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Children's Book Development

Rebecca Zomchek

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Children's Book Development

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in Illustration with Honors

April 24, 2008

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Capstone Abstract: *Children's Book Development*

My children's book development project for the Honors program is the creation of a children's book 'dummy' book. A dummy book is a creative process book that a children's book illustrator might send to a publishing company as part of an application or as a pitch for a future project. A dummy book includes several stages of production in the creation of a finished children's book. These steps include: the choice of a story, the initial thumbnail/small sketches, creation of the book's layout and design sketches, final drawings, and final paintings. These sample books serve as a model to display an artist's ability in a way that will showcase their style and work process as well as serve as a sample of their finished work.

The story I chose to illustrate for this project is the nonsensical poem: "The Owl and the Pussycat" by Edward Lear. First published in 1871 the poem tells the story of an owl and a pussycat who fall in love; go to sea; and are married in a faraway land.

Throughout this project I worked in a variety of mediums, each chosen to accompany the volume and complexity of the work being executed. The initial sketches were drawn in a sketchbook with ink pens. The 'dummy' book was compiled with Bristol paper and graphite. The final sketches and paintings were completed digitally. The digital pieces were drawn with a Wacom drawing tablet. This is an interactive drawing screen that is touch sensitive and picks up its digital pen's movements like a paper would when drawing on it with pencil. The program used to draw and paint the pieces was Adobe Photoshop.

I was always read to and encouraged to read and look at books as a child. Books and story time were always very important to me and had an enormous impact on my interests and goals. From my earliest childhood I was introduced to art and story-telling and was inspired to create. I was influenced by the artists of my favorite books and have continued to study art and art history to develop my knowledge of art and traditions as teaching tools. I have also come to understand the value of books and reading to children to teach and encourage imagination and creativity; this has drawn me to the children's book art form. I feel the presentation of a large collection of work can be a wonderful learning process and I very much enjoy viewing this sort of project when presented in any field of study.

Art to me is a powerful force that can inspire people to create and experience new things. I want to encourage these ideas and promote reading and storytelling. I also strive to reach children, parents and educators with my work and create a visually stimulating and exciting presentation. I therefore present this project in its entirety as an example of my creative process, the stages of children's book creation, and art at its essence to be viewed, experienced, and enjoyed.

Capstone Table of Contents:
Children's Book Development

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Capstone Reflective Essay</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Works Cited and Consulted</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>Capstone Summery</i>	<i>17</i>

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Children's Book Development

This project is dedicated to my mentors: professors, professionals, and friends all of whom have taught me so much. And to my loving family, without their support none of this would be possible.

Reflective Essay:
Children's Book Development

The process of creating my Thesis project was a series of artistic and developmental stages that took several semesters to complete. Each stage of the process was an important and necessary to bring the project to its conclusion.

The main challenge I faced in creating my project was how to take the process I work with to create one painting and use the same steps to create a fully designed book. Each character on each page needs to look cohesive and tell a believable, understandable story that reaches a large audience. I also wanted to show each creative step as a display of my work process and I wanted each stage to clearly relate to the other while standing on its own when presented. The other concern I had to keep in mind was how to design the book so it shows as much of my artistic potential and process as possible while also reaching a large audience. To me a children's book is a narrative to be enjoyed by families, children and teachers; the young and old coming together to share stories and ideas. That sharing process is a very important one to me and I wanted to present my work at its best to appeal to as many people as possible.

In the modern children's book market there is a strong push to make children's books more simplistic and child friendly, this includes the complexity and sophistication of the artwork. More and more children's books are being produced with unchallenging child-like images in hopes of connecting to children's own artistic abilities. This approach is not without

merit and public appeal, but my own style differs from this modern approach. In my youth I was always drawn to books and illustrations with detailed art and I believe that preference is reflected in my work and project goals. I try to gear my work towards a family and child audience, but I prefer to make my illustrations a bit more challenging than some of the books in the market today. To do this I created work with a more classic and traditional look. I also work in a semi-realistic style and therefore do research on everything that goes into my painting before I draw it to make sure everything is easily recognizable and accurate. My approach also involves my chosen medium.

There is a long-standing tradition to illustration and painting, some mediums are considered more professional than others and new styles are always coming in and out of fashion. Oil paints, because of their history and sustainability, are considered a 'high medium' where watercolors or modern colored pencils might be considered a 'low medium.' Recently artists have begun to learn and accept digital painting. My freshman year I was first introduced to the computer program Adobe Photoshop and the concept of 'professional' digital painting and I have been working ever since to learn and master the technique. I also researched digital drawing tablets and have been working with the Wacom brand to help develop my style. As I first was learning the program I went looking for my professor's help and advice. Most of the professors tentatively encouraged my exploration and offered what assistance they could, but in general I received very little guidance and was often told to focus on my traditional paintings skills. My professors had yet to

learn the new technology and until a very basic digital class was offered here by graduate students, I was left teaching myself. This was accomplished by looking for tutorials and advice online, often from other students and young professionals my own age. This is creating problems for illustration students at Syracuse University because many companies that hire Illustrators today require fluent knowledge of these programs. Having an art department with older professors uneducated in this new technology and therefore unable to instruct us to use these programs is creating many graduating seniors lacking these new skills to start in the work force. I feel digital art has amazing potential that is just starting to be explored. I have loved my experience with it and despite prejudice from painters hanging onto age old tradition I doubt I would ever go back to only traditional painting mediums even though my training here at Syracuse University has reinforced my fluency and skill in using these mediums.

I was always read to and encouraged to read and look at books as a child. Books and story time were always very important to me and had a huge impact on my interests and goals. From an early age I was inspired to create and was always influenced by the artists of my favorite books. I have also come to understand the value of books and of reading to children to teach and encourage imagination and creativity. I love to watch a project come together after long hours and hard work. To stand back and see the value of your time and effort come to fruition, becoming something that other people can experience and enjoy is a wonderful experience. I also greatly value the

history and tradition of art and storytelling, from the very foundations of our history these concepts have always been vital and I believe we need to keep these ideas and traditions alive.

I also believe that art brings people together. It is amazing to me, as I have begun to share my art with the world through the technology we have today via the internet, not only the volume of people who have been exposed to my work but also the diversity of people. People from all over the world, from countries I would never imagine being interested in my art at this stage of my career, all sharing and learning together for art's and creative sake. The children's book illustrators I know have always spoken fondly of seeing their books published and distributed all over the world. They also mention the wonderful opportunity to travel to schools and conferences to share their work with other professionals and groups of children. I can't wait to take this next step and continue to share my work with people who are excited and inspired by my art.

As with any project that is intended for a large audience I was very conscious of trying to make my images viewer friendly and visually appealing. One of my main design challenges was the idea of working with animals as my two main characters and giving them enough life and animation without making them too humanistic. I believed they still needed to have very animal like qualities, but they still had to be able to walk, talk, and wear clothes. I had worked on several sketches at the beginning of the process where the cat's 'hands' were still very 'paw' like in their design and my

advisor suggested they needed some development to be understandable. This limb design process became even more difficult with the owl character that has no 'hands' to speak of. That anatomy and character design balance for both a mammal and bird was a definite conscious concern.

An issue that I considered while I worked on illustrating this story is the consideration of the possibility of a symbolic multicultural or perhaps racial relationship between the owl and cat character. Children who are most times still free of the social stigmas and stereotypes might not question an owl and a cat falling in love. I am sure if a scholar were to interpret the text however, there would be some mention of the different species relationship between the two main characters and whether or not they had to leave to get married. Myself I have no issues with the story and enjoyed illustrating the light-hearted children's story but I occasionally wondered if anyone would notice the possible issue and if anyone would have strong feelings one way or the other. Edward Lear himself addressed the odd mix of the owl and cat's children in his short unfinished accompanying poem. We may never really know what his influence for the paring was.

The major decisions I had to make as I worked on my project were very much related to how I wanted my work to be seen and interpreted in its completed state. The biggest decision, also the first, was what style was I interested in working in? As I have suggested many children's books in today's market are very straightforward and I have taught myself how to work in several styles ranging from the very simple to the highly intricate. I had to

decide how complex did I want my images to be and how that decision would impact the timeline and work of the project.

I also wanted to take into account a historical time-period for the characters costumes and keep the objects that accompanied them believable. I chose the Reformation Period of Germany (1500-1525) for the building blocks of their classical design and wanted to give everything in their environment that old time feeling.

Those initial decisions went on to create more questions as the project developed. I had to decide: what colors did I want to work with? How big would I want the book to be printed? When it came to designing the characters of the book, how stylized did I want the characters to become? How did I want the characters to interact? What kind of personalities would they have? Did I want to directly illustrate the story or incorporate ideas of my own? Then I also had to decide how much time I would spend on each stage of the design process. Each stage had to be designed, completed and then approved by my advisors, so I had to plan each stage carefully to insure I had time to work on every stage as needed. I also had to decide how many final paintings I could complete once I had finished the rest of the project. My initial plan called for three final paintings, but looking at my due dates and how large and complex I had ended up making the paintings I knew that just wasn't an option and decided on two well finished pieces rather than three rushed paintings.

My project is presented as a timeline of my work starting from the initial sketches to the finished pieces. I wanted to present everything in chronological order so the viewer can see step by step the creative process and see how each stage builds on the other. Often times when I present my work to a non-artist audience I find people asking me how I come up with my paintings or thinking that the paintings come out of thin air. I think it's a wonderful learning opportunity to see any project in its entirety and really see the work that goes into making a final product.

When working with large art projects the pieces themselves and their care are a huge responsibility. As I worked on my project and began to collect and store my sketches and designs I was responsible for keeping track of my work and preserving it for presentation. I also had to be very careful with my large digital files so I could work on them and maintain them without technical difficulty. I was constantly backing up my files throughout the process and working with my computer to get through everything without any meltdowns. I did end up having computer problems late this semester and had to work through repairs, viruses and technical malfunctions, but with my back-up work and persistence everything turned out. The very important lesson that I learned is that art is no exception; one must always be prepared when working with computers, things can and will go wrong.

My other obstacle while working on my project was time. I was very dedicated to this project and put a lot into working each stage to a point where I was happy with the results. Needless to say each stage took its own

considerable time and the art professors who worked with me on my project are also busy professionals. Setting up meetings with them to look at each stage of my progress was sometimes a challenge. My honors advisor and reader are both professional Illustrators who have produced several children's books. Their input and advice for this project, as well as in their classes, have always been very helpful. They themselves have brought in their own work-in-progress for me to review which is always a wonderful learning experience and helped influence this collection for presentation.

My purpose with this project is to present the developmental stages of a children's book production and to share my own creative process. To show how I make my illustration designs and my creative process with the world. This sort of art presentation is the kind I am drawn to most and love to see and study as I have worked my way through art school. I feel it has been a wonderful experience to share what I do in hopes of answering questions and creating a demonstration to help educate those interested in how this process evolves.

In the new modern age of technology on-line libraries and museums, through the Internet, have become wonderful tools for artists to see and experience unlimited amounts of artwork. We are exposed to people and styles from all over the world through individual and group websites. Artists also have the chance to share how they create their artwork and help the community at large learn and develop. Having always had these connections

to my artistic peers and having taken several years of art history courses I have many artistic influences that have inspired me in many different ways.

My family has always been very supportive of my artwork. My mother is a very creative person and her father is also a gifted drawer and craftsman. I also have two cousins already in the art and design field who served as a bit of family influence to show that I could make my way in the world as an artist.

From my early childhood I was very much influenced by children's book artists including: Jan Brett, Dean Morrissey, Kevin Henkes, Mercer Meyer, Michael Hague, Kinuko Craft, David Small, Holly Hobbie, Beatrix Potter, Maurice Sendak, Dr Seuss, Steven Kellogg, Katharine Holabird, Tomie dePaola, Chris Van Allsburg and countless others, including the early animation masters.

Later in life, as I began to research artists and learn more about the contemporary art scene, my influences include: John Howe, Alan Lee, Todd Lockwood, Anry Nemo, Mary GrandPre, Donato Giancola, Tony DiTerlizzi, Scott Gustafson, Adam Rex, and many many others including many of my peers who have helped me learn and grow as we work together towards our careers. My style isn't really like one particular person in this list, rather looking at and studying how these people make their art I've learned to become a better painter and better express my ideas through my work.

Any and all art and visual media I encounter and enjoy, from books to magazines to movies to children's art, inspire my art. All of my visual experiences end up as an influence one way or another through color,

composition or technique. I am also very influenced by other things; nature has a very profound influence on my work. I love paintings plants and animals and feel there is a wonderful magnificence that can be found in the world around us. As a musician I am also very influenced my music and love to listen to different genres as I paint, and I am very inspired by movies and other creative media.

I find myself also very inspired by traveling. The spring of my junior year I had the wonderful opportunity to travel abroad to Italy and study the work of Michelangelo. I spent 8 days traveling through Rome and Florence spending hours in museums and ruins. The trip was a life-changing week; I saw and experienced so many wonderful things. The unbelievable collections of art that I was able to see and study in person had a huge impact on my knowledge of art and art history and the way I approach my work. By far my greatest influential experiences were viewing the works of the great masters like Leonardo da Vinci up close. We were given our own private viewing of the Sistine Chapel. I cannot describe the power of that experience and how it truly cemented my love for classic art and powerful detailed masterpieces.

My choice audience would be children, families, librarians and teachers, but really my audience is anyone who encounters and takes the time to view my artwork. I feel there is a great distinction to being a visual artist, it takes time and commitment to read and critique a piece of writing or music but as an illustrator your work can be viewed and judged in a matter of seconds. For some this is both a positive and negative reality, as for myself I

encourage any and all to view my work and always love when people enjoy viewing my paintings.

This project as a culmination of all of the things I have learned in art school and is a collection of my love for art and my dedication to my craft. My self-awareness and identity truly is that of an artist. There are people who do something because they've studied it and have become successful. But there are also those people who do things because they can't imagine doing anything else and can't live without it. This is art for me. I cannot imagine myself not constantly drawing and creating. In fact throughout my academic years my spiral notebooks were always filled with drawings and I have piles of sketchbooks overflowing with paper scraps and sketches. Art is what I do. I want people to understand that my art exists beyond economic underpinnings. There are artists struggling around the world to sell their work based on society's expectations and limitations. I have chosen to make art my life's work and how I choose to make my living. Although I will make money with my art, there's so much more meaning to it than that for me. I would do art regardless of my career and need for money, and it was very hard deciding whether or not to go to art school.

There was a small part of me that wanted to choose a more academic career in hopes of better job security. There was a time I was almost convinced I would go on to medical school and become a Doctor. I have always been interested in medicine and anatomy, but I love art so much I knew I would never forgive myself if I didn't try to become an artist. I have

even considered pursuing medical illustration as a future career to help combine my interests and participate in the medical industry. I will always struggle with doing art for clients rather than just whatever I want to paint, but I know I'll be able to strike a harmony between the two. I've learned that even though I may be instructed to paint something in particular I am still interpreting what I paint and the images I create. The viewer of my work is still seeing my personal style and taste no matter what the painting is about or what project the piece is for.

I also view this work as the next step on my way to my next degree. Another life goal of mine is to become an art instructor and share with others the same experiences I had growing up and really learning about art for the first time. I had the wonderful opportunity to be a Teacher's Assistant for a freshmen drawing class as a part of the foundation program for first year students at Syracuse University and fell in love with teaching and the college classroom environment. I came from a very rural area and as I tried to develop my art through out my childhood I was always disappointed with the lack of support and funding for our school art programs. The teachers were always uninterested, worn down by years of uninterested students and lack of decent work conditions and supplies. I always envied schools that supported art and made their departments as successful as possible and helped their students by encouraging them to pursue art. I want to support those students who have the same passion that I feel for my work and make sure everyone who wants to has that support and opportunity.

As I study art there are many artists who encourage students to explore ideas as many times as possible. Many artists layout and design pieces dozens of times until they feel the piece is refined and meets their expectations. In my thumbnail stage of design I will often design a piece in several different ways in hopes of coming up with the best version possible. With my style and way of working I often work through my decision making process while I am drawing the piece so I don't need future adjustments. Also when I paint with Photoshop I have complete freedom to move elements of the piece around until I am pleased with the overall look. Then after that step I can play with my colors in one continuous work session instead of painting sample pieces to design the colors just right. I often had to fight against professors who would try to force me to follow all the same steps they do to create their paintings. Their instinct is that if their techniques worked for them those same steps would be a good place for their students to start. I did learn from having to do these steps, but I have moved far from them now with my digital art and continue developing my own work system. Each person has their own process system that they use to get things done.

Other limitations that Illustrators often encounter are the expectations and needs of their art directors and publishers. These include deadlines, size and color printing limitations, and style expectations. Fine artists and gallery painters by trade, for the most part, have the freedom to paint and express their ideas in any way they please. Illustrators are bound by their jobs, contracts and expected style. Some illustrators choose to ignore these

boundaries. They are often hard to break free from and by ignoring them they can harm your reputation as a respected businessperson. When you develop a reputation for producing a certain type of work it is often very hard for an artist to switch styles without losing much of their client base. Some artists even develop pseudo-personas so they can work with different art directors doing different jobs. I myself can work in several different styles depending on the medium in which I work and the subject matter I am trying to convey. I've considered the idea that I may have to separately develop my children's book art and the more realistic side of my painting in two separate venues.

To anyone viewing and trying to understand my work, I hope that they first simply enjoy the experience visually; my primary goal in creating art is to craft something beautiful that people enjoy looking at and enjoy sharing with others. If they can I would also hope that they might try to appreciate the hard work and dedication that go into creating a book and a collection of work. It takes so little time to flip through a book, but every artist who takes on a large project dedicates months, even years of their lives and years of practice and experience to bring their pieces to life. I also hope I have created a project that stands out as being creative and unique. There are so many wonderful children's books available in stores and libraries. I hope that my work begins to compare to my artistic influences and leads to more projects and more chances for me to learn and grow.

From its beginning stages to my final painting there were many aspects of my project I had to consider carefully: how I wanted my project to

look, what I wanted it to say about me and my values, how it would be interpreted by my audience and what influences I could draw from my life and experiences to create a successful and defining project. I truly believe art brings people together and can share ideas and messages. Art can affect us emotionally and inspire us to be creative and learn. I want to encourage these ideas and promote reading and storytelling as an important tradition that has inspired me from my early childhood. I also want to share my creative process and help people understand what steps go into a large art project from concept to completion. I hope this project is indeed educational and enjoyable and I hope this endeavor inspires and leads to many more projects from others as well as myself.

Capstone Work Cited:
Children's Book Development

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Capstone Summary:
Children's Book Development

My children's book development project for the Honors program involves the creation of a children's book 'dummy' book. A dummy book is a sample book that a children's book illustrator might send to a publishing company as part of an application or as a pitch for a future project. A dummy book includes several stages of production that would happen in the creation of a real children's book. These steps include: the choice of a story, the initial thumbnail/small sketches, creation of the book's layout and design sketches, final drawings, color solutions, and final paintings. These sample books serve as a model to display an artist's ability in a way that will showcase their style and work process; as well as serve as a sample of their finished work. Professional children's book artists in the field would also follow these same steps in the creation of a final children's book for publication.

My stages of production of this project follow this same outline. My first step was to choose a story I felt would showcase my individual style and appeal to a wide audience. My initial plan was to write my own story for this project, but after talking this over with my Illustration professors, they assured me it would be better to work with an already established story. They argued that by using a classic, future art directors and public audiences would focus more on my interpretation of the story and my paintings rather than critiquing a new piece of writing.

After much consideration, the story I ended up choosing is the nonsensical poem: "The Owl and the Pussycat" by Edward Lear. First

published in 1871 the poem tells the story of an owl and a pussycat who fall in love; go to sea; and are married in a faraway land. I chose this story in particular because I love to draw animals and I felt this story, while still being a classic, has not been illustrated too many times which sometimes happens with other fairytales.

The next step of my project was to begin with a series of foundation sketches. With these drawings I began my design process and worked through my ideas in a process of trial and error. I worked on slowly defining my characters, deciding how complicated and photorealistic my paintings would end up being, and how I wanted the book to look in general. Many of my initial decisions about the project were made at this level in the process.

My next step was to start collecting some basic research. Since I work in a semi-realistic style I like my paintings to have a certain authenticity to them. To do this I found a lot of reference material from books, articles, and old prints to help me better understand my characters and their environments. Further, I researched things that would help build the world in which my characters lived. I started doing research on clothing and accessories from the time period I designed the book around, as well as preliminary research for the environments I would later portray. This step helped prepare me for one of the project's crucial stages, the actual dummy full book pages.

The 'dummy' book itself is the complete book all laid out as intermediate drawings with text. When submitted to a publisher this is the stage where they would either approve the drawings, or request changes.

These drawings are very important because they are the basic building blocks for the final paintings. They decide the placement of the figures on the page, the composition of the elements in the book, and the overall design and layout for the pages. I created the book on Bristol paper. I began by placing the text in the book and then drawing each page in place, working from my initial sketches to draw out the book in a cohesive clear style.

After all the pages were designed, sketched and drawn into my 'dummy' book I worked on another round of research accompanied by the creation of my final sketches. This time I found reference for specific objects and settings I would be incorporating into my final paintings. In the case of my first painting layout I found references pictures for the objects being held in the cat's basket, the boat deck, the sailor's knots and sail riggings in the background. As for the second painting layout I focused on finding reference for the lute being played by the owl and costume details for the close-up work of the characters. Most of this research came from internet databases together with reference books from the library. My most useful reference sources are often Knopf Books for Young Readers: 'Eyewitness books,' visual encyclopedia books for young children. They often have remarkable compilations of visual images and reference.

The final drawings I created from my sketches and this additional reference material served as the line works for my final paintings. The final paintings are a few select pieces taken from the dummy book that are fully painted to show how the book would look if it were to be completed. For this

project I chose two double-page spreads (four book pages) to demonstrate my finished work. Before I began my paintings I very loosely colored the images and sent the designs to my professors and advisors for approval. (In fact with each stage of production I reviewed my work with my advisors and Honors reader to gather their input and advice for the project.) As an art student we are taught to accept and value constructive criticism and often their advice involved page composition, character posing and page lighting. After years of working in the creative market and having created several children's book's of their own they are very knowledgeable about what it takes to make a piece successful and what art directors are looking for in finished pieces.

Throughout this project I worked in a variety of mediums, each chosen to accompany the volume and complexity of the work being executed. The initial sketches were drawn in a sketchbook with ink. I work with artist's pens in my sketchbooks because I feel they help me loosen up with my ideas and line work and not allow me to focus on making a drawing perfect as I might with a pencil and eraser. The 'dummy' book was compiled with Bristol paper and graphite which allowed for tighter more finished drawings while still being versatile and changeable. The final sketches and paintings were completed digitally. After years of study and practice I have become very comfortable with digital drawing tablets and associated programs and use them as freely as I do any other medium. Digital programs also give an extreme freedom to the creative process as the pieces created with them are easily editable and large to allow for complicated details which I enjoy. The

digital pieces were drawn with a Wacom drawing tablet. This is an interactive drawing screen that is touch sensitive and picks up its digital pen's movements like a paper would when drawing on it with pencil. The program used to draw and paint the pieces was Adobe Photoshop.

This project was a wonderful learning experience and a valuable opportunity for me. I very much hope to work as a children's book illustrator and by creating a full 'dummy' book I really got to experience the creative process and work that goes into such a complex project first hand. The final project will also be a strong addition to my portfolio when I graduate and look for Illustration job positions with publishing houses into the future. I truly believe art brings people together and through these creative projects people can share ideas and teach others through example. Art to me is a powerful creative force and can affect us emotionally and inspire us to create and experience new things. I want to encourage these ideas in the creative community and promote reading and storytelling as an important tradition that has inspired me since my childhood. I hope this project is indeed educational and enjoyable and I hope this project leads to many more books in the years to come from both myself and others influence by these projects.