

1st slide:

Hello and welcome to my thesis defense. I am Paulina, I am a general fine arts major. I typically work with comics, sculpture, and all things arts and crafts, but my project is illustration this semester, and it is titled: Rockararium.

2nd slide:

To quickly describe the work before getting into the lore/origin story, the work I have created is a mix between a field guide, and a graphic novel. It follows my dad through the places he'd lived through time, with the occasional informational page on a mineral from the specified geographical location.

3rd slide:

So to get into the story a bit.....

I started thinking about my thesis idea during my second semester of "junior year", and I say junior year with quotes because I'm a transfer so it's a little jumbled. #super senior, just kidding not really

I had begun rockhounding around Oregon, which reinvoked my love of crystals and rocks.

I, as much as possible, go and try to collect cool rocks just for fun.

4th slide:

I had a short lived rock phase in 5th-6th grade, in which I became extremely fascinated with geodes, and then rocks in general

I at every opportunity, tried to get my hands on break open geode kits, and spent hours smashing a hammer into the rocks. I still have all of the geodes I broke open, not to flex, which you can see on the table actually up here . I also spent hours with my friends digging through fake sand bricks with plastic tools to find poor quality pieces of minerals like rose quartz and tiger's eye. While these aren't actual field specimens, and I didn't technicallyyyyyyyy find them, I have such fond memories of smashing open things to find beautiful sparkles and colors inside. The rock phase kind of melted away with the stress of middle school, unfortunately.

5th slide:

But I started forming the idea of a solely informational mineral guide of rocks that I like, and from specific places I've lived. I settled on the idea of minerals from the 4 states I have lived in, did all my research, had a lengthy google doc of all that research, and then eventually pivoted.

6th slide:

I got an internship over the summer of 2025 at the RICE museum of rocks and minerals SHOUTOUT! Amazing museum, everyone go visit- and had the opportunity to create a temporary exhibit for them. I had complete free range of what I could curate, and it took a hot second to decide on what "theme" I wanted.

7th slide:

I settled on an oceanic theme, but highlighting minerals from places I lived, so it could double as practice and research for my thesis. During this time I realized I did not want my thesis to be about me- or at least all about me. This was my pivot. All of my research, and I mean A LOT was done, was all pretty much useless, only some of it was still relevant, as I switched to researching minerals from places my Dad had lived (instead of myself).

8th slide:

He was always somewhat mysterious to me, and I felt disconnected from him. I can't ask him about himself anymore, as he passed away about 2 years ago, but I knew I could do solid research about places he'd lived. I didn't want to abandon rocks either, and so I believe I created a perfect blend of him and I. His life, my love of rocks. His life guides what rocks I research and take interest in, so while I get to make a project about one of my interests, it is completely in the hands of his story and his choices he made. I liked the restriction of relying solely on his physical locations to start my research. It was kind of like him telling me stories of his past without speaking at all. And while he never collected rocks, he had his own collections of things- which led me to my larger idea: collecting.

Collecting in general, collecting as a hobby, and collecting as a way to communicate and make connections. My dad had many things he collected: toy race cars, circle things, CD's, figures, movies, etc.

I started thinking about how we use collecting, which is such a broad hobby that bleeds into pretty much every niche and interest, to connect with one another.

9th slide:

After switching to the idea of collecting, and rocks as the focus, I explored the idea of how these things we collect reveal our personalities, desires, understandings, and subconscious ideas we have. Collecting to me is a way to connect, and showcase our personalities and interests without having to use language to outwardly express them. Nicheness breeds connection, people enjoy bonding over specific interests with each other. People crave uniqueness, people crave authenticity. I wanted to include the general idea of collecting into this specific story of my dad, and my interest of rocks. It ties everything together, and opens it up to a conversation for everyone to relate to. Since the tie between my interest in rocks and my dad's physical locations seemed thin, the act of collecting strengthened it. Everyone collects something, including my dad, and using my hobby of rock collecting is wrapped and contained inside the realm of my dad's life.

I wanted to connect with him, and this seemed like a good fit.

10th slide:

Going back to thinking about the origins of my rock love in 5th grade, I think about how I was truly entranced, and how my dad was very encouraging of it. For Christmas and birthdays I'd get rock books and geode kits to break open. They got me a poster and an encyclopedia of minerals so I could educate myself better. My dad was the one who would give me the hammer and eye protection to break open the geodes. Even if I wasn't acutely aware of how excited he was about my own interests then, I can look back and recognize he was always there to encourage me. There are so many unspoken things from my childhood that deeply affected me,

but something directly tied to this thesis is the idea of play, and the child likeness of continuing collections of things we have always loved.

11th slide:

My dad was a boy at some point. He was a 5th grader like me, fascinated with Bruce Lee and Star wars, which clearly impacted what he collected and took interest as an adult. He played outside like I did, and looked at bugs, and rode a bike, and did stupid stuff with his friends. Sometimes it's hard to remember and understand your parents were just like you at one point, whether they like to admit it or not.

12th slide:

It's definitely a challenge still having a relationship with someone who's dead, someone you can't talk to at all, but I can understand him more with each year of life, and use his past collections to understand where he came from, who he became, and how. Maybe his excitement of my own love of rocks stemmed directly from how he felt as a kid getting to enjoy his own interests. He wasn't always the most emotional person outwardly, as he grew up in a time where hispanic men were expected to be Macho, and most male figures at that time were not one to open up about their feelings, so it's necessary for me to dissect all of the things he never said through what he's left behind.

9th slide:

Also you are probably wondering what Rockararium means, and on the second page of the book I put the definition. Rockararium means rocks and minerals from places that are meaningful

10th slide:

to get into the process of creating

The book was drawn on 11x14 paper, so I could get better detail by drawing larger, and scaled down to 8.5x11 for printing. I always prefer working traditionally, so I did everything by hand. I was nervous about the coloring, since typically for comics I have done them traditionally, and then scanned into color them digitally as it goes much faster, but I like the way my hand works more with traditional media. I think I just draw better, not sure why.

I knew I wanted a physical book, as well as digital projection of the pages, so everyone can have an experience of seeing all the pages clearly, and seeing it as a completed book in its intended form.

Its page count varied with every edit, originally starting with 20 pages, I thought that was too many, so I went down to 16, only to realize I needed those extra pages, so went back to the final 20. And you have to print in 4's so yeah ....

11th slide:

I also typically do full color for my comics, but after deliberation with my panel, and thesis mentor, we decided it would be best to break up the color palette and that full full color would be too much, too overwhelming.

I designated cool tones to the mineral pages, and a warm limited palette for the comics, which would emphasize the nostalgic warm feelings as well as keep it cohesive and stand out away from the mineral pages.

12th slide:

I started sketching minerals during the summer before thesis year, but all of those sketches became irrelevant after I switched ideas, and started sketching my final actual drawings during the first semester of thesis after finalizing the content of the comic. I had to start from scratch with the mineral pages unfortunately, but luckily I had only done sketches and nothing further.

13th slide:

Sketching took longer than anticipated, as I waited for many source images from my mom of my dad, his childhood home, and his things back in Texas since I do not have access to taking pictures there. Most source images I got, while extremely helpful, weren't the exact angle or shot I wanted so I had to get creative with framing some of the panels in the narrative portion of the comic. Not complaining mommmm, just had to mention it. It took awhile to figure out exactly how much I wanted to reveal about my dad, and what subject matter filled the panels. I didn't really want to depict my dad's face, once again I felt conflicted about "exploiting" him for art, but also respecting and memorializing him, so I did eventually depict his face in a few shots-stylized of course. Sketching is usually an intuitive process for me. Framing the text and panels was fairly easy, but there were some mistakes made, crumpling too much text into a page or into a corner, or making a really awkward break in the page, but I edited things after scanning the images to fix anything I wasn't happy with. Sometimes it's hard to see all things that you don't like when you get tunnel vision in a project. I usually started off with a general idea of the panels and boxes and where the text would go in conjunction with the images. Text and boxes always come first for me, and then I do images. After laying down those, I would then go into do a loose sketch of what I thought would pair nicely with the text. All of this is fairly intuitive, and I much like not doing an immense amount of planning. If I'm not happy with a sketch I simply change it when I have a new idea. My process is very loose.

14th slide:

After sketching throughout the semester, during winter break I started to ink a bit, and finalize designs and ideas. Inking was a processssssssss. I decided to do black ink for the informational pages, and brown for the narrative comic pages to separate the coolness of the minerals from the warmth of the nostalgia. Inking also took longer than expected, as did everything on this project, but inking is fun for me, I specifically wanted to use a tombow hard tip brush pen, because of the way it draws. It's extremely satisfying and I recommend those pens to anyone, not sponsored, but if they want to sponsor me I won't turn down money.

I inked mostly everything before coloring, and of course as I expected, coloring took the longest. With inking it is also an intuitive process, I don't ink any of the minerals, but I do ink the outlines of the narrative comic to then fill in with color. Not inking the minerals makes them more realistic, while adding sharp lines for the comic makes it much more stylized. That worked perfectly, as I wanted the minerals to be the most realistic part.

Then came coloring. Buckle down yall, this is gonna get soooo wild. I started laying down flat colors with copic markers. With coloring I didn't go in order of finishing each page in chronological order, that would have burned me out. I also enjoyed doing the mineral pages more than the narrative portion, in which there was a considerably less amount of them, so I bargained with myself and did a large portion of the narrative comic for roughly every one page of mineral. I bounced around a lot, so I didn't get bored.

I typically lay down all the main colors of what I'm depicting, and then I'd add one shadow color with copic markers.

For this project almost everything but the illuminated manuscript style designs were referencing an image I had, so I was typically looking at an image and trying to simplify what I saw to depict it in a more cartoonish fashion.

I tried to depict things accurately but did take many artistic liberties. The minerals obviously took more time, and I wanted these to be more realistic than the narrative comic portion. I sat down with the images next to my drawing and went section by section for the faceted minerals, and more loosely for the raw minerals. I did not go exactly off of the image though, and did change some shadows or highlights whenever I felt it needed an extra push. My process is fairly hard to describe because it's pretty much me making it up along the way, and if I don't like it, I'll just redo it. This happened with one page of the narrative comic depicting my mom and dad, I completely redid the page because it was my least favorite page and I despised how I drew my dad, he looked hella stiff and weird, so I just redid the page, which set me back a day but it was worth it. After finishing all of the copic markers, I went over almost everything with prisma colored pencils for more dimension and texture. This- like I've said, and I apologize for overusing the word, was also intuitive. If something felt too flat, I used a shadow and highlight colored pencil. If something felt boring, colored pencil, If something didn't match, colored pencil. You get the idea.

Then after all of this physical drawing, I scanned the images on the large school scanners, and transferred them to procreate to edit and clean them up. Lots of the pages had mistakes, which you can see on the physical images, and all of them, and I mean ALL of them, had smears and smudges I wanted to fix. This took about a week. I just went in and used a brush pen that matched the color of the paper to "white out" and areas that were mistakes or had smudges. After digitally editing, I had to print.

Now if you know one thing about me and art, it's that I hate technology. I'm not good at it, it frustrates me, I hate it. Mad respect to anyone who enjoys it and or is good at it

Flo really helped me with printing.

I had to put all of the pages in Indesign, which I had actually used before with previous comics, so it was easy for me to upload everything, but I had never used the printers that can saddle stitch, which is the printing and then stapling that the machine does, so Flo was extremely helpful telling me all of the commands to make that happen. All of this help finally culminated in these printed books of my amazing story so thank you Flo and Ardis, and my panel who were also my midterm review panel. Rockarium literally wouldn't exist without all of you.

15th slide:

As I mentioned earlier, my project started off as simply scientific illustration and information, then about the places I've lived and minerals from those places, then finally to be about my dad, the places he's lived and the minerals from there.

I learned that I find sharing, what some people consider basic information, to be very personal. I learned that while I knew I was private about a lot of information, I'm also very protective of my family's information and my own. This was something I really started to struggle with too deep into the project, which I don't think I voiced it too much as it was kind of my own battle.

At one point in my thesis, while it was much too late to pivot, I got anxious thinking about sharing anything at all about my dad. It feels weird to share information about someone who cannot be there to speak for themselves, and I don't really expect most people to understand grappling with that. I never want to exploit my dad, and I want to be respectful, which is why it feels weird for me to share any information about him at all even if it's not super personal, as he can't be here to actually advocate for himself. It's impossible not to talk about your loved ones, but it does become a weird feeling when you are the voice of that person, as I am not him. It's hard for me to make decisions on what to share. Like would he want me telling people that specific story of him, or this memory, or this comment he made. And it makes me exponentially nervous and guilty to share anything negative about him at all.

I don't want people to forget him, but it does feel uncomfortable to make the decisions on what to share and what to leave out, and that's why I kept all information about him pretty basic, as I do not know what he would feel comfortable with me sharing to people he's never met and will never meet.

Then I struggled with the question of: Is it my job to keep him alive in memory? Is it my responsibility to protect him? I don't have answers, and all I know is that I'm going to grieve forever, and this project is a love letter to a dad I'll never get to speak to again. And art is a fantastic coping mechanism, much healthier than a lot of other things haha, so I think this project was needed for my mind and body.

And I want to add, I know others get really uncomfortable talking about dead people, but I assure everyone, you are likely more uncomfortable than I am. From previous experiences of bringing up having a dead dad the immediate reaction is the worried eyebrows and telling me they're sorry. Lol guys it's okay, he's dead and it's just a fact, I am simply bringing up a fact, so you don't need to apologize, you didn't kill him. Unless you did.....then we need to talk.

Making this project was necessary for me. But it did feel weird because I needed to make this project, but I still have academic and institutional rules I must follow. Something that I struggled with was thinking about was inspiration and audience. I took these as I must have specific artists I've looked at and emulated in my work, but I didn't have that, but after a talk with my mentor she enlightened me on the broader idea. Of course I am inspired by many things, I was just thinking about it in the wrong way. Clearly my visual style has many inspirations. I use lots of illuminated manuscript styles, which I first started experimenting with after taking Colette's illustration class in which we had an assignment to make a few pages aesthetically aligned with an illuminated manuscript, and it was one of my most favorite assignments in my practically 5 years (because I took an extra semester) of art school. Projects like these are truly illuminating (pause haha) wink wink, but seriously things that seem maybe just like assignments to fulfill for a busy student are genuinely so impactful, because likely I wouldn't have used that language to

inform my thesis if it weren't for that class. Of course my own mentor has inspired me, I almost never dabbled in realism as it was never my strong suit and was always frustrating to me until my first semester at PNCA and 3rd year in art school I took Ardis' figure drawing and anatomy class. The body is so interesting, and I've always loved looking at real cross sections and cadavers of humans in museums, so I was extremely excited to take her class. That class had a direct result in my interest in scientific illustration, even if it was about the human body, and I am representing inanimate objects. That class blended my love of science and art. I don't have a science brain, as much as I so desperately want, I just don't, but that class made the gap between science and art seem a lot more achievable. I looked at mineral books I had from childhood, "The Encyclopedia of Gems" for general information and research, but aesthetically I more so drew from things I have seen over the years. I think occasionally if I felt an illuminated manuscript motif was repetitive I'd just look up more pictures to see other natural elements I could incorporate, and I just generally drew lots of inspiration from all the childhood pictures my mom sent to me. I also came across the Artist Tama Higuchi while researching, and while I didn't use her art specifically for anything, she just gave me this huge wave of wow. She is a mineral realism artist, her paintings look like photos, just truly incredible, she is just someone I will aspire to be like, and has given me a look into what mineral art can do and bring you to.

I also am a part of the Clackamas mineral and gem club, and was just generally inspired seeing older people have time for their passion after, often, decades of hard work, where they can finally meet and talk about their passions for a few hours. Nothing like sitting down with a ton of retired people talking about rocks. That sounds sarcastic but it's actually lit. But seriously it was the general sense of love and community over a shared interest, which was what my thesis was about anyways.

As for the audience I had a pretty negative, cynical answer as sometimes art school turns a student resentful, and I would say I didn't have an audience, cause I'm just edgy like that. And what I meant was I didn't care if anyone ever read this, as this project was for me, and I didn't realize that my audience was just any type of people that COULD be interested in my work. I was thinking about it like who did I have in mind when writing it, but I had my father and I in mind, so just us. But this project is for anyone who loves or relates to rocks, science, learning, illuminated manuscripts, nature, traveling, childhood, collecting, growing up, grief and loss, navigating relationships, and seeking to understand themselves and their identity. I think that covers pretty much everyone, but yeah I had such a closed mind on what an audience was, rather than what it could be.

When thinking about future direction, there are honestly so many things I would change if I had more time and money. I would change a lot of the narrative pages, as I feel its mineral counterparts are much stronger, and I enjoy the aesthetic of more. The narrative comic portion felt more rushed aesthetically since it is a lot more open and vague as to what to represent. I would probably not depict my dad's face, and obscure it more. I would also love to make it longer, adding more minerals of places that are meaningful but not necessarily places that he lived. I would add a map, showing all the places to visualize the distance, and some other natural elements pertaining to those specific locations. I would also have added collage

elements, I messed up several pages but still liked a section of the drawings on there, so I cut them out with an exacto knife and repasted them on the new pages which added dimension, and after then I realized how much I enjoyed the collage element and aesthetic of that. But these are all things only possible with a way longer timeline, so I am very pleased with how much I got done in a semester. I feel my discoveries and what I'm talking about are really strong, and I just wish I could strengthen it by better and more illustrations. From the proposal to the current iteration things change, but part of this process is acknowledging how this changed and could continue to change.

I see this work as healing. Not for gallery, or monetary value, or anything really. It was made for healing. I don't think I'd ever sell something this personal, to me it just feels wrong to profit off of someone close to me that can't be there to weigh their opinion, or at least a piece solely about and dedicated to. This book is for my immediate family and I. I am proud, but I don't need it to extend beyond us. I like it living as my thesis project, and then onto any family members who wish to have a copy. I definitely see a version that is more broad, just about gems and minerals I think are cool, unrelated to my dad, as a version to sell or give out, but just not this version.

Going beyond this project, I want to continue to pursue mineral and gem related work, as well as scientific illustration. I also enjoy gardening, which could pair perfectly with the scientific illustration as well. I'm not quite sure what that looks like, but I'm pursuing faceting classes as well as jewelry design, and endless hours of rockhounding. I see myself getting a regular ass job while I figure things out, but I am not seeking out a career for anything gallery related.

Anyways, this project was honestly way more time consuming than I anticipated. I mean Ardis knows, she heard my over confident ass being like oh yeah ill be done in march no biggie and have a whole month to plan and do my script and stuff, but as time went on we were both like yeah right calm down, and I was finishing right up until the end. Which is okay! I just thoughttttt I could do it fasteerrrr, but also lowkey I needed to still be a person and still had responsibilities. It took awhile, but to be honest yeah I am glad it's over now. I'm happy it's done because I was losing my mind at the end, I'm pretty sure all of my friends heard me making weird noises as a response whenever someone asked me how thesis was going, but I made it, I'm happy, and as fate would have it, today is actually my dads birthday, he would have been 56. Happy birthday dad, I hope you are proud, actually not to toot my own horn but I know you are. Anyways, thank you all for coming and yeah! Go collect stuff and hug your loved ones. Thank you.