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East and Walnut

Initially, I started my senior year with the idea that I would go into character design and concept art within either the TV or gaming industries. As for plans or specifics beyond that, I was walking into it all blind. During my sporadic artistic spurts, I had a penchant for making little characters, completely designing them from the intricacies of their personality and past, to all of their physical details. From this experience, I knew I wanted to go back to my roots and create some interesting people. But who? I could start with something more on the science fiction side of things… maybe gothic horror… or I could go in the direction of realistic fiction. While considering where to begin, I looked around me, at the city I had moved to just a few years ago. Indianapolis is a city that, befitting of its nickname "Naptown," could appear sleepy to the naked eye. People will fill the downtown streets throughout the week, until 4 PM rolls around. As soon as that hour comes, anyone who is not still working from home slips away. But as someone who has lived in the heart of downtown Indianapolis for the last two years, and spent hours upon hours exploring the city and getting up to no good with my friends, I know how the city really is.

I was walking just across the street from current my apartment with a close friend one day, at my favorite hour. It's the hour right before you can truly call it sunset. Or maybe you can, but the tall buildings make it so you would not be able to tell, regardless. The air is crisp, you can hear music from the bars and people in the distance, but nothing loud enough to become bothersome. If anything, the noise melts into a comforting white noise to back the ambiguity of the day's time. If I didn't have a phone telling me the hour, it could be an autumn 7 AM or a

summer 8 PM. This time of day marks the end of a full day's efforts, making way for a night I have zero expectations for. Almost anything could happen, especially when you have a social circle as spontaneous as mine. As I stood on that street corner, I said to my friend something along the lines of, "I think this city has untapped potential. It's strange that no one has created a piece of fiction including Indy, at least not one that has truly been noticed." Which, yes, is possibly undeserved high praise of Indianapolis, but something I feel nonetheless. When I look at the city with my biased eyes, I see every funny little mishap I have gotten myself into, every odd job I have had the pleasure of working, all the late nights of my friends and me exploring the city, and all the different people I have met here. For me, Indy is a city of stories. I then decided that the "Circle City" would be my setting.

As for characters, it was only natural that I would turn to my friends around me. I knew that I wanted a story personal to myself, including those whom I think of fondly. I came up with the idea to have a cast of characters, each with having either their appearance or background inspired by multiple of my friends. I would create this fake TV pitch, in the same vein as MTV's *Downtown,* a grungy animated 90s cartoon about a bunch of young adults traversing life in New York City. The pitch would include the designs for the characters as well as "screenshots" from the nonexistent episodes. A screenshot per character, with each getting their focused episode based on an experience I personally had. I wanted these stories to be a healthy mix of comedic, similar to *Broad City*'s hijinks, and angsty in a 2000s *Skins* way. From this premise, I created Farrow, Vince, Itch (a terrible shortening of "Richard"), Yvonne, Nadiya, and Luke. All six young adults confronted with an array of challenging circumstances whilst living in an apartment on the intersecting streets of East and Walnut. This street corner would serve as not just their story's title, but as a character of its own.

I knew that from this point, I wanted to make character designs, conceptual environment illustrations, and the "screenshots" I had mentioned earlier. The environmental illustrations gave me an opportunity to highlight the city I have come to love and to explore the multimedia aspect of my project a little more. I combined photos I took of my favorite streets and alleys as overlaying textures on top of city illustrations. Something that I had not fully realized prior to starting this project was that designing a character entails drawing that character, obviously, but drawing that character in 20 different ways, over and over and over again. I reached a point where I saw myself dragging my feet with designing these six fictional people. Every time my professor would try to advise me and say that I need to make a character more cartoony, less pretty, more sketchy and simplified, and less illustrative and prettified, all I can think is "this project is the last thing I would like to work on right now." I looked at my work, and I could see the disdain for the process. I saw sloppy products. I presented my work to my professors at that one-semester checkpoint, and they could see it too. If not through my work, in the way I spoke about it. They could notice that in all of the work I presented, *except* for the character design, I had passion for what I was doing, and I put ample effort into it. They asked why I was focusing on character design when I had no passion for it, instead of doing something I fully enjoy. My response was that I thought character design would be a more stable job to go into, to which they told me was completely ridiculous, because it is. No career in art is truly stable, so I might as well do something I love. Which, for me, is fashion illustration.

From that last critique, I felt as if my drive had been relit. I set up a new plan; I would create digital designs of clothing that my characters would wear, and an imaginary brand to go along, complete with its own distinct brand identity. For weeks, I was fully absorbed into creating this brand, illustrating these pieces of clothing, and making sure that they fit not just the

characters they represented, but also the world they live in. It had been such a long time since I had done something artistic that I felt I had a passion and knack for. Things came to a slight turn when my professors, who had been nothing but encouraging in this new path, told me that they would like to see some of these designs made into real wearable pieces. This ask would not be an issue whatsoever if it were not for the fact that I have no idea how to sew. I barely knew how to mend a torn shirt. This set me off on a new journey, one that I am still on. I decided to create one of my skirt designs for Nadiya and a multilayered dress for Farrow. Nadiya is inspired by my oldest and best friend Jordan, and two beloved friends of mine, Katie and Alex. Jordan is very stern, slightly hard to read, but always a place of support and love. Katie and Alex are both full-fledged creatives, with Katie excelling in illustration for as long as I've known her, and Alex and his brothers operating a Fort Wayne-based metal band called Damage. Nadiya, thanks to aspects I have borrowed from my friends' lives and personalities, is the frontwoman of a local Indianapolis band who makes her own clothes from random things she finds. Despite being ever so short in stature and consistently stoic, she has a wealth of fiery energy for when she needs it, whether that be onstage performing or providing defense for her loved ones. Her skirt design needed to look a little "DIY," a little grungy, but give her a good freedom of movement for when she performs onstage. I came up with a concept that involved multiple pairs of salvaged secondhand jeans and a custom-patterned fabric inspired by the city and pop culture. The denim from the jeans would end up getting stitched together to form an asymmetrical maxi skirt, and the custom-patterned fabric would be used to create a pleated mini skirt peeking through the front opening of the skirt. This opening would allow for a layered look on top of serving a practical purpose for the sake of movement. Sitting baggy and low-waisted, the skirt would be held up by a denim strap around the waist. Farrow's personality differs greatly from Nadiya's. I

had nearly all my inspiration for her character from my friend Avery. Avery is incredibly sweet, has a tendency for timidness, and is much taller than I am, which perhaps is not a hard task to accomplish. Farrow's appearance and demeanor follow Avery's, but her sense of style differs in the direction of minimalism and varied textures. She likes soft colors and neutrals, and has a penchant for browsing Issey Miyake designs she will never try to buy with her receptionist paycheck. I designed a two-layered dress that she would be able to wear to her job on top of her regular off-duty plans. The first layer is a low-waisted bubble skirt dress with a zipper to allow the wearer to fully customize the dress's neckline. Offices can get cold, so the top layer is a complimentary off-the-shoulder loose knit tunic with flared sleeves and just enough gaps in the knots to reveal bits of the first layer.

With the designs laid out, my next concern was bringing everything together. My less-than-subpar sewing skills were put to the test. For Nadiya's skirt alone, I stitched and tore close to four different skirts together to figure out how to best finalize it in a way that would sit right, feel comfortable, and match my original illustration. While creating the custom patterned fabric, staining the denim, and dying Farrow's dress fabric was one ordeal, troubleshooting sewing machine jams and learning the basics of sewing was a greater problem to overcome. Looking back at my process and where I started, I cannot help but feel that my efforts did not go to waste like I occasionally feared. There is no doubt that I still have heaps and loads of technique to learn, but I know that this project gave me an amazing opportunity to learn a craft that will benefit me throughout my career.

Going forward, my hope is that I will encounter many more opportunities that require me to challenge my skills, learn new ones, and improve upon my art. If those difficult opportunities fail to present themselves, I will create them for myself. My goal post-graduation is to eventually

work for apparel and accessory brands as a textile pattern designer, a conceptual artist, or a

fashion illustrator. It feels so deeply satisfying that, after four years, I have finally stumbled upon

my passion and carved out an outline for where I want to be professionally. I can only hope tha

the years to come will be as challenging and molding as the past four have been. I want to further

refine my style and taste, but also be tested and trained in things I am both familiar and

unfamiliar with.