

INTRO

- Introduction to me as a person

Hello everyone! Welcome to my thesis defense! I want to thank you all for being here today, I appreciate each and every one of you for your support.

Before I read the book to you all, I'm going to introduce myself and my project. My name is Robin Winwood. I am a queer, autistic, and nonbinary artist, and my pronouns are they/them. I am soon to graduate with an illustration degree here at PNCA. The themes I work with most in my art are those of comfort, childhood nostalgia, and nature, as well as neurodivergence, queerness, trauma and mental illness. I am heavily interested in visual storytelling and picture book creation, especially as a use of exploring more mature and dynamic topics.

Content warnings

I won't be going into anything super graphic, but I will be mentioning themes of mental illness and suicidal ideation, so if any of you aren't in the proper headspace right now I totally understand if you need to step out!

- Introduction to my project in general.

My project, titled "*Philip's Monster*," is a 40 page separate ended picture book about Philip the mouse, and the monster that follows him throughout his everyday life. The book explores themes of platonic intimacy and the comfort of home, as well as trauma, emotional sensitivity and mental illness. The book is memoir-esque in that Philip's experience is a direct parallel to my own. The book is largely a reflection of my complicated and difficult feelings around the friendships and losses I experienced as an autistic adolescent. *Philip's Monster* is an introspective project for me, which gave me space to look back on my childhood, while also serving as a stepping stone into my adult life.

Read book

Now I'm going to read the book. Just so everyone is aware, The book is mainly wordless. The only part I will be reading aloud is the dialog scene between Philip and his friend.

- Inspirations/comps (book wise. Little witch hazel. Drawn onward. Through the woods)

At the start of this semester, I was tasked with finding comparables. These are published books that are similar to mine in certain aspects, so that future publishers would know where my book fits in relation to other works.

My first comparable is Little Witch Hazel by Phoebe Wahl. I adore the whimsical and cozy vibe that she creates in her stories, and I wanted Philip to live in a similar world—somewhere out of a fairy tale. I also love the way Wahl handles limited color

palettes, so I wanted to replicate that as well.

My second comparable is *Drawn Onward* written by Daniel Nayeri and illustrated by Matt Rockefeller. This is specifically for the use of border work and panelling on every page.

Lastly, my final comparable is the graphic novel *Through the Woods* by Emily Carroll, as inspiration for the monster scenes. I love the way she handles artistic medium and text placement as a narrative device to further the horrific elements of her story.

- **Formal/technical description of work. What's in front of the audience?**
What lies in front of you all today is six of my picture book dummies that I bound myself and printed using the printer here at PNCA. They are 40 pages long, with all pages being brought to at least the final sketch phase, and 2 spreads being digital prints of fully illustrated gouache and collage pieces. The cover is also brought to this level of completion. One book has been hand-bounded with a hard cover and a dust jacket.

META/ PERSONAL CONTEXT

- **Context/backstory. Origins.**

I grew up autistic and homeschooled in Washington State, alongside my younger brother. My mother integrated elements from the Waldorf curriculum into her own style of raising us, and so much of our learning was inherently nature centric.

As a kid I had pretty intense sensory issues, due to being autistic. I was sensitive to almost everything, including water and baths, feeling fabric on my skin, or having my hair cut or brushed. If any of these things happened to trigger me, I would slip into a huge meltdown—and this was an everyday occurrence.

It was also obvious that I was autistic through the fact that I had special interests. I've been drawing since I was old enough to hold a crayon.

Fortunately my mother highly valued my artistic passion in her approach to my education, so it quickly became a staple of my learning style.

Alongside art, my other special interest is storytelling. A few years ago, my mom and I found a box in the garage filled with my childhood books— the books in which she would help me create, by

Stapling together my crayola marker drawings, and transcribing my garbled words onto the page.

Book after book, we found the same narrative. *An animal had a best friend, and then they lost that friend, and then the animal was lonely.* I find it funny that all

these years later, while paving my way into my professional career, I am telling the same story I've always told. I suppose I'll never *not* be an anxious person.

- **Reflection on my childhood.**
- Throughout my time working on this project, I've been reflecting on how Philip's life directly reflects my neurodivergent childhood. I've dwelled endlessly on the embarrassing things I did as an autistic teenager, trying to handle the nature of intimate relationships. I've thought about the friends I've loved and lost, the stupid things I've done, the pain I've felt, and what ultimately contributed to the development of the character of Charlie the fox, Milo the frog, and Nightcrawl, the monster.

Since the original creation of Philip and his monster, I've become significantly mentally healthier. The further I develop the project, the further I become from the original feelings that inspired Nightcrawl in the first place. I began to worry that this meant I wasn't qualified to tell this story anymore. But in reality, it means that I am stable enough to be able to properly represent my younger self's struggles, in hopes of helping adolescents who are hurting in the same way I did. And ultimately, by doing this, I am fully processing the painful aspects of my adolescence and laying them to rest.

- **(neurodivergence, autism, anxiety) the feelings of intense emotions. Emotional sensitivity. Rejection sensitive dysphoria.**

Between the ages of 12 and 19, I constantly feared that my friends secretly hated me. I wanted to be loved so badly, but I would become unhealthily attached to a specific person, and then spend all of my time fixating on whether or not they would leave me. My emotions were so, so large, and triggered by the tiniest of things, and they felt impossible to even try to rangle. I could be triggered by anything, like a change in tone or plans, or seeing my friends with other people on a social media post.

Of course all of this would cause conflict in my friendships, leading to arguments, and then falling out. It felt like an endless cycle of pain. I deeply, deeply hated myself. I struggled with daily suicidal ideation. I believed that I was completely unlovable, and that even my family didn't want me. Oftentimes the fact that I was autistic became the target for which I blamed.

- **NC as an art therapy thing**

In the beginning, Philip and his monster lived in completely different worlds. I created the monster as a way of visually articulating the uncontrollable aspect of my own strong emotions. A lot of early vent art featuring nightcrawl

shows him directly speaking to me—not Philip. At first, he represented the feeling of rejection sensitive dysphoria—a symptom of ADHD—but he soon grew to represent a broader range of negative things. Depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, trauma, PTSD, and mental illness in general. To this day, I still use him when I need him.

- origin of the graphic novel idea. Original (pre pnca) idea.

When I was 18, I began developing an idea for a graphic novel. This was the very first iteration of what's in front of you today. The story mainly focused on Philip going on a long journey through the snow, on the way to his friend's house. This was before Nightcrawl had different forms. Nightcrawl would follow Philip as he persisted on, taunting him and reminding him of his failures in past relationships. I didn't get very far in its development, but ultimately, the decisions I made then are still evident in today's version. Unfortunately, most of my drawings for this project are kind of lost media, because they're stored on my broken laptop that I can't access.

- zine in time arts

My very first semester here, I made a small zine titled "sensitive." This was for my final project in Time Arts. It was much shorter, and followed a slightly different story. The finished pieces were done in colored pencil, collage and ink. This zine is the first place where I show Nightcrawl having multiple forms, and where I first decided to shift the colors between color and grayscale.

- why I went forward with my book as my thesis/why I chose to do this for my thesis.

A year ago, I made a picture book dummy in my cultural marketplace class. This is what kickstarted this version of the story, and what led me to ultimately deciding to make it my thesis. I'm incredibly glad I went with this choice, rather than the other projects I was considering, because this project has greatly shaped the direction of my illustration style, and will go on to aid me in my future career. I decided, in the end, this project defines me best, and where I want to be in the industry.

INTENT & AUDIENCE

- My story's message and take away.

- My story has three main purposes. Firstly, my book exists as a means to represent a neurodiverse experience—specifically for those who struggle with anxiety around friendships and intense emotional sensitivity. I want neurodivergent readers to feel seen, and to understand that there are others like them. I want them to have an articulation device, for when their own emotions feel so overwhelming.

- Secondly, I want to show that even when someone you love leaves your life, you will always have other people that love you. The conversation between Philip and Milo is greatly inspired by the ones I've had with my mom, my

friends, and my therapists. When a person who was your whole life's focus leaves, it can feel like the world is ending. But you have to remember that there will always be someone who cares.

- This leads into my final takeaway: oftentimes the anxious thoughts are lying to you. The thoughts can spiral out of control, and lead you into dark and scary places. They can tell you that you are completely alone and no one loves you, even when your friends and family are right there. At the end of my story, Philip is able to reality check the situation, ground himself, and shrink nightcrawl back into his puffball form.

- **Intended audience.**

Honestly, figuring out where this book lives in the world of literature has been difficult for me. I'm still not sure if my story can be fully appreciated by young readers, yet I also worry it may feel too juvenile for adults or older teens.

- I have found myself stuck in a strange place where artistically, I love the format and art style of picture books, but creatively I prefer writing stories with more mature themes. Ideally, Philip's Monster is a *picture book* for ages 12 and older—it would be targeted towards the same age group I was when I needed this book most. It's frustrating, because culturally it's understood that picture books are *only* for very young children, and if a middle or highschooler is reading picture books for genuine enjoyment it's almost taboo. As I get further into my career, I hope to find more picture books that break this expectation.

Societal context

- My story lives in a world that is increasingly hostile towards disabled people, queer people, people of color, and other marginalized minorities. We live in a country where people are losing their rights everyday, and right wing extremism is on a steep incline. It feels like no one is doing anything about it. So why does my book matter in this current moment?

Throughout this project, I've struggled with feeling hopeless. I've struggled with feeling like there is another career choice that could be more important. But I've comforted myself by keeping in mind that working on the small things is important too. representation of neurodivergent experiences, and teaching kids about emotional regulation and anxiety *is* important.

VISUAL AESTHETIC/ARTISTIC AESTHETIC/VISUAL LANGUAGE, ART

- **Development of a new art style for picture books.**

At the beginning of senior year, my professor for Illustration Advanced studio 1, Zach Meyer, gave me a critique that changed my approach to illustration entirely. He told

me that my portfolio needed to be more consistent, and that I should lean into the abstraction style in my work. Honestly at first I was kind of annoyed, however after taking that critique to heart I was finally able to feel fully confident in myself. Prior to adopting my current style, I was really concerned with realism. I thought that if you're better at drawing realistically, it meant that you were fundamentally a better artist. It was hard because I *really wanted* to be more abstract, however I believed that I *wasn't allowed* to draw in a children's book style until I fully mastered realistic art– which now I realize is just silly.

- **Style inspirations. (phoebe wahl. Taryn knight, rebecca green, felicity sala, suwi illustrations, etc etc)**
- To aid me in building my new style, I started keeping a catalog of my artistic inspirations. At first I just collected random photos off Pinterest, but as I discovered more and more artists, I began studying their specific styles and implementing their marks into my own work. It's gotten to a point now where whenever I find an artist I really like, I want to add all of their work to my sketchbook and study their way of mark making. It's been really fun! Honestly, before this year I had never really done anything like this.
- . I'll go through some of my biggest inspirations:
- Taryn Knight
I love Taryn Knight's subject matter, and way of styling animals and people. I love the way she uses geometric shapes to simplify, yet effectively communicate. I adore how she uses decorative thin line work and patterns, especially on fabric or fur. I really admire how she is able to get flat, colorful washes in her shapes.
- Rebecca Green
I admire Rebecca Green's use of geometric shapes to define people and animals, and how she is able to make shapes feel flat while also having thick visible brush strokes and texture. I also appreciate how her style has limited amounts of line work, but all of the characters are still clearly seen through strong use of value.
- Felicita Sala,
Again, I love Felicity Sala's way of stylizing her subjects through geometric shapes. I also really really love how she uses thin linework almost everywhere as a way to add extra interest and detail.
- Kay Hunt.
Finally, Katie Hunt. Her work brings me so much joy– it's so whimsical. I love the amount of texture and variety you can see within her shapes.

PROCESS

Creative changes

- so many things have changed since my original concept, so I want to share some of the biggest changes throughout the project.

Artistic vision and style

In the very beginning, I planned for this book to be entirely illustrated using real miniature models, made from foraged material and craft supplies. I was going to single handedly create Philip's house, Milo's house, all of the props within their houses, and poseable figures of all of the characters. I planned to photograph each page, and collage Nightcrawlovertop them. I had no experience with miniature building or photography. However, I fully intended to do this until about half way through last semester. I still own all of the craft supplies and the ikea shelf that I bought to store all of it. I decided to move the whole project into the 2D realm for a million different reasons that I don't have time to get into.

Nightcrawlover's different forms.

Originally he was a small round puffball that turned into a Maltese, and after that, the monster. Throughout my critiques there was a lot of confusion around how all of the forms were related. People weren't really understanding that he was the same creature, just evolving into a bigger version. So I played around with harmonizing their designs, until I ultimately decided that for clarity's sake it was best to scrap the Maltese all together, and go for a pointy-er look. The idea for this came spontaneously after seeing a certain black chihuahua. I also added pointy ears to his puffball form, which kind of makes him look like a cat, but that's okay.

Other elements of NCs design

Overall, Nightcrawlover's design was something I had a hard time nailing down. Originally I wanted him to be completely collaged out of childhood photos and human eyes, but that was scrapped because it felt a little too intense and out of place. So I planned to illustrate him with sumi ink, with only the eyes being paper cut outs. What ultimately ended up happening was that he was completely collaged, however only using gouache, colored pencil and crayon. I think it adds a lot of narrative and visual interest.

Fox to frog

This change was made earlier in the project, but I wanted to share it anyway because I think it's cute. In the very first dummy, Milo was the fox character, and Charlie, Philip's old friend, was actually a river otter named Beck.

However, my friend gifted me a frog, which you can see on the table, that they knitted Entirely by hand. It touched me so much that I decided to include him in my

book as an homage to them.

I felt like it was an appropriate change because the fox design, with its pointy ears and snout, felt too similar to Nightcraw! in appearance. I didn't want to confuse viewers.

Process.

Now im going to go over my process

Sketch to final, what i learned in critiques

-In the very beginning, I printed out the spreads from the original cultural marketplace dummy, then drew super rough sketches over them. I did this with pen on tracing paper. I did it this way because I find it really difficult to Sketch loosely in procreate. Whenever I had trouble with a certain page, I would use my sketchbook as a place to practice and draw out more thumbnails.

- After that, I scanned the sketches, then drew more refined sketches and borders over them in procreate. This is the stage where the most changes were made, as I updated and refined each page after our weekly critiques.
- I toned the sketches, then used a gradient map to add the color.
- For the finished pieces, I started with creating color comps in procreate.
- Then I drew the refined sketches on arches hotpress watercolor paper.
- After that, I painted the flat colors with holbein acrylic gouache. I learned a LOT about gouache during this. I finally started feeling confident with the medium- it was so fun. I found a technique that I really enjoyed doing. I used a small liner brush to do the outline of each shape, and then I used several different sizes of flat and wash brushes to fill in each shape. I tried to balance out how much texture I was using, and where I was making things less or more matte.
- for the smaller details and linework, I once again used a small liner brush to complete everything.
- My collage process for Nightcraw! looked a bit different. First I made a variety of washes and textures using gouache, colored pencil, and crayon on mixed media paper. Then, I traced his parts of the refined sketch onto tracing paper. After that, I taped the tracing paper over the mixed media paper, and used an exacto knife to cut through both layers of paper. for the eyes, I just freehanded it. After everything was cut out, I brushed wet elmers glue onto the back of each piece, and pasted everything down in place.
- After all of the spreads were completed, I scanned them all using the epon scanners here. Since the paper is so large, I had to scan each piece in two halves and digitally merge them.
- Then I used photoshop to touch up everything and adjust the colors.

- Finally, I laid out the pages and text in indesign, and then printed and bound the books.

I struggled / things I should have done differently

- values

Generally in my work I tend to struggle with values. I have a hard time translating value into color, and how that fits in with a limited color palette. I wish I spent more time digitally planning and experimenting in general, even though I find it so boring.

- I also struggled with colors. I really wanted a strict limited color palette- similar to how traditional printmaking looks. I find that style really charming. However, again, mixing that with value got really frustrating because I kept having to lighten or darken my colors and it just ruined the “limited” feeling I was going for. I’m definitely planning on trying to incorporate this technique into my future portfolio pieces, I just have to get it down first.

- glue

- If I were to do this differently, I would find a better type of glue. Doing the collage this way sucked because little bits of glue residue kept getting on the paintings. it was probably a bad idea to collage directly onto the nice watercolor paper in the first place. In the future I might experiment with different types of glue, or digitally compiling everything together.

- Awful multiply layer situation

- The worst mistake that I made throughout the entire sketch process was my scanning and layers situation. When I brought the scans of my thumbnails into procreate I never isolated the linework or anything, I simply turned it on multiply mode, which makes the white parts of the paper essentially transparent. This would have been fine, if I didn’t merge All of my other digital sketch layers with the multiple Layers, on every single page, because procreate has layer limits. This meant that there were little transparent bits everywhere, and that you could see them ever so slightly once I started toning. if that was super confusing, all that matters is that you know this was hell to deal with and i ended up having to essentially redraw half of my book.

Should have been more consistent with character design

- I generally had a difficult time keeping Philip’s design consistent from panel to panel. I get really bored with too much technical planning, which is probably why the consistency is off. In the future I’ll try to use character reference sheets during the sketching phase.

success.

Overall, the element of my project that I am most proud of is my writing and visual storytelling. Since my book is mostly wordless, I had to focus primarily on the images rather than the words to convey the moods of each page. I prefer to tell retrospective and quiet stories, so naturally I have to embrace the fact that my images are the sole communicators of my narrative. My mentor and critique sessions really pushed me with this, and I can't thank them all enough for that. This book has become the highest quality project I've ever worked on, and I'm so proud of myself for it.

Visual storytelling and the details I used

I want to share some details I used to further the narrative in my story.

- NC is on a different piece of paper

Nightcrawl being completely collaged really stresses the fact that he's an otherworldly creature, and also explains why he can break in and out of the borders and panels. It even adds to his intimidation and fear factor— Philip's world is a 2D illustration, on one page, so it becomes unsettling and strange when we begin to see the bits of shadow between the pieces— it breaks our expectations around what is properly inside Philip's world.

- Border narrative details (anticipating the next spread)

The details in the borders usually anticipate what's going to happen in the next page. Nightcrawl is also always there, but that's more to draw people in and show that he's lurking in the background. Borders are absent when Nightcrawl is manifested or when the scene is particularly raw or emotional. Nightcrawl also can break over the borders and into the panels, and he does so when Philip is on the edge of breaking down.

- Panel spikes

- The outlines of the panels reflect Philip's emotional stability. When Nightcrawl is manifested, the panels become spikey. However, when Philip is emotionally stable, the panels are as well.

- NC saying that no one would even miss you vs milo saying I missed you

- One little writing thing that I wanted to share was that the first time Nightcrawl is manifested, he tells Philip that he should "just disappear" and that "no one would even miss him." However, when Philip first sees Milo, Milo greets him by saying "I missed you." This detail is important because it shows the viewer that what Nightcrawl says is not based in reality.

- NC hidden in black globs

- After Philip wakes up from the first nightcrawl scene, he finds black sludge all over his home. Not only does the sludge break out of the panels, but it also creates hidden nightcrawl silhouettes.

- Rain and sun motif and meaning,

- In my book, the weather represents Philip's proximity to his friends—mentally and physically. When it's raining, Philip is not necessarily unhappy but he *is* isolated. As Philip begins breaking out of isolation, and walks towards Milo's house, the rain stops and the sun comes out for the first time.
- dandelion motif meaning
- they're very simplistic, but these little puffball flowers are dandelions. They represent friendship and platonic love. When we first see Philip and Charlie together, they're making flower crowns together. When their friendship starts falling apart, the dandelions are gone, and in the border we can see that the flower crowns are broken in half.
- Later in the book, we see dandelions become more and more prominent as Philip gets closer towards Milo's house. At the end of the book, the two of them drink dandelion tea together.
- Easter eggs to Audrey and India's books
Early in the semester, My friends India, Audrey and I decided to include easter eggs to each other's projects in all three of our books. On Philip's trinket shelf, you can see a sheep which represents Audrey's book, and a human tooth in a jar which represents India's book. The three of us have been working together all semester, and it's been so wonderful to have their support throughout all of this.
- Bee poking head out of bee hive
- Lastly, I want to share one cute detail. When Philip is being comforted by his pet bees, there is one bee poking its head out of the hive. I think it's adorable.

TECHNICAL, CAREER, FUTURE PLANS

- **Where this fits into my career (picture books)**
- So where does this fit into my future career?
- Ideally, my future illustration career consists of writing and illustrating my own picture books and graphic novels, and selling my own products at artist markets. I fully plan to use this book as my first step into the industry. I believe that the work I've done here is extremely strong, and where the project stands now, is ready to be pitched to be publisher or agency. I have a few publishers in mind, such as Tundra books and Candlewick press.
- Of course, there's no way I can absolutely guarantee that this book will be published. so, even if *Philips monster* isn't picked up, it still works as a great portfolio piece that will show future clients that I have experience with illustrating picture books.
- **My direct plans the future**
- I have a fairly well thought out plan for what my future looks like directly after thesis and graduation.

- Firstly, I want to read up on Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market 33rd edition, since I haven't had much time to read during school.
- Then, I want to look for a literary agent that will represent me. I need to take some time researching and finding an agent that I think can properly represent the vulnerable and personal subjects I want to handle. I'll be writing a query letter, and submitting my book to agents I want to work with.
- I also want to get more involved in the society of children's book writers and illustrators, and attend their events and conferences.
- I want to focus more on the writing side of things in general, and study how other authors write. I want to read more picture books, and start working on my next book.
- alongside all of this, I will be growing my portfolio through building an inventory for my small business. I want to get better at creating products, such as stickers, prints and zines.
- In my free time, I would like to keep a nature journal of my day to day outdoor discoveries. I want to get better at illustrating plants and animals, since they're my favorite things to draw.
- Lastly, I am still determined to build a chicken coop and get more chickens. They are my favorite creatures in the entire world and they make me happier than anything.

CONCLUSION

My time here at PNCA has been absolutely invaluable. I have grown so much since freshman year, and I can't say that I would be anywhere near my current level of skill without all the lovely people I've met here. I am overwhelmingly excited and nervous for what my future holds. Without the support, I'm not sure I would have the confidence to say that I finally feel ready to move on and start my career.

There are so many people I want to thank, so I'll try and make this quick. Thank you to all of my lovely friends who made me laugh and feel loved while working on this project. Thank you to all of my family members who drove hours to support me here today. Thank you to my amazing girlfriend who's been with me through all my ups and downs. Thank you to my mentor, classmates and professors, who all helped me make this project the best it could be. Thank you to Ardis and everyone in the thesis department, who made this program what it is. Thank you to the lovely folks in the library who always make me feel safe and welcomed. And lastly, thank you to every single one of you who decided to come here and support me today. It means the world to me.