

Thank you for coming to my Focus Week presentation! For those unaware, my name is Rey Nolan, and I'm an illustration major here. My work focuses on portraying "heightened emotions" and dramatic, dark scenery. Ever since I was young, I possessed an affinity for flowers, partially due to my grandma's garden. This, combined with my struggles with mental health and countless hours reading books, informed this project's contents. Today, I'll be presenting the culmination of two semesters worth of work, and years of history: *White Petals*.

The story centers around Danielle Park, an investigative journalist sent to inspect a series of murders, initially thought of as cases of internal bleeding. Early on, she's led to a mysterious abandoned church. Danielle's girlfriend, Mary, joins her under the guise of wanting to shoot a short film. They meet with a botanist, Gabe, who is studying and taking care of the plants covering the former church. As they explore deeper, the story takes a supernatural twist as they become entangled in a world much greater and more floral than their own.

I initially proposed *White Petals* as a pitch bible for a visual novel. However, varying circumstances and events that took place over the summer, along with some advice from my mentor, caused me to shift my plans towards visual development. These works will serve as portfolio pieces, but they also lay the groundwork for the project's future development. My new works were illustrated on Procreate, with handmade analog textures to emphasize grit. *White Petals* is for an adult audience who loves surreal thriller stories infused with body horror, melodrama, and symbolism.

While developing these pieces, I decided to focus on *White Petals*' three main characters: Danielle, Mary, and Gabriel. Each of these characters are color coded, which is echoed throughout their character and asset sheets. Also, *White Petals* takes place around the year 2003/2004, in a fictional city that I describe as 'Chicago meets Portland'. The winters are foggy, cold, and rainy, peppered by rare moments of sunlight. Because of this, each character is bundled up and carries around a bag with some personal items.

Danielle's design, for example, is mainly blue and green, reflecting her cold, reserved personality. She's a freelance journalist who dreams of breaking a major story, and she's willing to risk her life (and break the law) to accomplish that. Danielle has few friends and rarely opens up to people, with the exceptions being Mary, and later, Gabe. Additionally, she doesn't sleep very well, and it doesn't improve for her, unfortunately. As displayed by her ever-important eyebags and messy hair.

She carries around a brown messenger bag that includes electronics and other work-related items. For the assets, I wanted them to relay their owner's story. Danielle grew up lower middle class, so she has learned to be frugal and practical. For instance, Dani uses an inexpensive cellphone (the Nokia 3310) and CD player. She always makes sure to carry around an extra pair of gloves (in case she gets her hands dirty). Related to her profession is her recorder, notepad, and pen.

Mary is a filmmaker by day, urban explorer by night. She is meant to contrast Danielle in almost every way. For starters, she's much more outgoing and joyful, wears make-up, and grew up relatively well off. Mary acts as a stabilizer who can spot things that Danielle misses. However, she's more reckless than Danielle, and often seeks validation from other people. She's also quite stubborn. Mary's color palette mostly consists of red, pink, and orange, to signify her bold personality. One fun fact is that I incorporated bits of Dani and Mary's color palette into each other's. For example, Dani's glasses are red (like Mary), and Mary wears a blue necklace (like Dani). (round shape language)

She carries a black bag with plenty of zippers for all of the little things, including granola bars and an extra pair of ear buds for her iPod. Her upper middle class background is expressed through newer technology, as she also wields a camcorder, extra tapes, and a pen for any mishaps.

Gabriel, or just Gabe, is a botanist who is studying the proliferation of the church's plants. Gabe is meant to contrast both Danielle and Mary: he is in control of himself and seems to remain calm even under the strangest situations. Additionally, Gabe gains an interest in helping Danielle's investigation and, depending on the path, Danielle herself. He presents himself as kind and reliable, but may possess something under the surface. This is reflected in his palette, which mixes earthy tones and blue. There are a few aspects of his design that allude to his inhuman nature. Gabe's hair is meant to invoke plant roots, his eyes are a striking green, and his shape language is triangular with added round forms.

He wears a green canvas bag that carries his necessary tools along with a few practical items. Most notably, his botanist tool kit, featuring a magnifying glass, a dropper, scissors, medical blades, and scalpels. These are actual botanist tools that I found during my research. In addition, he carries a phone, handkerchief, and gardening gloves, in case he gets his hands dirty!

A background of the abandoned church I created last term. This church unifies their fates, for better or for worse. I've always had a fascination with abandoned places and

focused last term's essays around them. For this piece, I painted over a photobash I made over a few different churches, to accentuate the present unreal atmosphere. It was initially completed in black and white before utilizing a gradient map in Procreate.

This next work is a depiction of an event that occurs in the middle of the story: Mary's death and the true nature of the murders, that being plant matter growing within the victims and sprouting outside of their bodies. White lilies, the flower in Mary's eye, hold a religious significance and are associated with renewal/rebirth. The nest of flower stems are red due to the hemoglobin it has absorbed. You can even see a few underneath the skin. It's a combination of the beautiful and grotesque that utilizes digital illustration and a splatter texture I made. This piece represents the narrative transitioning towards a fully surreal, fantastical story with a human core.

Next is an interior piece depicting Danielle in her bedroom, in the midst of her investigation, after Mary's death. I wanted to complete a full piece with a background and figure, so I proposed an interior piece to my mentor. Her room is disheveled, with a hastily-made evidence board spread across the wall (including an updated map of the church), crumpled pieces of paper scattered over her unmade bed, an unset alarm clock, and the flower from Mary's eye, as she still remains obsessed with every part of her. The palette for this piece ended up resembling a painting I made a few years ago, in which Danielle is woken up by a mysterious presence in her room.

This piece is a Romantic-inspired portrayal of a tragic scene involving Danielle and Mary. I wanted an illustration that depicted the two interacting in an intimate manner. Of course, they love each other, but express it in a way that is obsessive and not always happy. This is represented through the cool color palette and how the foreground and background mix together and fade out. Mary is still attempting to keep a cheerful face even in death. Perhaps this entire sequence is a romanticized scenario meant to soften the reality of the situation.

This is a cover depicting Danielle sitting on a window sill as vine/tendrils sprout out from her back. She looks out at the cityscape, its sky now a blank canvas. An eye gazes at her, but whose? Everything feels too open yet claustrophobic. Dani's been through a lot, but hasn't allowed herself the time to process her emotions. This aspect of her character reflects the turmoil I have faced with my own feelings, particularly my struggles with anxiety (and communicating with myself).

I've been influenced by several works of art while creating my project. This list has ebbed and flowed since my proposal presentation. Here's just a few of them. For

visually, I'm drawing on Baroque/Romantic art, particularly the works of Paul Delarouche. They expertly utilize contrast and dramatic compositions to create a sense of heightened reality that perfectly fits with the White Petals project.

Additionally, my personal art style for White Petals was influenced by concept artists such as Ayami Kojima and Kazuma Kaneko. I'm drawn to their usage of dark and ethereal yet beautifully rendered subject matter, often applying mixed media to their art. These artists have also greatly influenced my personal style and growth.

Noir/neo-noir has also influenced a few aspects of the story, mainly its scenes with dramatic lighting and moody contrasting values, and character archetypes.

White Petals has technically been in development for many years. It started off as a few unrelated character sketches, some poems (which is where the name comes from), and a few old college assignments. It was around 2020 when I got the idea to combine these characters in a seemingly-natural murder mystery that quickly spirals into a world filled with unwanted knowledge, body horror, and self discovery. In 2022, I decided to make it a visual novel, as a tribute to my love for the medium. I also have previous experiences making visual novels. White Petals has changed with me as much as I have changed with it.

In fact, I'm still changing it to this day. Who knows where this project will be in a few years, or even months? Part of the challenge for me will be taking White Petals and making it into a bigger project. My next steps are likely to continue developing its artistic language and write a first outline/draft for the story. I want to take this project with me and water it into a beautiful flower. Some people may be allergic to it, others just may not like it, but some people will observe it, smell it, take it all in, and perhaps spread it around.

White Petals has its abandoned landscapes, botanical body horror, and strange angelic figures, but at its core is a human story. The struggles of loss and surviving in a difficult world. Of rapid changes and feeling alone. Most importantly, it's about the ever-changing nature of relationships and the world.

I'd like to thank my mentors and friends, who are too numerous to list here.

Thank you all for listening.

