television show I enjoyed with my mom, *Living Single,* or as I like to call it; the better version of *Friends*. It helped inspire me when creating character interactions and the setting. Essentially how the apartment they lived in became a character itself. In *Cafe Mocha*, the cafe plays a role in the set up of each story.

Lastly, my own experiences help with this comic. When I say the stories portrayed are inspired by my own experiences, I was not kidding. In fact this first episode is based on my long running battle of being on time and public transit. There are some things that happened to me, that if you were there you'd be laughing like crazy. Honestly, I do the same looking back on them. But having a medium like comics to help portray it makes it a lot easier, then giving detail on the setting and such of what happened that day. That and I can write a happier ending than I ended up experiencing.

For *Cafe Mocha,* I had to play quite a few roles such as designer, artist as a cultural worker, layout artist, and cafe coniuser. I had to research things like cafe culture in America vs other parts of the world, specifically in Korea. I had to do research on Korean cities and their

layouts, along with studying parts of the San Francisco bay area. I did have some help from a friend when it came to refining the story.

The city, Keopijeom, is a mix of major cities in Korea, like Busan and Seoul, and my hometown Vallejo. I wanted to blend the two in a way that made it feel like a real place. This required a lot of photo references, researching city layouts and playing around with fitting things together.

When it came to characters, I wanted a diverse group similar to what I grew up around. So I took care to represent them in a light that didn't make them feel like a caricature. I also wanted to make sure the cafe drink or item they were based on is shown throughout their design. Like Kohi's colors being on the lighter end of the spectrum, similar to what happens to coffee when you add creamer to it. Along with Moka's colors staying pastel that complement the color green but having strong dark colors to contrast it, like how peppermint mochas are strong in flavor but still sweet.

My hope is to have Cafe Mocha printed and or published and available in comic book shops everywhere. How do I get there? These twelve pages can work as a proof of concept to show potential publishers and editors. I have been warned how challenging it can be to get noticed by a comic book publisher. And that it would be better to show them what I did, as opposed to what I would like to do. So I would also be excited to run a kickstarter for Cafe Mocha and have print copies on hand.

There are also multiple digital avenues available for me to grow my audience. Platforms such Global comix, Webtoons, Tapas and Tumblr have a lower barrier of entry for new creators. Obviously, there is still the sweat equity of reformatting my pages from a printed format to the digital.

In talking with my mentor and my midterm review panel, I learned that most independent creators utilize many different print and digital platforms to get their work in front of an audience. There is no single delivery system for comics anymore, readers are everywhere.

My metric of success is not just having a printed book but to have readers in general. With the platforms available today, my audience growth is only limited to how much energy and focus I can give to the project.

The target audience for *Cafe Mocha* is those who love anime and manga. Especially those who love shojo manga; one could say that this is a bit of a love letter to the genre. It's perfect for long-time veterans and newcomers to shojo.

It's also for young adults like me, who are not well versed in the ways of adulting.

Reason I chose this audience, because I feel that there aren't a lot of comics out there for us. Mainly stories that have characters that are college aged dealing with adulting and surviving somehow.

My original intention was to have a printed version of Cafe Mocha, additional character sheets, and three quarter turn arounds. As the semester went on and continued to revise these pages, I realized that having it printed in time would force me to compromise the quality of the work. Cafe Mocha will be in print, just not today. This also allowed me to spend more time arguing with my characters and getting to know them a little better.

My initial layouts underwent many revisions as I experimented with page design. I learned to prioritize story clarity over dynamic layouts. I've learned a bit more about how the reader interacts with a comic. I've learned about pacing and the flow of panels, to help establish tone. I was also made very aware of the importance of lettering and word bubble placement. My confidence with composition and layouts improved while working on this.

The biggest changes occurred on pages 9-12. After mid term review both my mentor and I agreed that changing the structure of those pages will allow the story to flow better. This also caused one watercolor background to be excluded and a half page spread was added. The next set of edits were on the minor side. Pages 3-5 were given additional backgrounds to make it clear that the characters lived in a city.

Even with minor edits, I am still able to walk away from the work feeling very proud of what I accomplished. 12 pages is no easy feat and the fact I managed to do it within the span of a few months, is still wild to me. Not the first time, I've done it but at least I can walk away proud of this one.

I'm still in the mindset of wanting to pitch this to a publisher and have this in bookstores. However, I also believe this is a good starting point for a career in the comic industry. Completing this tells me that I stand a chance in this industry.

Like I had previously mentioned, I can use this to pitch a kickstarter to fund the first book and build an audience. If this does get made into a book I would like for this to be a series of graphic novels. I would only keep it to about 4 books and maybe a special side story. Each episode/chapter would not only focus on Kohi and Moka but the other characters as well. The audience would get to know characters like Matcha, the ex-gang member who takes care of his dad and brother, and Taro, the fashion designer major who's a bit bossy but means well. I'm sure you get the idea. Each character would get a decent amount of screen time along with our main leads. I think *Cafe Mocha* has a lot of potential to branch out and reach a wider audience.

I don't necessarily want a cinematic universe or animated series, but that would be so cool. I want it done by Studio Trigger and it be streamable on Netflix. Overall, I think *Cafe Mocha* has the potential to become a well known name amongst other comics.

Kendall “Kenjay” Carnell
Illustration
Creative Brief

Project Vision: (50-100 words)

Cafe Mocha is an episodic romantic comedy following the misadventures of Moka and Kohi as they navigate the chaos of young adulthood. After moving for college, Moka struggles to make many friends; that is until she gets the attention of the town's most eccentric inhabitant, Kohi. They soon form a relationship however, Moka is introduced to Kohi’s interesting habits, which include but are not limited to; stalking, extreme levels of possessiveness, constant over dramatic proclamations of love and over-clinginess. Despite all of his shortcomings, she intends on making things work; with the help of her new found friends. Though cozy and comedic in nature, *Cafe Mocha* will also talk about the hardships and tribulations of young adulthood.

Audience: (50 words)

The target audience for *Cafe Mocha* is those who love anime and manga. Especially those who love shojo manga; one could say that this is a bit of a love letter to the genre. It’s perfect for long-time veterans and newcomers to shojo.

Methods and Materials (50 words)

This comic will use a combination of analog and digital mediums.The majority of the comic is done digitally using Clip Studio Paint and the backgrounds of the comic will be done traditionally; mainly utilizing watercolor and inks. The reason for this is because I love the look of watercolor backgrounds, similar to what you would find in Studio Ghibli films. My plan is to scan the paintings into Clip Studio, correct any imperfections, and add additional lines or colors where needed. I will then include filters and overlays to help the digital parts blend with the traditional.

Comparative Media (50 words)

A big inspiration for this comic is the anime *Hyouka*, a slice of life mystery series that follows the daily life of the members of the Classic Literature Club as they solve mysteries around their school. The main things I took away from this series was the self contained stories for each episode and the color palette; which leans on a warm, cozy side. Another inspiration is Studio Ghibli; mainly the older films like *Kiki’s Delivery Service* and *Spirited Away.* I adore the painterly style of the backgrounds and how well they blended together with the animation.

Marketplace Application (50 words)

Cafe Mocha, is planned to be a series spanning 4 books that will include 10 chapters. Each chapter will be a different story that spans about 12 pages. My thesis will serve as a prototype that can be pitched to publishers or on Kickstarter. Though print production is one of my goals, I would also like to take advantage of the market of webcomics and possibly publish this on platforms such as Webtoon, Tapas, or have it live on its own website.

Kendall “Kenjay” Carnell
Illustration
12/02/2024

Thesis Abstract

Cafe Mocha, is a young adult graphic novel series about navigating the chaos of adulthood, while also exploring themes of relationships, mental health, and family.

After moving to a new town for college, Moka, our kind yet nervous bundle of joy, struggles to adjust to her new surroundings and make new friends. That is until she meets and falls in love with Kohi, the town’s most eccentric inhabitant.

Cafe Mocha, will be a graphic novel series consisting of a total of four books. Presented at thesis was the first chapter of the series, which follows the story of Moka trying to get to work on time and Kohi coming to her rescue. This chapter consisted of 12 fully colored pages that mixed digital media and traditional media, mainly watercolor for the backgrounds. I took the watercolor backgrounds and scanned them into Clip Studio, to correct any imperfections, and tweaked them to fit the style of the comic. I have printed a prototype of the comic to be presented as a proof of concept to be pitched to a publisher or to be used for a kickstarter.

Kendall “Kenjay” Carnell
Illustration
12/02/2024

Kendall Carnell, or Kenjay C for short, is an Black illustrator and graphic designer hailing from Vallejo, California. She specializes in creating adorable characters with an err of darkness hidden within their designs and stories. On top of character creation, she is well versed in graphic design which she mixes into her illustrative works. In the fall of 2024, Kenjay is set to receive her BFA in Illustration from Pacific Northwest College of Arts in Portland, Oregon.

Her current project, *Cafe Mocha,* a romantic comedy about Moka and Kohi learning how to navigate adulthood, while also exploring themes of relationships, mental health, and family. It’s important for her to have characters that the viewer can see themselves in but also provide a bit of comfort. On top of wanting to continue the story of *Cafe Mocha*, she is also planning on pursuing other opportunities in the comics industry and designing characters for other forms of media.

Kendall “Kenjay” Carnell

12/02/2024

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