

The Monthly Squeak

Mini-Issue

Aug-Sep '26

Editor's Note

Welcome back everyone! After a hiatus, due to me being too busy and too member-less to continue the Squeak, it has returned, and evolved! I am now an employee of the Writing Studio as a publications editor. That means that the Squeak has double (maybe to quadruple), the support it needs. We are highly encouraging monthly submissions, volunteer journalists, editors, and artists, and your opinions on events and clubs. You can even send me things that you'd like to see more of, any events or tips you'd recommend we cover, or any requests for interviews on what you're doing. If you have any questions about contributing or joining the squeak, you can email or text me, or ask Julianna about it if you find yourself in the Writing Studio. We are working on new things to give the school support and easier access to information on what's going on.

This is a special mini-issue for the back-to-school club rush time, before our new newspaper system catches up to speed, featuring interviews from two of our now graduated seniors. Look ahead to our future issues with a much bigger page range!

-Elliot MacDonald (Editor-In-Chief)

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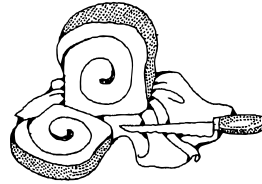
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The Dining Room

An Interview with *Marissa Rappaport* on her senior thesis, conducted by Elliot MacDonald.



E: Can you give a summary of your thesis?

M: My thesis is called the dining room. It's modeled after my childhood dining room. While I've been at college, my family and I have developed a lot of different medical ailments and things we just have to live with, and it's been really strenuous. So in the past few years, I started making more work about that. I wanted to explore our dining room and the place where we found peace and comfort throughout all of our turmoil.

E: There's also real bread and food that you made.

M: So the bread is from old family recipes and cookbooks. I grew up baking and cooking with my parents a lot, and I used to make a lot of food from scratch with them. So I wanted to work that back into my practice. When I took alchemy with Paul Jeanes in my junior year, it was the first time that a professor outright told me, like, "no food can actually be a part of your practice, it is its own art form." And that was really exciting for me. So I just started making things more, and I developed this language with the bread that I made, and kept experimenting with the taste to get it the way that I remembered and would imagine my family enjoying.

E: So the exhibition is an experience.

M: Yeah

E: Have you made three dimensional works before?

M: No. It was the biggest project I've been able to do. Most of my work previously has just been, like, drawings or paintings or smaller sculptures, that are usually either fantastical and escapist, or really grounded in reality but kind of hard to interact with. When I was still in the beginning of my bread journey, there was a point where my mom was having brain surgery, and it was all I could think about. So I made a loaf of bread that looks exactly like a brain and tried to explore, like, research books and things to learn more about what was happening. But it ended up being the wrong direction for me. It was getting too real and scary, and that's not what I wanted to do with my art. While it was cool to explore for a moment, I wanted something that was more comforting, and things I could share with my family as experiences. Also things that were welcoming for other people.

E: Given your writing major, what was the motivation for you to do something that is non-fictional?

M: Yeah, a lot of my writing has been more in the fantasy escapism sort of realm. But my writing also started to transition to more things that were happening with me in my personal life, or my parents and the

various illnesses they contracted, or things that were going on. So I wanted to just sort of document this stage of my life and how things were going, and have a way to celebrate my family and get us out of the dark place we were in for a while. My freshman year, my dad contracted a flesh eating disease that was really bad. He was in the hospital for, like, two weeks to a month, and he came out looking like a skeleton. He didn't fully recover from that until, I think, four months later, and that was like the first really scary thing. My mom also developed a brain tumor, and then things just sort of snowballed. My migraines got worse, my mom's seizures got worse, and that's when she decided she needed to get brain surgery to try to do something about it. So she got part of her skull taken out, and an implant put in, and a metal covering where the adhesive skull was to record her brain activity so they could do something to prevent more seizures in the future. But because all of these were really major and, like, big stressful moments. It was oftentimes the only thing I could think about. And for a while, I tried to get away from all of that in my art and just make things that were silly and whimsical and very bright, but eventually I just wanted to be able to talk about it through my work. So that's how the dining room sort of developed.

E: As for the visual aspect, you're

out how I was going to make this beautiful, perfect thing I was envisioning. Eventually, when I came back for the second semester, I had a really clear idea that I wanted to use thrifted materials to recreate this scene that I had in my head, with the work supporting it. So it was definitely a challenge for me. I don't really do interior design in my work typically, but I had a lot of fun doing it, and there's a lot of things I've learned along the way. Like I reupholstered the piano bench that was in my thesis myself, and I learned that whole process. I learned fancy napkin folding, and I got specific chairs that represented the different members of my family, so it felt like they were there with me even though they couldn't be there to see the work in person. I was able to give them a virtual tour, and it was just nice to be able to connect with them in that way.

E: Is this object-based art something that you want to keep doing?

M: Yeah, I feel like I really enjoy making objects. It's like, things I can take with me and share with the people that I care about. It feels more personal than if I were to just draw them or something. Nothing against illustration, I still love making 2D work. I just feel like I get more excited working with 3D objects.



using object design or interior design elements.

M: In the first semester of my thesis, I was kind of roaming around in different directions, trying to figure

E: You did a lot of bread baking events for the school. So was there a community outreach aspect?



M: Yeah, I wanted to get as many people involved with the work and excited about the work as I could, so it felt more like a shared experience than just my own personal thing. Because while it was about me and my family, I wanted people to enter the space and feel reminded of their own families and comforting times in their lives. So that everyone felt welcome to it. So a lot of the bread events that I did were bread making workshops, where I was teaching people how to make the things that I was, to connect with them on a deeper level.

E: Did the structure of the thesis class itself, where you're with a bunch of other people, help that idea?

M: Yeah, I think it depends on the thesis group you have. My thesis group felt a lot more like everyone was their own separate island. We would come together for the planning of things and to talk about ideas, but most of the time it was just, like, hunker down, focus on your own work and get feedback. I think it was helpful getting more insight, but they definitely weren't, like, super tied into my work, unless they really felt like they cared about it.

E: Do you prefer the longer project format?

M: Definitely. In Studio Arts thesis, there's a lot of time that they give you to explore and try different ideas. So my thesis idea changed at least five times in the first semester while I was trying to figure out what I really cared about showing and sharing with people. And, I think if I didn't have that first semester to just fuck around with different things, the work I showed for the final would have been much different, and I'm glad I had that second semester to really hone in on

everything I've learned and put it to use for the final product.

E: Outside of the more personal, singular objects, this kind of gallery space that you curated, is that something that you want to pursue in the future as well?

M: Yeah, definitely. I liked making something in the gallery that felt more homey and out of place. Usually, when people walk into a gallery, they're, you know, not free to interact. It feels a lot more sterile. There's kind of a disconnect between the viewer and the work in terms of engagement. But this was supposed to be very warm and inviting and allow people to just let their guard down and sit at a dining table in a gallery. I'm glad I got a chance to create that atmosphere.

E: Was the sensory experience where you, like taste, touch and looking at the objects- was it important to you to give a full experience?

M: Of course, I think it made everything much deeper. I think if I were to just, like, set this up, take professional photos of everything, and only have the photos hung in the gallery, that would have a much different feeling to it. I think the taste and smell and touch of everything made it more engaging for people, and I'm still having



people come up to me now that my thesis has long since been deinstalled. They're still remembering the way the food tasted, how it smelled, and that's what brings them back to the moment, and that's really exciting for me,

E: Did you extract and abstract from your real dining room?

M: So I knew that it had to be solid wood furniture. There had to be the pantry cabinet with the doors and painting I had, and there had to be the curio cabinet, because those are all things I grew up with and I strikingly remembered. But there were plenty of things that got more abstracted as I worked on the project. The color palette was purely for the sense of nostalgia I wanted to convey, not necessarily the colors of tablecloth or decoration that we actually had. It was just to make the work stronger. So there were definitely choices that were made. But the intention was to organize it like our original space.

E: It's not quite an assemblage, but it kind of has the same sensibility.

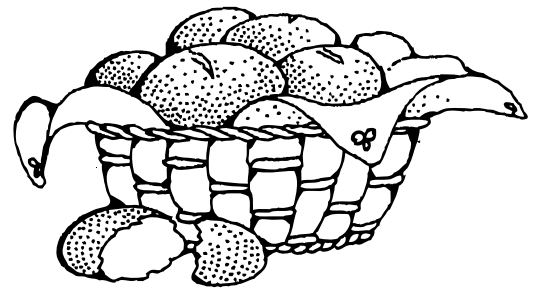
M: Yeah, I wanted everything to feel lived in and lived with, like it had a life before my show. Because a lot of the things that my family has we've gotten secondhand, or they've just been around a long time. So it feels different than just going to it assembling a chair or something. It feels like they have more personality, and that's what I wanted when they were shown, so they could feel like the people I was trying to portray.

E: Do you have any advice for people who want to figure out what it is that they want to do?

M: Yeah, don't be afraid if you can't find yourself motivated to work with your original ideas, allow them to change and grow and become what you want. The project is not going to immediately be perfect. There's going to be a lot of errors and fuck-ups and failures along the way, but it's all part of the process, and it's a useful experience. I think I was really happy with the final project I had because I spent so much time trying to figure it out and just working with a lot of different materials until I was happy with it.

E: Do you have any closing thoughts?

M: Make work that inspires you and work that you care about. Don't make something just because you think it'll get you a job, because that won't have as much meaning to you later. Make something that makes you immediately feel. That'll be the thing that actually lands you the job, because you'll be able to talk about it like you cared.



NIGHT'S FURY

An Interview with *Alicia Smith* on her senior thesis, conducted by Elliot MacDonald.



E: To start, can we have a summary of your thesis?

A: I decided to change my thesis over the summer to be a comic. The comic that I came up with is about witches that use the energy of the moon, like lunar energy, for their magic. And there's like different factions of witches, like healers, ones that use it for building, and casting spells and defense. One of the witches is graduating high school, and she's about to be awarded with the Coven Medallion by the Queen of the kingdom. So there's this whole ceremony that they're about to go to, and while she's about to be awarded, the ceremony gets interrupted by the long lost princess, who became this witch of the woods who uses solar magic. That's like a much more dangerous type of magic, because it's using fire, or destruction. So she comes back for revenge because she was banished for using solar magic in their kingdom. That's like the main area that I focused on for the actual comic, the ceremony and then the revenge.

E: Is this a story that you had before your thesis?

A: I wrote it for the thesis. I took, like, all of the first semester to figure out the story and design the characters. And that took a majority of that semester. That's why it kind of pushed me back on the actual comic.

E: Why did you want to make an original story for the thesis? Did you want to go



through the whole process?

A: Yeah, I found out that I really enjoyed designing characters and world building in my character design class that I took last year, and that inspired me to want to go through the pre-production process in more depth.

E: Is that what you're interested in professionally?

A: Yes, for sure, especially after that character design class. I was like, "Oh my gosh, this is what I want to do."

E: So what was the process of thesis like for you? Have you ever done a project that long before?

A: No, definitely not. I feel like I wasn't given the opportunity so far, in high school or college, to do a year long project. I did do sophomore studio junior year because I came in as a transfer, but that was obviously

one semester and a lot less in depth than your thesis.

E: Did you like this format more? Or do you think you'll go back to shorter deadlines?

A: I feel like, as an artist, I am very impatient. I like the satisfaction of finishing something faster, and I also don't really like writing the story part of it. If I could just do the art for someone else's idea, that would be my dream goal.

E: Had you done comics before? Was this your first real in-depth look into it?

A: I have done a few smaller comics, but having more of a long-form project made me dive into the page layout and apply my skills to that aspect of it, which I hadn't really thought about as deeply before.

E: What types of other artists or stories did you look at?

A: I follow a lot of artists on Instagram, honestly. They make a lot of, like, witchy art that I look at a lot more. I don't really read comics or graphic novels, so that honestly wasn't part of my inspiration, but more like witchy art on Instagram and Pinterest.

E: That's kind of surprising, because I feel like your composition is so interesting and dynamic. So what was the process like in coming up with a comic book?

A: At the beginning of my thesis, doing the page layouts was really hard for me. Being with Corinne in class, she would go through a lot of revision phases, and she would tell me how to improve the pages. And I feel like that back and forth really helped me try to figure out the flow of the page. And then the comics class this past semester was the next step in making me figure out compositions more. Half of my wall was the comics final, so I feel like that shows the progress, because my actual thesis that I started last semester didn't have that class with it, so I didn't really know what I was doing.

E: You mentioned that you don't prefer writing, so what was the part that you most enjoyed?

A: Definitely, the character design process. I feel like I could have pushed it even more than I did, but with the deadlines that I had for myself, I scrunched it into less time. But that was the most fun for me to do, like the iterations of the fashion especially, that was really fun.

E: When you were doing it, you structured it so that you did pre-production the first semester and then post production the second semester. How did that timeline work for you?

A: I would have taken less time with the pre-production that I did. It was the page layouts that took me the longest, and the revising, which I know I said was really helpful, but it also just really took a long time. I'd not even finished pages until very recently. So even though it did result in something really nice, I feel like I could have put more time into it last semester and gotten those done. That was my original plan, to have those done last semester. I thought it was going to be done with the comic a lot sooner.

E: Your whole thesis also has a very clear artistic identity, like everything in the project is very visually united.

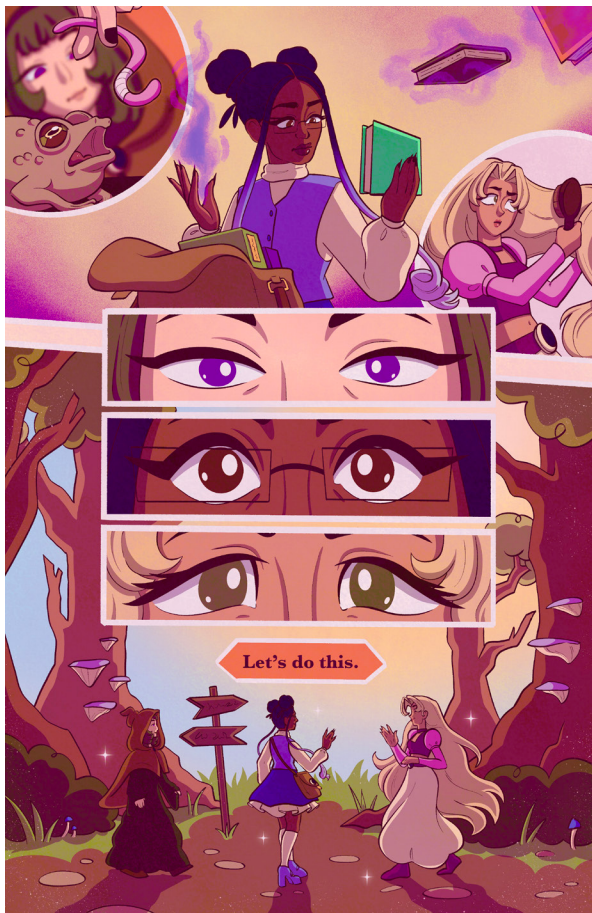
A: A lot of the pink and purple tones in the whole thing



were texture filters that I put on every page to unify them. I also feel like deciding definitively on a time of day was really helpful, because I chose to have it be at sunset, since the pinks and purples and the blues really come out at sunset. The lighting was really helpful in unifying the whole thing. But in digital programs, to put filters over it towards the end of my process, was really helpful. I also put those on the posters and my comics final so it made the whole wall more similar.

E: And for pre production, what is your process of character building or finding inspiration?

A: The first part is nailing down the lore. I wanted to make sure that I had continuity throughout the magic systems and the architecture of the locations and everything, and that aided in the actual character designing. You have to build the world so that the characters can fit into it. And then, when it came to the actual fashion, I learned from the character design class that silhouette is really, really important, and building like value structures within the whole figure is helpful. So I would make, like, one to two inch, very small sketches of the big, blocky shapes of the characters first.



E: Do you read a lot of fantasy, or are you more interested in the fantasy art?

A: I don't have time. I would if I could, but it's more looking at art and admiring it and having that influence my style.

E: Like extrapolating stories from art.

A: Yeah.

E: Why did you change from your first thesis?

A: Well, it was because I honestly got rejected. The first time I proposed my thesis, I wanted to do sticker sheets and sticker packs of aesthetics. I love drawing characters that have a specific aesthetic, and I wanted to explore a wide range of them and have, like, a character, and then their related belongings and pets and stuff around them on a sticker sheet. When I proposed it to Corinne, Mark, and Michelle, Corinne especially was like, "I know that you can push this further." They were suggesting that I do more stationary focused bundle designs. And that just wasn't really appealing to me, it just wasn't what I wanted to do. So then over the summer, I actually really, really thought about it, because that first idea was pretty rushed. Being a transfer, I didn't really think about it my whole three years. I kind of only thought about it like last spring. So being rejected made me have to, obviously, change my idea. Doing the whole 180 was because I decided that I wanted to do a comic instead of the whole stationary thing. But I think, ultimately, it resulted in more depth.

E: You did a lot of work for your thesis. How did you structure motivation scheduling?

A: At the beginning of the fall semester, we all made a document schedule for ourselves. I would say that probably no one actually followed it through each week. But I will say, last semester, I had a hard time not putting my thesis on the back burner because all of my other classes had deadlines that were coming up, and my thesis deadline was May. That's, like, in forever when you're in September. It's hard to find that motivation when you have other things that are more pertinent and the deadlines are coming up faster. I don't think I did a good job scheduling it the first semester, and that did

put more stress on me the second semester. Towards the end, it was kind of just like, “this is a lot of work, and I should have planned it out better.”

E: So what would be your advice for people going into thesis who are not fully sure of what they want to do?

A: Definitely don't try to put thesis on the back burner. Treat it as though the deadlines are what they are. Like, treat it as though you have someone, like a teacher, waiting on you to have it done. Because a lot of weeks, myself and others would come in and not have progress on our projects, especially last semester. I had Corinne, and she was very lenient about that, which I appreciate, but also treat it as though you have that deadline as an assignment.

E: I feel like a lot of visual development people are very concerned with style, and finding a unified style for their work. Is this a style that you had developed for this project?

A: It definitely represents the best of my own personal



style, but I do feel like that character class- I know I keep going back to it, but it was really influential on helping me find my style with drawing characters. Over my time at Montserrat, even though it's only been two years, I feel like I have found more of my own personal cartoon style. Just developing that skill through practice was helpful.

E: Did you transfer in from another art school?

A: I transferred in from a community college, but they had a really good visual arts program, so I took a lot of classes there. But it was not an art school.

E: For the story, how did you kind of narrow down themes or what it was that you wanted to see in stories?

A: I really love, witches and the whole aesthetic of witches, and I just really wanted to have a story where I could show off the magic systems of the world. But, yeah, I didn't particularly enjoy the actual writing of the dialog or anything. I feel like that's one of the less strong points of the whole thing.





think back on your time at Montserrat, and think of the classes that influenced you the most. And think of why you had the most fun or felt like you had the most growth in those classes. It's gonna be different for every person, because everyone has a different passion. Like, recognizing that the character class was my biggest push to grow, and I had the most fun in that class. Then I could base my thesis off of that.

E: Do you have any closing thoughts?

A: Good luck. I mean, it was really fun. It's also nice to have that little community of people that you're doing thesis with, because we really hit our stride. I feel like, at first, we were all down on ourselves and overwhelmed. But then we realized that we all were in it together, and we had each other, and we really came through in the end as a group.

E: I feel like the characters are very life-like, especially the slice of life comic that you did.

A: I think, by that point, I had already been with these characters for, like, almost a year. So narrowing down their personalities was really helpful in actually doing the dialog, whereas, at the very beginning, they were all new. It's kind of like when you have an original character, and over the years, you build up their personality. But this was a much shorter time.

E: Do you think you're going to stick with these characters?

A: Maybe. I would love to actually finish the comic that I had written, because I had more, it was just a time thing. I would love to actually make more pages and fill out this world building that I was starting. But I would also like to move on.

E: What's your advice for finding what it is you want to do?

A: It's kind of a case by case basis, I would say, try to

