

Felix Hastings - Oral Presentation - *Lambie: The Nostalgia Series*

- Hi everyone, thank you all for being here this afternoon for my thesis defense!
- For those who don't know me, my name is Felix Hastings, my pronouns are he/they, and I'm a 25 year old illustration major originally from Minnesota. I also go by LambieHeart online, and have a small online shop called Lullaby Fancy where I sell my art, stickers, and handmade accessories and clothing.
- My degree is in illustration, but I'm ultimately a multi-media artist at heart. When it comes to illustrating, I work in a little bit of everything from digital, watercolor, colored pencil, and ink, but I also really enjoy sculpting, sewing, and crochet.
- I find a lot of my inspiration in things that bring me joy or comfort, and my work features this through subjects like animals, toys, and fashion. I really love collecting vintage toys and greeting cards with kitschy designs, wearing cute clothes, looking around outside for animals, and pointing out every single dog I see to my friends and family, who are usually just slightly less interested. Overall, I'm inspired by all things cozy, cute, whimsical, and nostalgic.
- Nostalgia is such a large part of my work that it became the defining theme for my thesis: Lambie the Nostalgia series. This project is a series of blind box figure designs, based on themes of nostalgia and childhood memories, and features my original character Lambie.
- Lambie is a little plush sheep, originally based on a toy I found in a small-town thrift store back in Minnesota. For a while, he went kind of unnoticed in my collection of stuffed animals until I doodled him in my sketchbook one day. He was really fun and easy to draw, and at the time I had been struggling with my artistic identity and motivations. I tend to overthink any kind of drawing I do, even just in my sketchbook, but somehow he eased that pressure for me. I found that I was able to process some of my own inner thoughts and feelings through drawings of Lambie in a way I struggled to before. Over time, he evolved into kind of a mascot or persona for myself, and also became a character of his own.
- Part of what made Lambie fun to draw wasn't just that he was cute, but that I felt like I could express myself through him with less inhibitions. Growing up, I always had strong empathetic connections to toys and other inanimate objects, and I still do now. But I've often felt a struggle to connect with the actual people around me. I've always been quiet,

liked spending time alone, and I'm constantly anxious about whether I'm saying or doing the right things around others. When I was almost 23 I was finally diagnosed with autism, which definitely helped me understand myself better. But I struggle still with getting to know other people, or more so letting them get to know me. I feel like for others I can sometimes be hard to read, and I don't always outwardly express my emotions in the way people around me do, even when I'm feeling those emotions deeply on the inside.

- Lambie does have a mouth, but you just can't see it. I like to imagine that, like me, this means he can be hard to read at first. But those who get to know him start to understand how he expresses himself in other ways. Originally I drew him this way mostly for aesthetics- like, have you ever seen Hello Kitty with a mouth? It's just not as cute. Even though I didn't design him with this meaning intentionally from the start, I've discovered so many ways that I'm able to mirror my own identity through Lambie as a character, which I explored a lot in this project as well.
- Some of you might be wondering- what exactly is a blind box? Blind box toys are a format where a series of toy designs are packaged in identical boxes, so it's a surprise which design you will actually get. I've loved blind boxes since I was a kid, but recently they've gotten extremely popular with both kids and adult collectors. Labubu, Sonny Angels, and Sanrio are some of the most recognizable names in the more recent blind box craze. There's been some criticism though, arguing that these are just a blatant example of consumer culture. I definitely don't disagree with this being true in some cases, but many of us who collect toys and figures really just value the creative and artistic value of these designs.
- One thing I wanted to explore through this project was how I could approach the concept of toy design as an art form that takes skill, creativity, and can hold meaning and depth. I've collected toys my whole life- this was some of my collection as I had it displayed in my old room before I moved to Oregon, and they really made my room feel like my safe place. I don't just collect because I like "stuff", but because toys can serve as reminders of the things I love, hold memories, or even represent parts of myself. Toys are also symbols of both childhood and comfort, which also made them the perfect medium for exploring the concept of nostalgia.

- Nostalgia is a complicated emotion. It can be warm and comforting, but there's also a sadness to it as you reflect on how things used to be, and that you might not ever experience it again in the same way. There's a wistfulness that comes with nostalgia, even if the memories are happy ones. Sometimes things that weren't even happy at all can become nostalgic, like a memory of skinning a knee or getting scolded by our parents. I wanted to explore this idea and reflect on the emotions that come along with memories, childhood, and growing up.
- My finished thesis project includes four figure designs. Each one includes a turnaround sheet, a sculpted and painted prototype, and an illustrated insert card. I originally planned six designs and wanted to create packaging too, but as the semester went on, it realized that it would be more realistic to focus on four designs, and skip the boxes so that I could put more care and worldbuilding into the card illustrations.
- My process really began over the summer, when I started digging through my own memories. I looked at old childhood photos, talked to my parents and sister, and tried to understand what nostalgia meant to me. I spent a month this summer with my family in Korea, and when we had a family gathering I reunited with my cousins for the first time in a few years. It was also the first time we'd been together since we had all become adults. I was caught off guard by the emotions that came up for me that day. We had a lot of fun that day, but I couldn't help but think about how we'd all have to go back to our separate lives and likely not see all of each other again for a number of years.
- When we were kids, it was always sad to say goodbye, but it always felt like the next time was just around the corner. I don't think any of us had realized that someday we wouldn't be having watergun fights or playing dressup together anymore. We took this picture together, recreating an old photo from 17 years ago, and it was hard to believe how much time had passed. Nostalgia definitely hit me in the face that day, and I held on to that feeling all throughout creating this project.
- When it came time to sketch, I hit a wall. I kept writing lists and lists of ideas but I couldn't get myself to draw them. I had to push myself past that block by starting with extremely rough marker doodles. Just getting the most basic sketch down without worrying about making good drawings ended up helping me a lot, and it also helped me figure out which ideas actually made sense as physical objects.

- From there, I started sketching more intentionally for the turnarounds. If you don't know what turnarounds are, they essentially just illustrate all the angles of a figure design, along with color palettes, sculpt notes, and other details a manufacturer would need in a production context. It was hard for me to visualize every angle right off the bat, so I started with sketches of just the front and back of each design.
- Originally, I planned to finish all the turnarounds before sculpting the prototypes, but I found it worked better to do both at the same time. That way each one could inform the other, and I could troubleshoot things early. I started each sculpt with a wire armature, covered it in foil, then added polymer clay to build the rough shape.
- From there, I carved and refined the shapes, and added texture and small details. Some details were too tiny in polymer clay and kept getting smushed when I held it to sculpt, so I ended up using Apoxie clay as well later on to add some of the smaller pieces and details. Later on I also experimented with partially baking the polymer clay before adding smaller pieces, which also worked pretty well, but it did sometimes make it harder to correct any past mistakes I noticed as I was sculpting.
- Blind boxes usually have little insert cards inside the box that showcase the figure you got with a cute illustration of the design. Creating these felt like an important way to add some aesthetic context and worldbuilding to the series, and give some information about each design. I'd experimented in the past using watercolor along with colored pencils, and it was really effective at creating the nostalgic, sentimental sort of feeling that I was hoping to capture, so I decided to use this technique for the card artwork. I used the turnaround line art I'd finished and printed them onto watercolor paper, painted flat colors and light shading with watercolor, and then added detail and texture with colored pencils. I also painted a patterned quilt background to repeat across all the cards to tie the series together.
- Now is the fun part: the finished project! I'll go through each design one at a time, starting with figure #1 - the Playhouse.
- The back of the card reads: "Was this place always quite so small? As if he'd drank a magic potion from a storybook, Lambie grew and grew, but the little house stayed the same. His head peeked out to see the sun shining above, and vines climbed up the walls

to meet it. It feels like only yesterday that the world was bigger, and he could play the day away inside his tiny plastic house.”

This design was based on my many memories of playing in my backyard as a kid, and the plastic playhouse I had. When I was little, it felt like a real house when I was playing inside of it, but when I think about it now I realise how small and plastic it was. Part of nostalgia is the bittersweet acknowledgment that things change and will not return to how they were, and the playhouse felt like a perfect symbol for that.

- The colors I chose for this were directly inspired by my childhood playhouse, though I shifted them a bit to work well with Lambie’s design. I wanted to make sure it kept the flat, plastic kind of feeling through the colors as well as keeping all of the corners and shapes soft and rounded. This design had quite a few things to note about what details to paint or carve, like the windows, roof, and door. For the heart on the window, I imagined that it would be painted behind a small piece of transparent plastic that would be inserted into the window space, so I made sure to note that as well.
- This was the first figure I sculpted, and it was definitely a challenge. The roof and house shapes were geometric and detailed, and I also learned pretty quickly what level of detail I should keep for the other figures. The vines look cute now, but they were awful to sculpt. For the window, since I couldn’t realistically inset an actual transparent piece at least for the prototype, I used UV resin to create that effect and painted the heart between layers. The heart in the window was initially inspired by my memories of playing with digital pets like tamagotchi or pixel chix, so it was important to me that it was behind the window to reference the screens used in the toys.
- Moving on, design #2 is called Homework- which I’m sure sounds super exciting.
- Starting with the text again - “Lambie feels like a big dummy. Tears prick his eyes and the numbers blur on the page as the timer ticks down, and he just can’t think of any of the answers! He scribbles out the page and takes a big, deep breath. No matter how much of a dummy he feels like right now, he’s a very clever sheep if he just takes his time.”

I wanted at least one design to reflect some less positive childhood memories, and I’m sure a lot of people can relate to this one. A lot of childhood is great but there’s also a lot of helplessness that comes with being a child. I was a smart kid, but I struggled doing things quickly—especially math. I hated timed multiplication tests. I could do the math,

but the timer made me panic, and then I'd feel stupid when I couldn't finish as fast as my classmates did. As a kid, things like that feel like the end of the world. But as an adult I can look back and recognize how trivial it really was, I've been able to accept my own strengths and weaknesses. I still work slowly, but I've learned to accept that as part of myself, and it can sometimes even be a strength, too.

- This color palette is simpler and a little duller to match the theme, with the red pencil acting as a symbol of anxiety and pressure. The pile of papers was kind of tricky. I had to make it detailed enough to read as paper, but not so sharp or thin that it would be fragile or uncomfortable to hold. I wanted to try mixing some different textures and materials, so I made a note that the dunce cap should be translucent in the finished figure.
- I also wanted the dunce cap to be translucent to portray the idea that even though Lambie feels “dumb” in the moment, it's not a real label that defines him. It's really just something he's imagined and imposed on himself. I used translucent clay for this, but it didn't turn out quite as clear as I hoped. If I had more time, I would probably try making a clear resin version. Sculpting the papers ended up easier than expected though: I just built a mound shape, then layered small rectangles of clay on top of it.
- Now for design 3, which is called “Play Pretend”.
- The card says- “As he stares wistfully out the window, Lambie is a little pauper dreaming of a big adventure to make his fortune. But he's really just a little lamb playing dress up in an old hat and a coat much too big for him. He's so lost in his make believe that he doesn't hear the click of plastic shoes sneaking up behind him- Toki wants to play, too!” I was kind of a weird kid- one of my earliest hyperfixations was on Oliver Twist- both the book and the 1968 musical film. I also loved Annie and watched a lot of Shirley Temple movies where she also played poor little orphans, so I think I had this idea that orphans got to go on cool big adventures and meet new friends. Even when the scenarios are weird, I think there's something really special about the ability kids have to immerse themselves in their imaginations, and I know that a lot of us really miss that when we become adults.
- My little sister was always around to play with me, whether I liked it or not, and so much of my childhood was shaped by having a younger sibling. I created a character to go alongside Lambie as her counterpart—Her name is Toki, which is “rabbit” in Korean.

She was the classic little sibling who wanted to do everything I did, so I thought it would be cute to have her literally standing on Lambie's coattails. I decided that I wanted the two characters to be able to function as separate pieces, so Toki needed her own turnaround alongside Lambie's for this one. I realized that if I wanted Toki to be able to stand alone as well as on Lambie's coat, I'd have to sculpt a divot in the coat that would let her stand there as well, so I made a note of that in the turnarounds.

- Sculpting two characters that needed to fit together was difficult. I resized pieces several times to make them work. Lambie is already small as a sculpt, so Toki was extremely tiny and easy to accidentally squish. My sister used to love to stomp around in random shoes all the time, so I gave her shoes inspired by those really uncomfortable plastic princess heels a lot of us had in the 2000s, but they were super difficult to sculpt onto the tiny feet. I also included my childhood teddy bear in Lambie's arms. I spent a lot of time on these two, going back and forth adjusting, carving, baking, and adding more clay. But it felt very rewarding when they finally fit together the way I envisioned.
- Lastly is design 4 - "Cozy Day".
- "There's nowhere to be today but home. It's freezing outside, but Lambie is warm and cozy in his comfy blanket, playing his new favorite game. He lets Toki join in, but with a little bit of mischief first- she'll do anything he wants to get a turn, even putting underwear on her head!"

So, I'll explain that last line in a minute. Some of my happiest childhood memories were quiet days at home—during the weekend, on school breaks, and especially on snow days. Snow days felt really special, and my sister and I would make blanket nests, play Nintendo DS, and watch movies while our mom brought us snacks. I think these are the type of warm and comforting memories that a lot of people are thinking of when they use the word "nostalgic". Now- about the underwear on Toki's head. My sister used to hover over me while I played games, trying to watch, and her hair would fall in my face so I couldn't see the screen. I could have just told her to go put a headband on, but because I was a sneaky older sibling with all the power in this situation, I told her she had to put a diaper on her head or I wouldn't let her watch.

- I made the absolutely incredible decision to include a quilt in this one, which made it kind of a total nightmare to draw at multiple angles. I basically had to sculpt the entire

figure before finishing the turnaround because I couldn't visualize how the quilt squares wrapped around the sides. Keeping the pillow and the rabbit plush consistent with the quilt pattern was tricky too. The rabbit plush is based on a toy my Korean grandmother had given me when I was little. I sadly don't have it anymore, but I still think about it a lot and I hope I can find a similar one someday.

- This prototype had a lot of separate pieces—Lambie, Toki, the pillow, and the plush in the back—which I attached together after painting. The quilt wasn't any easier to paint than it was to sculpt, but I intentionally kept the patterns simple so that they would be manageable to paint. The butterfly pattern on the yellow squares was actually inspired by my original childhood bedroom. It had yellow walls and little pink butterflies painted around the border by my mom- didn't fully appreciate it as a kid, but now when I think about my mom painting those butterflies on the wall for me, I realise how special that really was.
- I learned a lot throughout this project. One big lesson was giving myself more time than I think I'll need, especially for the research and thinking stages. Because I spent so much of the summer just thinking, sketching, and reflecting on things, I didn't have enough time to create the 6 designs that I initially wanted to, but I really think that if I had rushed straight into making them I wouldn't have come out with a project that feels as meaningful and finished. I've also become really interested in pursuing toy design as at least part of my career. It felt unrealistic before, but after researching and working on this series, I realized there really are artists working in toy design, and that there's even an active indie toy scene. Actually manufacturing and creating these figures as a real product someday would be incredible, but for now I just plan on utilizing it as a great piece for my portfolio. I would really like to explore smaller merchandise ideas first, like making the designs into sticker blind bags.
- Before I end, I'd like to say thank you to my mentor, Ryan Bubnis, for his guidance throughout the semester, to my partner Zergy, for feeding me so I didn't waste away at my desk, to my family, for always supporting me and for supplying me with the memories that inspired this project, and to my dog Hugo, for forcing me to take walk breaks and always keeping me company while I worked. Thank you all for listening.