Dylan Mead

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Thesis Defence

Thesis Oral Final Speech

If you don't know me, my name is Dylan. If you do know me, let me re-introduce myself. My name is Dylan. You probably forgot about me having become a hermit, working on this every day for the last 6 months, with a job, all while trying to remain sane.
From the bottom of my heart, thank you for coming. Friends, family, peers, coworkers, my middle school art teacher !! Hi ms Quas!!!

Welcome to Lew Nork City! Squander Your Potential is a multimedia exhibition I created in order to pursue all my interests at once, and figure out why I can't figure things out. Exploring the themes of art, life, career, and all the self-sabotage that comes with being a creative in the 21st century, I built out an installation to tell this abstract narrative.

To preface, Squander Your Potential is quite an intense name.. I get that. I promise this talk won't be overly negative, though. … you know. It comes back around to positive, just stick with me.

You see, it's hard to admit, graduating from Art school, dedicating my life to art…. That I've had a long difficult relationship with Art. We probably all have.

From when I was very little, I've always been encouraged to do art. My mom has always had dreams of pursuing art, but that was never supported for her… which ultimately led to her life of encouraging art. I knew Van Gogh, Georgia O'Keeffe, Frida and their life stories by the time I was 9. I was always encouraged to pursue success in little ways. Art contests, practicing skills, and selling commissions. You know I grew to love art, I was getting good at it. I'd get compliments from classmates, teachers, and parents. It was becoming my personality. My worth.
I loved the idea of being an artist. Everything weird about me could be celebrated, I could have financial success from work I enjoyed doing, seeing my dad sell computers and insurance for 20 years, I knew that it was not just an option in my life, but the only option.

Even though I stand here graduating art school… My dad is still telling people— art professors at that —about my kindergarten baseball career and the sheer potential i had to be a baseball star. If you ask my family, I have wanted to be in every artistic career under the sun. But I have wanted to be a cartoonist, comic artist, illustrator, animator, caricature artist, painter, cake decorator, fashion designer, you name it. I had a lot of big dreams.

Despite these dreams, I've never really known what was right for me. I was always praised for my skills in proportion, lighting, and copying photos. But I rarely ever had an art practice that felt truly personal to me. From 5th grade, I was doing commissions for my dad's coworkers, painting their dogs, selling cards at the farmers market, by 16 I painted an album cover for an American idol winner– not gonna tell that story. From this early age, I had already developed a connection between art and money. The hope my parents instilled in me to do well financially became the foundation of my dreams as an artist. Maybe this has distorted my view of art. No matter how much I enjoyed the idea of various practices, I didn't stick with any if they didn't get that same sort of promise that realistic drawing or painting did for me.

No matter how much I enjoyed the idea of illustration and having many different artistic phases, I pursued what I thought I was good at.. In my senior year of high school, I was painting realistic landscape paintings. Still not sure why, it just thought it was the best I could do.

I'm from Oregon; applying for college, I was desperate to leave. I wanted to prove to everyone I knew that I was worth it, I was good enough, I was brave, I was better than Oregon and I was the one to make it out and make it big.

I thought because I was pursuing art, it was just my destiny to go to a place like Los Angeles or New York.. Because, of course, that's where all artists go. The artistic meccas that have infinite connections and career opportunities. When I was a kid all the way to high school. I really told myself that moving to LA to work for Disney was like a non-negotiable for life. Sorry Little Dylan, we're still in Portland and we're making weird little paintings.

Realistic Financial Aid kept me in Portland, staying incredibly close to home. Right then and there, I really thought I had squandered all my potential. But, little did I know my life would show a string of continuous squanderings of my potential that have led me here, to this amazing moment.

With this project, I really wanted to explore this connection I have, and maybe the relationship we all have– to potential. Why do we feel the insatiable need to compare our lives not only to others, but to ourselves? Or.. maybe these imaginary versions of ourselves we create in our head. The dreams we have for are lives do have value, they hold hope and esteem, but also work to build intangible versions of ourselves. At this point in life, graduating from college, like a second adolescence, I wanted to explore this precipice. What it means to be an artist, to have to imagine the future, to have artistic ambition.

I genuinely had no clue what I wanted to do for my thesis. And I mean that from the ground up. I didn't know what I wanted my work to look like, I didn't know what path to move forward with, what industry to cater to, what topics I wanted to explore. I had a difficult summer. I was working at a job, commuting an hour in the heat to work with kids, and commuting for 2 more hours for physical therapy. I was alone a lot of it. Still not willing to figure out what my thesis might be. In classic me fashion, I only really figured it out the week before I had to. But this summer I knew it was then, I had just to figure stuff out. I knew I couldn't ignore my anxiety anymore, at that point manifesting itself into OCD compulsions, I still had no idea what kind of artistic work I wanted to pursue.

In reflection, I was reminded of a time in my first illustration class, freshman year, where I was stuck with my first extreme case of art block. I had felt such pressure to succeed in this class, this project, and prove to myself and others that this is what I could do and what I even wanted to do. I had hated every idea I had until I figured out an invaluable trick that helped me. I had to stop reflecting on my past for inspiration and instead, reflect on that very moment. I was having art block. And so I created work about Art Block.

So, Squander Your Potential was born out of a moment of self-pity. I have worked hard, had enough people believe in me, to know I have this image of potential. And I was using this summer which I thought would be the most productive of my life, to be profoundly uncomfortable. I began to be frustrated with my lack of action, my self-sabotage, and my isolation. I wanted to explore why this ego, this perceived potential, could hold so much power for me.

When I came to Martin with ideas for a thesis, all I had was a large, vague concept, knowing desperately I wanted to explore the concept of "potential" in its entirety. The hardest part, though, was understanding

the vessel it wanted to live in. This caused me to question why I'm here, what sort of industry I'm supposed to be in, and what I want to show for myself. I love children's books, but it felt inauthentic, never having taken a children's book class here, and not feeling fully connected to children as an audience for this concept. Majoring in illustration and feeling so distant from sequential narratives was a hard pill to swallow. I knew I wanted an excuse to do everything I love. I paint, I draw, I design, I illustrate, I create things, I tell stupid jokes. I wanted a chance to do something large that worked to physically bring people into my absolute mess of a brain.

I developed this idea of an indirect narrative, allowing me to have an audience interpret a narrative for themselves, interact, participate, and walk through my journey. After knowing the installation was the vessel, I needed to know what shape the vessel took. I took time to explore worldbuilding and theme, figuring out what symbolism I could use to tell this story. I mulled over the options, from a cold office setting (severance took that) to a fantastical nature setting, but City became the obvious choice.

City is something rich with symbolism, it's almost overwhelming how much imagery there is. But cities themselves have always enticed me. I'm from the suburbs of Oregon, never had a car to go places, either tethered to rides from friends, or taking hour-long walks to my favorite places. I always knew I wanted to live in a big city, with everything at my fingertips. Surrounded by people like me, opportunities… promise. Cities like New York City and Los Angeles are known for their potential. Stories of miraculous success or dramatic failure, like a magic 8-ball, artists tell themselves are necessary to decide the path to greatness. City, in all of its imagery, is often taken for granted. From architecture to street signs, corny advertisements, graffiti walls, all these visuals are created by artists, or artists who maybe don't consider themselves artists. Maybe it's artists with a day job, artists who feel their personal work wasn't worth sharing, all represent the landscape we never truly appreciate.

I remember in Junior year, having a Portfolio review with my advisor, Martin, and not even having 10 pieces I was proud of. He asked me, "Where's are the rest?" – I don't like them. I've spent a lot of time exploring here. I feel like I've done every art style I could think of producing from my two hands, trying to find a medium or practice that felt comfortable. In that meeting, I felt embarrassed that I had come here and squandered everything I had been working so hard for, trying on too many looks, not knowing what was right.

While researching for this, I was reminded of a book I was tasked to read freshman year. I remember not liking it and struggling to get through it, but I knew I had to come back to it. Jack ack Halberstam book "the Queer Art of Failure". Being queer, your milesstones in life are set differently than a straight persons life might be; from dating, to marriage, kids, all heteronormative points of reference are disregarded in context. Halberstam says, "For queer folks, failure becomes a necessary praxis towards success," "We fail forward; we keep returning to failure until it triumphs in the site of its fumbling —which is what being queer feels like."

Not just in my college career, but just in this project, I had so many difficulties. I felt like I was alternating between failing and winning, hope and despair. Genuinely a constant ego death every 10 minutes. I can't go over the number of times I redid paintings, hopelessly reworked, toed the line of overworking, never knowing what visual decision would be a success or a failure… or just a series of failures that create a success.

Another quote from Jack Halberstam effortlessly works to explain how I feel in life, and what I'm felt while painting – "Under certain circumstances, failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing, may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."

Halberstam believes we should “read failures for examples, as a refusal of mastery, a critique of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit.”

In internal reflection, and I guess external reflection with a psychiatrist, I understood that I really truly do have ADHD (EVERYONE RAISE YOUR HANDS IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE ADHD!! DIAGNOSED OR UNDIAGNOSED!)

Okay yeah. “Coming to terms with” ADHD sounds corny, but it put a lot into perspective. I had always thought my lack of direction, my lack of focus, every hobby I picked up, was obsessed with, then immediately forgot about… I thought these were personal failures in my life. I was just not amounting to the image of myself in my head. Seriously could not tell you how many times I’ve gone to bed telling myself I’m turning my life around, gonna go to the gym every day, become a morning person, etc. Then, just stayed in bed that morning.

With OCD, I had to learn to sit in my discomfort. Every compulsion I thought would make things better never did, so I had to learn to accept the uncomfortable as best I could. These are invaluable lessons about life that really allowed me to fully understand how to survive potential.

There’s gets to be a lot shame when it comes to “failure", Or as Artists, not just failure, simply the absence of “great success”. Whether you feel it from others, or internally, like the expectations that live inside your bones. I was struck by this quote from essayist Noah Berlatsky referencing Carl Wilson’s book about having bad taste– "Shame has a way of throwing you back upon your own existence, on the unbearable truth that you are identical with you, that you are your limits. Which immediately makes the self feel incomplete, unjustified, a chasm of lack”.

Not living up to something you thought you could is a profound form of personal disappointment and shame. But even more so, a betrayal of dreams, or inaction at the foot of inspiration, follows an artist through. I wanted to unlearn a lot of this, no matter how hard.

I hate planning. But I like being prepared. It doesn’t often work out.
I worked hard during my proposal phase to dream big and be a little crazy. If you came to my proposal, not much has changed. I achieved a lot in what time I had, the product you see today isn’t far off from my loose sketches, I was hoping to be realistic in the proposal process. Some things didn’t come to fruition, though, whether that was from my proposal stage, or the million new ideas I came up with, convinced myself they were incredible, then had to immediately give up because why would I put myself through more work? I didn’t focus on the signage, design, or product as much as I desperately wanted to. Probably because graphic design was almost a full-time job outside of this. But in full, this process has made me understand the **process**. The disappointment of letting yourself down on things, the amount of compromise with yourself you have to go through to just make it out on the other side.

When it comes to my ADHD, it manifests in extreme decision paralysis, and this doesn’t just mean the big decisions, even the smallest choices I obsess over or avoid altogether. Oftentimes, I will procrastinate decisions in order to force myself to make concrete decisions.

My first step in this entire process, planned to finish over winter break, and ultimately done first to procrastinate on paintings– Creating props. This took a lot longer than I thought it would.

With the help of my dad (you'll hear that a lot through this), I got huge pieces of plywood. Taking my original sketches, I designed them, basically trusting that my first instinct was correct. I outlined every prop very generally on a grid, as much as my artist brain could calculate. Building a few miniatures and imagining an imaginary 5' 10" person. Being from here comes in handy– over winter break, quite literally on Christmas Eve and Christmas, I transferred my sketches onto the plywood and together my dad and I cut out each one with a jigsaw in our garage. It was my dad's Christmas gift to see me use power tools successfully. For the payphone, with my haphazard measurements, we built out the top, with a base with extra 2x4s a. The payphone part is real and was bought from Facebook marketplace and is genuinely the heaviest thing in the entire exhibit. They did not want people to steal those things.

Further procrastination ensued. I spent far too many days patching plywood holes, sanding, and priming. I wasn't feeling ready to start.

I continued by painting the props, building them out fully, and working to let those set the tone for me. First working the Hydrant, establishing shape language, and just show how fun it is to have a 3d fire hydrant. Then the painting of the payphone, coupled with hand-painted lettering, inspired by my love of craft and sign painting. All the props, this wall behind me, took long weekends of painting with help from my amazing Partner, Sage.

To complete my dream bus stop that was included in my original vision, I needed a bench. After my first two bench ideas fell through, my Dad graciously took all the extra wood we had and built out this bench. Within a week, I was able to prime, paint, and painstakingly create this bus advertisement. Both the website Domain and the phone number were rented for this, so they are fully usable, integrated into the theming, you know… just for the fun.

In the Squander of it all, I really struggled to build out concrete visuals for my paintings. I hoped this process would build out a sustainable personal practice. I would learn to sketch for myself, build out conceptual ideas and visual framework in ways that felt authentic and made me confident about my future as an artist. But, March hit… not a single painting started. I was paralyzed at the thought of starting them. Visuals that I would be judged for, My own personal expectations of "figuring everything out". The pressure was there. This project was supposed to be a commentary on the idea of squandering not necessarily the embodiment of it. It's all felt very meta.

My realistic goal for this project was for 3 paintings to be included in this… that was after a long reflection of the scale of this…… I HAD to be realistic… but I hate being grounded by reality. In high school, my painting class was having us do a painting a week,, so I knew I was capable of a lot, but my gut brought me back to earth. I've been working close to full-time at my internship, taking 3 classes here, trying to maintain a healthy relationship, and friendships. It's a lot.

What you see on this process wall is sketching, small paintings, and the result of a manic collage phase, where I made almost 50 collages to let loose and work on expanding my understanding of shape and color.

The first painting I developed was this self-portrait. This pigeon one. It was not the first sketch I made, but the first sketch I developed into a mini painting, and I loved it so much, I ultimately worked up the confidence to create it. I knew I wanted a self-portrait, and I knew I wanted a painting dedicated to the pigeon, so that birthed this painting. I used to do a lot of self-portraits in high school, and I hadn't done one in years. I had this image in my head based off a few things, first, this picture of a kid and his pet chicken.

Second, by pictures of me in High school. I don't often have pictures of me taken, but often times you'll see me in a sort of slouchy pose with a pouty look.

I dyed my hair yellow in January because I wanted to. This unintentionally built out my persona as my own cartoon. Yellow hair, vibrant sunburnt-pink skin. Round glasses. Slouchy posture, boxy frame. Building out a character I can draw and ultimately market. I saw myself unintentionally blurring the lines between me and a caricature of me.. And you'll see this continue throughout the exhibition. As artists, we're expected to put a certain amount of ourselves into our work, market that, and sell it. That was definitely an interesting avenue I worked to explore as I went through the paintings.

To touch on the many pigeons you'll see, let me go into some pigeon history for a sec.
Now known as rats with wings, they're a staple to any major city. This may come as a surprise, but pigeons aren't native to New York City. Originally known as rock doves, native to areas of northern Africa and the Middle East, living on sea cliffs and mountainsides. They were intentionally brought here, unlike rats, they were bred as pets, domesticated companions, and ultimately, the people's iPhone. Pigeons were used as communication devices, sending messages attached to their feet. In WWII France over 2000 homing pigeons were deployed by the US Navy for communication, with a 95% success rate in delivering messages.

As creatures, they're highly intelligent, known for their innate homing instincts, pattern recognition, and surprisingly, their emotional intelligence. Not only was their role in society important and revered, but they were arguably underused for all their valuable qualities. To get the story as to why pigeons need to fire their PR manager,
Post World War II, wireless communication technology advanced rapidly and exponentially, putting poor pigeons out of jobs, and ultimately, ceased to be used entirely. By the 60s the feral population was rapidly increasing. Reports of 2 people dying from pigeons led to pigeons being known as vermin.

For this project, pigeons started as an obvious visual addition to the landscape of a city. Because of course, they're gonna be there. I was exploring the symbols of a city and researching to delve deeper into various concepts, and this sort of tragic story connected with me. Forgive me, I know comparing myself or artists to pigeons can sound contrived or melodramatic, but maybe I just think pigeons understand a bit more about us than we give them credit for.

This idea that coming to the city as something useful, full of potential and opportunity then ultimately discarded when people no longer had use for them, it's a great story to explore what potential means for us. Thankfully, I grew up with support for the arts. But I'm 22 now, fundamentally dedicating my life to art, whether that has been painting, illustration, or design. I'm graduating now, and being told a robot is better off creating than I am. While we are not yet at the vermin stage of fascism, I can help but feel the same betrayal.

I had originally wanted to be in one of the downstairs gallery spaces, but applying for a show there, I instead got the opportunity to be in this space The Holt project space, for three whole months. This has really given me the space and time to develop my work into a cohesive space. But, this gave me the deadlines of First-Thursday openings to have work to be able to present. This setup also gave me the opportunity to do something I was really passionate about, with the idea of an immersive gallery space–community interaction.

In my proposal stage, I noted how important interaction with art is for me. I think interaction with art, –whether that be entering a gallery, actively participating in work, or just being able to touch or experience art in different way, it breaks down a certain barrier between art and viewer, viewer and artist. My only interaction planned from the start was the community poster pole addition of my thesis– the hope being that people could put up their own posters to show off events or their own work. By March First-Thursday, I was still not ready, but my props were complete, and with this, I invited people to interact with the city through graffiti. Giving free rein to do whatever people want to the payphone.

Street art is a big inspiration for me, not just on visuals, but in practice. A large part of my life, money, perception, and career have influenced how I view and make art. With graffiti art, not only is there no financial incentive, but there's inherent risk involved.. and yet still the act of creation and community fully drives this practice. A reclamation of the visual language of the city, back to the people. I have the same feelings about the Gallery. Not enough people feel as though they belong in the classic white-wall gallery,, so allowing people, from little kids to fellow classmates, the Portland community, to feel like they have a place, big or small, with collective ownership of art, is incredibly important to me.

April First-Thursday was a big opening for me. Everything was at a presentable state, it was coming together completely, but I still needed help completing my work– the poster pole was barren. With the help of FLO and Benita in the riso room, we brought the RISO printer down to make some prints. I invited folks to draw a self-portrait, a dog, anything in the center of the page, and with my RISO design in place, printing LOST DOG on top, creating an incredibly special collection of Posters. 'Lost Dog' was my way to touch on feeling lost, in a way that's funny and easy to access. This whole process of getting help from to community to complete the work has also allowed me to get all my friends and peers involved, and have something special to represent them in the exhibit

The Largest painting developed and developed and developed and changed a lot. Partially developed in my Illustration Painting class with Joshua Flint, some Input from my mentor Ryan, help from Zach, classmates— the amount of input I got for this helped, and then got to a point where I was just getting confused. It was originally very realistic, only really surreal in its scale. I had to change it completely, i hated it, I felt nothing looking at it. I felt like it had no soul.

Then, I planned this weird geometric cityscape, ignoring the rules of realism, taking inspiration from past projects I've done. But with this, I also felt as though I put up blocks for myself… I wouldn't say I always work geometrically; I like the balance of graphic shapes, but my work is usually loose. So I found I was really confined by this– again, realizing i'm restricted by rules I set for myself. I decided to add organic shapes that had no basis in reality, trying to have more fun with shapes. As this developed, not only thematically but in a process, I tried to take it less seriously.

This third painting I have comes with a Much darker tone,, from the start I knew I wanted a nighttime piece. You enter my exhibition by waiting for the bus at night– A situation I know too well, just a dark, lonely limbo of time. I've been trying to figure out for myself what the story is. I know the image, but even I wonder if I just got dropped off by a bus, am new to the city, or the bus just passed me by.

As an ambitious person, I think a lot about opportunity. Opportunities I never take because I'm not confident enough to go after them, or just opportunities that happen at the wrong place and time. The uncertainty of being an artist, every opportunity, whether taken or missed, adds up. Ideas you want to create, but never feel the confidence to start… It's a lot of baggage; sometimes it feels as though life passes me by when being so hindered by this.

The large sculpture remains abstract and personal. With potential, we often create versions of ourselves that are very large, and versions of ourselves we make really small. This is my connection to suburban Oregon, to big cities, from past, to present.

Ultimately, I achieved a lot in this process, but there was so much more I wish I could have developed. I had dreams of a mural gracing the walls, but there was no time. Merch involved, no time.
Sometimes, this felt as though this was a chain of compromises that worked to disappoint me. But now, I'll stand here to enjoy the outcome.

The influences for this project have come from a lot of places. First, from this random sticker I saw on Instagram, to films and tv, to further research I've done about potentiality and actuality.

A big inspiration of mine is the work of Julio Torres, a Salvadoran-American comedian, writer, and director. His surreal projects, Problemista and Fantasmas, uses himself as the main character, placing him in fictionalized versions of New York City. His series Fantasmas is shot in a single soundstage, the buildings are set up like theater flats, flimsy and unconvincing, and motion and life are shown through projection and theater painting. I got the chance to watch him at an artist talk in and ask him a few questions about abstractions and representation, further helping me understand the purpose of fantasy realism. His work perfectly combines the real with the surreal, using humor and art to comment on hard truths about systems that hinder us.

My first meeting with Ryan helped me solidify my love of making art about the city. Introducing me to Margaret Kilgallen, street artist, painter, and printmaker, often created large installations combining these many practices. Creating clusters of small canvases and murals of cities, often highlighting text, signage, products, and people. She had a love for the handmade, citing folklore and human creation as her biggest inspirations, creating large love letters to the things that inspired her most (in the form of grand installations).

As a kid, I was obsessed with visuals. I would tell my mom to give me 15 minutes with an eye spy or a 'Where's Waldo' instead of a bedtime story. These two brands actually played a big role in how I thought about the large piece. The surreal lighting of miniatures, directed in eye spy, by photographer Walter Wick. I love the flattening of space and the artistic control over lighting.

Where's Waldo.. Kinda obvious inspiration… it's a lot. I would've added more characters if I had the brain power to do so.

The shapes I created for the city was inspired by multiple references to art and labor. Through the shape language, I worked to reference art deco, the style of the 20s that was used to represent luxury and the faith in progress. I also got inspiration from labor murals, from Diego Rivera's industry murals to soviet murals.

In the contemporary art world, I'm inspired by many, many artists. The artist Aryz (Octavi Serra Arrizabalaga) is a Spanish street artist, also known for his murals and large-scale wooden installations. His art style combines a loose scribble with controlled portraiture, often abstracting form to distort and duplicate. Like the next artist I'll show, I've been fascinated by the use of squares and rectangles to build containers of color.

Matt Bollinger is a painter, but also works across mediums like animation, sculpture, and sound. His works show a melancholic view of middle America, inspired by memories. Each figure painted in vivid color, but somehow a bit cold and empty. I'm drawn to his geometric use of shape and color, and always interested in the settings he creates.

Stevie Shao is a Seattle-based muralist whose career I'm always following. Creating bold, colorful, sharp characters inspired by Chinese folklore and PNW ecosystems. Her work is able to translate from print to merchandise, to large and small plywood paintings, and full building murals. This has continuously inspired me to see where I can take my work.

I think A big point of tension in this project was the role it plays in the marketplace. I've been conscious about my career and marketability for art since I was a kid. Knowing that I would have to take this passion of mine and turn it into something marketable and sellable. I've also known since I was a kid, that turning my art into something marketable is what makes it less enjoyable.

I came into college, already exhausted by the idea of fine art. Hoping to come into illustration with fresh eyes, the hopes of work that is accessible to a wider audience, and work that comes with a built-in prompt. But in my time here, I struggled to identify my place in the marketplace. I didn't connect with the children's book as much as I thought, didn't connect with graphic novel as much as I really wanted to. I reality enjoy storytelling in ways that are maybe a bit more abstract. Instead of Illustration electives, I pursued painting again.

At the same time, I was realizing there was a huge lack of illustration internships available, and within the career of illustration, not as much financial stability as I continuously crave. I began working in Graphic design, hoping my art skills and passion for accessibility can work to help people and get me a job with health insurance.

Increasingly in the marketplace of art, I've become more jaded. For advertising, my morals tell me I shouldn't shill my art for large corporations, I shouldn't work in editorial for publications that push narratives that harm. It's really hard to disconnect myself from that. Equally hard that i never felt connected enough to children's books because maybe that was my last path to preserve some moral innocence. In this time of just… exaggerated evilness.

I wanted to create something divorced from the marketplace. Maybe this was stupid. Ryan helped me understand the new world of contemporary painting. Told me about all the galleries. The artists I should follow, the work that continues to be done.

After this… This collection of work will most likely live in my parents' garage… while I pitch work to galleries or figure out if a studio apartment can fit a payphone and bench in it. In my advanced illustration class, I've built out a strong portfolio in Illustration.

And with this project, it gave me the opportunity to explore even more and have a portfolio piece that proves I can work with large creative concepts and pull off a cohesive body of work. This can apply to further gallery opportunities, mural, illustration, and even creative direction in the future. That is, if I don't continue to squander my potential.

I said I would be positive at some point.

Within artistic career, encouragement is important, so many people have helped me be the person I am today. And with this thesis, I'd like to do a few thank yous if that's okay. I want to thank my dad for all his help with construction. Couldn't have done a lot without that help. Thank my mom for every phone call, just asking her to tell me I'm on the right track. My wonderful partner, Sage, for being my safe space and incredible painting assistant, and personal dj. To all the educators of the past and present not only being there for me in my art practice, but supporting me as a person. Ms Quas, your support and belief me in middle school meant the world. Zach, thank you for your emergency pep talks, unconditional support. Thank you Molly for your conversations on life and art. Ryan my mentor, and opening me up to a world of PROCESS. And Thank you, each every one of you all for being here.

Other people's support is important to esteem, but no matter the external support, the view others have of you, you're unfortunately the driver of your life. This exhibition is dedicated to all artists, designers, musicians, philosophers, thinkers, and creatives. The ones working in big galleries, the ones working at grocery stores. Coffee shops. Animal shelters.

It's to the artists who found new avenues, creating work no one bats an eye at; the sign painters, graphic designers who work to make road signs and brochures, to the artists who scribble on bus benches, the artists turned accountants and engineers. I think we're all searching for purpose and pride, a chance to know we're good enough and worth it. I want you to know at any stage of your life, whatever career you're in, whatever part of the process you're in — know you're valuable. Your worth is not tied to milestones or pictures. Your ideas are worth listening to, your work is worth pursuing.

With this exhibition, I don't want to prescribe how someone should feel experiencing it; But with squander your potential, I hope you don't take it at face value.

I set out to analyze why we as artists or as people live by our potential, why we punish ourselves, and control ourselves with our own barriers. I'm working to unlearn my own potential by building up a solid foundation of failure, learning to enjoy the process, a holding on to the love of creating. I hope we can all ask ourselves whether potential is truly something to live by. "Squander Your Potential" is not a warning, but a call to action, to look inward and see the influences, pressures, and expectations we live our lives by, and to figure out what we can do to unlearn those in order to truly live a creative life with no boundaries. I hope you join me in this process, and you too can squander your potential.

Thank You.