

NARRATIVES UNSEEN:
FEMINISM AND DISABILITIES IN VISUAL ART

A Thesis

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Abstract

Narratives Unseen: Feminism and Disabilities in Visual Art

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Throughout history, there have been many visual artworks portraying people with disabilities, both physical and mental. However, there are many instances where these artworks are inaccurate and give people with disabilities a bad stereotype. Additionally, in written works the main characters have always been written as strong, able-bodied males. Through a literature review and arts based research this thesis explores the history of ableist protagonists and the significance of a female main character in both literature and visual art. The creation of a graphic novel with a female disabled protagonist is used to further this research and give a strong example of how disabilities should be displayed in media and visual art. In result, the art making included five character boards and one printed graphic novel with twenty one digitally rendered pages in monochrome color with some pages featuring the colors blue, red, and yellow. Exploration of emerging themes, future directions, and limitations during the process are discussed.

Artist Statement

The World of the Ketone Krusher

Phoenix Hagerman

For as long as I can remember I have been someone who is obsessed with designing fantasy characters. As a child I built my own worlds through my imagination with pencil and paper. I read comic books and watched animated tv shows and movies, marveling at the characters brought to life. Creating art has always been a form of expression and coping for me since I was four years old and diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. As a child I remember wondering why there were no heroes or characters who had type 1 diabetes, or any other sort of chronic physical or mental condition. I remember wishing there was a comic book about a superhero with a chronic illness, something that accurately depicted a chronic illness condition and made the superhero powerful at the same time. Now, eighteen years later, I can finally make my dream a reality. The art that I have created for this thesis is a comic book about a female superhero with type 1 diabetes. However, I know that more than just one main character is key to making a comic a good read. I also created a superhero sidekick, a main villain, the villain's henchmen, and several side characters. Each of these characters has a digitally drawn physical character board created on an iPad. The boards are printed out on a larger scale and mounted on foamcore. The comic book itself is also printed in monochrome with some pages including the colors blue, red, and yellow which represent the protagonist, the sidekick, and the villain. The twenty-one pages are put together as a traditional comic book with a cover page.

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	8
2. Literature Review.....	10
Feminism in Art.....	10
Feminism in Art History.....	10
Sexism in Art.....	11
Artists with Disabilities.....	12
Disabled Artists.....	12
Media Representation of Disability.....	15
Building the Narrative.....	17
The Hero's Journey.....	17
Representation of Female Heroes.....	19
Summary of the Literature.....	20
3. Methods.....	23
Studio Space.....	23
Experimentation: Materials.....	24
Experimentation: Procedure.....	24
Fine Arts Based Research: Materials.....	24
Fine Arts Based Research: Procedure.....	24
4. Results.....	26

Experimental Results.....	26
Final Results.....	32
5. Discussion.....	40
Reflections & Discoveries.....	40
Limitations.....	40
Future Directions.....	41
Conclusions.....	41
Bibliography.....	42
Appendix A: Resume.....	45
Appendix B: Additional Images.....	47

List of Figures

1. Figure 1: Studio Space at Endicott.....	23
2. Figure 2: Protagonist Idea 1.....	27
3. Figure 3: Protagonist Idea 2.....	28
4. Figure 4: Ketone Krusher Suit.....	29
5. Figure 5: Protagonist's Sibling.....	30
6. Figure 6: Villain Idea 1.....	31
7. Figure 7: Villain Idea 1 Redesigned	32
8. Figure 8: Page 1 Color Test.....	34
9. Figure 9: Page 1 Monochrome Version.....	35
10. Figure 10: Colors of Protagonist and Sidekick.....	36
11. Figure 11: Color of Villain.....	37
12. Figure 12: Color of Villain 2.....	38

Chapter 1

Introduction

Historically, people with genetic conditions have often been represented as sideshows, monsters, or alternatively, as superhuman deities, angels, leprechauns, and giants.¹ The portrayals of disabled people in history have often been represented poorly or inaccurately. By creating art involving people with disorders, awareness is brought about and the notion that someone can do the same things as “normal” people even with a disability or disorder.² In addition the female representation is lacking in terms of the variety of representation of feminism in artwork and how feminist artwork can also be activist art if it means to involve change.³

The purpose of this thesis is to bring awareness to people who struggled with chronic illness or disability and felt that their issues had not been accurately portrayed in visual art and today’s media. Additionally, another purpose of this thesis is to highlight feminism in visual art and the significance of strong female protagonists in visual storytelling, for instance comic books. A third purpose of this thesis is to provide examples of disabilities and feminist independence in visual art.

This thesis intends to contribute to the field of visual arts, specifically the comic book industry. Since there is so much misconception about disabilities in society and lack of accurate art this research will make an impact on the field of visual arts by providing an example of how to accurately portray someone with a disability and how to incorporate a strong female protagonist into comic books. This thesis will also engage the field of art therapy regarding

¹ Gold N. The person looking out. *Am J Med Genet Part C*. 2021;187C:128–129.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajmg.c.31885>

² Gold N. The person looking out. *Am J Med Genet Part C*. 2021;187C:128–129.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajmg.c.31885>

³ “Sartle School of Art History: Feminist Art.” Sartle, December 3, 2020.

encouraging patients with chronic illness and disabilities that they are capable of doing many things and being their own strong protagonist.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review will focus on three major topics. The first topic will be about feminism. This section is divided into two sub categories: Feminism in art history and sexism in art. The next topic will be artists with disabilities. This section will include two sub categories: Disability in art history and representation of disability in visual art. The final topic will be building the narrative. This section will include one sub category: The hero's journey. Each topic will include references to literature regarding feminism and disability and representation or lack there of. All three of these topics will create an understanding for the reader of the limited representation of feminism and disability in visual art and the different methods that artists are using to make these minorities more visible in the art world.

Feminism in Art

Feminism in Art History

According to Caprino, feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of equality of the sexes.⁴ Li explained through a condensed timeline a summary of how feminist art arose from the 60s and its progression up to the current day. Li referenced scholarly articles and online articles to aid in their teaching of the timeline of feminist art. Li touched on a variety of examples of feminist art throughout history including fashion, installation art, collage, pop art,

⁴ Caprino, Kathy. "What Is Feminism, and Why Do so Many Women and Men Hate It?" Forbes. Forbes Magazine, March 9, 2017.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2017/03/08/what-is-feminism-and-why-do-so-many-women-and-men-hate-it/?sh=22ed736b7e8e>.

graphic design, and multiple feministt activists and artists. Some of these artists include Linda Nochlin an American art historian, Judy Chicago an American sculptor and painter and Sheila Levrant de Bretteville an American graphic designer. Li emphasized how all feminist artwork can also be activist art if it means to involve change. Li also explained how feminist art is not an art movement with a distinctive style, rather it is art that is created through “the lens of feminist art theory⁵. One example that Li referenced in terms of feminist activist art is the Guerilla Gurls and the 1989 poster “Do Women Have to Be Naked to Get Into the Met. Museum?” This example is well known amongst art historians and artists alike in terms of strong feminsit beliefs and activist art. Li’s summary of the rise of feminist art is concise gives the reader strong references about instances of feminism in art history and examples of feminist activist art.

Sexism in Art

Sexism is behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.⁶ Brown conducted an analysis of the reason why artwork made by females was less valued than artwork made by males. Brown explained that studies have repeatedly shown that employers are more likely to discriminate against women in job applications in some fields, and further indicate that women are judged differently from men by managers, coworkers, and consumers in regard to their competence, productivity, ability to innovate, and leadership style⁷. Brown emphasized on the inequality of female artists, touching on the fact that females were not able to use art as a profession until the 1870s. As an example of the female artist struggle in early

⁵ “Sartle School of Art History: Feminist Art.” Sartle, December 3, 2020.

<https://www.sartle.com/blog/post/sartle-school-of-art-history-feminist-art>.

⁶ Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary. Merriam-Webster. Merriam-Webster. Accessed February 3, 2022. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

⁷ Editorial, Artsy, and Taylor Whitten Brown. “Why Is Work by Female Artists Still Valued Less than Work by Male Artists?” Artsy, March 8, 2019.

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-work-female-artists-valued-work-male-artists>.

days, Brown referenced German architect Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus, a German school of art, architecture, and design, as a male misogynist who disagreed with the idea of women working as artists. Brown then used several female weavers (Anni Albers, Gunta Stölzl, Benita Koch) who studied at Bauhaus to counter Gropius's argument, explaining that there is more textile work seen on the market by female artists rather than male artists. Brown then transitioned into describing how results show that female contemporary artists today can be aided by online platforms such as Artsy. In conclusion, Brown's analysis showed that historically artwork done by female artists is valued less than male artists, but that in contemporary art today that is changing with the aid of online art platforms.

Artists with Disabilities

Disabled Artists

Korte used the examples of famous artists such as Frida Kahlo and Vincent Van Gough to provide a perspective of artists who struggled with disabilities and used art as a coping mechanism worldwide. Korte portrayed their knowledge through scholarly articles and art history and gave examples of artists who struggled with disabilities and their works to solidify their points. Korte touched on historical Frida Kahlo, a Mexican painter, Vincent Van Gough, a Dutch painter, Diego Velázquez, a Spanish painter, Francisco Goya, a Spanish painter, and Henri Matisse, a French painter. With all of these artists Korte gave an example of their artwork portraying their mindset involving someone disabled or their own chronic illness. One instance of this is Francisco Goya's work *Mendigos que se llevan solos en Bordeaux (Beggars Who Get About on Their Own in Bordeaux)* (1824-1827)⁸. Sarah Korte explained that there have always

⁸ Korte, Sarah. "Adopting a Disabled Lens in Art History." Honi Soit, October 28, 2021. <https://honisoit.com/2021/10/adopting-a-disabled-lens-in-art-history/>.

been disabled people, they have just been poorly portrayed in historical art or not included in artwork at all due to their physical disabilities. Artists who have suffered from chronic mental and physical disabilities have used their artwork as a way to bring awareness of what they are going through both physically and emotionally. Korte emphasized in their article how important it is for people to continue viewing the work of disabled artists with an open mind and for disabled artists to continue producing artwork.

Rider presented the question of if accuracy is important for handicapped people when portrayed in the media. Through other articles and collected data from a written survey Rider came to the conclusion that across the media handicapped people have been ridiculed and seen as victims of humor. Additionally, media like television gives people a predetermined idea of how handicapped people think and act. Rider claimed that handicapped people are portrayed as a distinct and stigmatized group. According to Rider, there is a lot of negativity and stereotyping that comes with the disabled population. Rider expressed the importance of removing the stereotype that all disabled people are usually less smart and live unhappy lives. However, Rider touched on the fact of how there are non-disabled people who fight against the stigma of handicapped people and encourage education to be spread through media. Rider commented in their article that despite the stereotypes and negativity associated with people with disabilities, there are more handicapped people being featured in shows, movies and other forms of media.⁹ Rider presented the fact that handicapped people want to advocate for themselves and educate people who do not have disabilities about the accurate positives and negatives of being a

⁹ Rider, Elizabeth. "Media Portrayals of People with Handicaps: Does Accuracy Matter?" *Studies in Popular Culture* 16, no. 2 (1994): 85–93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23413734>.

handicapped person. Rider's article ended with the conclusion that accuracy is important in the media when it comes to handicapped people.

Rocco interviewed David Hevey, Tony Heaton, and Jo Verrent who were three representatives of the Disability Arts Movement and the disabled community in the United Kingdom. Each of the people Rocco interviewed was heavily involved in disability activism and a part of the disabled community. Rocco explained to the reader that the Disability Arts Movement (D.A.M.) was initiated in the late 1970s and brought together a variety of activists, artists and creatives of all kinds who campaigned for the civil rights of disabled people and fought against their marginalization in the arts and culture¹⁰. Through the interview Rocco learned that the mindset of how disabled people are seen was changed by the D.A.M. and has given non disabled people a better understanding of the disabled community. Rocco also learned that the NDACA (National Disability Arts Collective & Archive) is a great resource for the UK and international disability activists. However, Tony Heaton, a sculptor and disability activist explained to Rocco in the interview that though there is a lot of awareness being raised through disabled artists and the D.A.M, there are still issues with "main-stream" art collections properly representing the disabled artists community. Many countries still believe that being disabled equals tragedy and that the only solution is charity. There is still much to be done to level the playing field between disabled and main-stream artists. Rocco touched on how Heaton's comment is a very true statement and that much still needs to be done in terms of fairness with disabled artists and activists. In conclusion, Rocco's interview enlightened the viewer about the history of the Disability Arts Movement and the issues that are still occurring today regarding equality.

¹⁰ Shapearts. "Reflections on the Disability Arts Movement." Shape Arts, February 10, 2020. <https://www.shapearts.org.uk/blog/reflections-on-the-disability-arts-movement>.

Media Representation of Disability

Gold discussed the differences of people with genetic conditions are treated today versus how they were treated historically. Gold explained that people with genetic disorders are looked at much differently today than they were historically. Working as a geneticist, Nina Gold learned that parents of children with genetic disorders are protective and defensive about images of their children. Gold discussed that throughout history, people with genetic conditions have often been represented as sideshows, monsters... All of these depictions, however, stand in contrast with the people we meet in our clinics each day: children and adults, who happen to look distinctive, and are dignified, beloved, and deeply human¹¹. Gold referenced historical Painter Juan Carreño de Miranda and his portraits of Eugenia Martinez Valleji, a six year old girl with features of Prader-Willi syndrome and pointed out the girl's sad expression, stating "thinking now of this child who stood alone while others looked on and stared brings on empathetic shame and anger" (Gold). But Gold also learned that photographing or painting someone with a genetic disorder improves their self worth and resilience. By creating art involving people with genetic disorders, awareness is brought about and the notion that someone should not be judged by how they look. Gold enlightened the reader about Photographer Rick Guidotti, who photographs children and adults with genetic disorders. Guidotti has taken many photographs of children and people with a variety of genetic disorders and there has been a positive response due to it. In conclusion, Gold emphasized in their article the importance of how much has changed in how people treat people with genetic disorders.

¹¹ Gold N. The person looking out. *Am J Med Genet Part C*. 2021;187C:128–129.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ajmg.c.31885>

Ratto explained through a researched journal the importance of retroactive continuity when creating a comic book hero with a disability. Ratto argued that the practice of retroactive continuity both erases and solidifies disability. Ratto used the comparison of three famous characters from comic books who are known for their disabilities to demonstrate her argument of retroactive continuity both aiding and hindering the evolution of these characters. Ratto provided the reader a useful method of choosing these three characters that each have a differing relationship to disability and how they have changed as they have been adapted into various forms of media. Ratto elaborated on the significance of a team creating a comic book hero, and how it is a group effort including multiple steps and people. These steps include writing the story, creating the art both in and on the cover of the comic book, coloring, lettering, and editing. Ratto heavily expressed this importance because when one team creates a character and then the character is passed onto another team, without following proper retcon of that character's backstory the disability can appear to be "cured" or often appear in flux throughout series and different media portrayals.¹² Ratto also explained in their research that a hero having a disability can many times cause them to be shelved, which also explains the narrow spectrum of disability displayed in the comic book industry. Ratto's article gives the reader a firm understanding of the importance of retroactive continuity when creating a character with a disability.

Weselby emphasized the use of on the disabled superheroes in the Marvel and DC Comic industry. Weselby explained that "there have been plenty of occasions in the past where disabled characters have risen up from the pages of our comic books to save their world, showing us all in the process that anyone can be a hero" (CBR, Weselby). Weselby gave the reader a countdown that started from fifteen of the top disabled superheroes. Weselby included both male and female

¹² Ratto, Casey M. "Not Superhero Accessible: The Temporal Stickiness of Disability in Superhero Comics." *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v37i2.5396>.

superheroes, but they all had some sort of disability. One female example was Oracle, or Barbara Gorden from the Batman Comics, who originally started out as “Batgirl” but after being shot in the spine and paralyzed, she became known as Oracle, a computer genius and director of an all-female squad of superheroes known as Birds of Prey. Weselby expressed “when DC made the decision to bring back her old alter-ego Batgirl in the New 52, many fans were outraged that Barbara had been transformed back into an able-bodied hero”.¹³ This showed that DC comics was not as concerned about the importance of including disabled superheroes. Weselby’s article highlighted other major, well known superheroes who also have disabilities like Marvel’s Hawkeye, the super archer who is deaf, or Professor X, the wheelchair bound telepath and one of Marvel’s most powerful mutants. One of the parts that could strengthen Weselby’s article is including more female superheroes with disabilities, but they are unfortunately hard to find in both Marvel and DC comics and media.

Building the Narrative

The Hero’s Journey

Lefkowitz conducted research about how Joseph Campbell, an American professor of literature best known for their theory about heroes in the world of mythology, known as the monomyth or “the hero’s journey”, really felt about the theory that they preached.¹⁴ Lefkowitz’s research aimed to educate people about the real side of Campbell. Although seen as a kind and open minded person on television, Lefkowitz revealed through their research collection of transcripts of

¹³ Weselby, Joanne M. "More Than Able: 15 Superheroes Who Inspire Us." CBR, December 7, 2021. <https://www.cbr.com/more-than-able-15-disabled-superheroes-who-inspire-us/>

¹⁴ Lefkowitz, Mary R. “Mythology: The Myth of Joseph Campbell.” *The American Scholar* 59, no. 3 (1990): 429–34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41211815>.

Campbell on television, their writings, and beliefs that Campbell actually turned out to be anti-Semitic, misogynistic, anti-black and against other religions. Campbell was against the beliefs of scholars when it came to myths and they did not take myths as seriously in terms of accuracy. Campbell made their own interpretations and told their own updated version of the story. Lefkowitz explained in their article that Campbell often referred to religious figures when discussing the monomyth, specifically male and Greek foundation heroes like Hercules and Alcmeon. Lefkowitz clearly stated that Campbell was misogynistic and believed that women were meant for providing childbearing and nurturing, not meant to be heroes or show masculine traits.¹⁵ Lefkowitz argued that Campbell was wrong in only considering the importance of male figures and trimming ancient mythology to fit their own preferred description based on their strong dedication to Christianity and lack of open mindedness for other religions and ethnicities.

Phillips discussed through an article the usefulness as an approach to literature of the monomyth. Phillips also expressed how there are times when the monomyth is useful in a story and other times where it is not. Phillips compared other old stories such as “The Secret Sharer”, “The Horse Dealer’s Daughter” and “Sailing to Byzantium” with the usefulness of the monomyth and how there are issues that come up when using the monomyth universally. Although, Phillips did discuss that the monomyth is well suited in classrooms when discussing literature. Phillips elaborated on how the monomyth is highly social and that there are three rites of passage; separation, initiation, and return.¹⁶ However, despite the universal knowledge of the monomyth, Phillips continued to argue about how it does not accurately represent all stories and mythologies. Phillips deconstructed the process of the monomyth and compared it to the three

¹⁵ Lefkowitz, Mary R. “Mythology: The Myth of Joseph Campbell.” *The American Scholar* 59, no. 3 (1990): 429–34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41211815>.

¹⁶ Phillips, Steven R. “The Monomyth and Literary Criticism.” *College Literature* 2, no. 1 (1975): 1–16. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111054>.

stories they chose to see if it applied to each one and the accuracy. There is a majority of the article that is a shortened version of each of the stories which for the reader, is a bit confusing. Yes Phillips used these summaries to compare the usefulness of the monomyth, but they did dwell a bit too long on each of the stories. Nevertheless, Phillips's journal does provide how the monomyth can and can not be universally used in literature.

Representation of Female Heroes

Nicholson claimed that Joseph Campbell's theory about the monomyth presented problems from the perspective of a feminist analysis and for female heroes. Nicholson emphasized how Campbell has been criticized for oversimplification and has a sexist view towards women. Nicholson said how Campbell saw women as inferior to men and a temptation to the hero, not a main character but simply one to fuel the hero onward. Nicholson also said that Campbell thought of women as lures, guides, and motherly figures in the monomyth, specifically in ancient myths.¹⁷ Though Campbell's theory of women in the monomyth can be left open to interpretation, Nicholson pointed to the evidence that Campbell failed to follow traditional gender norms for both other religions and ethnicities and time periods. Nicholson explained how though oftentimes in traditional stories women are described as having feminine traits and lesser roles, there are still myths and stories that portray women as heroic figures and main characters which Campbell seemed to gloss over, tweaking these stories to fit what he thought was an accurate interpretation. Nicholson explained in their article that other scholars pointed out similar evidence that is portrayed in Campbell's work and their beliefs. These scholars were also not female, but male. So, it can be concluded that both male and female scholars disagree with

¹⁷ Nicholson, Sarah. "The Problem of Woman as Hero in the Work of Joseph Campbell." *Feminist Theology* 19, no. 2 (2010): 182–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0966735010384331>.

Campbell's ideas of the female in the monomyth and as a main character. Nicholson did a thorough analysis of how there are issues presented in Campbell's monomyth theory.

Summary of the Literature

According to an analysis done by GAME, Marvel Comics' Spider-Man claimed the top spot in 57 countries, including the United States, for a remarkable 48.7% of the share of search volume.¹⁸ The results of the analysis also showed that the majority of the most popular and favored superheroes around the world were white and male. Yes, Wonder Woman was included but society has a tendency to think of the males first. All of these characters are in perfect physical condition and able-bodied. There is a need for visual representation of disability in visual art and media. In this thesis the research will discuss the limited representation of disability and feminism in visual art and the importance of proper representation of the minority in visual art.

According to The American Journal of Medical Genetics, throughout history people with genetic conditions have often been represented as sideshows, monsters, or alternatively, as superhuman deities, angels, leprechauns, and giants. Essentially, there have always been portrayals of disabled people in history, they have just been represented poorly or inaccurately. Artists like Frida Kahlo who have suffered from chronic mental and physical disabilities have used their artwork as a way to bring awareness of what they are going through both physically and emotionally. Through her self-portraits Kahlo explores her relationship to her disabled body. Even her choice to become an artist was influenced by disability following a bus accident at 18.

¹⁸ Mangan, John. "New Studio Reveals the World's Favorite Superhero." ITM, December 7, 2021. <https://insidethemagic.net/2021/04/worlds-most-popular-superhero-jm1/>

By creating art involving people with disorders, awareness is brought about and the notion that someone can do the same things as “normal” people even with a disability or disorder. Even though there is now a lot of awareness being raised through disabled artists, there are still issues with “main-stream” art collections properly representing the disabled artists community. Many countries still believe that being disabled equals tragedy and that the only solution is charity. There is still much to be done to level the playing field between disabled and main-stream artists. It is evident through this research that handicapped people want to advocate for themselves and educate people who do not have disabilities about the accurate positives and negatives of being a handicapped person.

In addition to the representation of disability, this research also discusses feminism in visual art. Historically, women have been suppressed in the art industry, as females were not able to use art as a profession until the 1870s. In this thesis the research will discuss the variety of representation of feminism in artwork and how feminist artwork can also be activist art if it means to involve change. This research also includes how females were viewed in literature, specifically through the monomyth, a concept created by Joseph Campbell. Campbell saw women as inferior to men and a temptation to the hero, not a main character but simply one to fuel the hero onward. There are scholars who believe that the monomyth is well suited in classrooms when discussing literature. However, this research discusses the importance of strong, main feminist characters in fictional literature and visual art.

Weselby wrote an article that emphasized on the disabled superheroes in the Marvel and DC Comic industry. The article included both male and female superheroes, but they all had some sort of disability. There is not enough visual representation of main characters who have a physical or medical disability in the visual arts industry. Especially today, it is very important

that people with disabilities are given accurate portrayal in visual art. It is especially important that these main characters are female, as feminism is still oppressed in the art industry. People need to know that superheroes don't need to be able-bodied and flawless to be heroic.

Chapter 3

Methods

Studio Space

The studio spaces for this thesis took place at the artist's home in Boxford, and in the semi-private studios on the third floor of Endicott College School for Visual and Performing Arts (see figure 1). The studio space was shared with another artist at a shared desk. The studio space was small, divided into two sections for each artist's work to be stored. There was also a collaboration of decoration around the walls of the studio space, including printed illustrations, photographs, and artwork unrelated to the thesis pinned on the walls. Though a bit cluttered, the studio space was comfortable and organized. Art was commonly created in the afternoon and at night.

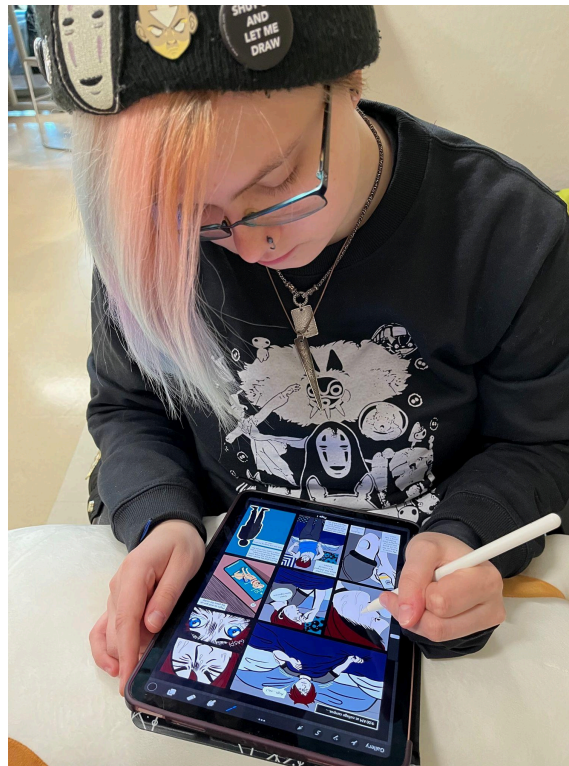


Figure 1. Studio Space at Endicott

As seen in figure one the artist is holding their apple pencil in their left hand and using their ipad to work on a page of the comic. The artist is wearing a black sweatshirt with white illustrations on the front and a black beanie with several pins attached. The artist has light blue, pink and orange hair and is wearing glasses with their head tilted down at the ipad. The artist is seated at the desk in their studio space at Endicott College.

Experimentation: Materials

Two phases were involved in this work, these included phase 1 and phase 2. Phase 1 was the experimental research phase. Phase 1 included digital sketches on an Apple iPad Air with an Apple stylus pen. Phase 2 included more fleshed out character designs of the characters. The same materials The program used to create digital artwork was called Procreate.

Experimentation: Procedure

For the experimental process several digital sketches were created, each depicting a different version of the main protagonist of the graphic novel. Notes were taken on these sketches about the background and backstory of the main protagonist and their connection to the other characters in the story. After the main protagonist concept was fleshed out a bit, the remaining characters of the story were sketched out, including the main villain, best friend, and villain's henchmen. These sketches also included notes about background, backstory, and connection to the main protagonist. After these sketches were finished, color was added to gain an understanding of the characters' skin tones, clothing colors, and other physical traits.

Final Artwork: Materials

The materials for the final comic pages and fully fleshed character boards included an Apple iPad Air with an Apple stylus pen on the application Procreate. The character boards were printed using the Endicott College printing lab printers and the access paper was cut using an x-acto and a ruler. Foam core board was cut using an x-acto knife and ruler and the printed images were mounted using the graphic design print lab technology.

Final Artwork: Procedure

In order to complete the final work for this project, The artist had first had to fully render the character boards created for each of the characters and the main protagonist, as well as side characters. After finishing the character boards the pages for the comic were drafted and fully rendered. The finished character boards were blown up in size through photoshop and printed. The printed images were then mounted on cut foam core boards. The entire finished comic was printed and turned into a comic with twenty one pages and a cover page. .

Chapter 4

Results

The results chapter will present the experimental results and the final results. All experimental results explored creating a main character protagonist from scratch, creating additional characters, and forming comic pages all while revolving around disability and feminism. The visual results are presented in two sections: experimental results, and final results. The experiential section includes the sketches and notes of creating characters, the character revisions, and storyboarding of the comic. The final results section includes the final character designs and finished comic pages.

Experimental Results

In the experimental phase the themes of feminism and disability visibility were explored. In this exploration character concepts were developed for the comic planned ahead. The first two digital sketches as illustrated in figures 1 and 2 demonstrate the drafting process of creating a strong female protagonist. Notes are included on the sketches to flesh out the character's backstory and more clearly realize the protagonist's ideals and goals. The protagonist's suit was designed to be anonymous and also display the colors and symbol of type 1 diabetes as seen in figure 4. This drafting process was done for the remaining other characters, including the protagonist's sidekick, the villain, and the villain's henchmen. Additional sketching and brainstorming happened for the side characters including the protagonist's two mothers, the protagonist's sibling, the protagonist's pet, the sidekick's father, and the sidekick's pet. During the brainstorming the protagonist's sibling was chosen to be physically disabled (see figure 5) to contrast the protagonist's chronic condition of type 1 diabetes and include variety in disability. A majority of the characters sketched ended up being female as the theme of strong, independent

females was being explored. One instance of a character being redesigned was the villain as she started out with an average female form as seen in figure 6, but after some consideration was redrawn as a plus sized woman (see figure 7) to include more unique body types amongst female characters.



Figure 2. Protagonist Idea 1

As seen in figure 2 the illustration is of the first concept of the protagonist. The character is wearing a light gray bodysuit that covers their entire body, face included and there is a circle on the center of their forehead. The character has light blue elbow length gloves and knee high light blue boots with a darker blue strip around the ankle and wrists. The character has a dark blue contraption on their hand consisting of multiple lines that reach out to each finger tip. The character has their back slightly facing the viewer, with their head facing forward and their left arm reaching up with their thumb and pointer finger raised.

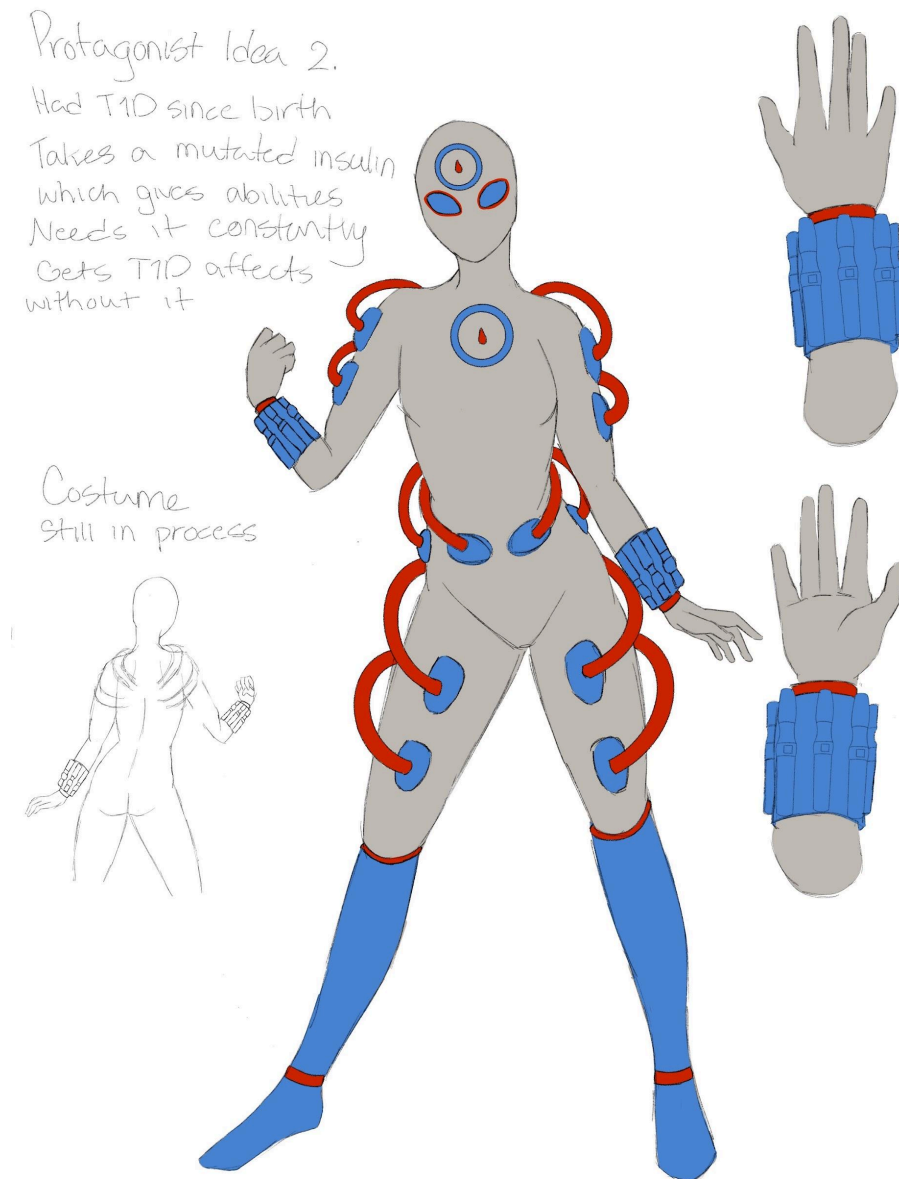


Figure 3. Protagonist Idea 2

As seen in figure 3 the illustration is of the second concept of the protagonist. The character is wearing a light gray bodysuit with knee high light blue boots with two bright red stripes at the top and at the ankle of the boots. The character has two light blue wrist gauntlets equipped with long barrels that are on all sides of the gauntlets, and there is a red stripe on the hand. The character only has two eyes on their masked face, blue with a red outline, and a blue circle with

a drop of blood is on both the forehead and the chest of the suit. The character also has a set of two blue oval devices on their upper arms, waist, and legs, which are attached with red tubing.



Figure 4. Ketone Krusher Suit

As seen in figure 4 the illustration is a fully rendered version of the protagonist's superhero suit. The character is wearing a light gray bodysuit with knee high light blue boots with two bright red stripes at the top and at the ankle of the boots. The character has two light blue wrist gauntlets equipped with long barrels that are on all sides of the gauntlets, and there is a red stripe on the hand. The character only has two eyes on their masked face, blue with a red outline, and a blue circle with a drop of blood is on both the forehead and the chest of the suit. The character also has a set of two blue oval devices on their upper arms, waist, and legs, which are attached with red tubing. There is also an illustration of the backside of the suit with a larger blue circle and red drop of blood in the center. There are large blue patches on the back of the forearms, lower back, and back of the legs with red tubing.



Figure 5. Protagonist's Sibling

As seen in figure 5 the illustration is a fully rendered image of the protagonist's sibling. The sibling's name, "Aiden" is in bold blue letters above their head. The character is in a blue

wheelchair with black wheels. The character is wearing all black clothing, including a black t-shirt, black pants, and black shoes. The character is missing their right leg and is gripping the sides of the wheelchair with their hands. The character is fair skinned with short black hair, brown eyes, and has several piercings on their right ear.



Figure 6. Villain Idea 1

As seen in figure 6 the illustration is of the first concept of the main villain. There are two characters, both representing the villain in their supervillain outfit and their everyday outfit. Both figures have their arms folded and legs crossed while standing. The figure in the supervillain outfit is wearing a white bodysuit with gold knee high boots and elbow length gloves. The gloves have black claws at the fingertips and there is a belt around the waist holding several golden orbs. The supervillain is wearing a golden lion mask and has a white hood with

the mask's ears poking out. The everyday figure on the left is a tan skinned woman wearing a black blazer and pants with a white blouse and black high heels. The figure has brown hair pulled up in a bun and brown eyes and dark red lips. The figure is wearing golden necklaces, golden rings, golden dangly earrings, and long golden nails.

Villain Idea Redesigned



Arch Nemesis "Gold Stinger"

- CEO of the company that mutated the insulin = HIVE
- Very wealthy, had to climb her way to the top
- Suffered a tragedy (?)
- Has her workers perform secret human experimentation and takes the successful results for her own use
- Reason for being a villain - (?) WIP

Figure 7. Villain Idea 1 Redesigned

As seen in figure 7 the illustration is of the main villain redesigned. The character is a tan skinned, plus-size woman wearing a black dress with black high heels. The character has brown hair worn down and wears golden necklaces, golden rings, long golden nails, and has golden dangly earrings. The character has brown eyes and dark red lips and she is drawn older but with heavy makeup. The figure is drawn with her hands on her hips and feet pressed together in a confident stance.

Final Results

In the final phase the protagonist's character was finalized and drawn on a character board. This process also happened with the other main characters and all of the side characters were placed on one character board in a line. The sketches that storyboarded the comic were fully rendered in black and white with hints of color. The original first finished page of the comic was fully colored as seen in figure 8, but after consideration the colors changed to monochrome with minimal color to give a more serious appearance and not appear so overwhelming to the viewer as seen in figure 9. For the remaining comic pages all of the coloring was done in monochrome with some pages including the colors blue, red, and yellow. This method proved to be quicker and more efficient compared to fully coloring each page. Additionally, the colors added represented each of the main characters. As seen in figures 10, 11, and 12, the colors blue and red represent the protagonist and the sidekick, while the yellow represents the villain and her henchmen.



Figure 8. Page 1 Color Test

As seen in figure 8 the image is of the first page of the comic. The page is fully colored with nine panels and dialogue. There is a black border around the comic page and the content includes the character waking up from a nightmare, getting out of bed, and getting dressed.

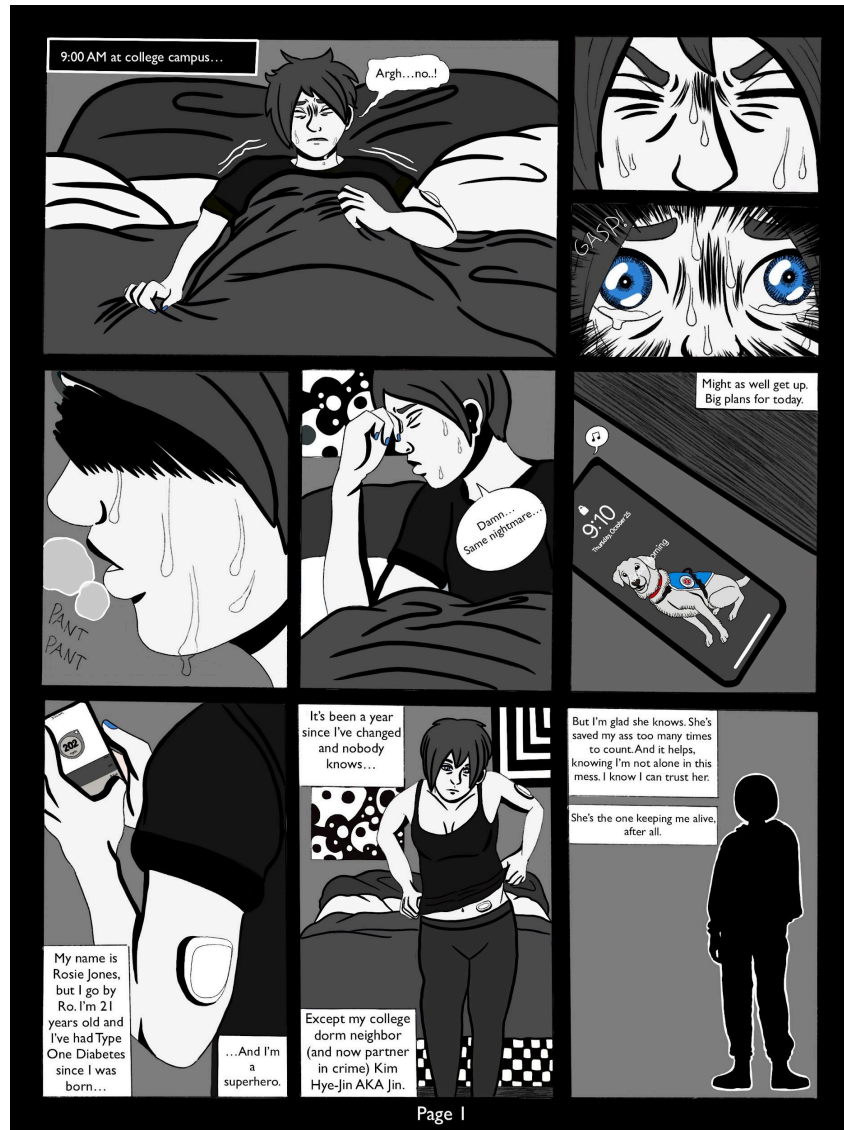


Figure 9. Page 1 Monochrome Version

As seen in figure 9 the image is of the first page of the comic. The page is in monochrome color with 9 panels and dialogue with hints of blue in the images. There is a black border around the comic page and the content includes the character waking up from a nightmare, getting out of bed, and getting dressed.

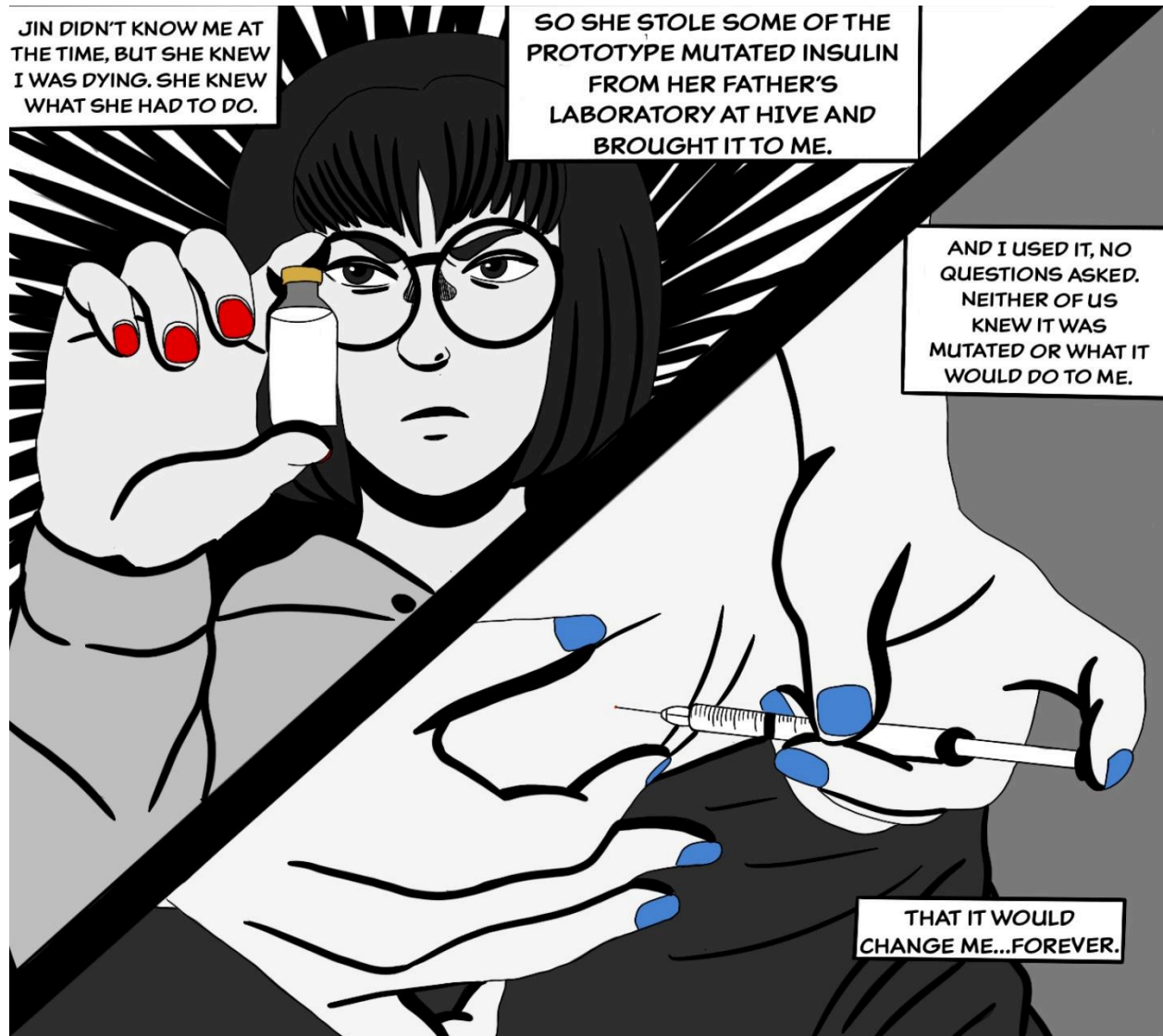


Figure 10. Colors of Protagonist and Sidekick

As seen in figure 10 the image is of two panels with the sidekick and the protagonist. The comic page is done in monochrome color with only hints of red, yellow, and blue. The dialogue is

explaining how the protagonist is using the insulin that the sidekick stole.



Figure 11. Color of Villain

As seen in figure 11 the image is of the main villain smirking at the viewer. The image is in monochrome with only hints of yellow. The dialogue box is the protagonist narrating about how the villain is her nemesis.



Figure 12. Color of Villain 2

As seen in figure 12 the image is of one of the villain's henchmen. The image is in color; with the figure dressed in a yellow suit with a yellow helmet that covers the face entirely. The helmet has a black visor and the yellow suit has black patches all over the body which are protective pads. The character is facing the viewer with his arm raised holding a white gun.

At the end of the experimental and final results emerged a main female protagonist and other fully fleshed out characters placed on character boards. Many of these characters explore the topic of feminism and disability. The process of building a character and the world that they exist in developed throughout this experimentation and the discovery of working in monochrome instead of full color and using three colors for representation for rendering comic pages came about. As a whole, this process addressed the topics of feminism, disability visibility, character design and world building.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Reflections and Discoveries

This art based research allowed me to work on an art project that I have wanted to do since I started learning character design, which is to write a comic about a superhero with type 1 diabetes. What I discovered from creating a comic entirely on my own is that there is a lot of planning that is involved, from storyboarding the comic to creating the characters and deciding what they will say. However, as much as the workload was, I did discover a passion for creating comics. I think my passion stems from when I was younger and I created small, unfinished comics. Additionally, creating a character who is so close to my heart in terms of having the same chronic illness and struggles in life has been a very eye opening experience and made me realize how strong I really am with all that I go through each day. In regards to the question asked by my thesis

Limitations

In the process of this art based research and thesis my work was slightly restricted in a couple ways. My first roadblock was that I did not plan more time in advance to create my comic storyboard. I think I would have felt more secure in my workload if I had started drafting the comic story in the first semester while still developing the characters. However, I know that it would have been harder to develop a story without the characters developed first, which is a critical first step. A second roadblock in my work was balancing other classes in addition to working on this thesis and artwork. Though I managed, I still had a tendency to unnecessarily stress about my time management and if I would be able to get everything done. Lastly, though it was not really a limitation, I think looking back I should have done more brainstorming the

summer before my senior year so I would be able to hit the ground running with my thesis work. This would have included doing more research, finding more sources, and brainstorming the story and characters ahead of time.

Future Directions

In the future I want to continue with character design and storyboarding in digital illustration. I would like to focus on characters that represent things I am very passionate about and experiences I have had that have changed my life in my professional practice. I dream of properly publishing my Ketone Krusher comic so other type 1 diabetics can have a fun comic to read about a relatable female protagonist. I plan on selling copies of my comic to Boston Children's hospital, as my doctors expressed much interest in my comic concept when I explained it to them. I would like to do freelance illustration as a part time job and hopefully gain more connections with animation industries and gaming companies for future opportunities to work with a team of artists.

Conclusions

Through my thesis of disability and feminism in visual art I researched literature and art examples of disability both physical and hidden displayed in artwork, especially with female figures. In this art based research I learned the complex process of creating a comic from scratch and the importance of educating the public about disabilities. Though the entire project was hard with time management and balancing workload with other classes and life activities, I finally created a comic book and superhero that I have dreamed of making since I was a kid. I plan on properly publishing the Ketone Krusher comic and working as a freelance illustrator in the future. The most important thing I have taken away from this year is that superheroes don't need to be able-bodied and flawless to be heroic.

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Appendix A: Resume

Phoenix Hagerman

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Objective

To become a character designer for a video game company or animation company and become a freelance illustrator.

Education

ENDICOTT COLLEGE, BEVERLY MA | UNDERGRADUATE

BFA in Studio Art with a concentration in intermedia.

GPA: 3.85- Dean's List

CLARK SCHOOL, ROWLEY MA | HONORS ROLL | MAY 9, 2018

Graduated with honors- Salutatorian.

Experience

GALLERY ASSISTANT | NORTH SHORE ARTS ASSOCIATION | MAY 19-JUNE 27, 2021

Five weeks of interning as a gallery assistant at the North Shore Arts Association in Gloucester, MA.

STAFF ASSISTANT | ESSEX NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA | JUNE 4-AUGUST 1, 2019

Eight weeks of interning as a staff assistant at the Essex National Heritage Area in Salem, MA.

ART TEACHER ASSISTANT | THE ART ROOM | APRIL 13- MAY 11, 2018

Six weeks of interning as an art teacher assistant at the Art Room in Topsfield, MA.

Skillset

Procreate, Photoshop, Illustrator, InDesign, Lightroom, Windows and Mac devices.

Art mediums: charcoal, pastel, graphite, pen and ink, acrylic, gouache, and oil.

Bookbinding, wheel thrown and hand building ceramics.

Data management, organization, and office assistance.

Appendix B: Additional Images



Figure 14. Comic Cover Page*Figure 15. Protagonist Character Board*

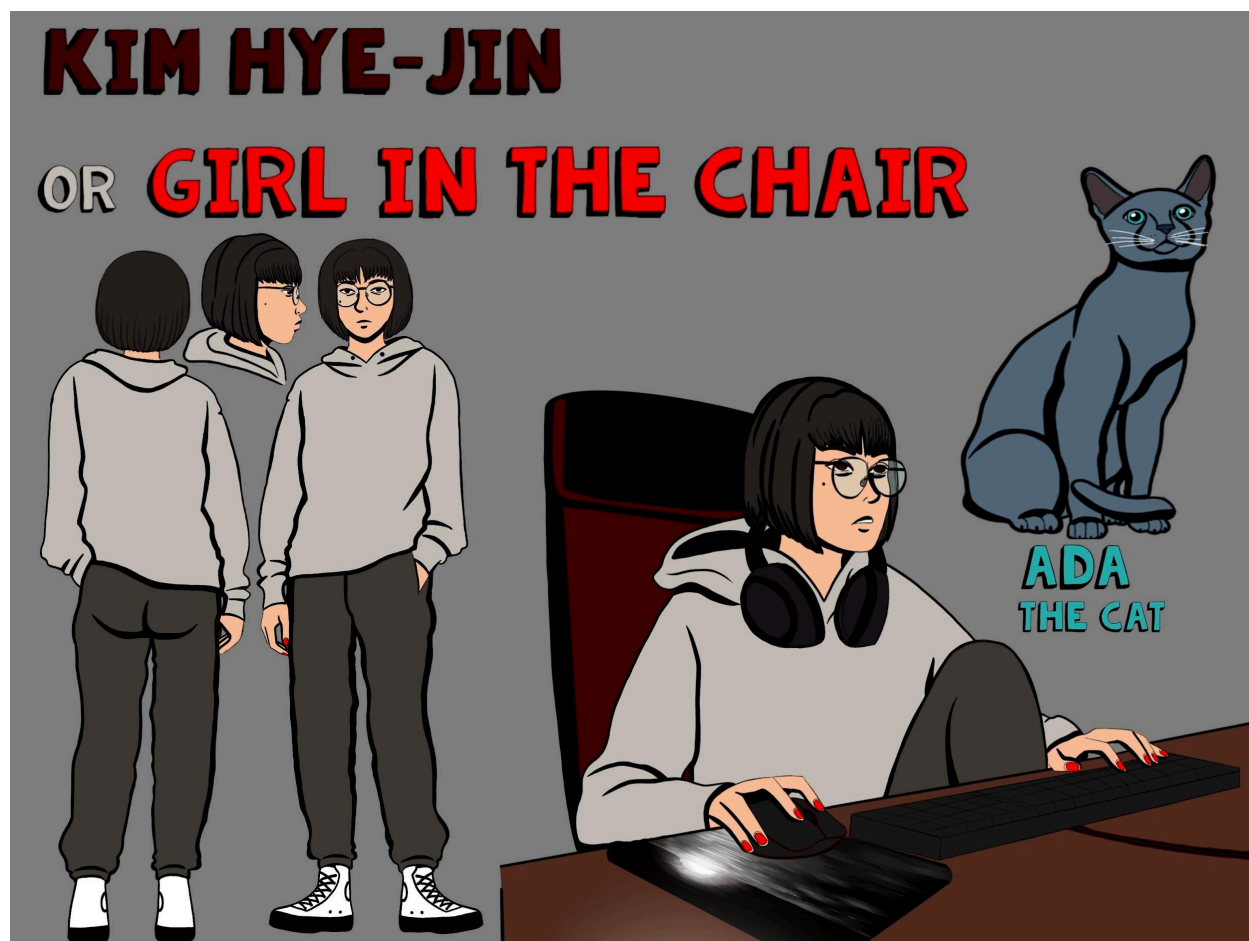


Figure 16. Girl in the Chair Character Board



Figure 17. Villain Character Board

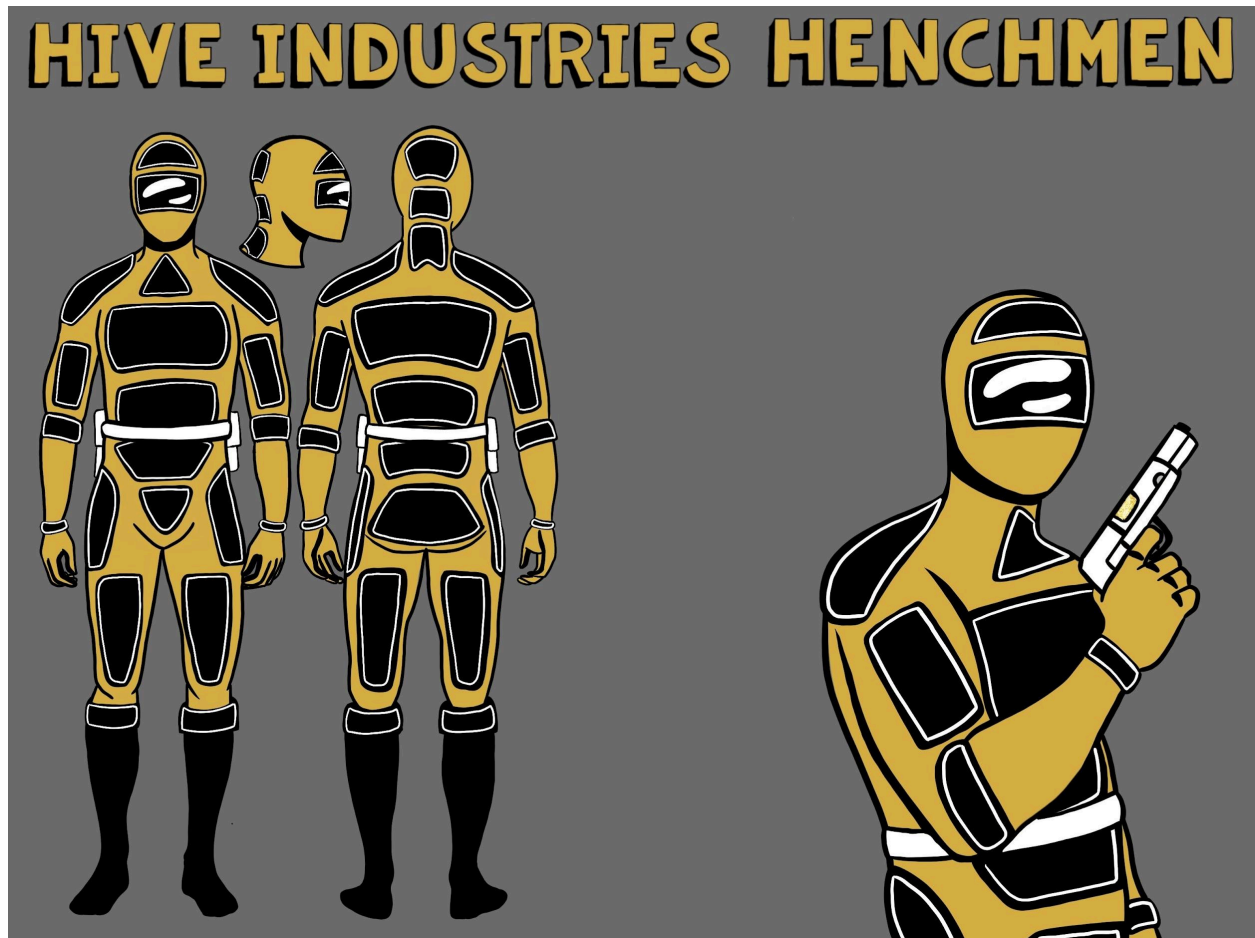


Figure 18. Henchmen Character Board

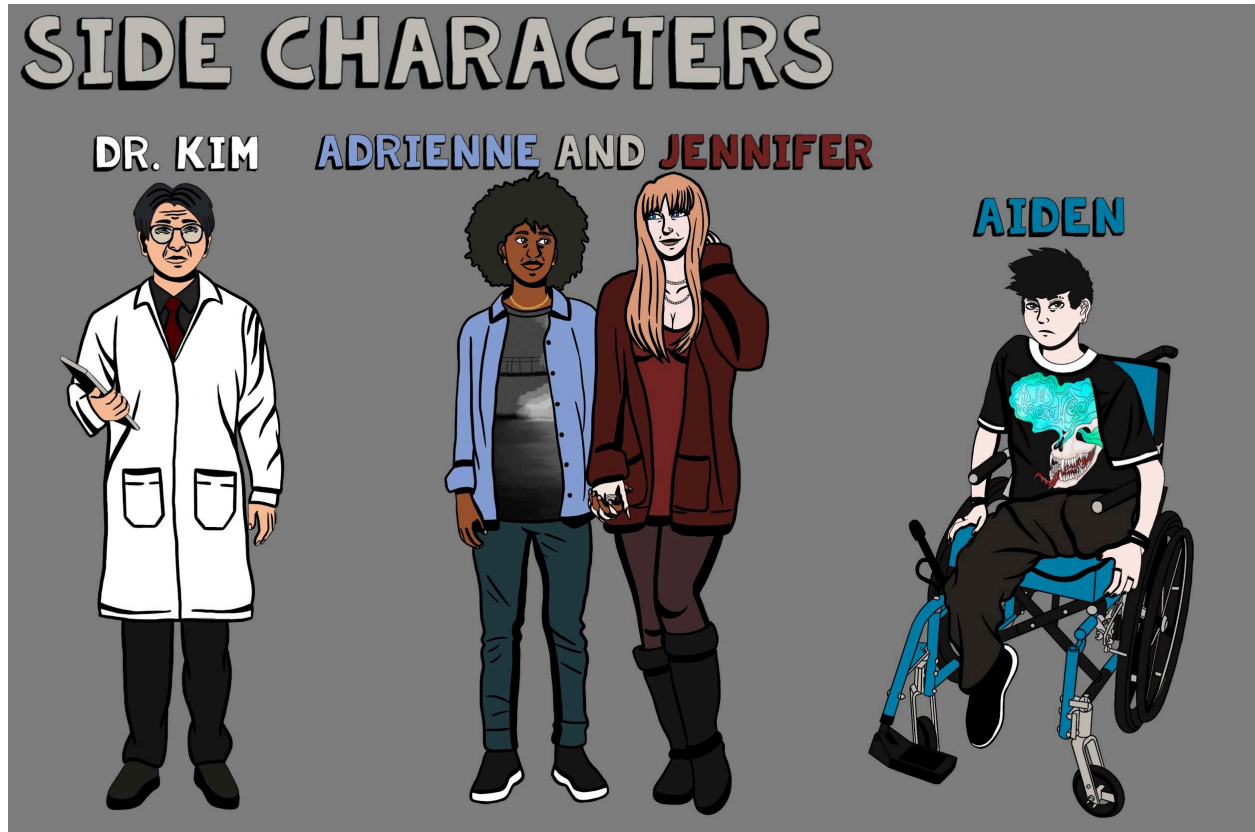


Figure 19. Side Characters Character Board