

Daydream: A Series of Layered Display Illustrations Exploring the Mundanity of Everyday Life

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Abstract

Everyday life is considered mundane. We wake up, get dressed, commute, go to school, go to work, go home, and repeat again the next day. There are only a handful of moments in life where we can say that we actually look forward to, like anticipating fun events or accomplishing big achievements. In contrast, ordinary things such as falling in line, doing laundry, or even getting stuck in traffic are often dismissed as just “everyday” things or errands and are often deemed boring and repetitive because we already experience them daily. At the end of the day, these small, overlooked moments are what makes our lives different and special every day.

By creating a series of art pieces for this three-dimensional art display, I would like these works to invoke the feeling of mindfulness in everyday scenarios that we often let pass us by. With this art display, I aim to provide different and more creative perspectives on these everyday realities that wear us down by emphasizing the little things we experience every day – and putting my own unique and creative twist to make them more interesting both conceptually and visually.

Keywords: illustration, 3D, layers, display art, mundane, every day, mindfulness

Introduction

Nowadays, every day’s routine looks like this: wake up, go outside, go do work, sit at the desk for hours, sleep, then repeat again the next day. Accompanied with the hustle culture of today’s society, sometimes it gets difficult to see any sense of importance whenever you are in everyday situations like waiting in line or getting stuck in traffic. Truthfully, most of life is mundane. You go to work, commute, go home, and repeat. Because of this, we often tend to look forward to the next big thing that will give us that rush of dopamine as a reward for our hard work. It eventually makes us forget to pause and give a second thought to what is present to us at the moment. We start to neglect appreciation for the small things in our daily routines because we are too engulfed in the feeling of having to be productive. In turn, it eventually takes a toll on our emotional health resulting in the feeling of being on autopilot which often times eventually leads to being stuck. At the end of the day, a person’s life is not comprised of the big moments, but rather those that actually happen in the in-betweens (Christian, 2023).

As a working student, I often find myself struggling to balance work with my studies. Often times I even find myself in a dilemma between sacrificing one for the other. Although I have started to learn the importance of time management and keeping calm under immense pressure, stress still finds a way to build up and even leads to the dreadful feeling of burnout, which only leads to incapacitating me to actually get work done.

As an illustrator, doing artworks is a process that helps me make these emotions into more coherent and tangible thoughts. Putting these feelings into canvas actually helps me clear my head. As I have started

on this project, I have developed a sense of mindfulness wherever I go, and I try to take it in as much as possible in the moment. Looking at things with more detail nowadays helps me translate better on paper that particular feeling I want to convey.

The project will delve into the overlooked intricacies of everyday life and what makes seemingly mundane events unique and special. Supported by the concept of Vita Activa and Vita Contemplativa (Arendt, 1958), it seeks to show that indeed there is a divide between the need to fulfill one's survival needs and the need to satisfy one's contentment in life. Daydream will serve to show that these two conflicting realities can be put together by showing that through mindfulness, there will always be a different way of seeing everyday things.

Daydream will mainly be a series of three-dimensional layered display art, that depict the everyday mundane in a different and more out-of-this-world perspective. It will be for show at an APC SoMA exhibit in 2024. Upon completion of the illustrations, it will be formed into 24"x24" sintra board displays. From there, it will be pieced into layers from the artwork's assets, creating large layered pieces with the illusion of depth.

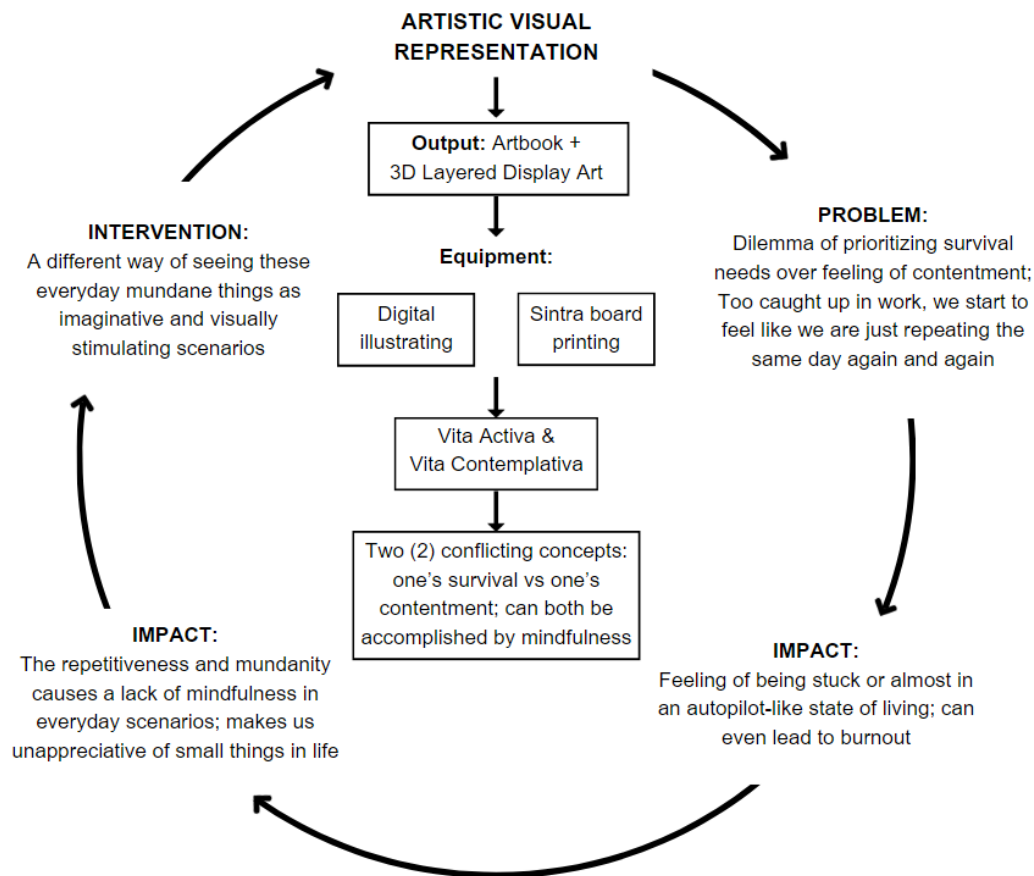


Figure 1 Framework of the Visual Representation of the Impact of the Mundanity of our Everyday Lives

The creative framework I have come up with serves as a foundation for the topic of my project. It features a comprehensive summary of the problem I wish to tackle, which is the unspoken phenomenon of focusing on work too much that we practically work ourselves to death. There is this dilemma of having to choose survival over one's contentment in life simply because we were wired since birth to have the need to feed ourselves. There is nothing inherently wrong about wanting to be productive and climbing up the social ladder in our careers. Especially as professional creatives, we recognize the competitive nature of the industry. Although through what I have observed and experienced so far, sometimes the stress does eventually take a toll on us and even burns us out, incapacitating us further to get any work done.

With this, we find ourselves in a routine of rushing to get work done, go home, and repeat the day all over again. We dread the upcoming deadlines and we only anticipate the ends of the weeks when we have something to look forward to like a big event or an achievement for all our hard work. What happens to the inbetweens of these big moments? They are overlooked as boring and repetitive tiny errands that we deem unimportant in the bigger picture of our lives. When in fact, our lives are actually made up by these insignificant smaller moments. We forget to actually feel and be present within these small moments because we are so caught up by the rush to get to our next big achievements. My project aims to highlight these mundane events in our lives and put them in a better, more creative light. By showing that through mindfulness and a bit of imagination, we can learn to be appreciative of what we have in the current and be present in these everyday moments in our lives.

The **research design** is mainly a slice-of-life themed artbook and display art. It will feature a series of illustrations that depict the everyday life as anything but ordinary and mundane. Generally, artbooks are defined as a collection of an artist's works. More into that, artbooks are commonly known to be made by artists who've worked on media productions that showcases films or games and their concept art. Artbooks can tell stories merely through its imagery. It can be defined as a handheld installation of ideas gathered into a single object, with the sole purpose of it to be shared and viewed more privately. To me, I arrived to the conclusion that making my own series of display art is the best way to put this thesis idea into life because aside from unique artworks being a staple in an art professional's career, it is my way of physically and intimately showing people who I am as an artist and what I can accomplish.

My **target audience** for this will be those who want an escape from the everyday realities that tire us out. This artbook is for the everyday weary students and workers alike who want a visual trip into other possibilities that this world can be imagined into. Additionally, similar to how I was inspired from other works, Daydream will also be dedicated to my fellow artists who also just want a spark of inspiration from a well-made series of large-scale art.

The **design process** began with photography. Starting this project, I knew that initially I would need to take photographs of my own routines and routes to and from school and other places I would visit on a regular basis. From these pictures, I used them as references to start making studies for a few main illustrations. I started exploring and drafting the scenes I want to create through studies including; the everyday commute, the occasional sightseeing to explore places, or even the contrary – the feeling of being confined to the four walls of a room.



Figure 2 *Initial Photographs Taken for References*

Delving into this more, specifically I would take images of my public transportation rides in trains, jeeps, and cars, going up and down overpasses, or even crossing the street with a crowd of busy people. Additionally, I moved on to taking pictures of people I would normally encounter on these daily ventures. Like a woman in a grocery store picking out drinks, an office worker stopping to pet a stray cat, or a stranger passing by another stranger.

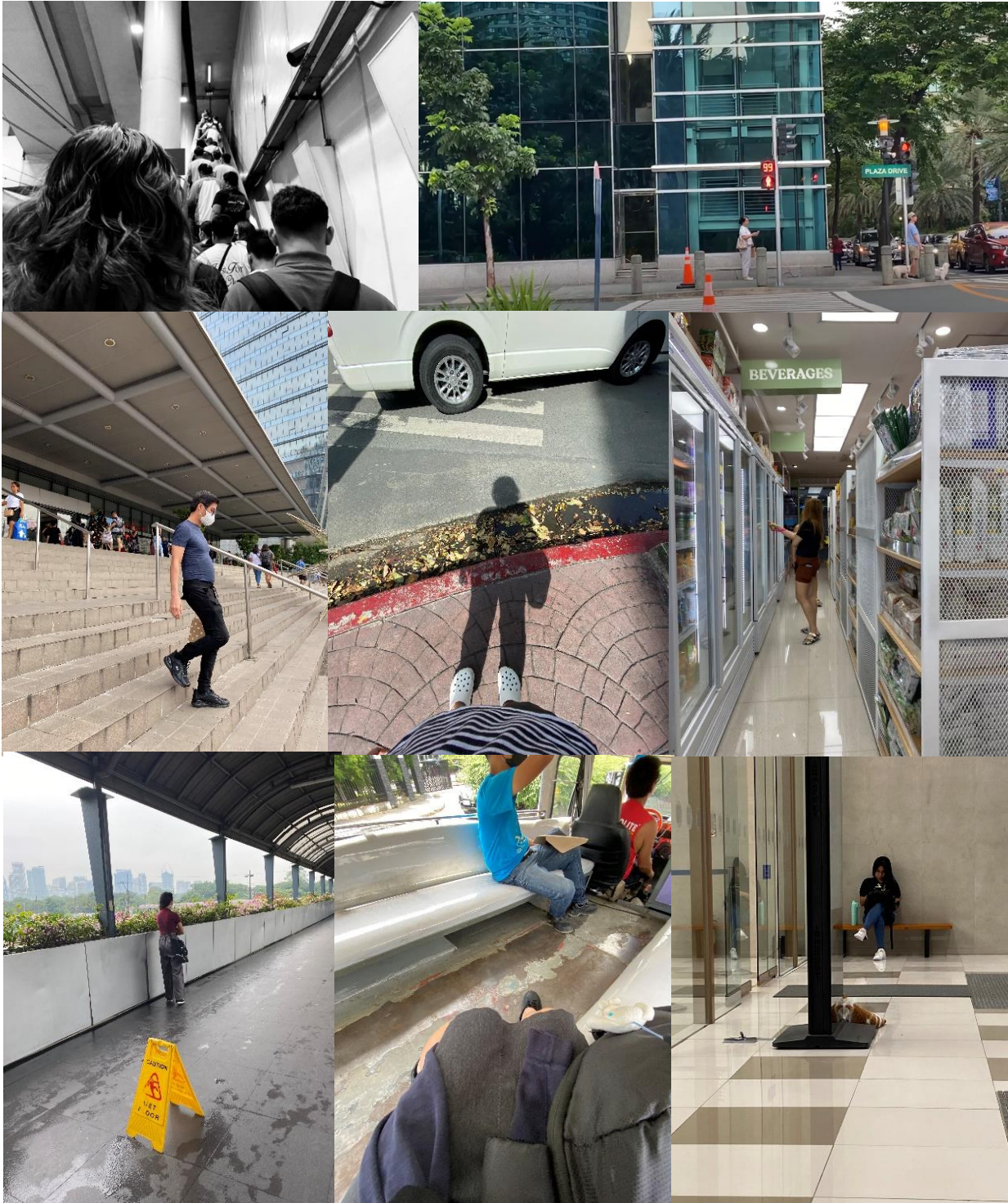


Figure 3 *Photographs Taken for References*

Taking inspiration from a plethora of artworks I've always admired, wherein they combine the elements of our reality with different genres of fantasy, I've come to the conclusion that I want to incorporate those ideas into my works and arrived to the conclusion that an artbook would be the best way to showcase this. Before the beginning of this project, admittedly I've always been used to only doing character portraits most of the time, so I thought that finally delving into more background-focused works could challenge me to do better in doing full illustrations with interesting environments.

I would define my works as having this distinct vibe of being dreamy to look at. My characters would be defined mostly by their shape language as I've always enjoyed making them look more dynamic with both curved and sharp shapes to form them. To add to this, I've always enjoyed using colors that make my drawings more fun to look at, either they would be super saturated for a bright and cheery mood, or more cool and toned down, but still has that moody type of feel that always mirrors the character's personality.



Figure 4 *Personal works @nadssuuu*

Connecting this to the series of illustrations I will be making, I've come up with a narrative shape for the color direction my pieces will have. If my project were to have a shape to help define its colors, it would be a circle. I've observed that the feelings we experience everyday come and go and repeat. Thus, I think the circle best represents that cycle of emotions one goes through every day.



Figure 5 *Narrative Shape*

Additionally, I will be using a color palette that gets associated with that dreamy and otherworldly vibe that I'm trying to convey. I've made my own color titles to better associate them with scenes such as Underwater Blue, which show the shades of the sea and sky and induces a sense of calm in life. Bubblegum Pink and Purple would make the world look dreamy and like it's being viewed through rose-tinted glasses. Star Yellow would illuminate the scenes and give a sense of happiness and contentment.



Figure 6 *Main Color Palette*

Applying these into scenes, I would use colors for both the goal of visual aesthetic and the emotions that I want to convey through the environment and characters interacting in it. The aim is to be able to have these colors embody the particular feeling I want to show. Such as a scene when doing the laundry, my character will be surrounded by a bright blue, such as one would be submerged in a pool. When waiting in line, the environment would be a muted yellow or blue, suggesting that they are drowning out the noise. When riding the MRT, the whole train will have a purplish-blue to its atmosphere, mirroring that of an underwater carriage. A scene in a grocery setting will have LED-lit aisles with neon pink/blue for a moody lighting like it would be in a bar. Taking a shower would bring a purple and blue atmosphere as well, giving the sense of self-reflection and isolation.

Pre-Production

What would begin as photographs of my daily experiences would then be turned into references for studies that would be essential in starting this whole project. I've conceptualized certain scenarios within these everyday scenarios wherein one would let their imagination run wild – see things that would not be there normally. Scenes such as underwater MRTs, doing the laundry with sealife, alien invasions in malls, crossing a street submerged in a lake, giant cats on buildings, and fishes staring at you from glass panels in the underpass you walk through everyday.

Not only is this a good way to start the project, but a great way to get the creative juices flowing. Because I find that when I start on one idea, I find myself crafting another new idea from it too. Such as when I started conceptualizing on the idea of an MRT carriage being underwater, I could also envision a whole other idea behind it – such as the station itself being a whole aquarium instead.

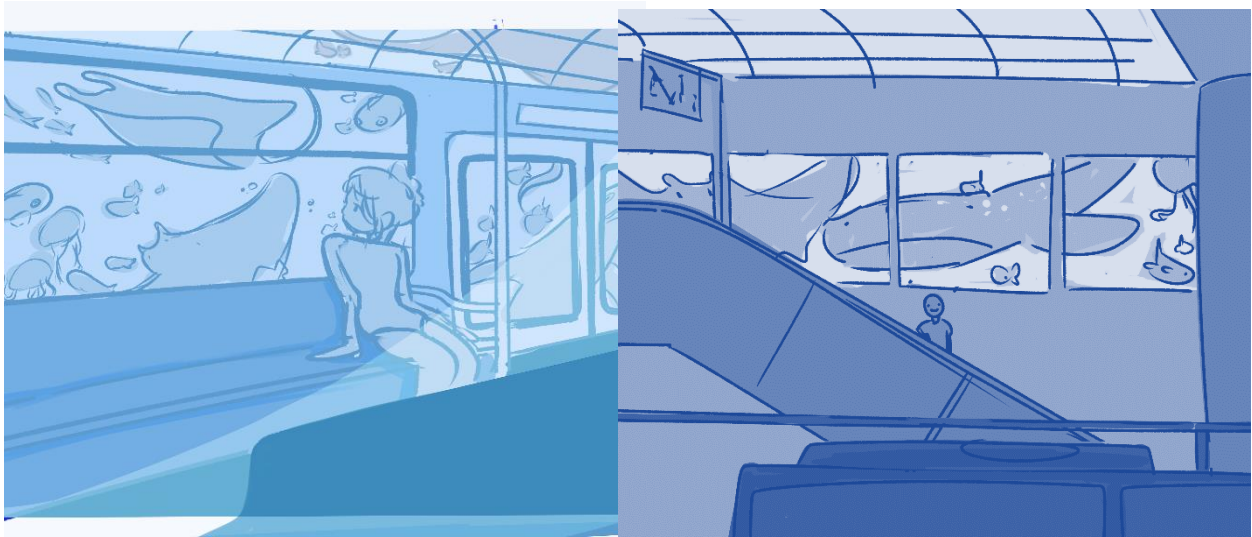


Figure 7 *Studies on MRT station scenes*

Since the beginning of my thesis, I've developed the mindful habit of taking photos when I go out or even when I'm just inside my room, then turning them into studies such as these. I've gone ahead and actually made fully rendered illustrations for other subjects such as SCENOGRAPHY where the plates needed from us aligned with what I was already starting to develop with my thesis. In the end, working on these plates immensely helped me envision more of what I want my thesis to look like.



Figure 8 *"In the 4 Corners of a Room" from SCENOG 3 Scenes*
by Nadine Franz Borromeo



Figure 9 “Raining Cats and Cats” 3D Display Art Prototype
by Nadine Franz Borrromeo

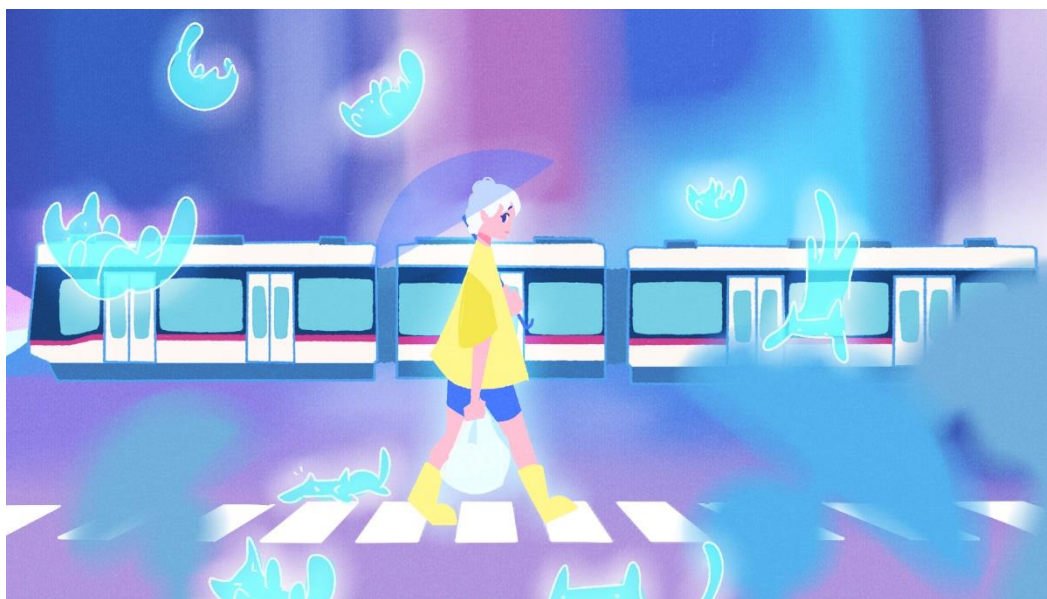


Figure 10 “Cat Crossing” a study by Nadine Franz Borrromeo

Production

Production began when I came up with the first five (5) final scenes that I will be producing as rendered illustrations for the artbook. Namely: *Under the Weather*, *Crossing the Road*, *Road Block*, *Exploring Malls*, and *A Night in Bed*. Additional scenes will yet to be decided upon completion of the first five (5) illustrations. Ideas include, but not limited to; grocery shopping, floating transportation, doing the laundry, cooking breakfast, working on my small business, scrolling on the phone, and more in depth of my commute going to and from places. All the illustrations will be done on my personal laptop at home with my Wacom pen tablet and Paint Tool Sai as my drawing software.



Figure 11 *Under the Weather* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

“Under the Weather” is an environment scene based off of the street along our house. It sits atop a slope hill kind of street that is usually the main road for vehicles that pass from Rockwell to Guadalupe EDSA. “Under the Weather” depicts the feeling of wanting to go out but second-guessing it. More often than not, staying at home becomes a better option anyway. The scene is covered in blue shades as I wanted to portray the feeling of being “under the weather” but in a way that isn’t gloomy – but rather made it more interesting because the bright blue shades makes a scenic underwater environment.



Figure 12 *Crossing the Road* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

“Crossing the Road” is an everyday occurrence for me and numerous other students and workers that pass by Lapu-Lapu Ave along Magallanes. Normally, the pedestrian lane there is always busy with large trucks and PUVs passing hurriedly. In this illustration I wanted to depict an opposite feeling to distract from the hustle and bustle of the road – being in the stillness of a pond. The white pedestrian lane acts as a bridge across this ethereal looking pond, filled with mysterious freshwater fish swimming by. Through this illustration, at its core, I wanted to show that the feeling of getting to your destination shouldn’t always be so stressful.



Figure 13 *Road Block* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

“Road Block” is a depiction of the feeling of wanting an escape from work. At the end of a busy day filled with work and bills and deadlines, I like to think that we all want a vacation every now and then. The feeling of wanting to be able to drop everything you’re doing and be drawn into a getaway vacation is one of the most blissful things a tired creative can dream of. I admire the way I framed this scene because the sharp edges of the buildings in the foreground and background is big and looming, in contrast to the glow of the smaller, but eye-catching, organic scenic nature in the center.

Around April 2024 as I was progressing slowly with my illustrations, I found it difficult to individually execute the backgrounds and environments of the scenes I wanted for my drawings. Because of this, I came up with the idea of using the photograph references I took and utilizing them to be used as the backgrounds for the illustrations. Since my specialty is character design and admittedly I am weak in drawing backgrounds, this was a breakthrough for me because it made my workload much more convenient and is not just for the sake of becoming a shortcut, I genuinely think it actually makes my work have more depth to it. It made me focus more on the elements I want to add to the scenes because I wouldn't have to worry much about the technicalities of doing the time-consuming background environments.



Figure 14 *Personal photos taken daily*

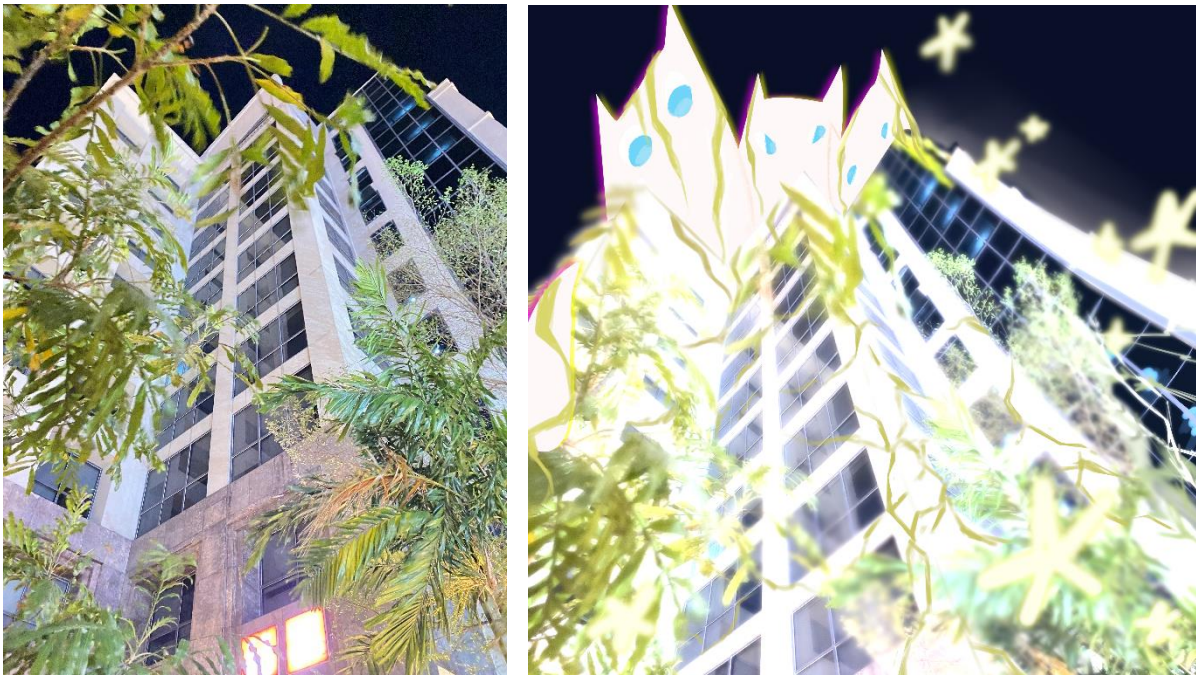


Figure 15 *Triplet Towers by Nadine Franz Borromeo*

With my use of photomanipulation and editing, I managed to make my illustrations blend well with the scenery I took. The whimsical concepts I've added makes the scene so much more interesting because there is still something so human and authentic about incorporating the raw picture in it. Take Figure 15 for example; The way I drew the giant cats on here look as if they are ancient beings looming over and guarding the office towers. It even looks like they've been carved into the white towers itself.



Figure 16 *Oh You're Here!* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

The concept behind this is as I was exploring a “*palaisdaan*” restaurant, I happened to find this pond that heavily resembled the magical bodies of water in *Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. Heavily referencing from that, I thought of a giant fairy lady emerging from the depths to greet us on our weary journey because it was a really hot day at the time. Overlooked by the everyday diners there, the pond really was the highlight of going to that restaurant for me.

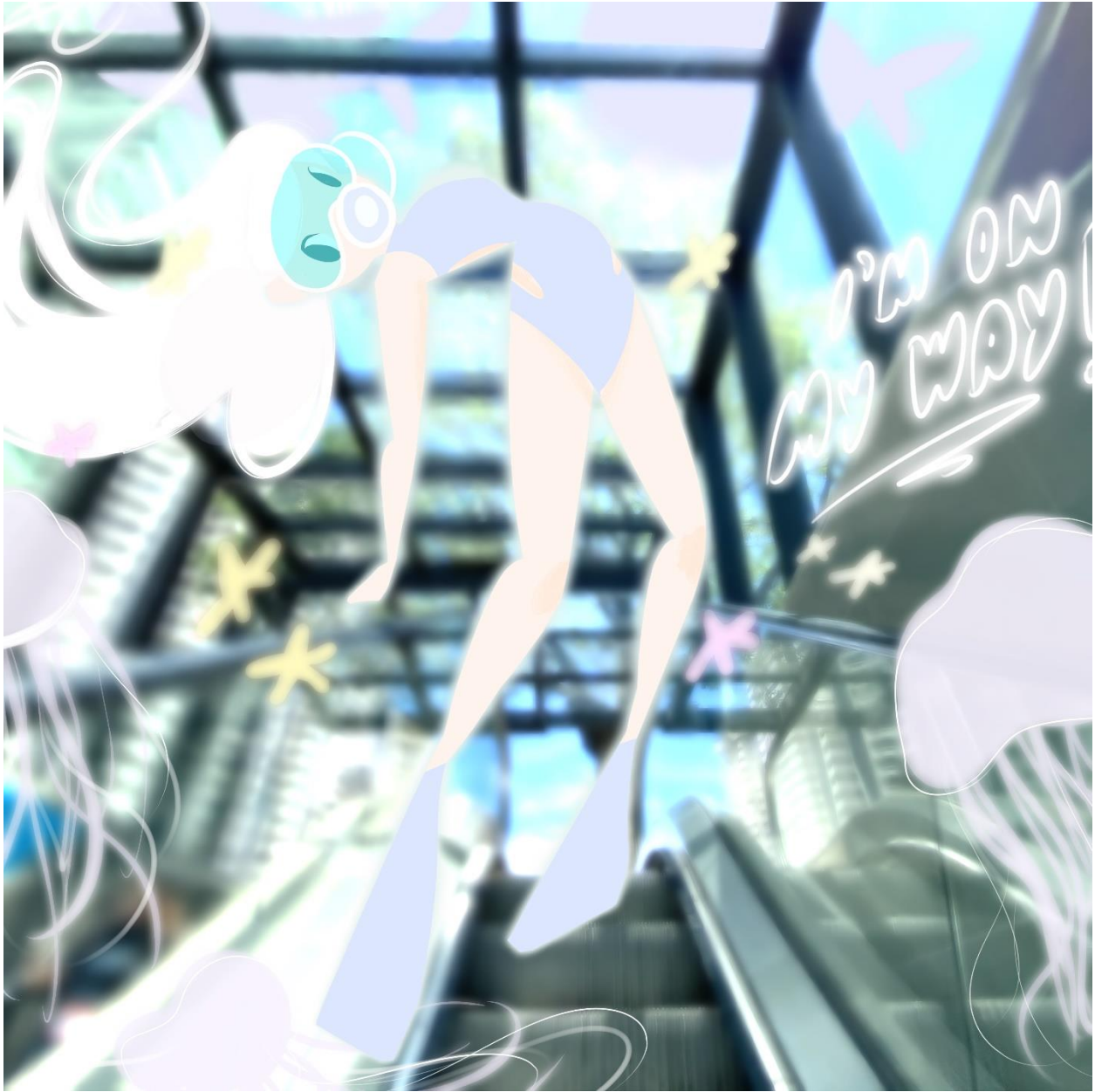


Figure 17 *I'm On My Way* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

I'm On My Way takes place in the underground walkways of Ayala where I often pass by. Its underpasses are always full of people rushing to get to their respective workplaces, with Ayala being the business district of Makati. With this piece, I wanted to depict the feeling of that walking rush, but also in a different sense – what if you're swimming underneath the aquarium-like glass panels instead?



Figure 18 *What Are They Seeing?* By Nadine Franz Borromeo

This particular corner is also around Ayala. I really like walking around the area everyday. In this scene, I wanted to show a gathering of cats (there are a lot of cats always roaming there) and show a particular scenario wherein they're seeing this invisible giant cat goddess that's why they're surrounding the area. This hidden deity makes the nature thrive there that's why the flowers are always seen to be blooming in this particular corner of Ayala.



Figure 19 *What Are You Doing Up There?* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

What was supposed to be just a normal walk along Seaside Boulevard turned into a sightseeing journey when I was thinking about my thesis. There was this one hotel that had its architectural structure similar to a windowsill, where in real life cats would often be seen taking a nap. I thought of a scene between two giant cats where one would be taking the fattest nap on top of the 5-star hotel, without a care in the world. It's such a huge contrast to the hustle and bustle of the overwhelming Mall of Asia where people are always swept away by the sights of the malls and the amusement park – sometimes it's more fun to look at things that are hidden in plain sight.



Figure 20 *Where Are They Hiding?* By Nadine Franz Borromeo

This is set in an area around Legazpi, Makati. This particular area is urban walkways with lots of overgrown nature around it. More often than not, you'll see a stray taking a rest behind these bushes. They are not often noticed by the everyday walkers, but when they are, it is such a delight to see these calming creatures after a long day at work.

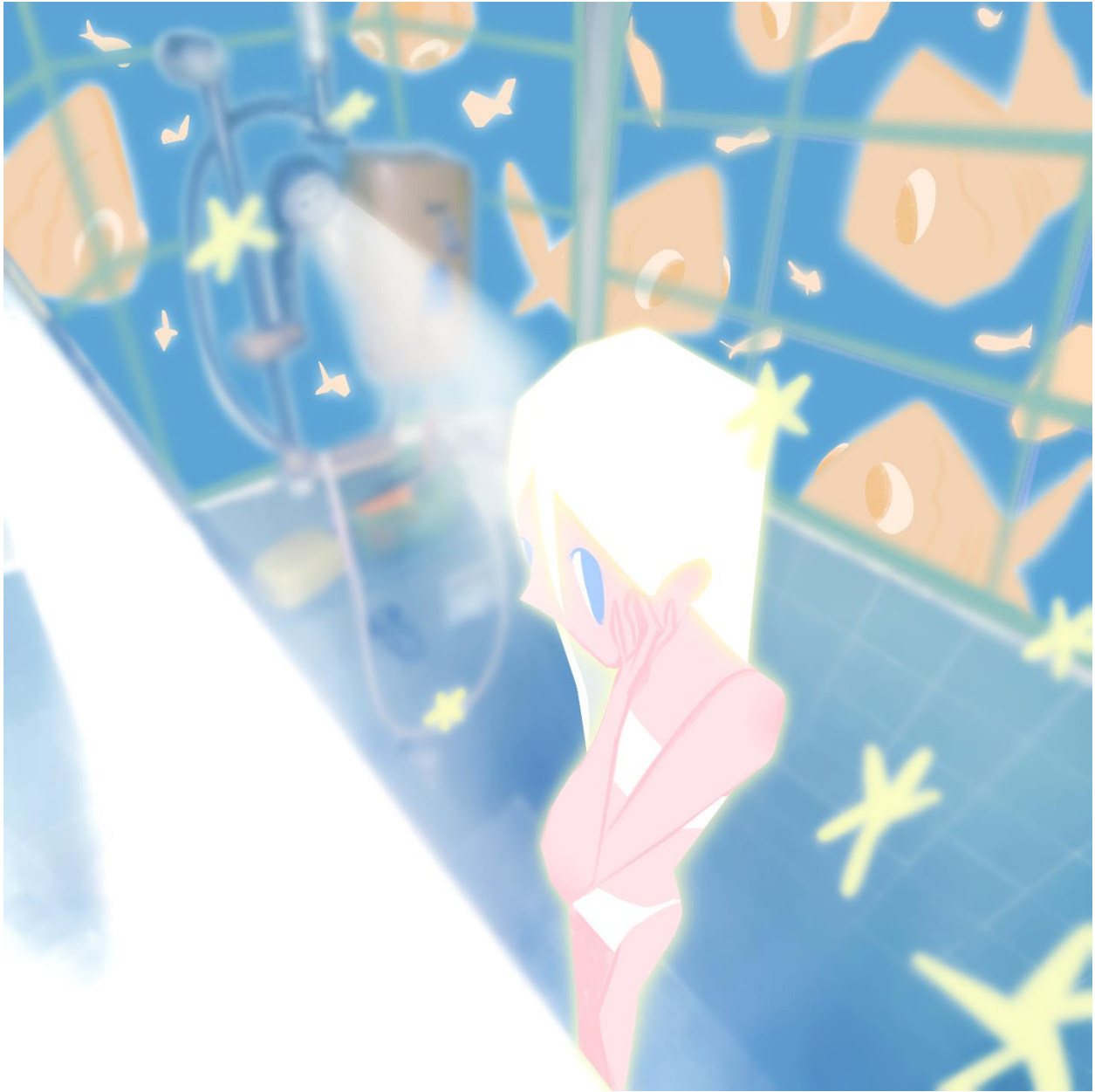


Figure 21 *Solitude* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

This particular scene depicts the feeling of solitude that taking a shower brings. I decided to play with the elements of the tiles in the bathroom as clear windows at the same time fish can be seen peeping inside. I wanted to highlight the contrast between the solitude one experiences in the shower and the whimsical feeling of being in an underwater carriage.



Figure 22 *By the Tracks* by Nadine Franz Borromeo

This work is the final piece for the whole series. This depicts one of the most frequent things I do everyday, that somehow after this turned into one of my favorite things to do – riding the MRT. This is the very first concept I’ve ever came up with since the beginning of my thesis, wherein I quite literally thought of the concept of my thesis while I was on a night ride on it. This concept of having the MRT be an underwater aquarium thing was the very basis of my whole thesis, so this piece is the most special one for me.

Post-Production

Upon completion of all illustrations needed, I then split them into separate layers and assets via Photoshop. Once done, I sent them for printing to my chosen manufacturer, Mackim Prints, that was conveniently located just near here in Guadalupe Viejo, Makati.

They were printed onto 3mm sintra board, sized at 24"x24" each, along with the die-cut assets I had made and printed out as well. From there, I hand assembled these pieces into a frame to make them look layered and three-dimensional. Giving the illusion of depth – for a visually interesting large-scale display.





Review of Related Literature

The Mundanity of Everyday Life

The Human Condition, although an old publication, is still very timely because it introduces the concept of *vita activa* (active life) and *vita contemplativa* (contemplative life). Philosophers would emphasize the importance of *vita contemplativa* for one's own fulfillment, while *vita activa* provides us with one's necessities for survival such as food, money, and shelter (Arendt, 1958). Putting this into perspective in modern times, nowadays it is either you be productive and work or be considered lazy and starve. Because of this, we fall into a pattern of work, work, work rather than taking the time to enjoy life as it happens. Though this is not meant to put working for a living in a negative light – it is simple, we all need money in order to feed our physical bodies, hence the need to work. It just further explains that we humans were born into a pre-existing world that prioritizes survival over one's fulfillment in life.

The Repetitiveness of Daily Routines

There are clouded moments in our everyday lives that feel normal, but these times are actually when we often break contact with the deepest parts of ourselves. These everyday experiences and repetitive occurrences make us fall into an almost robot-like way of doing and seeing things (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Because of this, we lose the opportunity to grow from these minute experiences that ultimately hinder us from connecting with our innate creativity.

In addition to that, most of our waking hours are spent with our wandering minds. Even as busy as we are, every now and then our mind always manages to drift off someplace else. The mind is actually a very powerful tool in envisioning things that are not often seen in everyday life (Urbano, 2016). This project aims to show that even though we fall into this pattern of work, work, work, there is always a different and better way of seeing things if we think creatively enough outside of the box that we are so used to.

Encouraging the Importance of Mindfulness

With today's rampant hustle culture, the globally-acclaimed self-help book, *Atomic Habits*, discusses people's productivity in a way that does not praise the thought of overworking yourself to death. Rather, it does the opposite and actually promotes the view of doing those little small things every day that do not seem like much, but overtime will produce the greatest of results without damaging our well-being in the long run (Clear, 2018).

Aligned with this, another critically-acclaimed self-help book, *Ichigo Ichie*, introduces Japanese concepts and ways that help a person reflect within themselves to ultimately find happiness. It delves into the importance of mindfulness in our busy lives (Garcia & Miralles, 2019). As everyday workers, we forget to sit back and appreciate moments in our lives that we think are just everyday recurring things. Everyday things such as getting groceries, sitting on your desk, being stuck in the rain – in hindsight, these are actually unique moments that we can learn from because these are little occurrences that are never to occur in the same way again.

Review of Related Creative Works

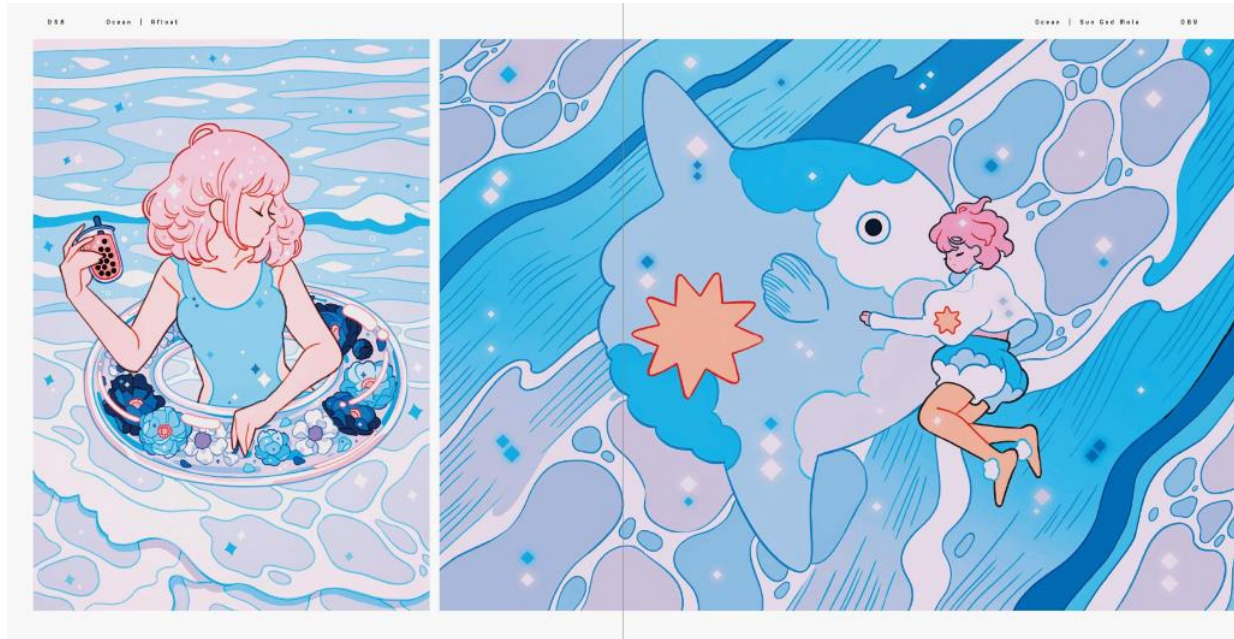


Figure 14 *Polaris: The Art of Meyoco by Meyoco*

Polaris is Meyoco's first commercial artbook in 2021. Inspired by nature and flora, she always manages to incorporate these elements and shows a dreamlike pastel-colored world through her works. The color blue can be seen dominant in her works, especially with her fondness for the ocean and sea life. Connecting to this, it can symbolize the feeling of constantly just floating through these everyday scenarios in life.



Figure 15 *Untitled by Fuwan on Pixiv*

Seen in the figure above is an untitled work by Japan-based artist, Fuwan. They do their works through digital illustration and can often be seen posted online on sites such as Pixiv. Observed in this artwork is a surrealism type of art wherein the character is swimming through what seems to be ruins of a modern building.



Figure 16 *Untitled* by @-秋田鹿町 on Weibo

Figure 3 is an untitled piece by digital artist, Azhuuzoo, on Weibo. They are a Chinese painter who has a fondness for drawing county towns. Seen here are natural elements such as sea life, mixed in with the dinginess and rustiness of the apartment complex. It highlights a sense of wonder as the character peers out the illuminated window to look at the nature surrounding the dark environment outside.



Figure 17 *Untitled by Kung-fu-Piggy on Instagram*

Figure 4 showcases Japan-based artist, Kung-fu-Piggy, and their creative take on riding the bus. The vehicle is traversing underwater as light from the water illuminates the inside of the dark carriage. Two characters can be seen in this scene; one being human while the other being a hybrid shark. Despite this, they seem to complement each other well because they mirror each other's expression and personality.



Figure 18 *Daydream: The Art of Karen Vidals by Karen Vidals*

Similar to my own work, both name and concept, this thesis is inspired from an artbook by Karen Vidals. In her works, she imagined everyday scenarios in different ways outside of the norm. As a kid, being in places like the laundromat with her parents would bore her for hours so she would imagine things that were not there to cure her boredom and pass the time; Scenarios like how the washing machine doors would be portals to fish and sea life would be pouring out.



Figure 19 *Sometimes it Feels Like Drowning* by Rai Cruz

Sometimes it Feels Like Drowning is a part of Cabinets and Curiosities – a curated exhibit by artist, Rai Cruz, and his experiences during the isolation of the 2020 pandemic. These 3D pieces highlight the ideas of fear, resiliency, and personal growth. Handcarved individually into layers, this 3D display art encompasses the feelings of certain memories, either felt deeply or better hidden. Technique-wise, the artist handcarved each layer with multiple layers of wood which were then assembled into small cabinets. Similar to what I will be creating, the presence of different layers will emphasize that there is depth to the different emotions I want to portray in my illustrations.

Research Results About the Subject Matter

With today's society and its hustle culture, accompanied with the art industry's competitive nature, working ourselves to the point of burnout is more often expected than not. Though there is nothing inherently bad about our human nature to progress and better ourselves career-wise, it is still important to stop every once in a while and remember that we are not put in this world to not appreciate things that are already around us. The concept of Vita Activa and Vita Contemplativa teaches us that we are torn between living for survival and living for one's own contentment. My thesis serves to be the bridge to this dilemma – that we don't have to choose one over the other, but rather we can do both by simply practicing the art of mindfulness.

From my observational analysis which included taking photographs of these everyday mundane things that we tend to overlook – such as crossing the road, taking our daily commute, or even indulging in a shower after a long day, I've noticed that people tend to not encapsulate these moments much less than they would a "special occasion". They would tend to treat these moments as everyday, passing events that are deemed ordinary and repetitive, therefore boring. But I would beg to differ. From these everyday moments, I visualized scenes and elements in which this moment would be enhanced into a fantasy-like world. With these fantasy-like scenarios, I have turned situations like the hassle and struggle of getting on a 5PM rush hour train into an aquarium-like utopia experience. I've also noticed that when I would stop to take photographs of certain situations or places that I would particularly find interesting, most of the people would not see what I am seeing, which reinforces the notion that everyone truly is just in their own busy worlds.

Research Results of the Design Process

I've used both photographs and illustration to show what I want to depict in my thesis. Turns out, doing a number of full illustrations really took a toll on me, especially with the backgrounds. Hence why halfway through production, I decided to use the photographs I took and just incorporated them as the illustrations' backgrounds. Admittedly though it can be seen as a shortcut, I found that incorporating these photographs made my artworks look much more visually interesting, because there is that human and raw component to it that a photograph brings.

Conclusion

This thesis project encapsulates the personal feeling of wanting to escape our everyday reality of being overwhelmed in the hustle and bustle of our lives. From working late nights to just feeling stuck in our rooms, it is easy to lose ourselves and our sense of whimsical wonder for the world. This project not only served as my thesis, but a wake-up call for myself as well to live in the moments I would once myself overlook and pass by. It taught me the importance of practicing mindfulness and actually realizing that despite having a million things to do, I would always choose to enjoy my time outside to just feel the sun shine on my face.

In short, I hope this thesis serves as a reminder that it is indeed okay to take our busy lives at a pace, and take our time to appreciate the little things in life.

Recommendations

For future researchers and artists who are looking to do something similar, I strongly recommend them to further add more scenarios of the everyday mundane. Admittedly, I would have done a dozen more if given more time. Putting this concept into a film would be a level-up for production and would be so much more visually interesting and appealing as well. I would recommend doing more photograph studies of people and their everyday tendencies to let these small moments pass by. What would be interesting is having more creative and even more bizarre ways of seeing the everyday mundane, as well as the not so attractive parts of everyday living.

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