

Intro

thank you for coming!!! hi! my name is casper, im an artist from the small town of ellensburg, washington, historically home to the k'it'tas and pshwánapam bands of indigenous peoples. ive always been passionate about visual storytelling, drawing me to illustration, animation, concept art, visual development, character design, comics, and more.

both of my parents are artists, which naturally has had a huge influence on me and ive been drawing for as long as i can remember. they taught me that creativity is a gift and a lifelong pursuit worth dedicating myself to, and they've supported me the whole way through.

as an autistic person, art and drawing is absolutely my biggest special interest. i dont know what id do without it. art has always been how i process the world, how i connect with others, and how i understand myself. its everything to me.

Ties to you

1

My work explores the duality of intimacy and horror, the beauty and terror of transformation, the comfort and suffocation of the body, and the way the past haunts the present. It's deeply rooted in queer and trans experiences, offering a mirror for those who feel othered, who exist in bodies that don't always feel like their own.

2

Horror, to me, is writing what you fear. And what I fear most is being trapped in a body. It's the feeling of being a ghost in an uncomfortable shell, a prisoner in flesh that changes without consent. It rots, decays, makes unknown fluids. You're born into it, and you're stuck with it, which is why

3

I'm both horrified and fascinated by the nature of being trans. I hate the ostracization, the dysphoria, the fight to be seen for who you are rather than what you were given. But being trans is also reclamation(reck-lamation) taking what you're handed and reshaping it into something that feels like you. This tension, the beauty of transformation and the horror of it, is at the core of my work.

next slide

For as long as I can remember, I have needed to tell stories. Whether it was through printer-paper comic books, Webkinz videos on YouTube, or making my Littlest Pet Shops kiss, storytelling has always felt like something deep in my bones. But I didn't always know how to go about it.

In 2017, during the chaos of high school, it hit me: ghosts. I spent every study hall doodling a girl who could see them, a character who would eventually become Emily. She needed a ghost cat companion, Socks, inspired by my first cat, Ginkgo, a black-and-white bobtail. After he died, I was convinced I could still see him, a ghost lingering in the corners of my vision, haunting my dreams for a long time.

From there, Emily needed a girlfriend, CJ, because lesbian ghost hunters felt like a no-brainer. Then came Dirt, their ghost friend, who needed his own friend, Kae, followed by Moth, Eve (who later became Elliot), and Greyson. Slowly, painfully slowly, a narrative began to take shape. It was probably a backward way to build a story, but I was learning as I went.

These characters have been with me through everything: almost dropping out of high school, COVID, my ED nearly taking my life, treatment, recovery, transitioning, and college. I always knew I wanted *Ghostlight* to be my thesis, even when I had no idea how to make it work. Writing has never been easy for me. My work is deeply character-focused. Designing them, doodling them, and exploring their dynamics is what I love most. I just wanted to draw my characters making out in cute outfits, so writing the script was terrifying, and in many ways, it still is. But I discovered that character-driven narratives, rooted in my own experiences, and scriptwriting were forms I could connect with.

plot

Emily, an autistic trans girl, has spent her life haunted, both literally and figuratively. Raised in a small Oregon town by her two dads, Elliot and Steven, she grew up surrounded by spirits only she could see. When Elliot, a trans man struggling with his own identity and early parenthood, disappeared without a trace, Emily's hauntings intensified. Her only comfort is Socks, Elliot's old cat, now a ghost who has stayed by her side for years.

CJ is a free-spirited ghost hunter raised by a mother who taught her to understand, rather than fear, the supernatural. Always searching for adventure and the next mystery to solve, she hitchhikes across the country which leads her to Emily and her haunted life.

The pitch pages focus on the beginning of Act 2, where Emily and CJ prepare to road trip in search of Greyson, a figure from Elliot's past who may hold answers.

In my work, seeing ghosts manifests from near-death experiences or simply being born with a sense of otherness. It's about placing the people in my head into situations that reflect real-life struggles, like dysphoria, feeling out of place, and the fight to exist as yourself.

Ghostlight is about identity, the idea of the monstrous other, and the fluidity of self. It's about the past and present, how one influences the other, and the struggle to let go and move forward. It's about found family, growth, and the messy, complicated process of becoming who you're meant to be. For me, storytelling is about creating something that resonates, something that reflects the experiences of those who feel othered, and something that, hopefully, makes them feel seen.

What I set out to do/story/process thumbnails

For my proposal, I initially planned 10–15 pages from Act 1. After panel feedback, I decided to go for another part of the story, where there were more characters, more meat, more action, to keep both me and the viewer wanting more. This expanded the plan to 17 pages.

I knew I wanted to blend traditional and digital media to create depth, texture, and atmosphere. For me, the handcrafted, textured labor of love that defines analog techniques, along with the precision and polish of digital techniques, is so important to me and my work. This hybrid approach allows me to balance intricate detail with expressive, dynamic shapes. The visual tone shifts with the story: horror scenes lean into heavy, flat black inks, while quieter moments embrace a softer, more painterly style. This contrast mirrors the duality at the heart of *Ghostlight* horror and beauty, life and death, the past and the present.

NEXT

Initially, I planned to paint every page with gouache, but I quickly, (or not so quickly,) discovered this takes way too much time and I wasn't happy with the outcome. With my mentor's guidance, my new plan was to use ink for the pages, reserving gouache for covers or large, painterly spreads. I started by sketching digitally from my script, refining the work with feedback from my mentor.

character design

Before I could continue refining my sketches, I had to work on my favorite part, character design. While I've drawn these characters for years, I needed to decide on their outfits and create a consistent reference for their proportions. I simplified their silhouettes to reflect their personalities:

- Emily: Reserved and closed off, squares and rectangles.
- CJ: Soft and open, circles.
- Dirt: Silly and impulsive, ovals with sharp, angular accents.
- Kae: Protective and grounded, squares and triangles.
- Moth: Closed off externally, but soft inside, circles and triangles.
- Grey: Wholehearted and strong, circles and squares.
- Elliot: Nervous and responsible, rectangles.

LINEUP

For my characters, clothing is an extension of who they are. I wanted their outfits to speak before they even opened their mouths.

Since I've been drawing them for years, their appearance was already ingrained, but choosing their first outfit for the comic was a different kind of pressure. I focused on shape language, silhouette, and their personal style. And, honestly? Their outfits are what I would wear. I looked at '80s punk and goth fashion. Kae, Dirt, and Moth all blend masculine and feminine elements. Kae, for example, rocks a sharp, intimidating leather jacket, oversized platform boots, ripped tights, a corset, and a

miniskirt. The Ancient Egyptian ankh in their design isn't just a classic goth symbol, it's a symbol that means eternal life, the duality of life and death, and the masculine and feminine.

Moth might be my favorite character to draw. They kinda hold all of my toxic traits, my fears, my insecurities. Their design leans into rounder, squatter shapes with sharper accents, dangerous on the outside but soft and squishy on the inside. Their duality is everywhere: half-white, half-black hair; half-blind, half-sighted; a lock without its key. Their outfits are layered, long sleeves, tall shoes, like armor.

values:

I took the approved rough sketches and planned the values prioritizing readability and contrast on where I want the viewer to focus.

colors:

From there, I used gradient mapping to experiment with color. One of my biggest concerns from the beginning was how to clearly distinguish the past from the present. After brainstorming with my mentor, we decided to separate them using distinct color palettes: cool tones for the past, and warm tones for the present.

billion sketches

inks

Once my sketches were ready, my mentor saved me so much time by advising me to print my sketches in light blue onto the paper, instead of tracing the sketches by hand. I hung references above my desk, and prepared my ink with a dip pen and brushes. I discovered late in the process that I actually prefer inking with just brushes, which is something to carry forward in future pages.

NEXT

Mistakes were constant, frustrating, and waned my confidence, but some became happy accidents. My dip pen splattered ink onto CJ's map, creating a dark mass with veined edges that looked intentional.

fin inks:

Moments like this is why I love physical inking: the care and attention add an unmistakable layer of effort, making all of the time and frustration worth it. Worst case scenario, I can fix it digitally later. Which I did a lot of.

After countless hours of inking, I scanned everything in, fixed a bunch of mistakes I made while inking, and began the coloring process.

I wasn't sure I could finish, but I was determined to push myself and give it everything.

story:

PG 1:

The scene opens in the early morning, sun rising, all warm oranges and soft pinks bleeding into muted purples like a bruise. Before they leave, Emily discovers Elliot's hidden journal, a find that becomes a window into his past.

The basement embodies the uncanny, a place where the unconscious, the ignored, and the dangerous collect dust. It is where aspects of the psyche are hidden from others, a space where the past and present collide. Avery Gordon in her book *Ghostly Matters* describes this as "transgenerational haunting," the past infiltrating the present. By bringing the journal to light, Emily opens a trauma that explains her haunted nature.

PG 1.2:

The camera becomes another form of revelation, a sudden and startling truth that Emily is not yet ready to accept. CJ forces her way into Emily's life and, with her presence, brings light into the darkness.

PG 2:

Together, they begin to unravel the truth, venturing deep into the dark, dense woods of Elliot's subconscious. Like the basement, the woods represent the ignored, the hidden trauma and danger.

PG 2.2:

Deep, dark forests often symbolize the inaccessible parts of the human mind, where taboo desires and repressed fears take root. They are spaces of the unknown, where anything can happen and forbidden actions unfold. In this journey, the woods become the setting for confrontation, discovery, and the unearthing of what has long been buried.

PG 3:

For Elliot in 1981, this year marks a beginning. His metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly, a symbol of rebirth and spiritual awakening. Butterflies embody fragility, mortality, and the tension between beauty and decay, mirroring his own journey of self-discovery. Elliot is haunted, not just by ghosts, but by the weight of his gender identity and the feeling of being fundamentally Other.

PG 3.2:

The ghosts he sees amplify his isolation, forcing him to wear a mask to appear "normal." This echoes the autistic and trans experience of navigating unstable social, legal, and medical spaces. Yet, as he prepares to don another mask, he meets people who embrace his "otherness" for the first time.

PG 4:

Greyson, Elliot's new roommate, lives explosively in electric pink, purple, and blue. His home is a testament to his identity, cluttered with records, posters, and flyers from punk shows. He doesn't clean up for Elliot, doesn't perform politeness, because Greyson doesn't wear masks.

PG 4.2:

His clothing is just as bold: a shirt emblazoned with the Bad Brains lightning bolt, a symbol of rebellion. The band used the bolt to represent their explosive energy and defiance of the American establishment. It's a fitting emblem for Greyson, who embodies the same authenticity. Greyson invites Elliot to a punk show, a world far removed from anything he's known.

PG 5:

Punk, often whitewashed in history, was pioneered by Black bands like Death, Pure Hell, and Bad Brains. It's a movement of defiance, resistance, and inclusivity, a space for outcasts to challenge oppression and find belonging.

PG 5.2:

For Elliot, the chaotic, blindingly neon pink and blue energy of punk becomes a revelation. Onstage, he sees people unapologetically themselves, and in that authenticity, he glimpses who he could be.

PG 6:

Elliot is introduced to the band members: Kae, Dirt, and Moth, three gender-nonconforming figures who are as intimidatingly cool as they are unapologetically weird. To his shock, they invite him to hang out, though their choice of location is classic goth-punk: the cemetery, deep in the woods.

PG 6.2:

Here, Elliot faces another decision. Despite his fear of the ghosts he knows will surround him, he bravely accepts the invitation. He clings to his mask, desperate to make a good impression, even as the weight of the unseen presses in around him.

PG 7:

On the journey to their usual spot, stars speckle the sky and a faint sliver of the new moon glows above them, a quiet symbol of new beginnings.

PG 7.2:

They chat as if he's always been there, signaling to Elliot that his presence isn't weird or unwelcome.

PG 8:

Elliot sits down with them and, hesitantly, suggests a lyric: "Formaldehyde?" The word cuts through their creative block, foreshadowing his future role. But just as he feels a flicker of pride, he screeches at the sudden appearance of a ghost sitting beside him.

PG 8.2:

He profusely apologizes, but their reaction stuns him. They can see the ghost too.

PG 9:

They don't just see them, they name them, talk to them, treat them like old friends.

PG 9.2:

For the first time, Elliot doesn't feel like a freak. For the first time, he doesn't feel alone. And they like his lyric.

drink water

PG 10:

The palette shifts from cool purples and pinks to warm yellows and oranges as the story moves from past to present. Yet questions linger. Entangled roots bridge the two timelines,

PG 10.2:

burrowing deep into Emily and CJ's subconscious and lived experiences. Like a creeping infection, the roots spread through their veins, twisting, and taking hold, until they've opened something that can never be closed again.

PG 11:

Emily voices the strangeness of digging into Elliot's subconscious when she barely remembers his voice. CJ, curious, asks about her experience. "Re paila," (pie-lah) she says, Colombian slang for "that sucks." Meanwhile, Socks bats at a moth fluttering out of the window.

PG 11.2:

They talk about his name, his relationship with Emily, the things they've lost. Socks cuts in, the panel suddenly burning red, with a cry. Warning that danger is near.

PG 12:

Then, blindingly red, stark black, touches of pink and purple. A monstrous creature erupts from Emily's open window, mouth gaping to reveal rows of sharp, mismatched teeth. Moths spill from its form like its very nature is in flux.

PG 12.2:

It uses its claws to attempt to rip Emily out of the window, but quickly, CJ swerves, and pulls Emily through to the other side.

MONSTERS:**PG 13:**

Monsters are never just monsters. They are the embodiment of a culture's deepest fears and desires, the physical form of "difference made flesh." They blur boundaries: between human and beast, male and female, between what is deemed "normal" and what is "other."

PG 13.2:

History shows monsters used to justify oppression: (jerr-uhld) of Wales' *Topographia Hibernica*, written in 1188, portrays the Irish as Other: monstrous, barbaric, deviant, to rationalize colonial control. Gerald describes werewolves to symbolize Irish "otherness," a tactic used repeatedly to dehumanize marginalized groups.

PG 14:

Susan Stryker connects monstrosity to trans identity: "The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science, flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born."

But Stryker argues for reclaiming “monster” as a source of power. If words like “queer” and “fag” can be reclaimed, so can “monster.” The Latin monstrum, “divine portent” suggests monsters aren’t just threats; they signal change.

I am a transsexual. I am a monster. I claim this identity without shame. My body challenges the idea of a “natural” order. Stryker puts a mirror to your own identity,

QUOTE:

“I call upon you to investigate your nature as I have been compelled to confront mine. I challenge you to risk abjection and flourish as well as have I. Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself.”

PG 14.2:

Like Frankenstein’s monster, trans people are often seen as less than human, fueling a rage born from exclusion and survival.

“My exclusion from human community fuels a deep and abiding rage in me that I, like the monster, direct against the conditions in which I must struggle to exist.” This rage fuels the monstrosity.

QUOTE:

In Sabine Baring-Gould’s *Book of Werewolves*, the body is framed as a cage for the soul, “If the body be but a cage... it is quite possible for the soul to change its cage.”

TRANSFORM ILLU:

Moths symbolize death, decay, and transformation. Like butterflies, they represent fragile souls, messengers from the spirit world, and the destructive allure of the unknown. They are attracted to light, the truth, even if it’s a flame that threatens to consume them.

Rabbits represent anxiety, vulnerability, and duality. They’re linked to the underworld, witchcraft, and failed experiments. Always on high alert, caught between survival and the constant threat of danger.

Eyes symbolize truth, enlightenment, and spiritual connection. Blindness represents ignorance; sight, understanding. They can also reflect vulnerability, surveillance, and the fear of being seen. Distorted eyes suggest unclear perception or loss of identity.

Teeth symbolize the fear of losing yourself, decay, obsession, and the horror of becoming something unrecognizable.

SILLOUHETTES:

With all this in mind, I wanted to create a monstrous, ghostly, demonic creature. The design combines elements of moths, wolves, and rabbits, with long, sharp teeth and limbs, many eyes, and oozing black goop.

DESIGN:

The challenge was balancing all these elements into a simple yet terrifying design, cohesive enough to be instantly recognizable, but complex enough to feel deeply unsettling.

PG 15:

CJ wards off the ghostly, fleshy creature with her talisman necklace, its eye symbolizing protection. As the intense reds fade away,

PG 15.2:

the scene softens into a softer, painterly moment of soft yellows, oranges, and pinks. A stark contrast to the previous pages. Seeing how deeply these spirits haunt Emily, CJ gently rises onto her tiptoes, trying to place the necklace around Emily's neck.

PG 16:

But Emily stops her, her guardedness and hesitation clear.

PG 16.2:

This moment captures her struggle with trust, her autism, her lack of self-confidence, and the loneliness that she usually fills with the dead, not the living.

PG 17:

CJ explains why she wants to help, with Socks perched on her shoulder as if to back her up. After a pause, Emily, hesitant, finally accepts CJ's offer, placing the talisman over her neck.

PG 17.2:

She lets CJ patch up her wound. As they continue their journey, the protective charm rests against Emily's chest, a small weight of comfort. She opens the journal again and keeps reading, while in the rearview mirror, Moth's reflection lingers, following closely behind.

The ghostly moths break free from the panel borders, just as trans people so often exist in contradictory or unstable spaces, legal, medical, and social positions that refuse to contain them. These ruptures, these breakdowns in form, mirror the non-linear reality of transition, the way trans people haunt and are haunted by institutional systems that were never built to accommodate them. There is no clean progression, no settled future, only a spectral state of becoming, where the past lingers and the future remains uncertain.

details:

I LIVE FOR THE LITTLE DETAILS!!!

This project was such a great exercise in balancing my love for detail and my perfectionism with the reality that not every tiny element needs to be flawless. That said, here are the things I did obsess over:

- graffiti
- posters
- people in crowd
- boarder/roots

Influences

comic and graphic novel slide

the illustrative work of h.a, emily carroll, rosemary vo, and junji ito deeply informs the visual language of *ghostlight*. they all expertly balance intricate detail with visual clarity, a balance i am trying to achieve in my own work. their works, like *the chromatic fantasy*, *a guest in the house*, *dont go without me*, and *uzumaki* illustrate how horror, slice-of-life, and romance can coexist within a single narrative space. These works help as reference for composition, pacing, and the integration of character-driven storytelling into a longer graphic novel format.

horror media slide

horror media in all its forms has deeply influenced both me and this project. queer horror podcasts like *the magnus archives* and *camp here and there* have been major inspirations to me. their blend of the supernatural, humor, and romance, as well as intricate plot, compelling character arcs, and inventive storytelling, are something i constantly aspire to in my own work.

tv shows like *yellowjackets* and *the haunting of hill house* have also been major inspirations. they show how horror can be seamlessly interwoven into long-form storytelling, balancing emotional depth, mystery, and striking visuals. i admire how both series use nonlinear narrative structures, shifting between past and present, to slowly reveal connections and build tension. the same structure informs my approach to *ghostlight*, where flashbacks and discovery of the past unfold like pieces of a puzzle.

films such as *evil dead*, *bring her back*, *the craft*, *ginger snaps*, *reanimator*, *i saw the tv glow* and many more are also major inspirations for this project. im especially drawn to how they balance horror with emotion, exploring transformation, identity, and the supernatural through striking visual language and atmosphere.

trans horror novels slide

stories such as *cemetery boys* by aiden thomas, *spirit bears its teeth* and *hell followed with us* by andrew joseph white, and *the woods all black* by lee mandelo inspire my storytelling using my authentic trans voice within horror. these novels demonstrate how horror can be reclaimed as a genre for queer and trans voices by transforming monstrosity, abjection, and survival into metaphors for lived experience. they demonstrate how to approach my story with honesty, vulnerability, and defiance.

80s punk and goth music

bands like *voodoo church*, *specimen*, *misfits*, *dirt*, *45 grave*, *alien sex fiend*, and more provide huge tonal and aesthetic influence for *ghostlight*. their sound and visual culture capture the eerie, dark, and melancholic atmosphere that i want to infuse into the story.

beyond the music itself, goth and punk have always been countercultural movements: spaces for outsiders, misfits, and anyone who rejects societal norms. their emphasis on individuality, self-expression, and confronting the taboo aligns deeply with the themes of *ghostlight*. both genres embrace darkness not as something to fear, but as something to explore, reclaim, and find beauty in.

Conclusion

At its core, *Ghostlight* is about Emily recognizing the ghost in herself. The journals in this story aren't just records; they're fragments of a transposition, a movement that doesn't erase the past but carries it forward. Haunting, here, isn't something to exorcise. It's a way of being. It defies linear time, stable identity, and the illusion of a 'fixed' self. Through Emily's journey, we see her begin to heal the fractures between past and present, not by fixing what's broken, but by accepting that some wounds shouldn't be fixed. Some are meant to be carried. Some are meant to teach us how to live with them.

This story is about transcending the echoes of trauma, not by silencing them, but by learning to listen.

books 2:

And as much as I need this story to be good, as much as I've poured myself into it, I also hope it ends up being my worst story someday. Not because it's bad, but because I want to keep growing. I want to make more stories, each one better than the last. These guys have lived in my head for so long that it feels surreal to even talk about it, let alone hold the book in my hands, and knowing that people actually want to read it? I'm still wrapping my head around it.

books 3:

This piece combines everything I've learned at PNCA. Just a couple of years ago, creating something like this felt like an impossible, far-off dream. I'm incredibly grateful to all of my professors, who

didn't just help me improve my skills, but helped me find my voice and gave me the confidence to pursue what I truly care about. That's not something I take for granted.

This isn't just a thesis project. It's proof of how far I've come, and a promise of where I'm going next.

THANK U:

quick thank you to my family for supporting me, working so hard all the time just for me and my silly gay ambitions. it means the world and i love you.

thank you to jason mcnamara for finally getting me to just write the damn script and helping me shape my mess of ideas into something real and for helping me fight illustrator on my dying laptop, i promise ill get a new one one day. you're the best!

i feel like the luckiest guy ever to have one of my favorite artists in the world, molly mendoza, to be my mentor, i couldnt have asked for a better one. im so honored to be ur mentee, thank you for everything

free palestine, fuck ice, and no one is free until were all free

questions?