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The Unwantables: An Exploration of Visual Narrative

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Virginia Commonwealth University

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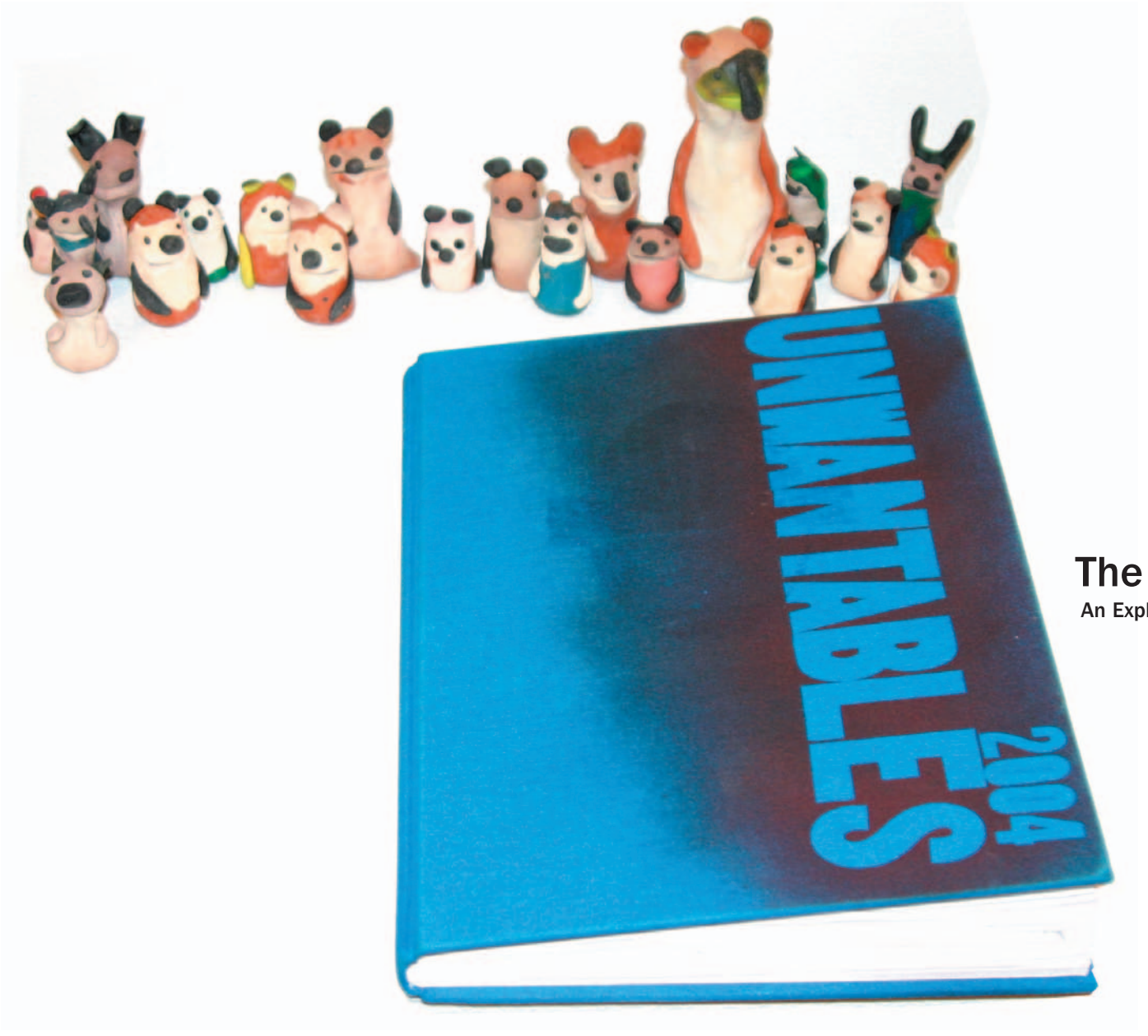

The Unwantables

An Exploration of Visual Narrative

A VISUAL NARRATIVE
BY
MARIUS VALDES
"THE UNWANTABLES"
They first appeared when
I was a little kid.....

The Unwantables
An Exploration of Visual Narrative
by Marius Valdes
BFA, University of Georgia

Submitted to the faculty of the School of the Arts of Virginia Commonwealth University in partial fulfillment for the degree, Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communications.

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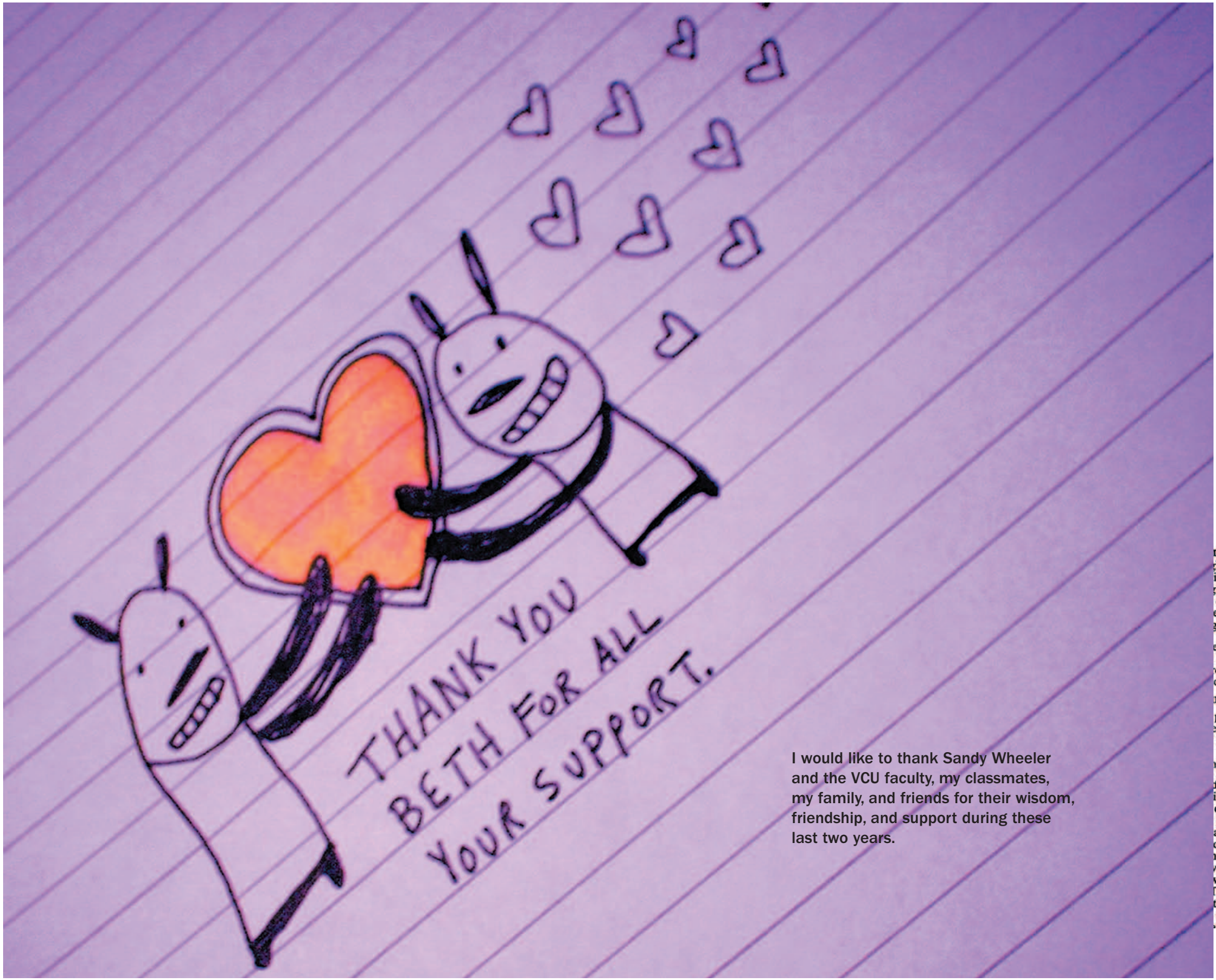

I would like to thank Sandy Wheeler and the VCU faculty, my classmates, my family, and friends for their wisdom, friendship, and support during these last two years.

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r Is Imagination?What Is Imagination? What Is Imagination?
ination is more than bringing images into consciousness;
is imagery or at most hallucination. Imagination, creative
ination, is an action of the mind that produces a new
or insight. "Out of chaos the imagination frames a thing
eauty" (Lowes's *The Road to Xanadu*) or of truth. The
comes unheralded, as a flash, full-formed.
Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination
en suddenly, by having a blank canvas, I discovered I
make a picture myself. That is the point, to make a
e on a blank canvas. And I was forty before I had the
ourage to try. Then it became an orgy, making pictures.
nation Imagination
So, of course, I decided I couldn't
paint. Perhaps I can't. But I verily believe I can make
s, which is to me all that matters in this respect. The
painting consists in making pictures—and so many
accomplish canvases without coming within miles of
g a picture. Imagination Imagination Imagination
In this sense it is possible to
der inspiration the creative absolute. It is certain that in-
ion occurs only when the artist is compelled to give some-
of himself, and when his creative imagination is unham-
by technical procedures unsuited to it. Thus a system of
al materials which fails to lead to inspiration can be con-
d unnatural, and a system which leads to inspiration can
nsidered one which insures the natural functioning of the
e mind. The composer can be certain that something has
rong with his musical thinking when he loses his inspira-
The composer to whom inspiration is granted can be as-
that he is drawing on the most significant creative forces
are available to him. He is in a position to perceive the

A picture comes to me from far off, who knows how far, I divined it, I saw it, I made it, and yet next day I myself don't see what I have done. How can one penetrate my dreams, my instincts, my desires, my thoughts, which have taken a long time to elaborate themselves and bring themselves to the light, above all seize in them what I brought about, perhaps, against my will? Imagination Imagination Imagination

I am no pessimist, I do not dislike art, for I could not live without devoting all my hours to it. I love it as the whole end of my life. Everything I do in connection with art gives me a tremendous joy. Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination
in front of it, to paint it. So, of course, I decided I couldn't really paint. Perhaps I can't. But I verily believe I can make pictures, which is to me all that matters in this respect. The art of painting consists in making pictures—and so many artists accomplish canvases without coming within miles of painting a picture. Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination

And I believe one can only develop one's visionary awareness by close contact with the vision itself: that is, by knowing pictures, real vision pictures, and by dwelling on them, and really dwelling in them. It is a great delight, to dwell in a picture. Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination

All my life I have from time to time gone back to paint, because it gave me a form of delight that words can never give. Perhaps the joy in words goes deeper and is for that reason more unconscious. The *conscious* delight is certainly stronger in paint. I have gone back to paint for real pleasure

What Is Imagination? INSPIRATIONINSPIRATION
It is a mistake for a sculptor or a painter to speak or write very often about his job. It releases tension needed for his work. By trying to express his aims with rounded-off logical exactness, he can easily become a theorist whose actual work is only a caged-in exposition of conceptions evolved in terms of logic and words. Imagination Imagination Imagination

But though the nonlogical, instinctive, subconscious part of the mind must play its part in his work, he also has a conscious mind which is not inactive. The artist works with a concentration of his whole personality, and the conscious part of it resolves conflicts, organizes memories, and prevents him from trying to walk in two directions at the same time.
Imagination Imagination Imagination Theorise, theorise all you like—but when you start to paint, shut your theoretic eyes and go for it with instinct and intuition. Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination

To my distress and perhaps to my delight, I order things in accordance with my passions. What a sad thing for a painter who loves blondes but denies himself the pleasure of putting them in his picture because they don't go well with the basket of fruit! What misery for a painter who detests apples to have to use them all the time because they harmonize with the table cloth! I put in my pictures everything I like. So much the worse for the things—they have to get along with one another.
Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination Imagination

It would be very interesting to record photographically, not the stages of a painting, but its metamorphoses. One would see perhaps by what course a mind finds its way towards the crystallization of its dream. But what is really very curious is to

PROCESS

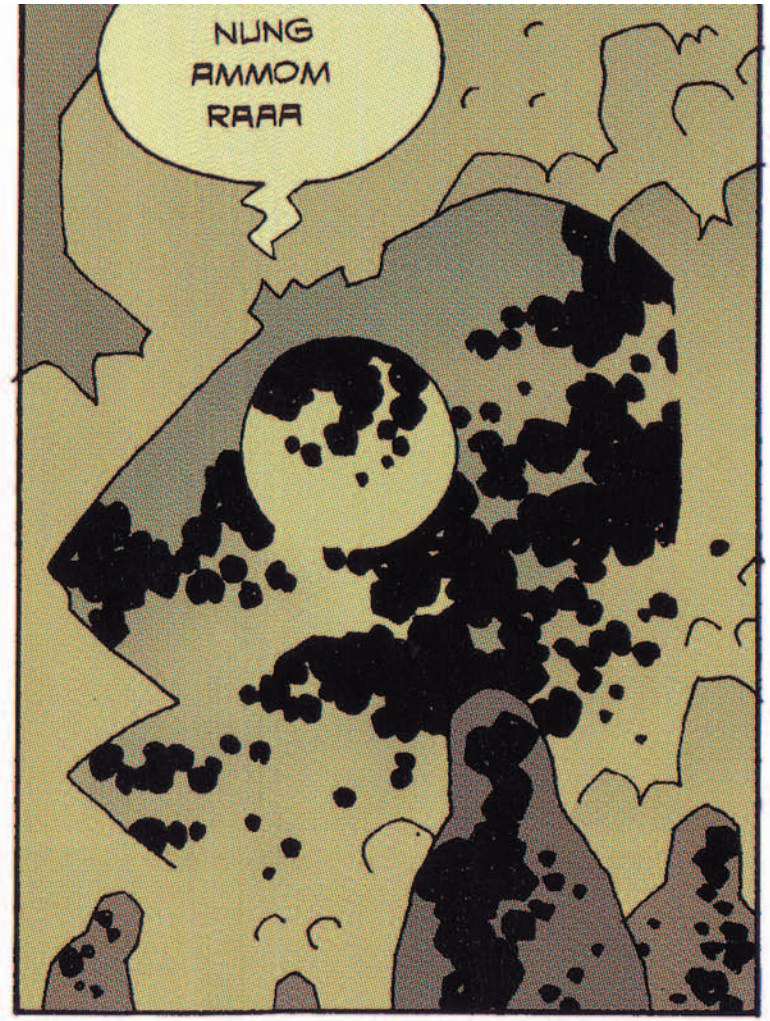
Q What Is Imagination
ne has to eat one's o
assert, perhaps I even wrot
be painted has been painted
sibly be laid on canvas has
at a dead end. Then sudd
painting myself and am fa

I disappeare
the most exciting moment—whe
a big brush full of wet colour,
diving into a pond—then you st
as I am concerned, it is like sv
and being rather frightened ar
striking out for all you're wort
sharp as a needle; but the pictu
intuition and sheer physical a
intuition gets into the brush ti
is to be a picture at all. Imagina
Imagination Imagination Imag

Heretofore pictures moved
gression. Each day brought
sum of additions. With me, a
I make a picture, and proce
nothing is lost; the red I hav
up in another. Imagination Imag
Imagination Imagination Im

I want to develop th
that no one can ever se
What I want is that my
tion. INSPIRATIO
What Is Imagination? INSPIRA

WHAT ABOUT THE GIRL?
TRUST ME, SHE WILL PAY.
GOOD ENOUGH.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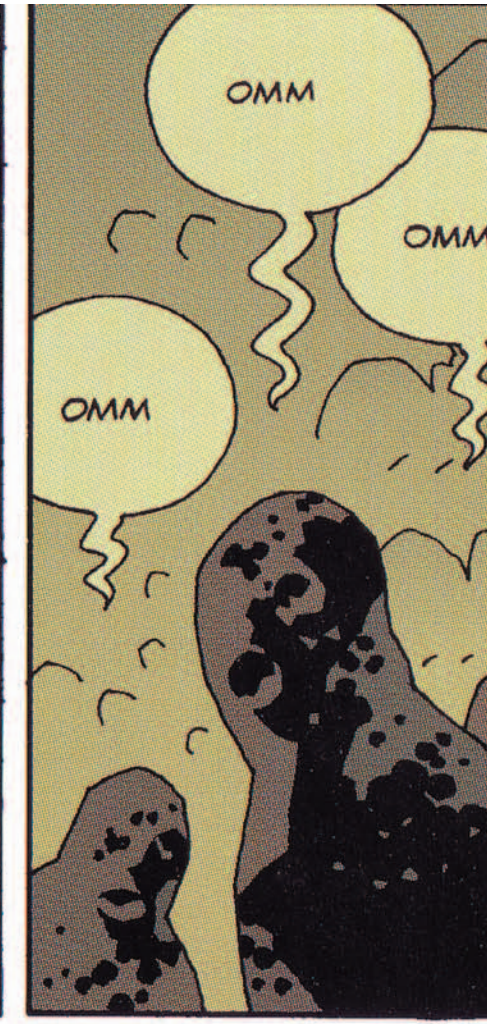

OMM
OMM
OMM

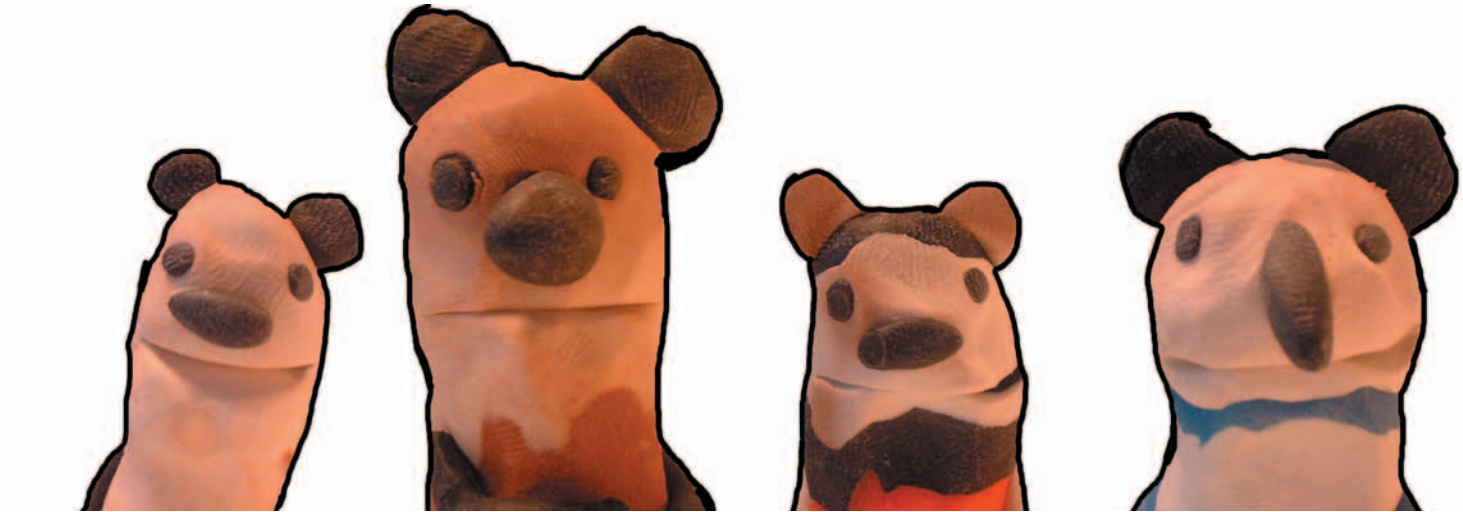
AHHHH
SON OF A...

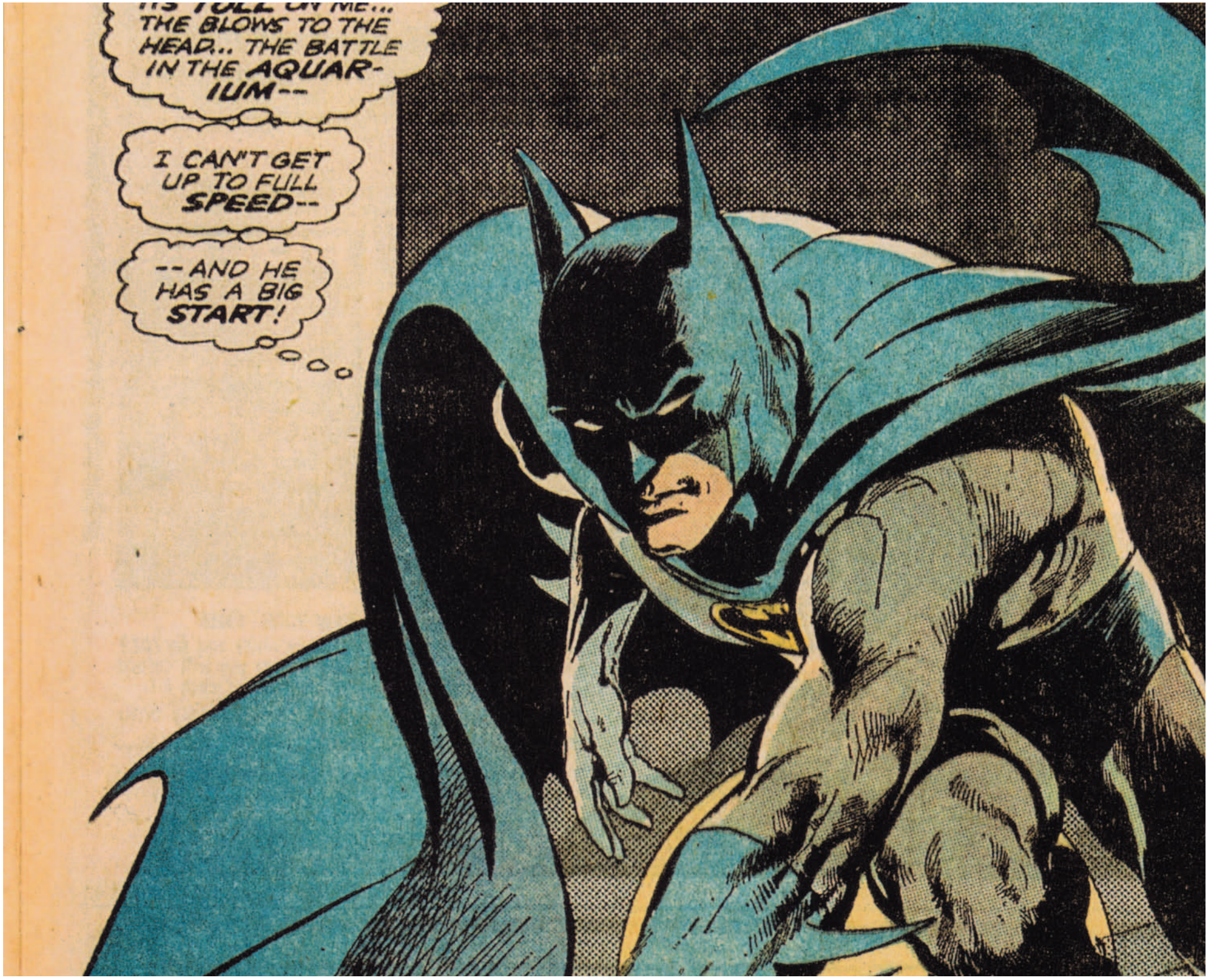
A visual narrative, or story, is a visual representation of a sequence of events arranged in a deliberate manner. It is the representation of an event or story through images.

Left Image sequence from *Hellboy: Conqueror Worm* by Mike Mignola

UNWANTABLE

The Unwantables is a creative project that has evolved from my lifelong interest in and relationship with visual stories. To me the most compelling aspect of visual storytelling is “imagination.” The author possesses the ability to create new worlds, interesting characters, and situations that have the potential to communicate about any topic. My project explores visual narrative as a communication tool to explain the role of imagination in my life.




IT'S TOLL ON ME... THE BLOWS TO THE HEAD... THE BATTLE IN THE AQUARIUM--
I CAN'T GET UP TO FULL SPEED--
--AND HE HAS A BIG START!

One of my fondest childhood memories is of sitting with my father as he read to me the latest adventures of *Batman* in *Detective Comics*.

Then, I would spend hours at the kitchen table drawing superheroes, aliens, and monsters, lost in the moment, imagining my own stories. As I grew older, Larry Bird replaced Batman as my hero. Sports, girls, and rock 'n' roll became more important than comics and drawing. It was not until college, when I was exposed to graphic design and illustration, that I began to revisit the art and style of comics that I loved as a kid. As I have progressed professionally I have come to understand that narrative is a powerful tool when used in visual communication and has many practical applications. When I started this project I wanted to explore this topic so that I could understand and develop visual narratives and produce a new visual language.

Left Image of *Batman* from *Detective Comics* by Neal Adams

Visual storytelling has always been a significant and ever-present means of visual communication. Stories continue a narrative tradition at a time when non-linear thinking and hybrid forms are the norm. *Graphis*, *Eye*, *Communication Arts*, *Print*, and *The New York Times Magazine* have all ackowledged the legitimate contribution of visual storytelling to the design community and society in general. These reputable publications have featured profiles of graphic novelists, photo and illustrative journalists, advertising agencies, and design studios who are immersed in the practice of storytelling. While researching these professionals I found the following interesting and diverse justifications for this form of communication.

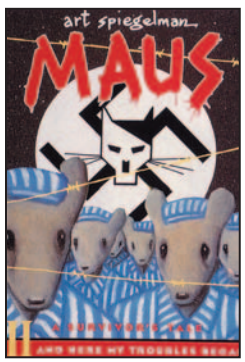


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

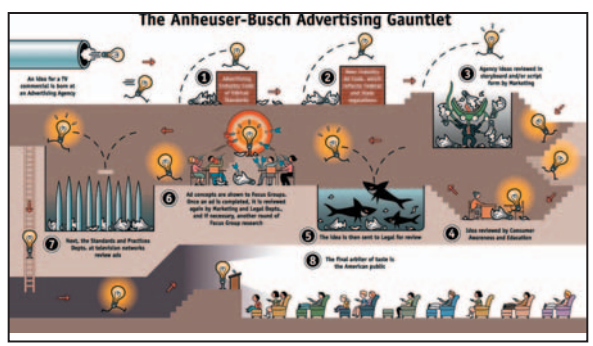


Figure 7

Graphic Stylization

Many authors use imagery and graphic styles to address difficult, controversial subject matter that otherwise would be hard to represent in realistic depictions. For example, Art Spiegelman won the Pulitzer Prize for his depiction of the Holocaust in his graphic novel *Maus* (figure 1). Spiegelman used cats and mice to represent Nazis and Jews in his recounting the story of his father's experience in the Nazi concentration camps. Spiegelman also published *In the Shadow of No Towers* using the language and format of Sunday morning broadside comic strips to reflect on his experience during and after September 11. This book incorporates modern software technology to further stylize the visual language of comics in the digital age.

Pushing the Medium

Many other designers use traditional and non-traditional mediums for visual narratives in new ways, utilizing modern technologies, ideas, and visual language with successful results. Chris Ware is a cartoonist and graphic novelist who incorporates the language of vintage cartoons and the craft of hand-lettered typography into experimental narratives that extend the boundaries of traditional comic book structure and storytelling (figure 2). J. Otto Seibold was one of the first designer/illustrators to use vector-based software, such as Adobe Illustrator, to create children's picture books (figure 3). His unique style allows him to create art that is rendered exclusively using digital production on a computer.

Clarifying Complex Ideas

Stories have always been used to teach the abstract ideas of values and morals, and visual narratives are able to clearly explain these abstract concepts. For example, children's picture books allow children to learn morality lessons from fairy tales such as *Goldilocks and The Three Bears*. Other types of complex ideas may also be simplified. For example, Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* uses the graphic novel format to explain the visual language of comics including such fundamental design principles as semiotics, visual hierarchy, and sequential art (figure 4).

Social Commentary

A visual narrative may offer social commentary. Charles Schultz's *Peanuts* is a popular comic that reflects the thoughts and lives of everyday people (figure 5). Another well-known comic strip, Doonesbury by Gary Trudeau captures political attitudes of our culture in the space of a four-panel comic strip. Newspapers feature political cartoons that make humorous but accurate observations about our government and politicians.

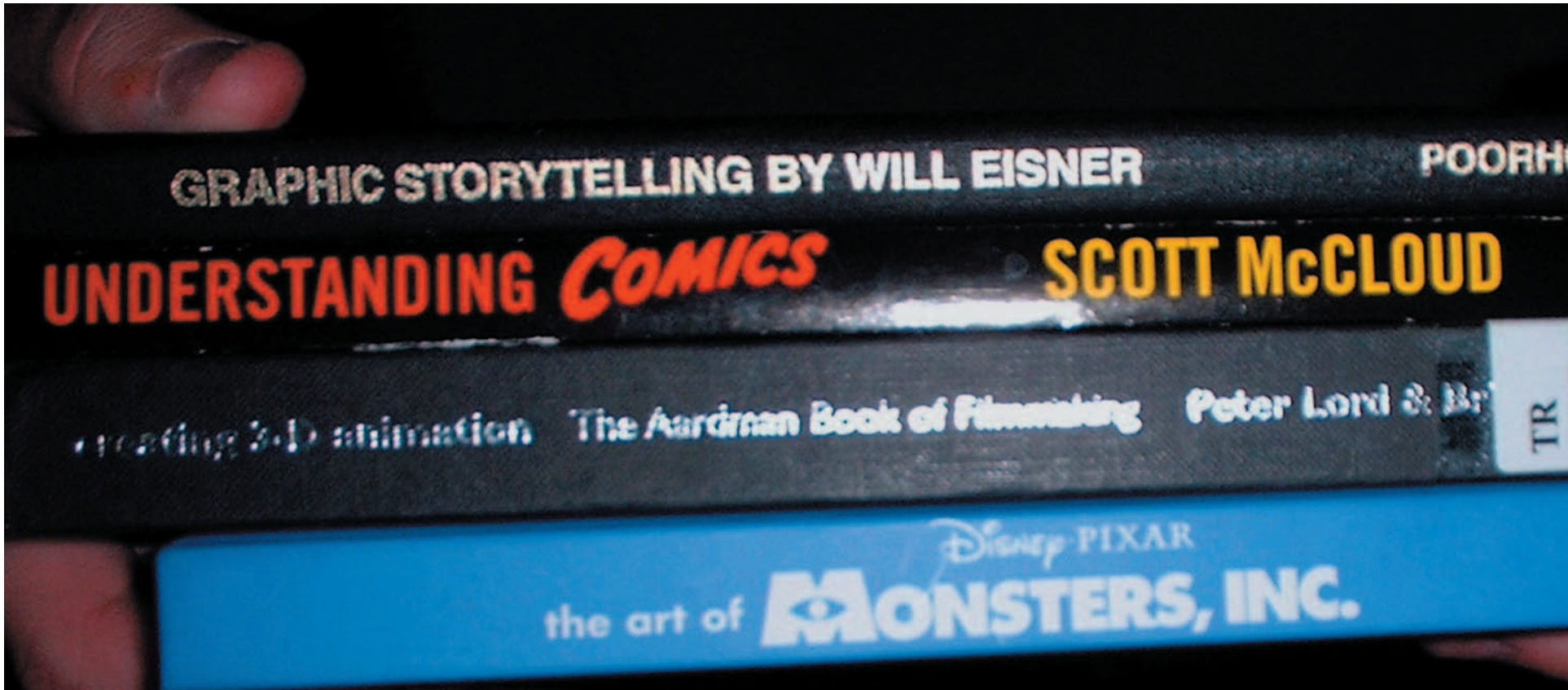
Inform and Educate

A visual narrative can inform and educate. News magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek* use photojournalism to transport the viewer into unique situations, such as a hostile war zone or a championship game, that we might never experience in our daily lives (figure 6). Diagrams and charts use sequential imaging, symbols, and icons to illustrate information such as how to buckle a seatbelt on an airplane or use a tool (figure 7).

Visual Entertainment

A visual narrative can entertain. Most stories are told to make events or information more interesting or entertaining. Will Eisner used the example of a caveman recounting a failed hunting trip to other cavemen to teach them the importance of teamwork. Modern special effects and computer animation allow for movies to be visually as or more exciting than the story itself. Pixar (figure 8) and George Lucas use cutting-edge technology to make film narratives that have limitless possibilities in exploring imaginary worlds and characters.

Figure 8



My intention for this project was to use my skills as a graphic designer and illustrator to develop my own language of visual narrative and to use it as a tool in my professional work. In addition, I have researched ideas and methodologies from a wide variety of visual narrative forms. This project is not meant to exhaustively define or research exclusively any one medium of visual stories such as animation or comics.

There are four main sources that I turned to in my research. Each offered comprehensive overviews of visual storytelling. Will Eisner's *Graphic Storytelling* is a definitive book on comic and sequential art. His work provided me with the basic overview of what visual storytelling is. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* builds on Eisner's work and sets visual storytelling in modern context to illustrate how comics function in their design as well as the role of comics in visual communication. *The Art of Monsters Inc.* and *Creating 3-D Animation: The Aardman Book of Filmmaking* details information about the methodology of creating visual narratives from concept to creation. In addition to these books, I found much useful information in the extra features sections in a variety of movie DVDs. Examples include George Lucas' audio commentaries of *Star Wars* and "making of" features for movies such as Pixar's *The Incredibles* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

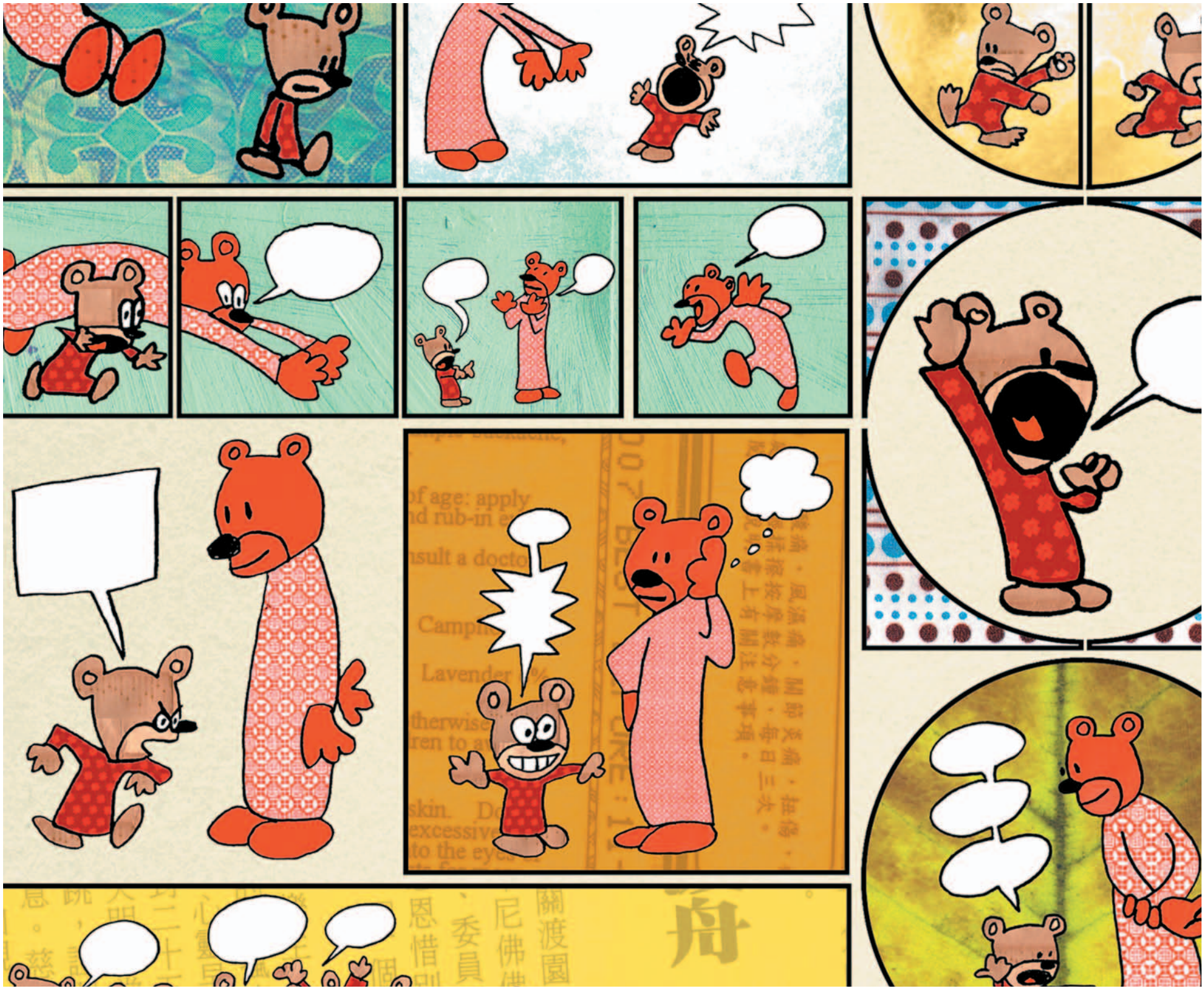
The Graduate Workshop has served as a means of inspiration and exploration for my creative project. The workshop taught me to think about any creative project as a process. In this process, there are four areas that must be given attention in order to create visual communication that is both successful and thoughtful.

Research
This includes utilizing research from books, periodicals, internet sites, interviews, guest lectures, films, and discussion. Graduate school allowed me luxurious time to thoroughly investigate multiple topics thoroughly and perspectives.

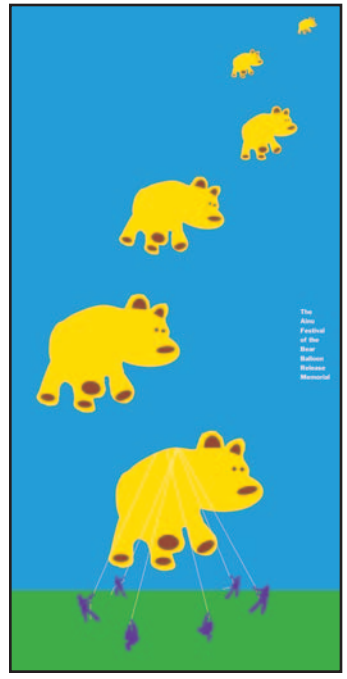
Experimentation
Graduate school, for me, has been about letting go of tried-and-true methods of working and embracing experimentation with new methodologies and technology. A major breakthrough for me was overcoming my fear of photography and learning new technology.

Critical Thinking
Critical thinking helps in analyzing, evaluating, assessing, and reassessing about what is learned in research and experimentation. This is essential for making difficult decisions about what to keep, and what to not keep, when developing a project.

Refinement
Once the time and energy has been invested in research, experimentation, and critical thinking, it must be pulled together and refined to achieve the best solution. This fine-tuning allows for subtle and precise distinctions of good ideas discovered in the process to become more complex and effective. This also allows for connections to be made from the design process.

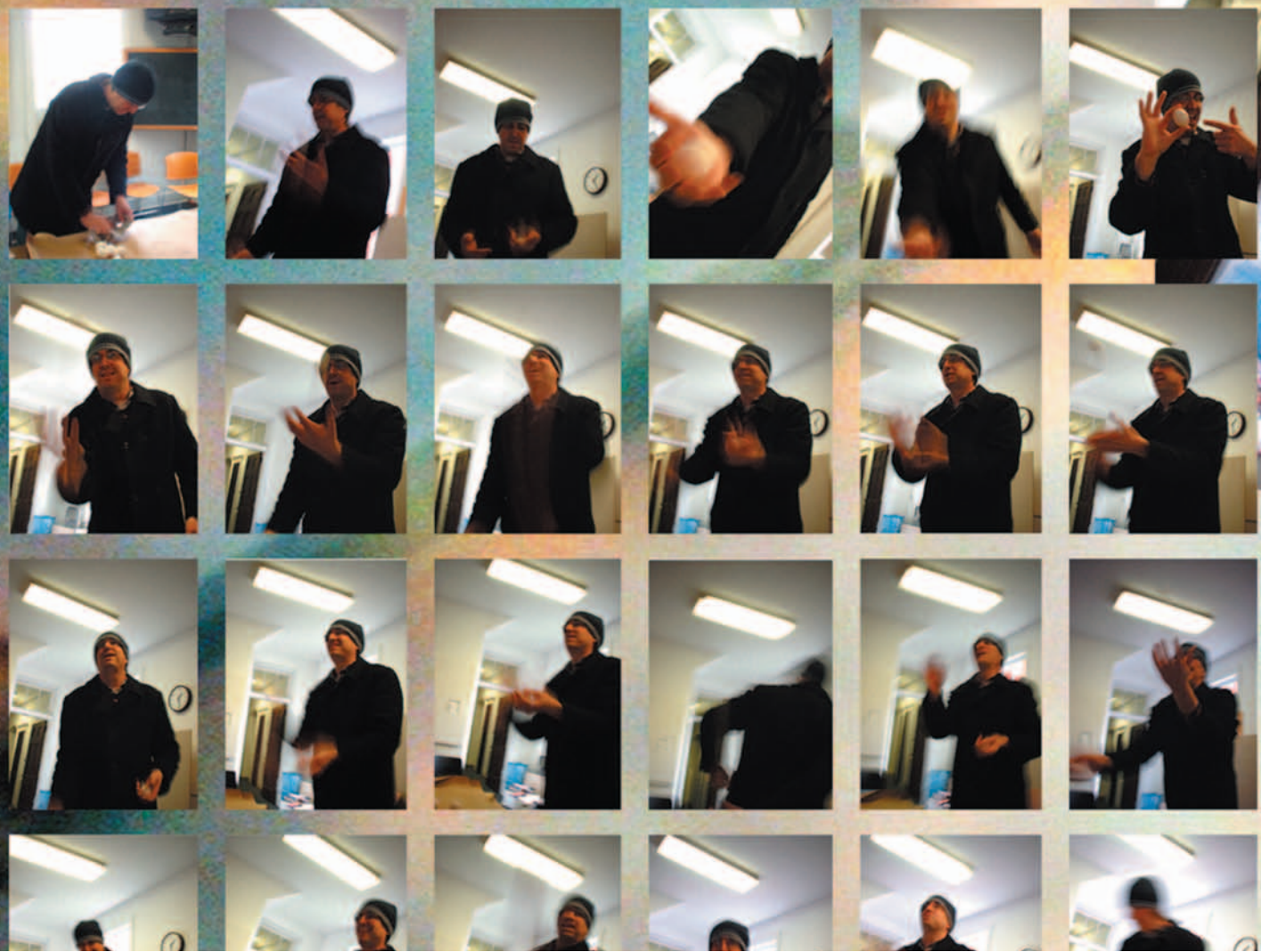


Yoki the Bear
Workshop: Rob Carter, Fall 2003
In my first graduate workshop, we were given the assignment to research an indigenous culture and create a visual archive. I chose The Ainu Indians of Japan. Fascinated by their storytelling traditions and the tribal customs derived from their folk tales, I created a documentation based on the idea of storytelling. I chose to use the visual language of comics to record my findings. I let the colors, customs, clothes, and stories of the Ainu dictate my choices for the final design of the comic. The project is one of my favorites because it allowed me to explore the visual language of comics in a way that I had never done before. I was no longer just admiring visual story-telling. For the first time, I was creating my own graphic narrative using a creative process that included research, visual exploration, critical thinking, and refinement to communicate an idea. I wanted to explore this methodology in many ways, it opened the door to developing my creative project.



Ainu Festival of the Bear
Workshop: Rob Carter, Fall 2003
I designed a poster based on the Ainu's Festival of the Bear. The project required that we create a monument for the culture. I chose to create a monumental balloon festival to celebrate the traditional Ainu belief that when they sacrificed a bear, they released its soul to the heavens. My poster captured the sequential events of the festival from the people holding the bear balloon to it's release and drifting away. I was able to show sequential action in one image using a very graphic stylization of the event. The poster was personally successful because its refined form and content was derived from intensive research.

My studies have made me re-evaluate my relationship with the photographic image as a medium, tool, and inspiration.



POWER

R.E.M. by Laura Levine
Workshop: Sandy Wheeler, Spring 2004
While I have always admired photography, I have never had much interest in its formal qualities. I have always used photography to supplement my design work rather than enhance it or be the focal point of the design. My studies have made me re-evaluate my relationship with the photographic image as a medium, tool, and inspiration. Technology and the digital camera have made taking pictures quick, spontaneous, and economically more accessible to my work. Taking pictures has become a useful tool for exploration of concepts.

This workshop gave me the chance to choose one photograph and spend half a semester evaluating it based on John Szarkowski's five characteristics of a good photograph. This was a new way for me to think about the photographic process and it proved to be a useful methodology for breaking an image into small pieces to investigate. It also helped me to be less literal in interpreting the image and instead use it as a point of departure for my own studies. This encouraged me to take more chances with my work and try things I had never done before. I started taking my own pictures and playing with the idea of taking experimental photographs of type and studying the idea of the decisive moment. These studies played an important part in my creative project because the image making became part of my process. In the end I used no photography for my final film but the hand-drawn imagery I used was based entirely on photographs I had shot in the experimentation phase of my project.

TNT Monster Matinee
Workshop: Matt Woolman and Roy McKelvey, Spring 2004
In addition to working with digital photography, I also began to work with digital video and new technologies such as *Final Cut Pro*, *AfterEffects*, *ImageReady*, *Flash*, *iMovie*, and *GarageBand*. This software was used to make short films, animations, and other experiments in motion graphics. In addition to learning new technology, I also investigated preproduction techniques for storyboarding in traditional and non-traditional ways. This part of the process of creating motion graphics is crucial because of the time-intensive nature of producing animation and film sequences. The thought process involved in storyboarding became a crucial part of my creative project.

The culmination of my experiments from my motion graphics studies resulted in a ten-second promotional sequence for a monster film matinee series on the cable network TNT. I used these various studies to create a series of live-action clips of a Godzilla model and small plastic army men burning. Then I redrew each frame of these clips to create a high-energy and illustrative narrative that captured the fun and energy of a classic monster movie. This creative process of capturing images via digital camera, or video, and digitally editing them allowed me to try visual experiments that I had never done before and opened the possibility of creating narratives using motion graphics. It also introduced the importance of editing, pacing, and preproduction necessary for this medium.

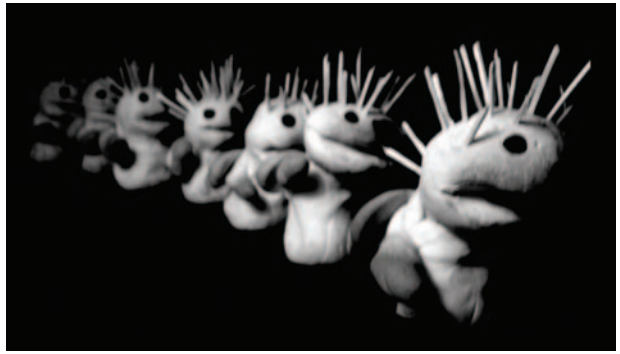
Creativity Creates Change
Workshop: Laura Chessin, Spring 2004
This workshop addressed communicating concepts using sequential images. We were asked to explore the concept of change. We had to choose a particular filter through which to examine “change” in a cultural and a personal context. I chose the idea that creativity can create change. We were asked to use only photographic images to try to present this concept as clear and concisely as possible. I started all my projects by taking as many photographs as I could that might relate to my idea. After each session of taking pictures and reviewing the images, connections and new ideas for other images emerged. Time was devoted to writing about the concept and looking up the definitions, synonyms, and other uses of the actual word.

After reviewing images, writing, and engaging in lengthy discussions about the concept of creativity creating change, I began to choose images that best described my idea. I then tackled the design problem of arranging these images into a visual narrative that would clearly illustrate the concept. In doing this visual exercise, it also made me refer back to my writings and redefine my statement. Visual stories that best reflected my statement were then developed. The studies for this class stressed the importance of a well-crafted, well-sequenced visual narrative. This project increased my understanding of the visual narrative in edited film clips and many communicative aspects of the photographic image.

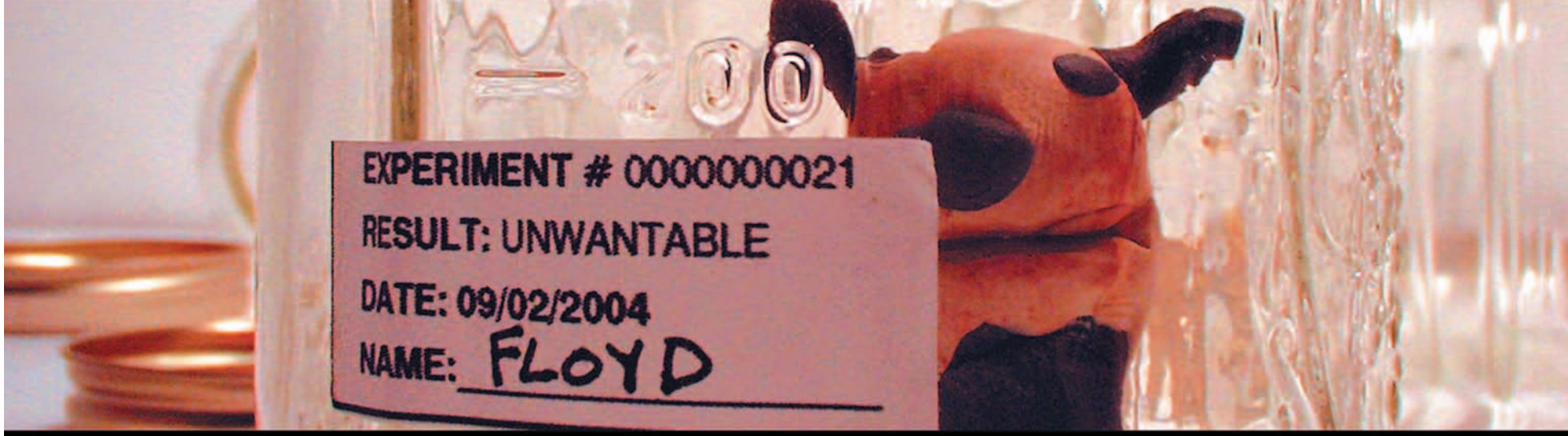
Fear 2004
Workshop: Susan Roth, Fall 2004
In this workshop I developed a single image in a poster format to create a visual narrative. The assignment was to choose one aspect of the 2004 election and design a visual graphic based on our research and critical thinking. I chose to focus on the aspect of terrorism and fear being played by both political parties. After experimenting with different forms I chose to shoot photographs of college students wearing army helmets holding signs with powerful thought-provoking phrases on them, such as martial law, pre-emptive war, and power. I then digitally manipulated the images to make them more graphic and bold. I then pushed the colors to extremes, using filters to create eye-catching patterns that unified four separate posters into a family that could work together or individually. This was a process that I revisited more thoroughly during my creative project but did not use in the final film.

The sum of the parts became stronger when unified and proved to be an invaluable exploration for my creative project.

Sixty Days Election Archive
Workshop: Rob Carter, Fall 2004
In this Fall workshop I documented the news media in print for sixty days leading to the 2004 election. I collected election headlines and images from the newspaper daily and then created collages in a sketchbook. When the election was finished I took these collages and transferred them onto acetate and built miniature environments. I invented a story about a character wandering through this setting composed of excessive media images and campaign messages. This allowed me to refine my ordinary flat collages into a series of three-dimensional, experimental, typographical studies. It also became a useful exercise in crafting a visual narrative. I also used the software *GarageBand* to make my own soundtrack to score the short film and explore the use of sound in this medium.



Fairyland, Virginia
Workshop: John Malinoski, Fall 2004
During this workshop I used photography of miniature environments and characters to create a campaign that would raise awareness of environmentalist David Suzuki's *Ten Steps To Save The Environment*. I created a six-minute video that would be used as a sales pitch to fund the campaign. The narrative employed static and kinetic imagery, atmospheric music, and simple text messages to deliver a unified concept. The sum of the parts became stronger when unified and proved to be invaluable exploration for my creative project.


EXPERIMENT # 0000000021
RESULT: UNWANTABLE
DATE: 09/02/2004
NAME: FLOYD

EXPERIMENT # 0000000021
RESULT: UNWANTABLE
DATE: 09/02/2004
NAME: FLOYD

AMERICA'S ENEMIES
POLITIC

AMERICA AND
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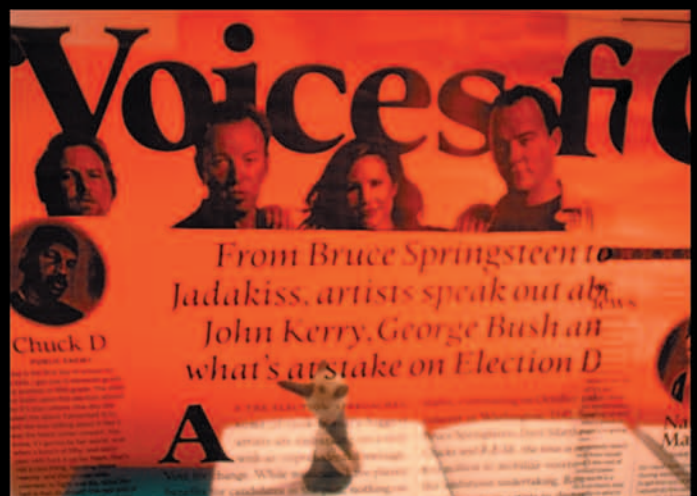

Voices of
From Bruce Springsteen t
Jadakiss, artists speak out ab
John Kerry, George Bush an
what's at stake on Election D
Chuck D
A

I guess I'll just have to go look for
Let's see...I'll start at the zoo
Then I'll go to the book store.
After that I'll try the marshmellow store.

Stupid imagination.

It's always getting me into trouble.
Like that time I thought if I wore a towel around my neck I could fly like the super-mega-man.

I am interested in many aspects of visual narrative but to me the most important element is imagination.

Imagination gives an author the power to offer a unique perspective of new worlds, characters, and situations that can address any topic. In the twenty-first century we have many tools at our disposal to visualize our imaginative ideas regardless of how simple or complex. It is an exciting time for anyone who has ever wanted to communicate through visual stories. Mediums like animation, photography, and film are affordable, accessible, and manageable by one person. It requires an active imagination and some degree of technical skill to produce a visual narrative.

The imagination also allows a viewer to interact with a story. We have the unique ability to form images and ideas in our mind of the things we read about, but have never seen or experienced directly. Unlike written books, visual narratives provide images to further assist the reader in getting closer to the author's perspective. Instead of describing what he wants you to see, an author can actually show you. *Peter Pan*, which started as written words on a page, has been visually interpreted in numerous stage performances, movies, and illustrated books. Our imagination allows us to suspend reality and enjoy what can only be fiction. The visual narrator enables us see his vision of the narrative.

My imagination transports me out of my everyday life and into a new reality. When I read a comic book, I am able to go to a world where people can fly through the air and monsters actually exist. When I observe static images on a printed page, my mind fills in the action that takes place in the gutter between the panels. I get to enjoy the visual splendor of watching Spiderman swing through the air. I lose track of time as I become immersed in watching the visual narrative unfold on the page.

I also enjoy visual narratives for the imaginary characters and character design. Charles Schultz's success as a cartoonist was due to his ability to create characters that everyone relates to. Charlie Brown is the loveable born loser that always keeps trying, and Snoopy is the ultimate pet and companion. My imagination lets me suspend disbelief and come to view "Snoopy the dog" as "Snoopy the person." I enjoy watching Snoopy sit on top of his red doghouse writing a mystery novel on an old typewriter, or fighting as a World War I pilot against the Red Barron. Snoopy can also be appreciated formally for his simple design. Other than Mickey Mouse, there are few characters that have been so universally accepted in all cultures as a visual icon as Snoopy. His simple expressions and form have the ability to communicate countless emotions and expressions that all human beings can appreciate and relate to.

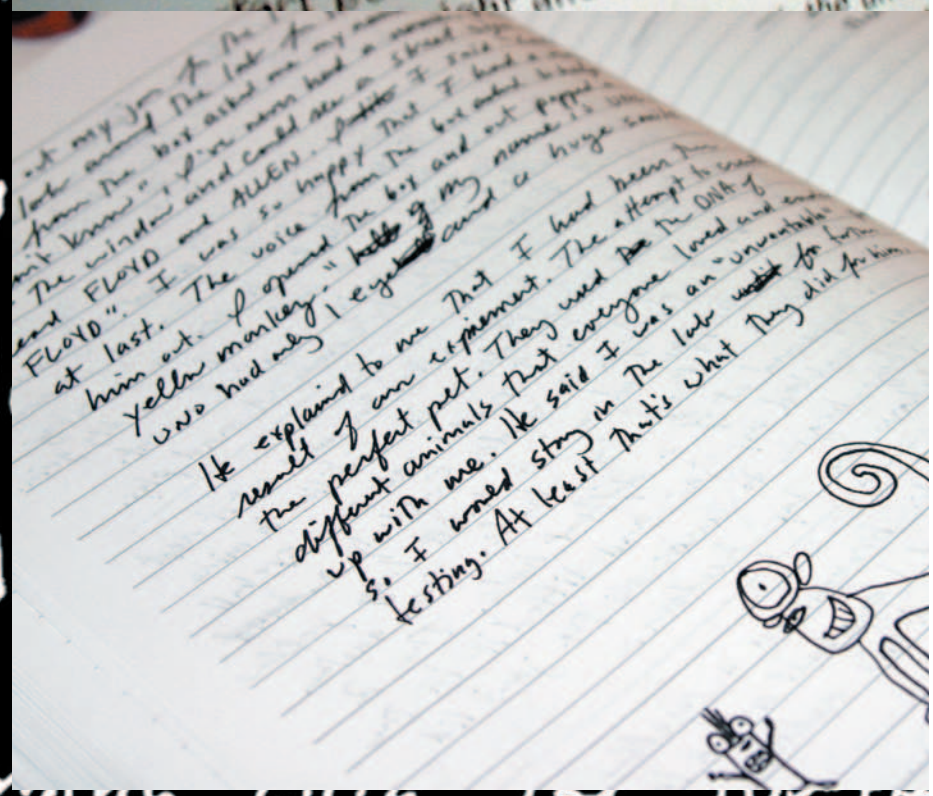
Fantasy in visual narrative allows us to live vicariously through others. I am able to go on archeological adventures with Indiana Jones and travel to galaxies far away with Luke Skywalker. Carefully crafted stories draw us in and make us care about seeing the story through to its outcome. I have seen the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* more than any other movie because the story has so many great moments of drama, action, and humor that I want to watch each moment, and see how it leads to the next. It doesn't matter that I already know how the story will end; I still enjoy watching the events unfold because on some level I want to be Indiana Jones. My imagination allows me to project myself into the story in his place.

Left Formal exploration of story idea

2004-
the unwantables-take 1

A DNA scientist in hope of getting rich and famous
create "the perfect pet" in his home garage. His e
only resulted in creating pets that have major ge
ing in new breeds of animals that the scientist
"unwantable".

he stores "the unwantables" in his garage in
hamster cages (!) while he continues to try
fect pet. Unbeknownst to their creator th
ght and adventurous.



I have reached a point in my life where I want to tell my own stories.

I have always had an active imagination and a love for making images. While in graduate school I have found myself wanting not just to observe, but to create my own stories and share my imagination with others. I keep sketchbooks and digital files that are filled with designs for characters and ideas for stories. In the summer of 2004, I came up with an idea of a character who was a genetic mistake created by a scientist who was trying to invent the perfect pet. This character lived in a jar in the lab and was doomed to a lonely existence until he found out that there were others like him. I named these characters *The Unwantables* and I began to fill my sketchbook with drawings of what they might look like. I wrote a theme song for them, and my fiancé and I imagined how they would sound and what they might say. Out of all my ideas, this was my favorite.

That same summer, I found a book of painted puppets by artist Paul Klee that truly inspired me. Seeing this painter, well known for his expressionistic paintings, work in a three-dimensional medium made me question how my work might translate to three dimensions as well. I have always admired the work of folk artists and outsider artists who do not allow their lack of training, skill, or materials to limit their expressions. At this same time, I was researching popular designer toy boutiques such as *Kid Robot*. I appreciate the character design and formal qualities of these toys.

I felt inspired to buy some cheap *Sculpy* clay and make my own figures based on the idea of *The Unwantables*. The first batches of *Unwantables* were different colors, shapes, and sizes. I accidentally cooked them too long and some of them burned. I found those to be my favorite. I found the white colored characters looked best when burnt. Since I could buy large quantities of white *Sculpy* for less money, I began making *The Unwantables* using mainly white sculpy and one dark color for their eyes, nose, and ears. This gave them a unified appearance. It was remarkable that they looked related yet each had so much individual character.

Their unique character became more evident when I began to take pictures of them documenting their creation. By using subtle lighting, the small *Unwantables* became lifelike and larger in appearance in photographs. They appeared to change expression by simply changing the lighting slightly. They were increasingly photogenic little figures. I began to keep a journal about them. *The Unwantables* became a muse for me in my paintings, drawings, and photography. I found myself buying more *Sculpy* and slowly making more and more models, developing slight variations and families of these characters. The most rewarding aspect of this process is that I made them by simply having an idea. They were developing a life of their own.

Left Original Unwantables concepts from sketchbook

At the beginning of my third semester I introduced these characters to my advisor, and she encouraged me to keep developing them during my independent study. In addition, she suggested I consider ways to incorporate them into my workshop studies. I used them successfully in a project documenting sixty days of the 2004 election. I created *Unwantable*s that were in either Democratic or Republican colors and used one neutral-colored *Unwantable* to explore an environment composed from election-based media headlines. *The Unwantable*s also influenced my work in creating Fairyland, Virginia. In that film I used the same technique of photographing small *Sculpy* figures and monumentalizing them in photography and digital video. I also used the idea of being unwantable to create a group of misfit graphic design students that were also superheroes called *The Unwantable*s, Their design was based on Jack Kirby's classic version of *Marvel Comic's X-Men*. Each hero was based on a different classmate and I created a story in a comic book/zine format as my final paper in Sandy Wheeler's seminar.

Over the Christmas break, as I began to plan for my last semester, I continued to make more *Unwantable*s so that I would have a vast army of them at my disposal. I decided that for my creative project I would explore visual narrative using *The Unwantable*s as my main characters. I began by writing stories about the origin of *The Unwantable*s and how they came to be. This was a challenging step for me because the last time I had attempted creative writing was in elementary school. I quickly realized how challenging it was to craft a well-written and compelling story. Referring to my research encouraged me to organize my thoughts and keep writing.

At first, I considered telling the story of Floyd, the very first *Unwantable*. This story involved the biographical story of Floyd being created from the mixing of DNA of idealized pets such as small dogs, cats, and bunnies. Then, I explored the idea of what life would be like to live in a jar in a lab. I considered what Floyd would do with his day and who his friends might be. Characters such as Uno, the one-eyed lab monkey and the blog frog, a computer-savvy genetically enhanced frog were developed but later not used. I wrote stories that mirrored some of my own personal plans for *The Unwantable*s as a commercial product but ultimately I did not find this story very interesting. I struggled to find a story that interested me enough to develop.

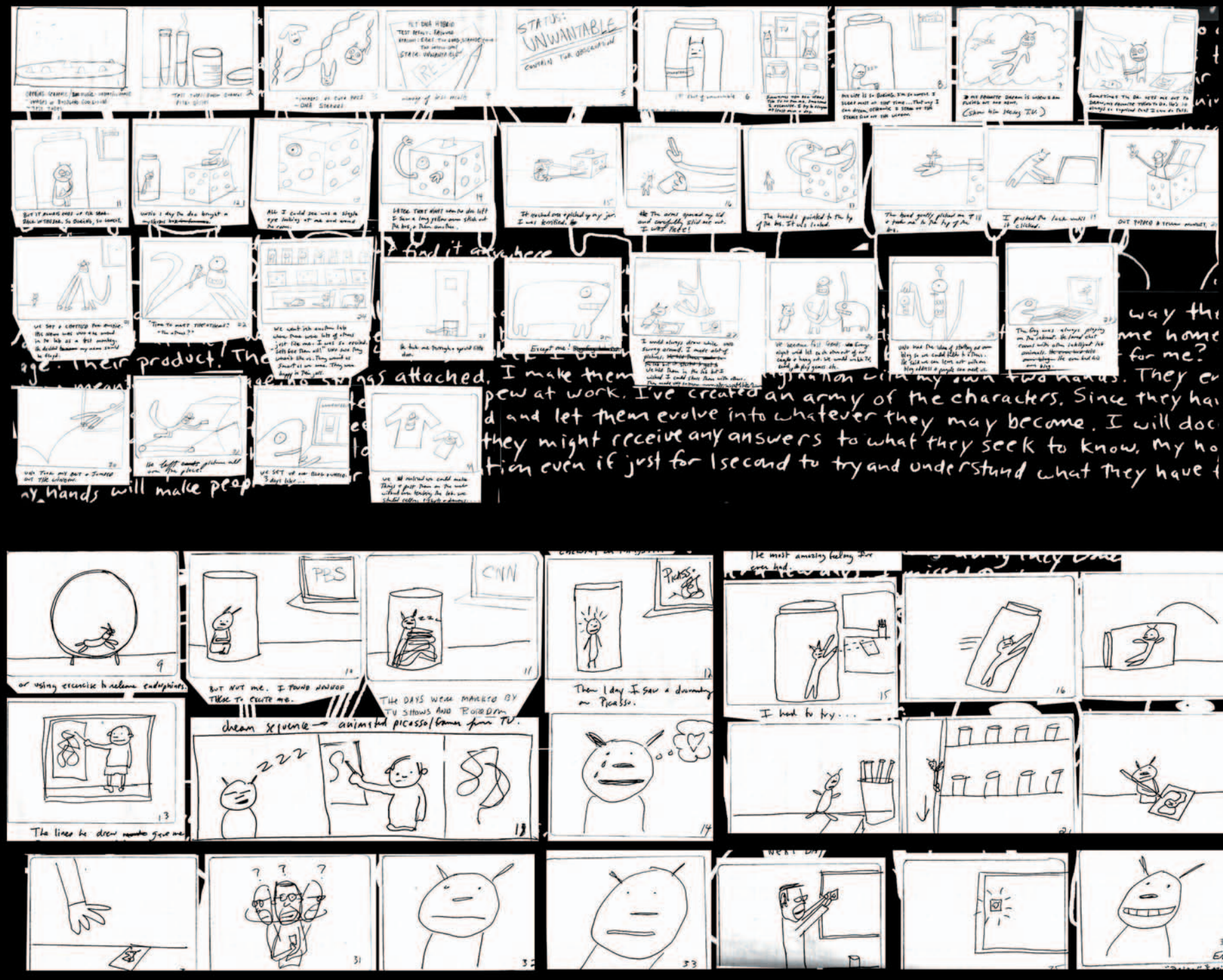
At this same time in Directed Research we were working on schematic diagrams mapping our ideas and trying to develop a concise project statement. In addition to writing stories about *The Unwantable*s I was also examining my creative process and what role it played in my project. In doing this I begin to consider the idea of telling a story about my creative process. I began to incorporate my directed research exploration into my *Unwantable*s stories. I began writing stories about Floyd the Unwantable's desire to create artwork and his process of doing so. I did not consider these stories successful either but they felt like a positive step.

During all of this, I continued to do extensive character studies to determine if I had chosen the correct form of *The Unwantable*s. I created a variety of different versions of these characters. Some were more animal-like, while others were more non-descript. I allowed myself to be flexible and open to new ideas as I developed the story.

During this process, I continued to do extensive character studies to determine if I had chosen the correct form for *The Unwantables*.

Right Original Unwantables character studies from sketchbook

FLOYD, the unwantable
there were so many things Floyd wanted to do, ~~this~~ but he was stuck in his jar. All day he dreamed of surfing, of skiing, of riding a horse, feeding a monkey, swimming with the turtles.
The UNWANTABLES
Floyd, Ivan, Emerson, Gus, nick
766816
Happy Thinking
ANTABLES THEME SONG
AS supposed to be a
dle, but they messed
my DNA."
MAIN CHARACTERS
The UNWANTABLE – THE ARTIST
"FLOYD"
– The naive creative
The BLOG FROG – CONSTRUCTOR
"BOBA"
– The practical
"IVAN" THE MONKEY – The delivery man
– Sinister
– The entrepreneur
– Spontaneous
UNO


STATUS: UNWANTABLE
CONTAIN FOR OBSERVATION
find it anywhere
way the
me home
for me?
Their product. The
attached. I make them
pew at work. I've created an army of the characters. Since they ha
d and let them evolve into whatever they may become. I will doc
they might receive any answers to what they seek to know. My ho
tion even if just for 1 second to try and understand what they have
my hands will make peop
PBS
CNN
Picasso
or using exercise to release endorphins.
BUT NOT ME. I FOUND NO WAY THERE TO CELEBRATE ME.
THE DAYS WERE MARKED BY TV SHOWS AND BOREDOM
Then 1 day I saw a documentary on Picasso.
I had to try...
The lines he drew gave me
dream sequence → animated picasso/frames from TV.
END

Sketching rough storyboards of my written stories dramatically helped me in developing new ideas. I found that while writing was an essential component of my process, it was when I began to physically draw that I found myself getting into a better rhythm. I realized that my imagination was the most important aspect of my creative process. This was the story that I wanted to reveal; the role of imagination in my life.

I storyboarded several ideas that involved Floyd the Unwantable using his imagination to escape his dreary life in a jar. I quickly found that this limited my story to only one or two characters and I had over three hundred *Unwantables* by this point. Carrying these figures had become a bit of a burden because they were physically heavy and nearly broke the box that I stored them in. Then, I began to wonder, what would it be like if my imagination was represented by *the Unwantables*? What if I used them to present a day in my life? What if these numerous characters appeared whenever I used my imagination? These characters were the physical manifestation of my imagination. Why not use them to illustrate my story?

Sketching rough storyboards of my written stories dramatically helped me develop new ideas.

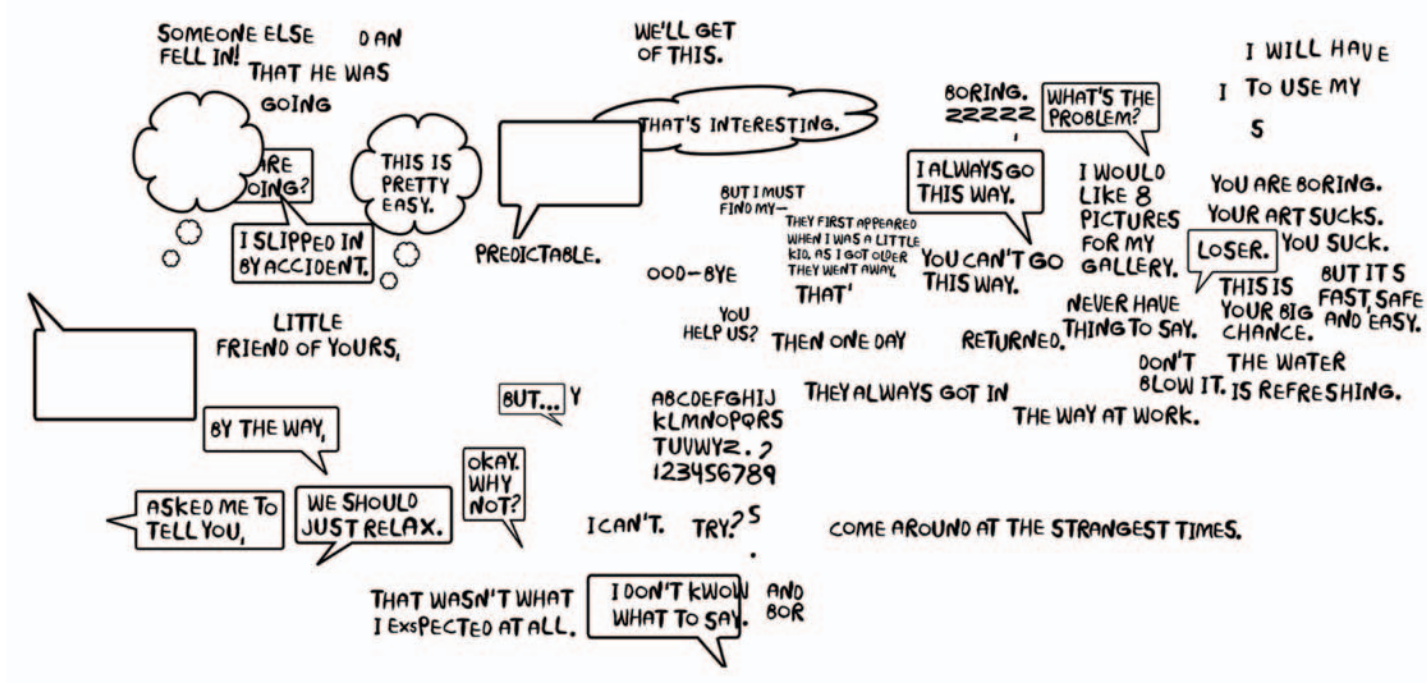
The series of photographs that captured *the Unwantables* in my everyday life were rendered black and white to make them look more timeless, dramatic and, to cover up my poor photography.

My first concept for the piece started as a sketched storyboard. Then, I spent a week shooting hundreds of photographs of these characters intertwined in my everyday life. They were present from the time I woke up until the time I went to bed. I photographed them with me brushing my teeth, walking to school, working, daydreaming, eating lunch, etc. In the process, I began to realize the constant presence imagination had been in my daily life. I decided that my story would show myself tiring of them and putting them in a box so they would leave me alone. But eventually, I would come to see the important role that *The Unwantables* had in my daily life and that everything seemed boring without them. Unfortunately, they escaped while I was ignoring them and this made me sad. Eventually, when I began to relax and use my imagination they returned and a new beneficial relationship developed.

The series of photographs that captured *The Unwantables* in my everyday life were rendered black and white to make them look more timeless, dramatic, and to cover up my poor photographs. I carefully arranged these images into a sequence that told the story well. I brought the images into *ImageReady* and created an animated slide show of the story. I set atmospheric music and overdubbed myself telling the story in a rather monotone voice. I considered this first film a moving storyboard to help me evaluate where the story needed to be developed and what images needed to be shot. Later, I edited the same footage with different music and a different overdubbed voice. I took more photos to fill in the appropriate spots that were lacking clear communication. I felt these first films were successful in telling my story but I was unhappy with the photographs and wanted to explore other visual mediums as well.

Left and Above Still frames from first visual exploration

NO.
CAN YOU HELP US?



I began to explore telling the same story using *The Unwantables* figures since they photographed so well. I altered the focus of my study to Floyd who would be a painter who keeps his imagination in a box. When he needs to paint he simply lets his imagination out of the box and they confer over how to create a nice painting. In this story, when Floyd goes to sleep one night, his imagination escapes and Floyd sets out on a journey to find him. On this journey he encounters different characters and situations that help him grow and come to understand his imagination better. In this visual treatment, I again animated the still frames in *ImageReady* with music. I developed a typeface from *Sculpy* clay, which was converted to vector art and used as a typographic treatment in the short film.

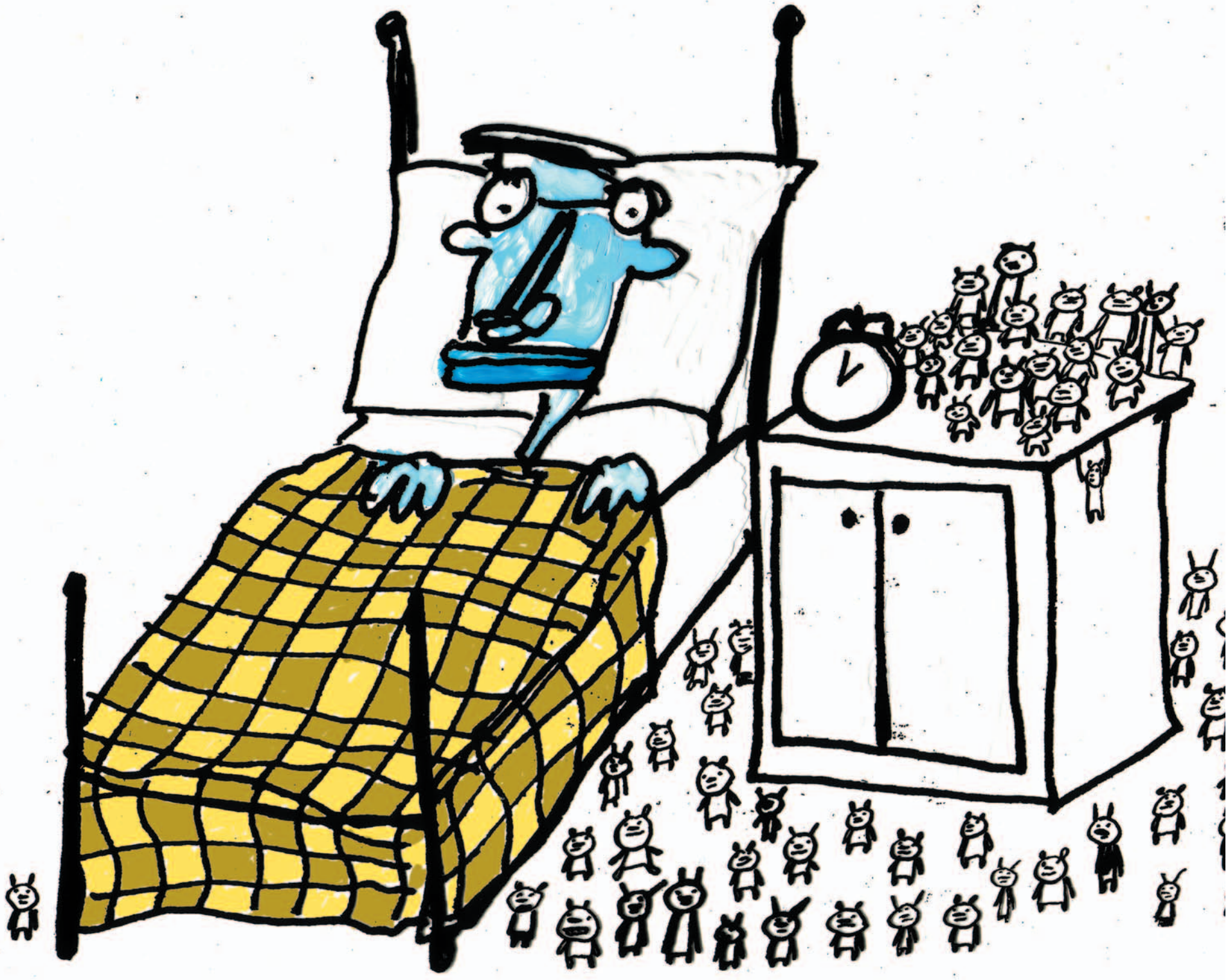
After reviewing this version, I was advised to consider developing only a small segment of the film as my main story and consider the idea of the muse, rather than the imagination. From this discussion, I created a short film using the classic technique of stop-animation, photographing 12 frames per second to give the illusion that the characters in the film were actually moving. This resulted in a two-minute short made up of over 500 photographs. The result of the film was entertaining but lacked the power of the first black and white exploration.

Left Still frames from muse visual exploration **Above** Exploration of Sculpy typeface

The concept would synthesize enhanced photographic images and hand-drawn elements.

I returned to the original photography I shot for the first films and I began to capture additional footage of myself with *The Unwantables* using a mini digital video camera. From this video footage I selected key frames and began to assemble roughly animated films to mix in with the other images that had been previously taken. Stylizations of the images were made in an attempt to make the film graphically interesting. Color and contrast were exaggerated and the images were roughly cropped in extreme angles to create a different aesthetic than my usual work. These images were then assembled into a linear collage. I envisioned the visual narrative being slowly revealed as the image scrolled from left to right across a set frame or stage. The concept would synthesize enhanced photographic images and hand-drawn elements.

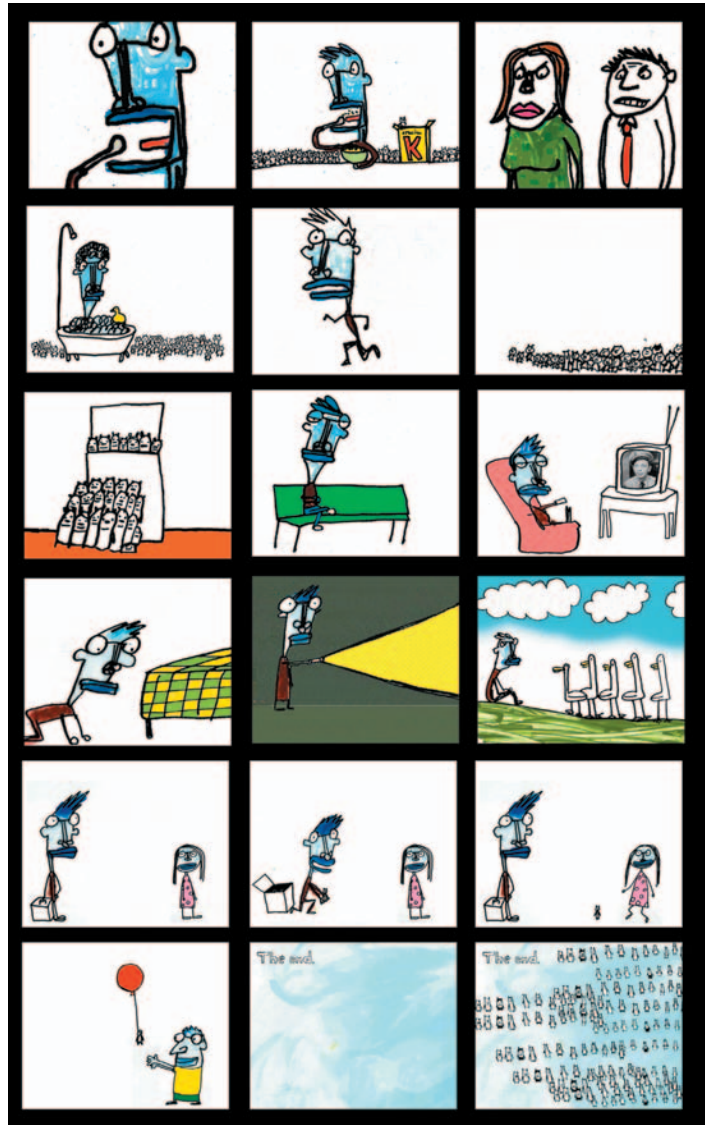
Left and Above Exploration of visual form for narrative



As I created these storyboards by hand and pinned them up on a large wall, I found myself drawn to the simplicity of the sketchy drawings.

In preparing this concept, I used storyboarding to work out the necessary shots and to perfect the order of events. As I created these storyboards by hand and pinned them up on a large wall, I found myself drawn to the simplicity of the sketchy drawings. The work reminded me of two illustrators I admire, William Steig and Quentin Blake. Both use simple expressive line and limited color to create energetic and imaginative drawings. During my mid-term review, Robert Meganck remarked that I just needed to figure out what I wanted to say, and say it simply and clearly.

The drawings did just that. I no longer was concerned so much with the formal qualities of the narrative but rather with simply telling the story. I transferred all the drawings to acetate, and hand painted them as if they were traditional animation cels. These cels were scanned, and intentionally left rough and unrefined. A new film was created by cutting up these digital files in *Photoshop* and animating them layer by layer. These sequences were exported as *QuickTime* movies and assembled in *iMovie* where sound and transitions were added.



Left Animation cel that has been hand painted **Right** Still frames from final film

Sandy

change music

GHETTO is OK.
LoTech leads To New
Limitations lead To
MAKE STUFF. Th
To more IDEAS.

michael gray <michael@liquidfuxion.com>
Re: unwantables_cartoon_draft_3

oh lord. i almost made a puddle a few tim

who's that kid at the end? is he retarted?
up. actually, i think you could get rid of h
maybe she kind of tells it all? i will use c

1-Do you think the baby scene is nece

the baby scene. i t

THE UNWANTABLE

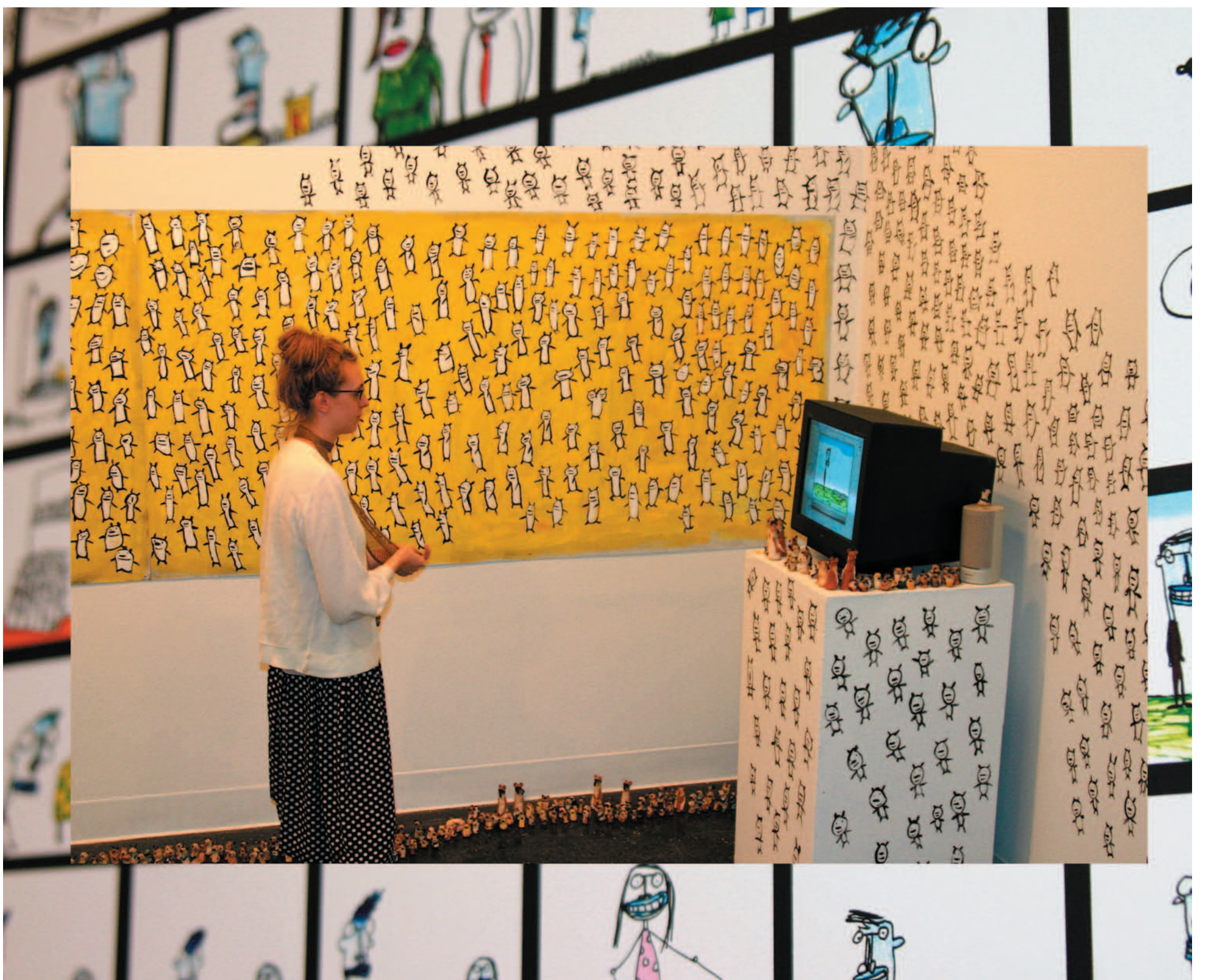
A VISUAL NARRATIV
BY MARIUS VALDES

The committee's revisions required redrawing, repainting, and reanimating scenes in addition to creating new ones, all of which resulted in a much more cohesive film.

Sound was composed using *GarageBand*. The first draft of the movie simply used one song to propel the movie. I then recorded variations of the song adding a slower introduction and more changes in the music to break the monotony of the soundtrack. Eventually, I recorded multiple songs to help differentiate significant parts of the film. I used slower music when I wanted to evoke a sad moment and more upbeat songs to reflect the adventure of the narrative. This process made me aware of the emotive role that sound plays in a short film and the difficulty of creating smooth audio transitions and atmosphere.

Numerous revisions and edits were made to the film after meeting with various committee members. Roy McKelvey indicated ways to improve the pacing, and pointed out scenes that would be helpful in making the story more complete and coherent. I added over two minutes of footage that I had previously cut out to make the short faster paced. Sandy Wheeler suggested revisiting sound and transition. The music became a much larger sub-problem than anticipated. It was difficult to create music that synchronized exactly the way I needed it to. Robert Meganck mentioned improving more dramatic shifts in perspective. I tried doing this by adding new scenes that focused in closer on the characters and their expressions. The committee's revisions required redrawing, repainting, and reanimating scenes in addition to creating new ones, all of which resulted in a much more cohesive film.

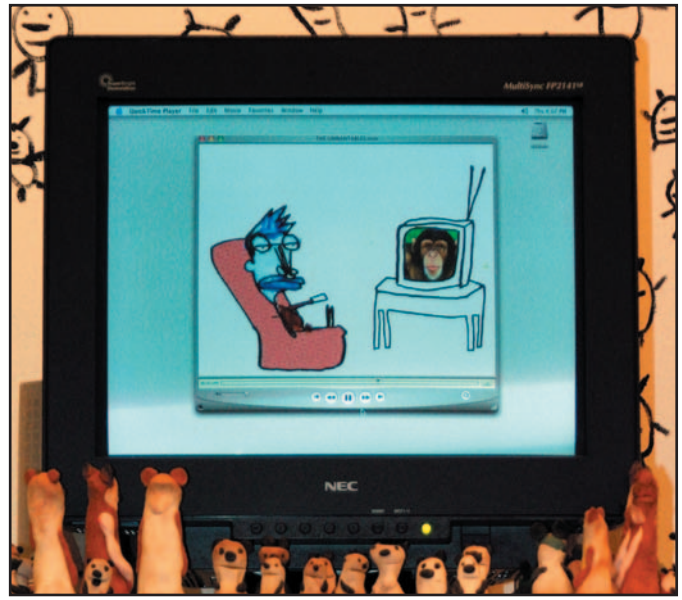
Left Revsion notes and feedback from committee and classmates



Overall, I found the project to be successful. When I started the project I developed a number of sub-problems to investigate. Through these problems, I learned a tremendous amount of information about visual storytelling by exploring several different mediums such as photography and animation. I made a first attempt at creative writing and successfully developed an original story. I managed to spend a great deal of time examining my creative process and the role of imagination in my work. I developed a methodology for creating a visual narrative. I explored the process of storyboarding, editing, and production of short films. I explored the use of sound in visual narrative. I spent considerable time developing and designing *The Unwantables* as characters and as metaphor. Most importantly, I gained greater understanding of narrative as a tool for visual communication. I believe I will see this project's merit more clearly in the future, especially after I have some distance from it.

In hindsight, there is one thing I would have done differently. I would have benefited from using software like *FlashMX* or *AfterEffects* to create my movie. While this would have required me to learn new software applications, I realize now how much easier it might have made the final assembly of the film and the amount of creative freedom it might have offered as well. Although I am happy with the film's final form, and the rough animation style is appropriate for the visual narrative and subject, I could have achieved the same look and feel with other applications faster and more efficiently.

It would have been a benefit to attempt or build a series of shorter, less involved stories as well. Rather than tackling one large story, it might have been useful to do a series of small simple stories to learn about the basics of visual narrative. While short sequences were explored in the creation of the final film, there was a great deal of pressure that they be made to work in the scheme of the larger film. Experimental films may have provided a transition into creating a more refined story.



Left and Right MFA Exhibition of creative project at the Anderson Gallery

The important achievement of this project is that it marks a beginning for me, in a new area of visual communication. When I entered graduate school, my work had become boring, predictable, and safe. Graduate school, and this creative project, have pushed me and challenged me more than any other intellectual pursuit I have ever undertaken. I have learned many new things that require me to evaluate how I will reenter the field of visual communication as both a design educator and as a professional. I will no longer be a passive observer and admirer of visual narrative. I have gained important understanding about how I can tell my own stories and with great confidence. I have developed new methods of storytelling that will help me create work that is imaginative, inspired, original, and effective. I have insight and experience that I will be able to share with my students. I have experienced creative and personal growth, established new friendships and professional relationships. I am prepared to transform and translate this aquired knowledge and experience into a meaningful form of visual communication that will benefit our profession.

UNDERSTANDING COMICS
SCOTT McCLOUD
the art of MONSTERS, INC.
Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels
THE WORLD OF WILLIAM STEIG
LORENZ
KEITH HARING
JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT
Leonhard Emmerling
JOE SORREN
THE END OF PRINT
CARSON
BLACKWELL
John Maizels
RAW CREATION
Outsider Art and beyond
drawing now: eight propositions
laura hoptman
Pictured in My Mind
Contemporary American Self-Taught Art
Fanelli
THE PUSH PIN GRAPHIC
CHWAST
Teddy's World
MIKE MIGNOLA
THE ART OF HELLBOY
PANEL DISCUSSIONS:
REBEL WITHOUT A CREW
ROBERT RODRIGUEZ
DUMB LUCK
BASEMAN
Animation 2D and beyond
Jayne Pilling
MYTHOLOGY
ALEX ROSS
CHIP KIDD
GEOFF SPEAR
TASCHEN
DEVILS
Gilles Néret
DRAGONS
DR. KARL SHUKER
FRANK MILLER
The Comics Journal Library
Creating a Graphic Novel
BARRON'S
Illustrating Children's Books
SUPERMAN
Brian Sibley
CHICKEN RUN
HATCHING THE MOVIE
TONY C. CAPUTO
VISUAL STORYTELLING: THE ART AND TECHNIQUE
TINTIN The Complete Companion
MICHAEL FARR
Clifford Ross
Karen Wilkin
The World of Edward Gorey
11/2004
EVENT DESIGN
THEM MAGAZINE 007
The Language of Comics Word and Image
On Photography
THE WRITING LIFE
MARIE ARANA
STEPHEN KING On Writing
THE AESTHETICS OF COMICS
WRITING WITH PICTURES
R.O.Blechman: Behind the Lines
VCU GRAD

Baseman, Gary. *Dumb Luck*. Chronicle Books: San Francisco, CA. 2004.
I admire Gary Baseman's ability to extend his artwork beyond editorial illustration into animation, fine art, and designer toys. I also enjoy his artwork and unique graphic perspective in telling stories.

***Charles M. Schulz Conversations*. Edited by M. Thomas Inge. University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, MS. 1994.**
Charles Schultz is the most successful cartoonist of all time and this book revealed his thought process and ideas about telling stories.

Eisner, Will. *Graphic Storytelling*. Poorhouse, Tamarack, Fl. 1996.
Will Eisner thoroughly explains the craft of sequential art.

Lord, Peter and Sibley, Brian. *Creating 3-D Animation; The Aardman Book of Filmmaking*. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York, NY. 1998.
Aardman Studios offers great insight into every step of the creative process of 3-D animation from concept to completion using examples from their award winning work.

Lorenz, Lee. *The World of William Steig*. Artisan, New York, NY. 1998.
His artwork makes me want to throw my paintbrushes and computer away and just draw, draw, draw.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. HarperCollins, New York, NY. 1993.
This book extends the foundation of Will Eisner's *Graphic Storytelling* explaining design principles used in visual narrative in a more contemporary context.

Meadows, Mark Stephen. *Pause and Effect*. New Riders, Indianapolis, IN. 2003.
This book discusses the interactive experience in visual narrative and it's role in today's digital world.

Pilling, Jayne. *2-D and Beyond*. Rotovision SA, East Sussex, UK. 2001.
This book compiled interviews of animators that are creating unique and interesting short films using a variety of different traditional and new mediums.

Pixar. *The Art of Monsters, Inc*. Chronicle Books: San Francisco, CA. 2001.
This book was my inspiration for exploring character design.

Free Throw Coach
Sandy "Pistol" Wheeler

Patient Listener
Roy McKelvey

Like A Rolling Stone
Robert Meganck

Extra Eyes
Matt Woolman

Spiritual Advisor
Laura Chessin

Editors-in-law
Mark McHugh
Barb McHugh

Pen Pal
Michael Gray

Left Brain
Rachel+e Riley

Right Brain
John Stanko

Voices of Reason
Teresa Engle
Justin Howard

Voice of Madness
Matt Gardner

Technical Support
Chris Malvern
Andrew Ilnicki

Cheerleaders
Avril Valdes
Beth Ward
Team McHugh
Anne Graves
Priya Khatri
Kate Resnik
St. Red Dog
Winnie Beginnie

Mental Break
Joe Good
Jerrod Wilkins
Mary Beth Lumley

Document Design
Marius Valdes 2005

Project Equipment and Software
Apple Macintosh G4
Wacom Tablet
Fuji 2.1 MegaPixel Digital Camera
Panasonic Mini DV Camera
Adobe Acrobat (used to create pdf's)
Adobe Photoshop (used to edit images)
Adobe ImageReady (used to animate images)
Adobe Illustrator (used to create vector-based images)
Adobe InDesign (used to layout printed documents)
Quicktime Pro (used to render movies)
Apple iMovie (used to edit and assemble movie clips)
Apple GarageBand (used to create music)

Musical Input
Jimmy Eat World, *Futures*
U2, *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*
Arcade Fire, *Funeral*
Killers, *Hot Fuss*
Various, *Michael Gray CP Mix*