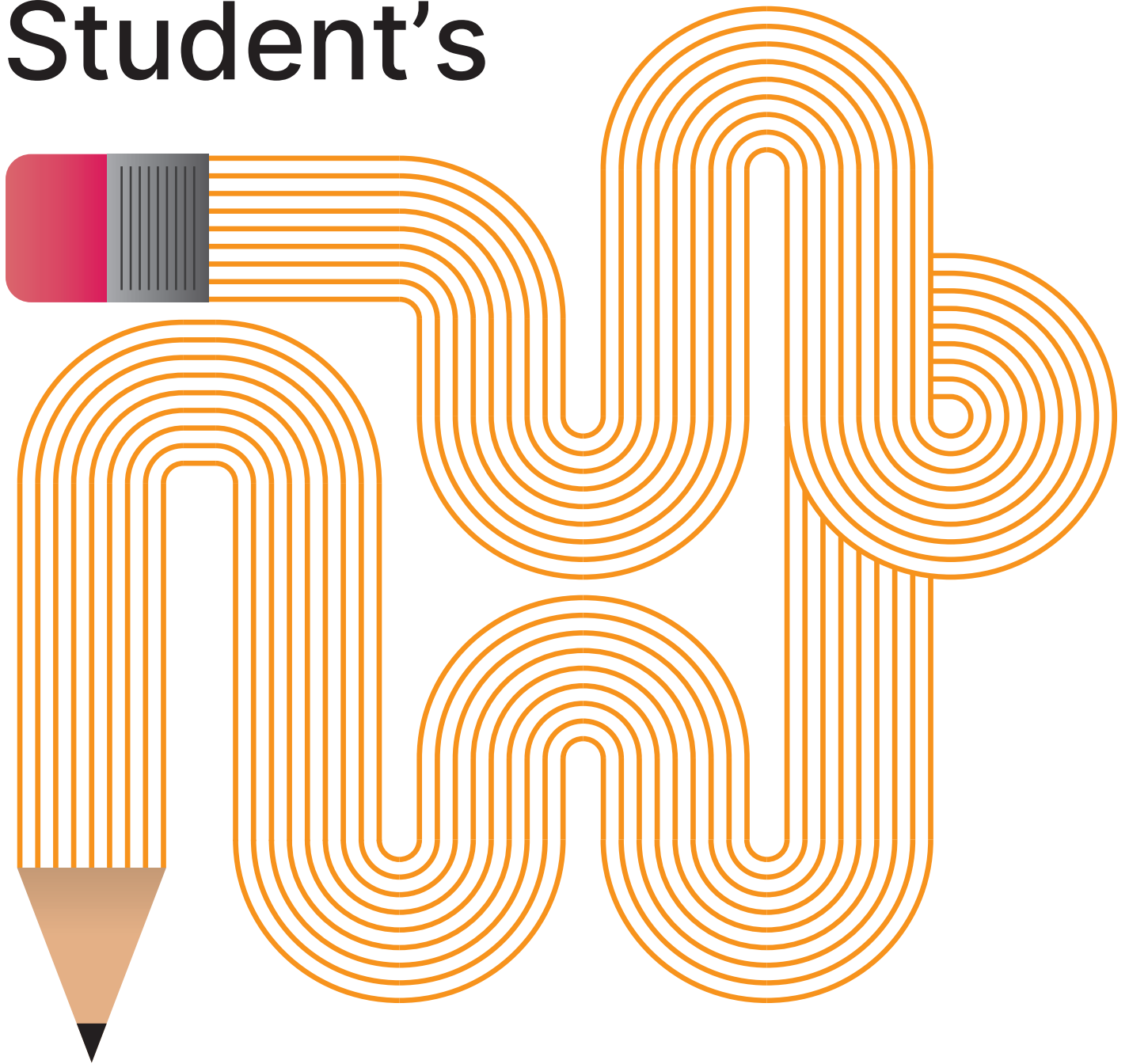


A Graphic Design Student's



Timeline

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26	From me to you A reflection to students.	28-29	Timeline picture Images of my senior thesis project in Seton Gallery.		

PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to help students recognize and understand the challenges they face when starting their design career, especially the fear of imposter syndrome and the moments of self-doubt. By addressing these concerns, students will have a clear understanding of the vast environment of graphic design, while producing better quality work and improving feedback for their peers.

By creating a supporting environment where students can share experiences, offer constructive feedback, and reflect on their own growth, this thesis encourages students to strengthen their technical skills, improving their mindset, and focusing their professional awareness for the competitive field of graphic design. Additionally, through the use of my personal work, both successful and less successful examples, to demonstrate the lessons learned and show how project experiences can inform growth and understanding in the practice of design.

To achieve these goals, the project includes four interviews with designers and artists in different disciplines, currently active in the field. These interviews were built on a series of questions based on each person's experience in the arts field, along with their early struggles as a student entering the field of art/design. Finally, there are a series of twelve projects that I believe had benefited me the most in my design career. These projects will range from major successes to not quite successful ones. Each year presents a brief description of the content learned, along with a summary of each project.

MY CREATIVE JOURNEY

As a graphic designer, my creative journey has been shaped by moments of uncertainty, self-doubt, self-discovery, and a transformation into who I am today. When I was a sophomore in high school, I had no clear vision of what I wanted to do with my life. In March, the beginning of the pandemic, COVID-19 placed everything on pause, leaving me with time to reflect on my future. Days turned into months, and before I knew it, I was a senior still asking myself the same question, “What direction do I want my life to take?”

Art had long been a constant in my life. Since the age of twelve, I had filled sketchbooks with illustrations of characters inspired by classic movies and TV shows. I was fascinated by how a simple drawing could express emotion, movement, and a story. At first, I believed my path was in illustration and storytelling. I wanted to build a career around the traditional art I had always loved, yet lacked the form of communication I wanted to convey with my work. Conflicted with this choice, I started a conversation with my high school art teacher, who



introduced me to his love for graphic design. He shared work from his college career, along with his portfolio. I realized that graphic design was a profession where communication and creativity merged. Design was not just about creating good artwork, but rather a form of purpose, clarity, and connection. This realization became the foundation for my future career in design.

After touring several schools, I discovered the University of New Haven’s Art and Design program. The environment was filled with passion, experimentation, and freedom. I knew this was where I could grow both conceptually and technically. Before graduating with an art award granted by my high school, I committed to the University of New Haven.

Over the summer of transitioning between high school and college, I began to immerse myself in the digital side of art for the first time. Learning the Adobe Suite programs like Illustrator and Photoshop through YouTube. Where I once used a pencil and paper, quickly became layers, anchor points, and endless tools that I barely understood. I often questioned whether I had chosen the right path in my freshman year and fell into a state of depressive episodes about the choices of study, and my work.

My first year was a test of both creativity and resilience. I was living away from home for the first time while being surrounded by new people. I struggled with self-doubt and the pressure to fit in. I constantly compared myself to others who seemed more experienced and confident. Critiques felt like the guillotine to my projects and the endless hours I spent on the work. Over time, I began to understand that design is not about perfection as, nothing is truly perfect. Designing is about the process of understanding and failing, while growing as a better designer.

Soon critiques felt more and more enlightening; I learned from my past

mistakes and applied my newer skills to each project. Every project, critique, and late-night work session pushed me closer to finding my own voice as a designer.

My work now focuses on the relationships between storytelling, identity, and visual communication. What once began as a simple love for drawing led me to take a leap of faith into the design world. Here I discovered numerous opportunities that have inspired me to continue my design career. As I approach the final months of my senior year I’ve developed this thesis project, to reflect on my journey and give back to others who are now in a place I once was.



Title: Sceletus et caput
Year: 2025
Media: Oil on canvas



Title: Terminal 13
Year: 2024
Media: Photography



Title: Stabbed through the Heart
Year: 2026
Media: Adhesive and transparent acrylic, surrounded by a wooden frame.

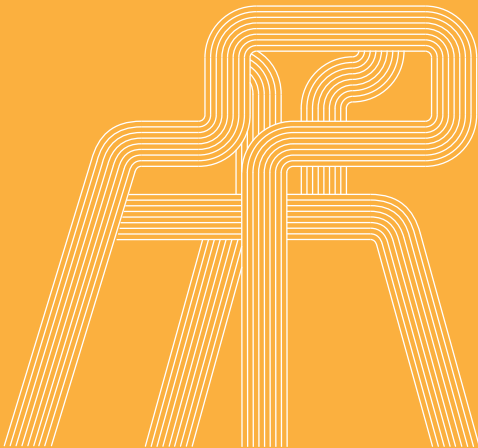
THE INTERVIEWS

Laura Salaberry is a visual storyteller and multimedia designer based in Queens, New York, who works with video production, motion graphics, illustration, and editing. She has collaborated with major media organizations including The New York Times and Dow Jones, creating visually engaging digital stories and short-form video content.

Judith Modrak is a New York City-based sculptor and installation artist whose work blends art and science, exploring themes such as memory, emotion, neuroscience, and the natural environment. Her sculptures and participatory public installations often address ecological issues and human connection while encouraging audiences to engage with ideas about the mind and the planet.

Alexander Gilkey is a multidisciplinary self-taught designer whose work blends strategy, branding, and visual communication to create purposeful and engaging design solutions. His practice emphasizes collaboration and impact, using design not just as a visual tool but as a way to support meaningful causes and connect with audiences.

Allison Poulsen is a fashion designer with over a decade of experience working in the industry, blending artistic intuition with the technical demands of corporate design. Her work is influenced by romantic and decorative aesthetics, drawing inspiration from styles like Art Nouveau and a personal love for beauty, texture, and expressive detail.



LAURA SALABERRY

In the early stages of her career, Laura describes design not just as a moment of confidence, but as a constant negotiation between imagination and limitation. The ideas were always present in her design process, but the tools to bring them to life often lagged. That gap, she explains, was one of the frustrating parts of learning. “You can see what you want to make, but you are not yet able to accomplish it.”

Over time, that tension shifted. Through repetition and persistence, the technical barriers began to dissolve. What once felt impossible slowly became second nature. But mastery, she notes, introduces a new challenge—breaking away from what you’ve learned. She explains that early in her design career, professors focused on control, such as understanding software, refining techniques, and achieving precision.

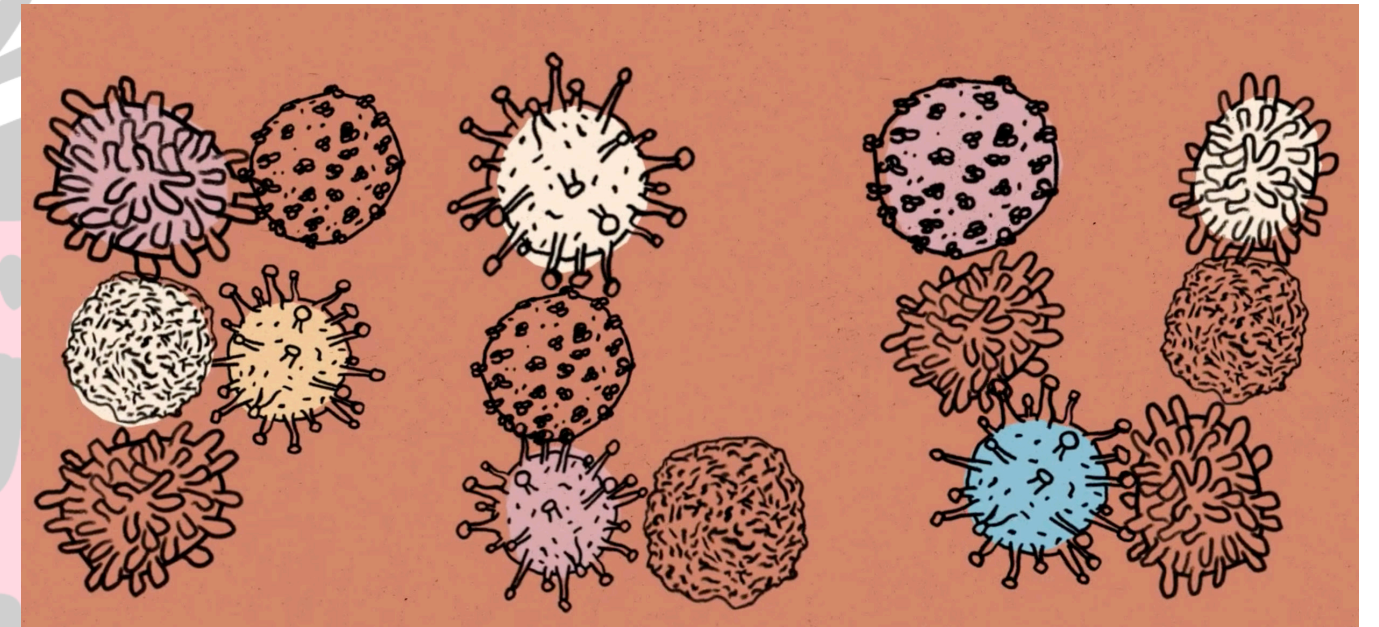
Laura’s work in journalism reinforces this evolution. Each task demands a new approach, a new way of thinking, and often a new set of skills.



No two stories are the same, and that unpredictability is what keeps the work alive. Still, even with years of experience, doubt never fully disappears. “It happens all the time, every project, the best thing to do is overcome that fear.”

What has changed is her relationship with that uncertainty? Rather than resisting it, she embraces it as a part of the creative process. Trial and error, iterations, and adaptation are not signs of failure. They are a part of the work itself that comes with being a designer. For Laura, design is less about arriving at a perfect solution and more about staying open to feedback, collaboration, and the possibility that the best idea might not be the first one you hold on to.

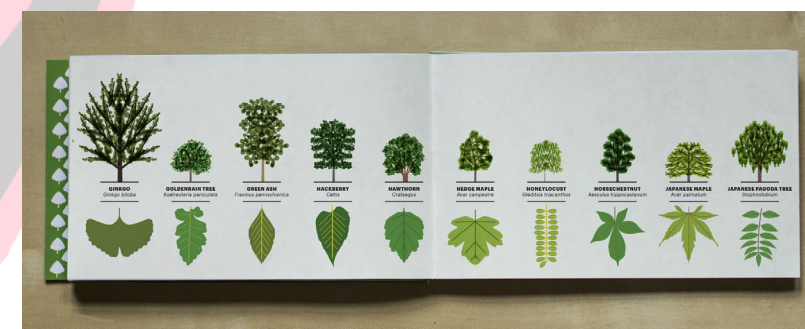
(background)
Title: Lara Salaberry Logo
Media: Animation and motion graphics



Title: The cost of Things: Flu
Year: 2021
Media: Animation and motion graphics



Title: Retire Away - Market Watch
Year: 2021
Media: Design and animation



Title: All the trees in NYC
Year: 2007
Media: Design and book printing

JUDITH MODRAK

Judith describes the early stages of her career as a time when she focused on building skills and exploring the subjects that interested her most. Rather than feeling limited by obstacles, she developed strengths that helped guide her projects towards her fascination with the sciences. These interests eventually became a central theme in her work, leading her to reflect deeply on what it means to her and how it can communicate the complex ideas of her art. Currently, Judith is continuing her passion in the sciences and arts and also aiming to help students like myself in their own creative journeys.

For students entering the creative fields, Judith believes that education should expand on studio practice. She wishes that the business side of being an artist had been discussed more during the earlier start in her career. She wishes that in her past, educators had talked about setting up online portfolios and making connections with other artists. She also wishes that she had been “taught about the politics



of art,” when to adjust an idea, how to communicate meaning effectively, and how to persuade audiences to engage with the deeper concepts behind a work. Without these deeper connections, she believes that the work is not as effective and loses its emotional value.

For students navigating the start of their own creative journeys, regardless of major, Judith’s reflections offer a reminder that education is not just about mastering techniques. It is also about building confidence, understanding the professional world, and learning how personal interest can guide work to be meaningful and strengthen the value of one’s own work.

(background)
Title: Fluid Pathways
Year: 2019
Venue: Murcia, Spain
Media: plaster, concrete, pigments



Title: Earth's Voices
Year: 2025
Venue: Saint John Fisher University (SJFU), Rochester, New York
Media: aqua resin casts, plant and tree foliage, mirrors



Title: Our Memories in Naumburg Bandshell
Year: 2018 - March 2019
Venue: Central Park, New York, New York
Media: resin cast, acrylic memory stones



Title: Growth
Year: 2021
Venue: Pen + Brush Gallery, New York, New York
Media: plaster casts, pigment and oil

ALEXANDER GILKEY

Alex’s path into design didn’t begin in a studio or a classroom. It started with a sense of curiosity and ambition. Without formal training, he entered the field entirely self-taught, sparked by TED talks and the willingness to explore. At the time, he wasn’t studying design as a profession but instead studying sociology. Still, he found his way into creative work, becoming an editorial cartoonist and filling his sketchbooks with ideas that slowly bridged the gap between interest and practice.

That early period in Alexander’s career was defined by experimentation. Teaching himself tools like Adobe Illustrator during the pandemic, Alexander approached design not as just something to master but as a process meant to develop and grow into. Every project became for him a new learning experience, offering a new challenge requiring a new skill.



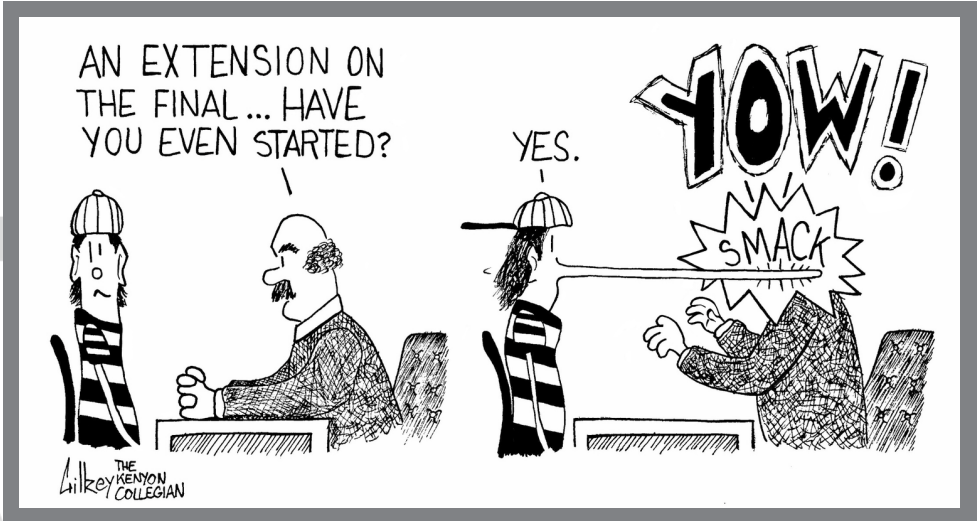
Being self-taught came with its own obstacles. Without a structured education, there was no one to slow him down, emphasizing the importance of layouts, grids, and composition. He explains “you want to jump in and create, but those basics are what make the work successful”.

At the core of Alexander’s journey is a belief that design remains deeply human. Despite new tools and technologies, he sees creativity as something rooted in personal expression, something that can’t be automated or replaced by a prompt. For him, starting out as a self-taught designer was never a limitation; It was an invitation to stay curious and keep learning, this led him to build a practice defined not by perfection but by persistence.

(background)
Title: Alexander Gilkey logo
Media: Digital Art



Title: God's Love We Deliver 40th anniversary logo
Media: Digital art and design



Title: Editorial cartoons from The Kenyon Collegian
Year: 2020
Media: pen and ink on paper scanned



Title: College Concierge logo
Media: Digital art and design

ALLISON POULSEN

Allison remembers the early days of design not as a time of confidence, but of constant questioning. “For the whole first year, I felt like I was just trying to keep my head above water.” Coming from an arts focused background, she entered college believing she understood design, only to be confronted with the confusion of a creative direction. Unlike math, where answers are concrete, design demanded interpretation. Instructions like “make it feel emotional”, or, “create movement” within a still image left her searching for clarity in a field that typically has no real solution.

That uncertainty, she explains, never fully disappears. Even now, over ten years into her career in fashion design, Allison still grapples with moments of doubt, yet she comes to understand that this discomfort is part of the process of being a designer.

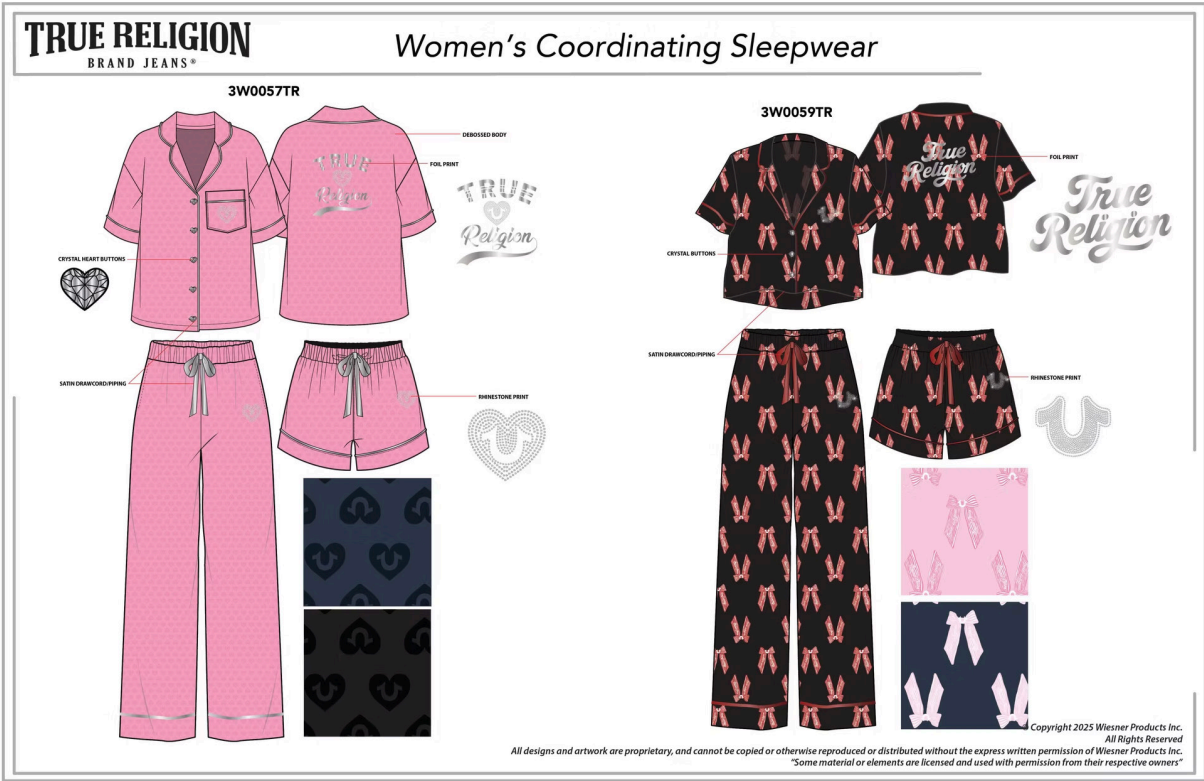
Transitioning into the professional world introduced a new series of challenges. In corporate environments, creativity becomes collaborative and



often constrained. She claims that designers must balance personal vision with clients’ demands, learning quickly that their work is no longer purely their own. “Your art becomes a community,” Allison explains. Feedback can feel impersonal, even harsh, but it taught her how to separate herself from the work and defend her decisions with confidence.

Despite the structure of corporate design, Allison still values the creative practices she had developed as a student, sketching, researching, and experimenting freely. She talks about how these habits are easy to lose but crucial to maintain in order to grow as a designer. Allison also mentions how she wishes that she had continued to sketch and iterate her own ideas more often.

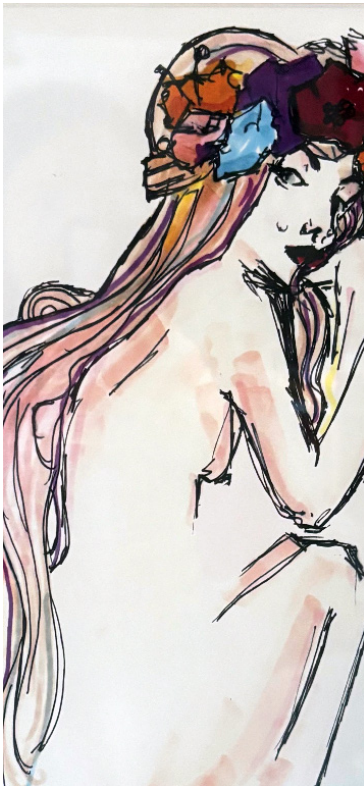
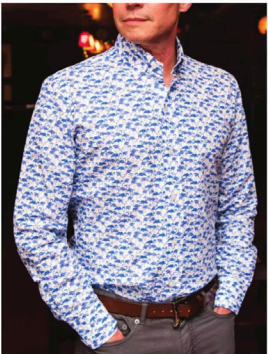
(background)
Title: NOUVEAUILL
Media: Ink and water color on paper



Title: True Religion (Women's Coordinating Sleepwear)
Year: 2025
Media: Digital Art



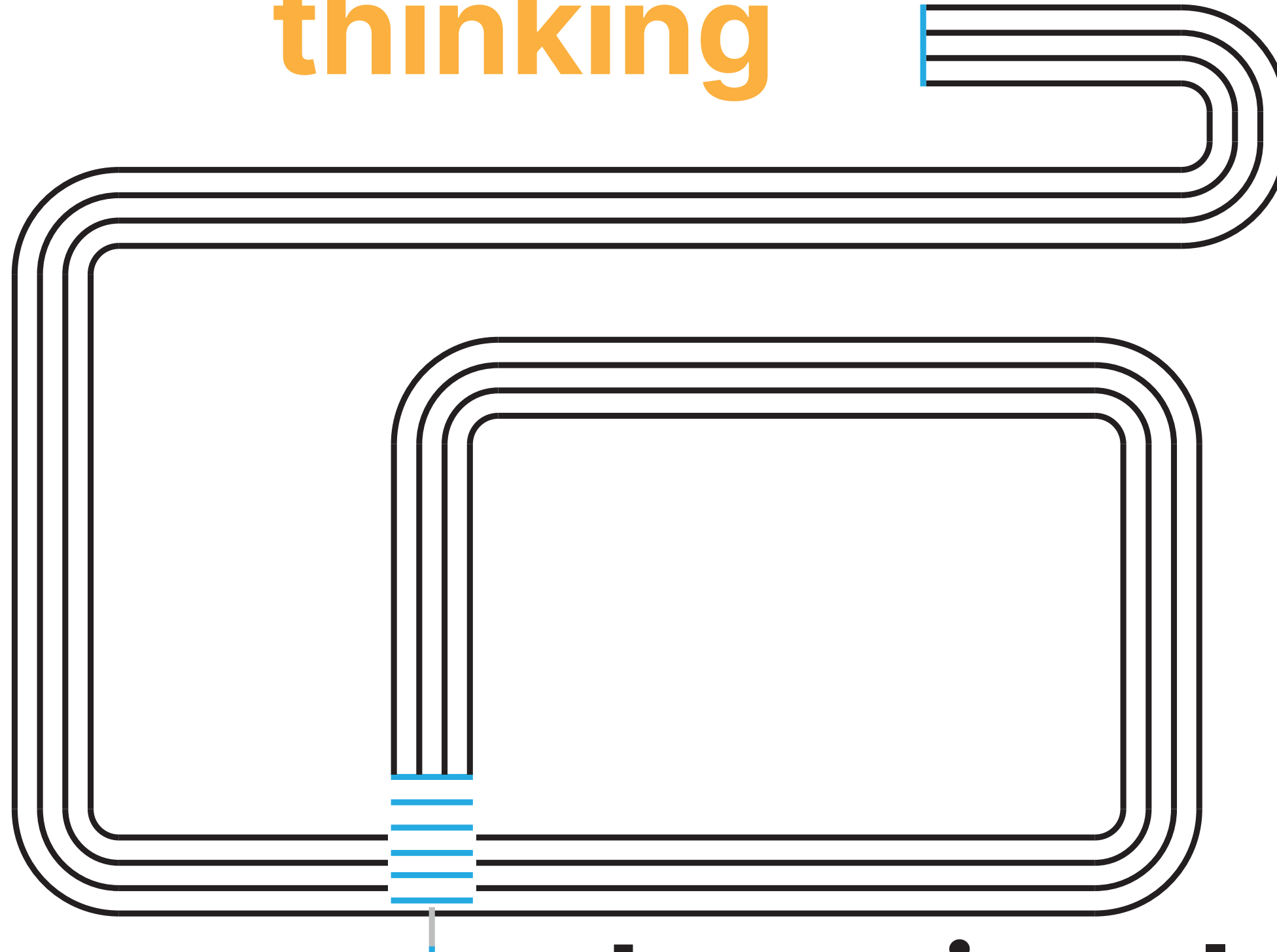
Title: LEBURY SS19
Year: 2019
Media: Print on seersucker



Title: untitled sketch
Year: 2015
Media: watercolor, marker, graphite
2014

“Design is thinking

Timeline of a Designer



One of the most important lessons I have learned came from my own work. From the projects that instantly clicked in my head to the long, degrading brain teasers I could not figure out, I have learned one key lesson from each project. By allowing both successes and failures to fuel my passion for graphic design, I was able to build off each lesson to shape my progression.

To help inspire students in understanding what it means to become a designer I'm presenting Three of my personal and/or school projects from each year that have taught me a valuable lesson. Each project begins by summarizing the year based on the skill sets and fundamentals prioritized. The next section gives an overview of each project, including a brief explanation, steps, and media used. Finally each year and project is discussed in more depth, including the struggles of the assignment and, along with what I could have changed.

made visual.”

Saul Bass | *graphic designer and filmmaker*

Year One

Freshman year was spent learning and understanding the fundamentals of drawing and graphic design. Freshman year drawing classes consisted of large-scale projects, understanding perspective, colors, and types of illustrations. Graphic design consisted of learning the fundamentals of how to conduct research, the Adobe Suite applications, and creating both digital and traditional projects.

Drawing II midterms consisted of choosing a small scale object and creating a six-foot realistic image of the object. The object that I had decided to produce was a standard Altoids mints can. For this project, I had printed out the staged image of the can and proceeded to model a grid to work on each section into smaller parts. This project was executed on brown kraft paper and black and white charcoal.

In 3D Design, I created a wearable replica of the Doom Slayer 1993 helmet using foam board, acrylic sheets, and silver spray paint, applying hands-on fabrication techniques to bring a complex, iconic object to life. However, one of the major struggles I encountered was using an excessive amount of foam board, which caused the final piece to become bulkier than intended, resulting in many refinements to the original design.

Graphic Design One is when we were introduced to the Adobe Illustrator, for this assignment I created a digital illustration of Hotel Marcel, originally designed by Marcel Breuer, learning how to effectively use layers, shapes, color, and composition to recreate architectural form in a clean, vector-based format. Together, these projects reflect my growth across multiple disciplines, highlighting both my technical development and my ability to learn from challenges, particularly in material selection and execution.



- 1 Title: Want a Mint?
Year: 2023
Media: Black and White charcoal on newsprint
- 2 Title: Doom slayer Helmet
Year: 2023
Media: Foam board, spray paint and clear adhesive glued together
- 3 Title: Hotel Marcel Illustration
Year: 2023
Media: Digital art

Year Two

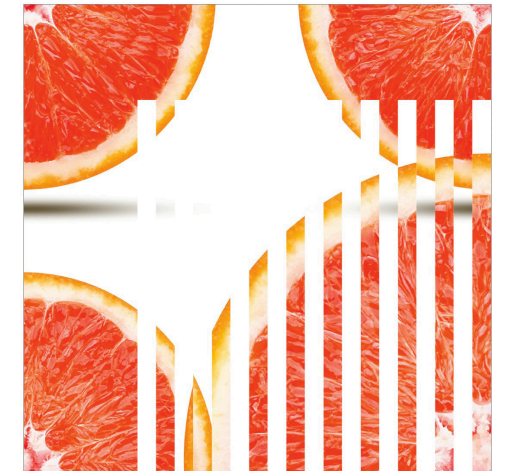
Sophomore year, started diving deeper into the basics and began long term projects spanning multiple weeks throughout the semester. These projects were organized to tie together both the research and design process. Ultimately allowing students to practice their own presentational skills in front of their peers. The range of work started to take on a more digital aspect, but with traditional additives like utilizing the printers, scanners, and the university’s makerspace.

In Introduction to Communication Design, I worked with an established system in InDesign, first creating structured digital compositions with text and then translating that same grid base thinking into a series of images with a citrus fruit, reinforcing my understanding of alignment, hierarchy, and how grids can help designers in both the physical and digital realm of design.

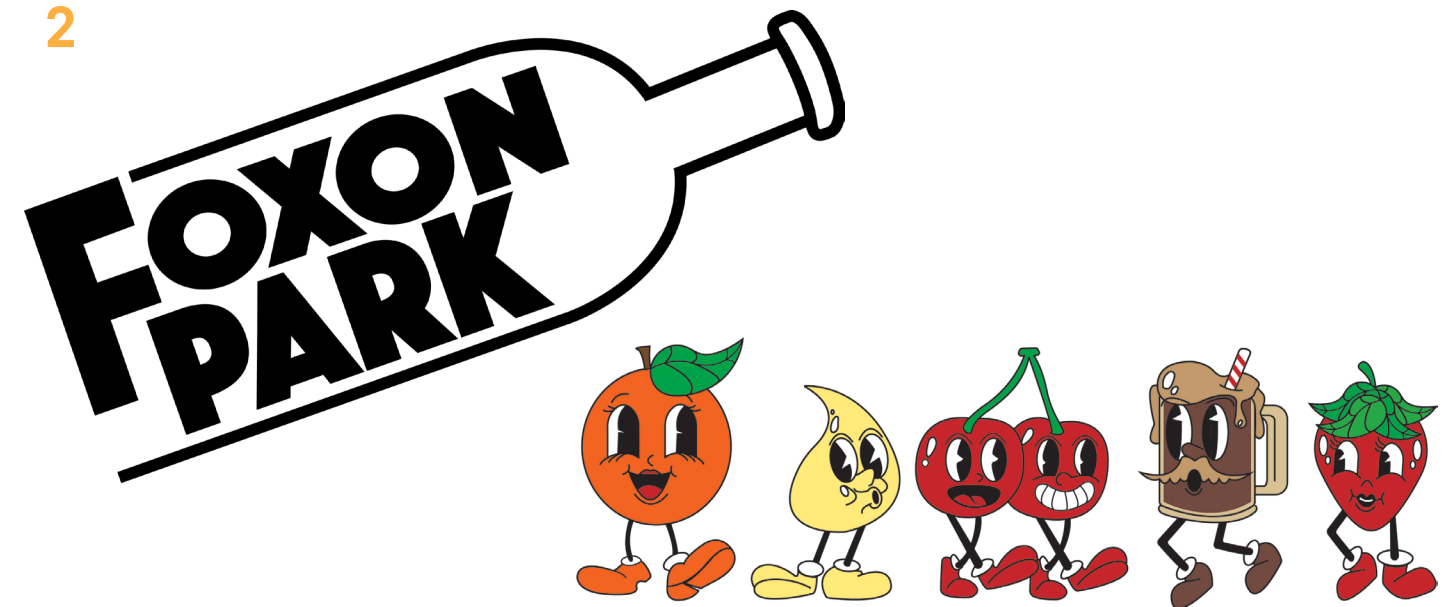
For Designing in Context, I took on a long term branding project centered around Foxon Park soda, a local East Haven soda company. The Project began with conducting research into the company’s history, intended audience, and visual identity before redesigning a modern logo and developing a series of characters to create a more family friendly and approachable brand presence. The project allowed me to strengthen my ability to connect concepts and audiences, and to have a visual story being told for an extended period of time.

In Typography, I shifted towards more personal expression by designing a custom typeface based on the cyberpunk and post apocalyptic aesthetics, constructing each letter and number from scratch with sharp angles and consistent fifteen degree tilts, which challenged my perception, consistency and attention to detail; However one of the main struggles I encountered was becoming too absorbed in the details of certain letters and concepts. This made it difficult to step back and evaluate the design objectively, and was further complicated by the lack of strong communication between the instructor and I, limiting the amount of needed guidance and feedback for the process of this project.

1



2



3



1

Title: Grids and boxes
Year: 2023
Media: Digital art

2

Title: Foxon Park Rebranding
Year: 2024
Media: Digital art and branding

3

Title: Cyberpsychosis
Year: 2024
Media: Digital typography and art

Year Three

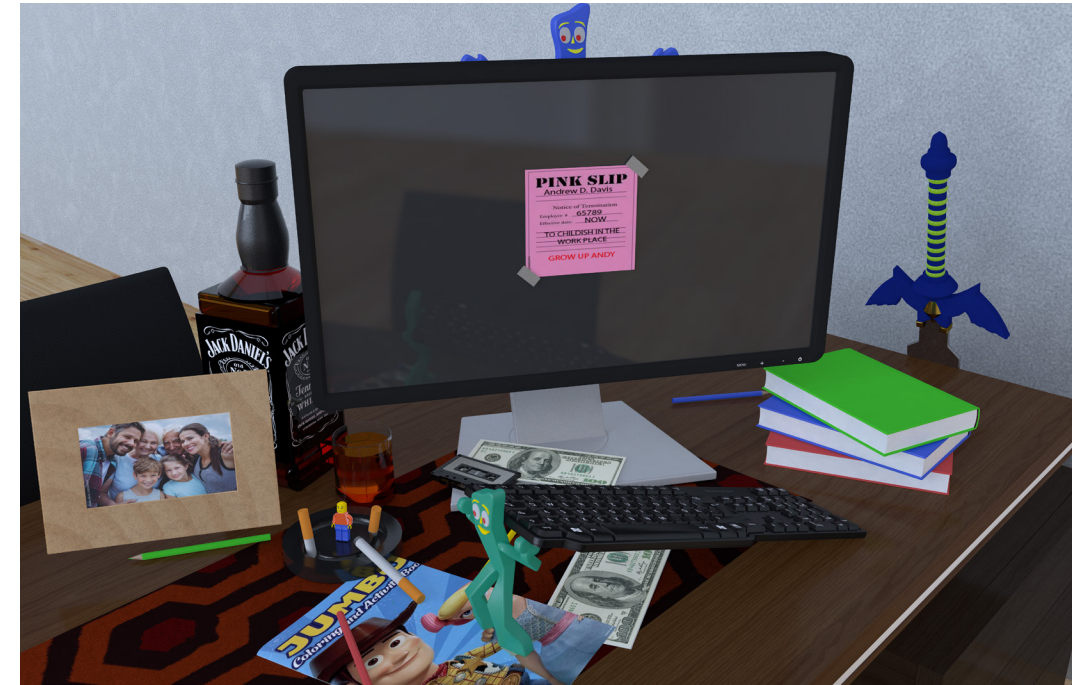
Junior year is where most students find a sense of style in their own work, along with trying to cater to an industry they are interested in. Similar to sophomore year, students continued to work on their presentational and design skills while also planning to create their own portfolios and websites to advertise themselves. The range of work depended on what field or study the student catered towards, often revisiting older projects and applying newer knowledge to the outcome.

In 3D Modeling and Animation, I focused on transforming 2-dimensional ideas into a fully realized 3-dimensional composition. This project centered around life and death, the theme of growing, or the life and death of growing from a child to an adult. I juxtaposed adult-labeled items with childlike toys and crafts to create a sense of contrast and narrative; Using Cinema 4D, I developed both my modeling and rendering skills while learning how to communicate meaning in my own design and its process.

In Designing for the Client, I applied my skills in a real world context by selecting a waste management company called New England Disposal Technologies (NEDT) reimagining its branding through the creation of a friendly caricature and the simplified name “NED.” This combined my skills in Illustrator, Photoshop, Indesign and 3D rendering to produce a cohesive and modernized visual identity, which strengthened my ability to design for a specific audience.

My Internship with Educators in Virtual Reality, which served as both a professional and personal undertaking that brought together multiple bodies of my own work including NED, Foxon Park, and Break the Limit, into a fully interactive VR exhibition. This project required the use of the Adobe and 3D applications I have known, while also taking into account user interactions and a presentation in an immersive environment. The complexity of integrating many different projects into one cohesive VR experience, along with the technical demands, made this internship the most challenging. The final form of this project was a walkthrough of each project, along with a large scale interactive model.

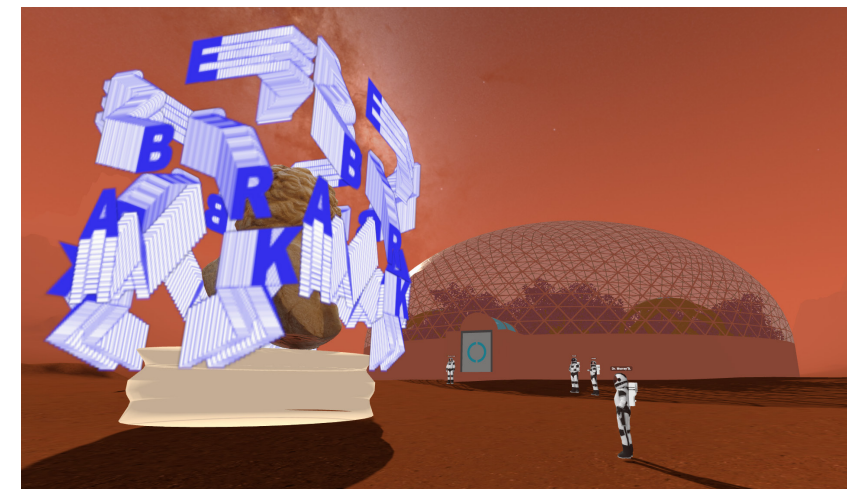
1



2



3



1

Title: Grow Up Andy!
Year: 2024
Media: 3D rendering and modeling

2

Title: NED
Year: 2025
Media: Digital art and branding

3

Title: Limitless: Through the lens of mind and motion
Year: 2025
Media: 3D rendering and modeling in an immersive world

Year Four

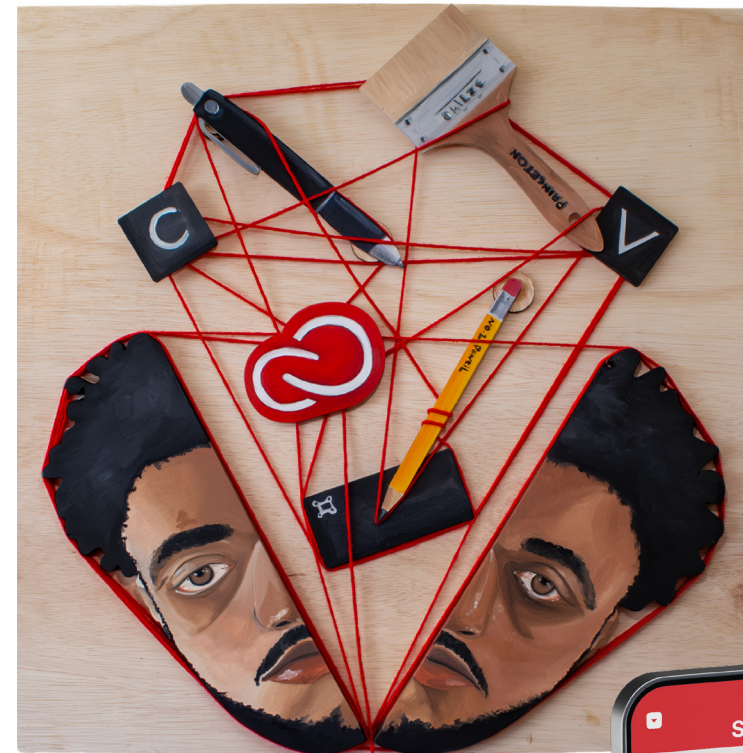
Senior year marks the end of a student's journey as simply a student designer. The goal for the student is to maximize their portfolio with their best work while also planning their senior projects and a final show. Students work independently to choose a topic of their choice and come together to discuss a theme for the show, consisting of all art and design majors. The following projects require a commitment of a full two semesters.

In Painting One, I created a large scale "13 by 13" mixed media self portrait piece inspired by the artist Matt Cunningham, combining a constructed wooden canvas with a silhouette of my face as the centerpiece. My face was painted onto the two silhouette pieces along with representational objects such as key buttons and applications. Finally, to tie this project together I used string to create the finished piece. Titled, Diamond Mind, it reflects on the idea of the diamond method taught to us over the course of four years.

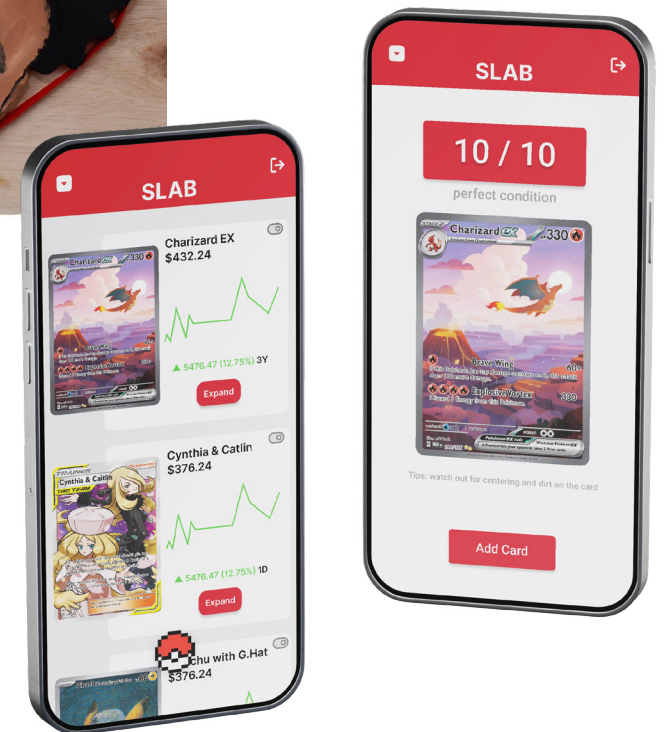
In UX/UI Design, I developed another brand and application called SLAB tailored to the trading and card collecting community, focusing on card appreciation and tracking the price of cards over time. Both parts of this project were made using Figma and Adobe InDesign to construct a clean and precise interface that emphasized usability and audience focused design. This interface went through various testing phases, peer reviews and requirements for following ADA accessibility before its final critique.

Portfolio photography was a completely new media I discovered over the summer. My goal for this class was to learn the basic functions of a camera and take pictures every Saturday reflecting on my work as a photographer. Some of the biggest challenges came from this class and understanding concepts like ISO and shutter speeds, and the best time of day or environment for certain settings. Whether it was reflective oil-painted surfaces or framing and staging large-scale work I found it frustrating to take the best quality of photos. The goal for this class is to gather three of the best photos per week then create a collage into a series of graphic design work. Tying this project to my major while also understanding photography and creating a portfolio.

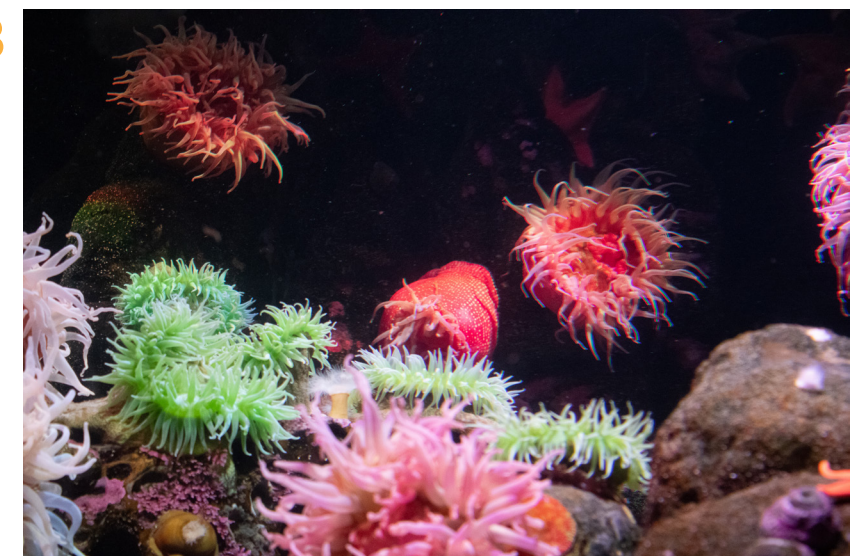
1



2



3



1

Title: Diamond Mind
Year: 2025
Media: oil paint, yarn and wood

2

Title: SLAB
Year: 2025
Media: Digital art and design

3

Title: Portfolio Photography
Year: 2026
Media: Photography and design

From me to you

As a freshman, students will go through a sort of “art/design major shock” when entering college. As a student who may have easily both passed through their first twelve years of school, it’s hard to adjust to long hours and required outside work. It’s also hard to understand that everyone is at a different level. We all have our own strengths and weaknesses. Students should not be afraid to reach out to peers and teachers for feedback about their work. Over the course of your four-plus years at college this is your time to mess up and fail at something. It’s also a time to try and go outside of your comfort zone and test experimental concepts and learn from these experiences. The best thing a student like myself learned over the course of design school is to be open-minded and try anything and everything that the school has to offer.

Another point I would like to mention is time management. In college, in general, it is very easy to focus on long projects, but it is just as easy to forget about essays and other non-major courses. The best advice I can give is to write everything down in a planner or using a whiteboard of some sort.

Sometimes ideas don’t usually come to my head instantly, and it’s a tough spot to be in when an assignment is due within the next couple of hours. When this happens, the best thing to do is to step away and do something else, like go out for a walk or get something to eat. You’d be surprised how much a random object can spark a series of ideas.

Finally, remember to take care of your mental health as a student. For most people, this is their first time living away from home, and most likely, sharing a room with one or two other people they have only ever met via email. It is also a time when you may arrive on campus not knowing anyone at all. If you are going through these fears and emotions before going to college, just know someone else is also going through these emotions as well. I advise everyone to reach out to their peers and plan days to work together or just grab a slice and talk. This helped me, and now I have close friends from different fields helping me with my own work, and I help them with theirs. I think this is the best about being in the art/design field because of the mix of ideas and feedback about your work.

Whether you’re just starting or planning to be a designer, I urge everyone to be as open and creative as possible. Best of luck as you take this first big step in your design career.



Title: Four Experimental Self Portraits
Year: 2025
Media: Oil painting on Canvas pads

THE
MELINE





Choosing to be a design student has been one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life, shaping not only my creative abilities and passion but also my perseverance and mindset. This book is meant to inspire young designers and students to take that first step, while also giving an honest look at the realities and challenges that come with pursuing design. Through a selection of my personal and academic projects, I showcase a range of work created over four years of design school, highlighting both successful and not so successful outcomes that pushed me to grow. Each piece reflects an important lesson learned, a risk taken, or a problem that I solved. This is more than just a portfolio; This collection represents the process of becoming a designer, embracing failure, and continuing to move forward.

"My argument is that all graphic designers hold high levels of *responsibility* in society.

We take

invisible
ideas

and make them tangible.

That's our job."

-Debbie Millman

