

My name is Alyssa Morris-Hatch, and I come from the Pacific Northwest in Washington. Specifically, I am Tulalip, and I grew up outside of my reservation, although it was only 15 minutes away.

I have always been an artist, and after my dental assisting job after college, I realized that's not how I wanted to contribute to the world. I started my journey of education by studying graphic design and getting an AFA after a couple of years.

I learned that if you did not want to work at Funko, you had to sell out and work for commercial companies, and it felt wrong to emotionally manipulate and capture an audience for profit, so I studied film.

Film gave me the idea that it would connect me further with the communities around me, and I fell in love with documentary work.

They told real stories about real people and expressed themselves genuinely as they were. From that point on, I knew I had to work in a field with genuine folks who inspired the flame of curiosity, boldness, and, overall, their dreams.

This turned my attention to Laika, whose whole business is making magic and wonder, so I joined PNCA to learn stop-motion animation.

I have the utmost respect for stop-motion because it requires all of my skills and focus, and I learn new things every time I'm on a set. I finally discovered my passion in life. Stop-motion animation not only fulfills my creative needs but also my need to connect to the communities I'm surrounded by and be inspired by their dreams.

My thesis project is a stop-motion short film exploring how to exist and communicate effectively among different communities and exploring the concept of self. I connected with Cecilia Vicuña, a powerful

artist who explained her process, "...My process is not about thinking, it's about sensing, attending to that, that is around us, in our field of love, I would say, things that you love."¹ So what do I love?

Fundamentally, I love all living things and respect those that aren't yet. With this in mind, how can someone love another who is hard to understand or relate to?

Neil deGrasse Tyson, in a rather rude dream appearance, appeared before me, and I didn't know who he was. He berated me for sitting in an empty warehouse.

He stomped up to me and threw his hands in the air, "That's it, you're just going to sit there?" he exasperated and huffed off. I had obviously seen him in the media but had yet to connect with who he was and what his career is.

I was determined to figure out who he was and why he felt so upset with me. Once I discovered he was an astrophysicist, the dream became profound and motivated me to learn as much as I could about our world and what's beyond.

This stop motion will explore how to grow and communicate.

I am fascinated by subjects that don't have concrete answers, as we are and should be forever evolving and reinventing what turns our wheels as we traverse different times and environments.

¹ Vicuña, Cecilia. 2020. "Cecilia Vicuña: Hugo Boss Prize 2020 Nominee." YouTube. October 5, 2020. https://youtu.be/cL_7MDuT8Xk

As Terrance McKenna explains, “Nature loves courage.

You make the commitment, and nature will respond to that commitment by removing impossible obstacles.

Dream the impossible dream and the world will not grind you under, it will lift you up. This is the trick.

This is what all these teachers and philosophers who really counted, who really touched the alchemical gold, this is what they understood. This is the shamanic dance in the waterfall. This is how magic is done.

By hurling yourself into the abyss and discovering it's a feather bed.”²

He inspires me to reach for the stars while staying rooted to Earth. I knew this was going to be a huge workload, but this is also everything that I am and what I strive to explore and grow in every day. It was much more problem-solving to properly navigate through the challenging animation parts along with set building and set lighting. At the end of the day, I had no choice but to work for my stories and appreciated my work more and more as I poured into it. As my story grew, so did I.

This story was inspired by a vision I had while trying to fall asleep, and Aloma came into view. They stood in a meadow, silent, but I felt they were there to tell me something.

² McKenna, Terence. “Unfolding the Stone.” The Library, June 1, 1991.
<https://www.organism.earth/library/document/unfolding-the-stone>

Aloma didn't say anything, but their name boldly jumped into my mind. I felt compelled to write a story based on our interaction and how it felt. Their deer skull and white braids represent death, while the poppies signify birth and beauty, along with war and destruction. They aren't actually any of the things they decorate with, what they actually are is the cloud behind the mask that the orb conjures together.

This musically led story unravels from a problematic system that we all live in and could apply to anyone in society.

Rather than having the hierarchy be oppressive, the hierarchy within the story works within the dynamics of the purpose and desire of each subject.

With this project, I am exploring how to become more conscious. How can we work as one within the context of many that benefit everyone?

JJJJerome Ellis, an artist and proud stutterer, once said, "So I think music and polymeric music really helps me listen to my intuition. And dissonance too. Just because something is dissonant, doesn't mean it's wrong or bad, which I feel is a truism when I say it but I really have to practice."³

Speaking of practicing, I discovered a lot more about Dragonframe as I used it, for example, being able to add sound to my scene was helpful in the timing of my animation.

I used Dragon Frame, a Canon camera, and materials that were gifted, lent, and what I had to create physical backdrops and puppets for my stop-motion.

³ "On Embracing Blocks as Opportunities." n.d. Thecreativeindependent.com.
<https://thecreativeindependent.com/people/artist-jjjjerome-ellis-on-embracing-blocks-as-opportunities/>

My project ruminates on roles, the purpose of self, and community building. Aloma thinks they are a spirit guide, and whether they are or not, they evolve from their position and transform themselves into what becomes a part of the universe's society that they have helped to maintain from within their void.

I have researched some people, and a few have stood out. This is a verse that I found compelling that you all can read. I would like to talk about Etel Adnan. Etel Adnan was a poet, essayist, and painter born in Beirut, Lebanon. Her resistance to war, poetry of despair, serenity, and hope for the future is something I found expressive and inspirational.

Her mother was Greek, and her father was Syrian, so she spoke Greek, Arabic, and French. During the Algerian War, she resisted French writings and shifted her focus towards abstract oil painting. She would switch from writing poems to becoming the cultural editor of a French-language newspaper.

Her expression incorporates surrealist elements and formal experimentation that addresses the nature of exile and political oppressive injustice.⁴

I also found an artist and musician that I previously mentioned, JJJJerome Ellis. They are a disabled Grenadian-Jamaican-American artist who works between music, performance, writing, video, and photography.

They explore relationships among blackness, disabled speech, divinity, nature, sound, and time.⁵

⁴ Foundation, Poetry. 2021. "Etel Adnan." Poetry Foundation. October 25, 2021. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/etel-adnan>

⁵ "About - JJJJerome Ellis." 2024. JJJJerome Ellis. 2024. <https://www.jjjjerome.com/about>

Sound is a powerful tool and is an element that I am passionate about, so it is important to understand how sound can be stretched and manipulated, as I explored soundscapes for the universe.

I used an Arturia MicroFreak synth, keyboards, pedals, and a variety of instruments and objects to create a soundtrack.

As I researched further into what sounds I had in my library, I discovered a wobbly reverb that fits the mise-en-scene. With the materials being a mix of practical elements and found material, it has a mix of textures and elements that give another feeling without being too scary. I wanted to evoke a sense of adventure and wonder with a mix of magic and darkness.

To create this work, I have used found and given materials to build a set 3 ft wide, and puppets that are 1.5-7 inches tall. I ended up working 45 hours a week. I used found and already acquired materials because I want to be as least wasteful as possible and be mindful of my material usage

My practice included looking to my mentor to keep me knowledgeable about what kinds of materials are toxic to use and what would be best to use in the development of sets and characters. For the hair of my puppet, I planned to use my hair that I collected, and along the way, I had people in the PNCA community who have also given me their hair. Needing a white foundation, I had to find a way to color the hair but there was no way to get it to the color I needed. I learned that what made the hair special was the process of receiving it.

It had harbored a new meaning of community support while collecting the hair itself, and that is what made it special to me, whether or not it made it into the film.

The process of having people give me their hair reflected and encouraged my purpose of creation and storytelling. The act of gathering also reflected a life lesson that it is not just about gathering what I need to be successful, but also how and who is affected by my intentions, motivations, and work.

Bradley Snook studies geometric shapes in nature and how he reflects that within himself and others. His connection between nature and his body is very surreal, but also makes sense in some way. This kind of bizarre harmony is what I want to capture in my stop-motion.

Woosie's puppet fabrication and environment building is unique in that she includes herself in the work she designs. The practical fabrication is admirable, and I really enjoy the different fabric textures she uses. I want to make sure that I can design work that is both eye-catching and ergonomic.

Christiane Cegavaske has a blend of dark, surreal and whimsical elements in her work. I am also just in love with birds, especially crows. They remind me that I have many stories revolving around my Indigenous heritage that I wish to share outside the community by incorporating their lessons into my work. For my thesis, I directly want to speak on a higher understanding of the world and the existing communities and ecosystems that lie within it. We are many individuals with our own systems and our world desires articulation so that we may understand our common goals and interests.

Moving towards the pipeline of my work, my workflow involved writing the script, then I created the soundtrack before I began a first pass at the storyboard.

I worked mostly in my studio, which I created. I cleared out my craft corner and blacked out all the windows and put a curtain wall between the living room to quarter it off, as well as the multiplane at PNCA.

I used Audacity and Adobe Audition to record and edit the music. It took a long time to cut the music down from 25 to 5 minutes.

I saw the scenes happening in my mind and continued to cut until it was around 5 minutes. I then created a storyboard while listening to the soundtrack to ensure that the beats in the frame match with the music. After the storyboard was complete and critiqued, I built out my sets and puppets.

I was constantly referencing my schedules and making lists just to keep my head straight so I wouldn't wander off and make something else that wasn't immediately important.

That aided me in directing my focus. I shot with Dragonframe in layers (background, subject, foreground) and edited in Premiere and After Effects.

I received feedback on my project from friends, my mentor Suzanne Moulton, my panel, and other guest artists that I had the pleasure of hearing from. My creative artist and resource inspirations were discovered with the help of Jay Ponteri and my thesis professor, Erin Doughton.

The final project is compiled as: A short film, a soundtrack, and a display with Aloma, a dark spirit, and a full spirit inside the set. I hope that this work will engage the viewer in a way that makes them curious to explore more within politics, avenues of thought, and self-exploration. I have installed the scene, and then people will be able to take a closer look after the viewing.

Due to the impact that our overconsumption and wanton materialism have had on our planet and everything within it, I have become conscious of the potential that any piece that a material holds. How can it be transformed? What properties does it hold? How can I honor the material while transforming it? How does it transform me? I hope this film will engage all communities to be more mindful of the ways we work, coexist, and grow.

Bibliography

Ellis, JJJJerome. "Loops of Retreat." In *The Clearing (2021)*, curated by May Makki Online

<https://sweetpasssculpturepark.com/jjjjeromeellis.html>

JJJJerome exhibits May 25th-July 22, 2023. The performance unfolds through musical and visual immersive content. It offers new perspectives of the human experience through publications, sound, installations, and a video of their performance at Sweet Pass Sculpture Park.

Etel Adnan. "Shifting the Silence." *nightboat books* Online.

<https://nightboat.org/book/shifting-the-silence/>

Adnan writes a book regarding her life and coming to terms with her age, the concept of death and how to approach her own. She echoes these concepts through the lens of climate change, war and the sea.

Etel Adnan. "The Indian Never Has a Horse & Other Poems." *Litmus Press* Online.

<https://litmuspress.org/product/the-indian-never-had-a-horse-other-poems/>

Poems from all over the world, people share their experiences of violence, destruction, witnessing all ranges of emotion, and nurturing love.

McKenna, Terence. "Unfolding the Stone." *The Library*, June 1, 1991.

<https://www.organism.earth/library/document/unfolding-the-stone>

This philosophy inspires hope in times of uncertainty, darkness, and growth.

Tyson, Neil deGrasse. "Startalk." YouTube, December 22, 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/@StarTalk>

Knowledgeable of most things outside of the world, Niel is an astrophysicist who talks about all things space while inspiring others to explore and learn from the great frontier.

Vicuña, Cecilia. 2020. "Cecilia Vicuña: Hugo Boss Prize 2020

Nominee." YouTube. October 5, 2020. https://youtu.be/cL_7MDuT8Xk

A fluid artist who explores her inspirations through song, dance, and art. She breaks the boundaries of what it means to be an artist by doing everything she dreams of doing.