

# Why A Picture Book?

Its Fall 2023. It's not that I don't know what to do for a BFA project, but that I have too many things to choose from.

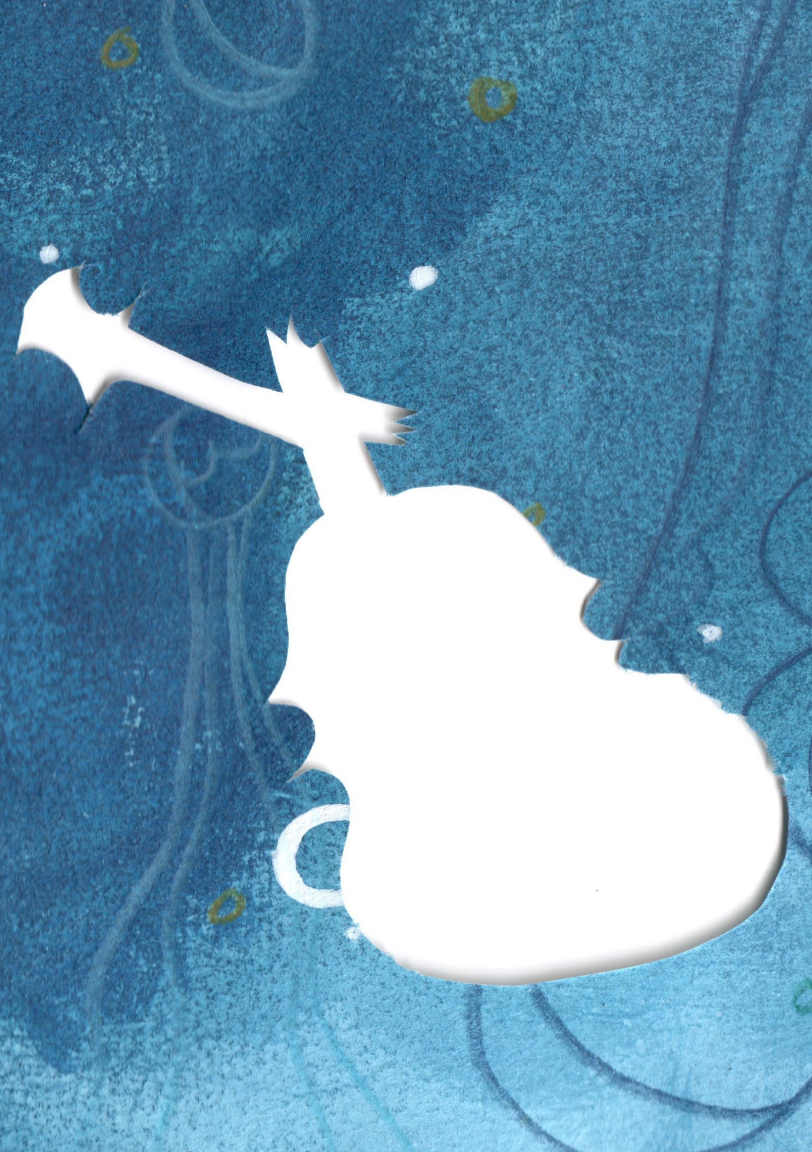
It's been four years and I've been hungry to make so much, comics, zines, digital and tabletop games, editorial illustration, poster design, books and letterpress work. I stalled for some weeks, unsure of which thing would touch on everything I wanted to touch on. Something that would encapsulate that idea of the *Designer/Illustrator*. (Emphasis on the slash...)

The same semester I enroll in a Childrens Book Illustration class. It's funny, looking back on my undergraduate work, it seems like once a year or more I make something for children. In general my work usually falls into two camps aesthetically, an inky DIY thing or intense whimsy.



I was excited of course at the outset of that class, I was right in my wheelhouse. It was everthing I expected: a fun, experimental picture puzzle and simultaneously a tremendous challange. I had a lot of fun. I also struggled. A lot.

I ended that semester with most of a complete picture book. One that I was proud of. I also ended it acutely aware of everywhere that my work had fallen short of what I knew it could be. I entered the winter with a decision for the BFA, hungry to try again and come back with something better.



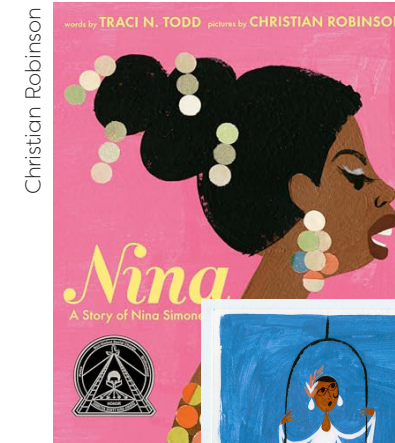
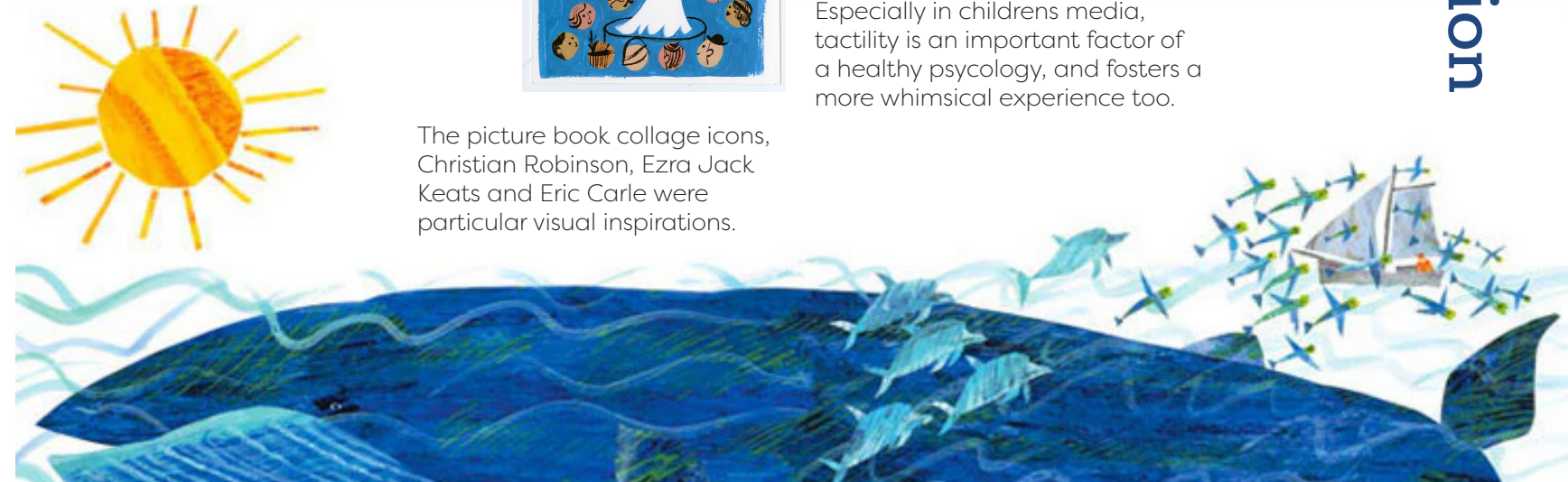
Picture books exist in the middle of many things. A venn diagram of elements a designer must contend with. Book design, illustration, print, tactility, sequential imagery, semiotics. Unlike similar mediums, comics for instance, they have typically explicit guidelines. Specific and limited page counts. Specific sizes.

Many projects students choose for this thesis work have some problem, some untapped market, some pain point or niche that a designer or illustrator can approach with a fresh perspective. Pictures books are consistent, there is nothing about them that needs fixing, or even innovation. Yet they are wildly different. Thousands of books can be made within these guidelines and still not be tired after decades. For me, the picture book was the perfect vessel.

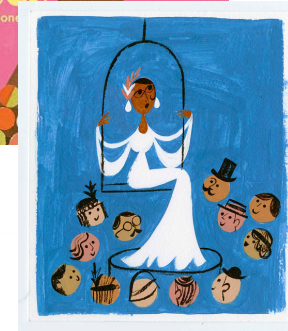




# Influences



Christian Robinson



The picture book collage icons, Christian Robinson, Ezra Jack Keats and Eric Carle were particular visual inspirations.



Eric Carle

Color, and especially texture were huge. I'm a big believer in tactility being central to design, and spent a lot of energy in my work across the last couple of years chasing texture, grit and shadowlines.

Especially in childrens media, tactility is an important factor of a healthy psychology, and fosters a more whimsical experience too.

# Visual Inspiration

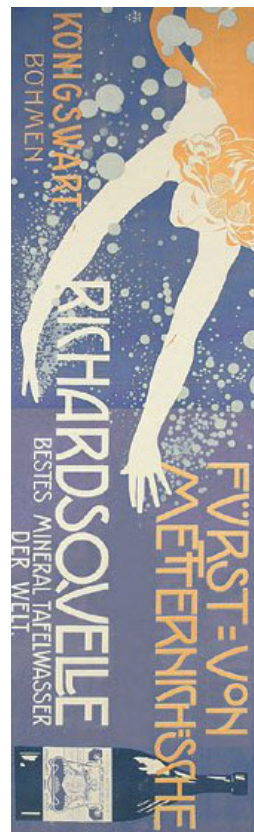




The work of the Vienna Werkstatte was another explicit inspiration. Through the semseter, *Die Flache*, a reproduction of the work from that period, was always about a foot away from my desk.

It all has a slightly *Nemo In Slumberland* feeling, strange color palattes, odd angles and proportions. It's a weird middleground between deco and nouveau that's really appealing to me. I didn't want to mimic the style exactly, but there was a feeling, and ambiance I was really moved by.

In terms of collage theres a flatness in the work that doesn't sacrifice depth of feeling or composton.



Within the Werkstatte, a particular artist, Dagobert Peche became my central inspiration. My mouse's namesake, Peche was a industrial artist, textile artist, poster designer and illustrator. Everything he produced was beautiful, magical, and mysterious.

Boxes disguised as birds, lace scenes of strange people, oddly cute and sophisticated patterns.

There's a folkloric quality present in his work that is somewhat absent from his peers, and as somewhat of an homage, many patterns used in the books are partial recreations of Peche's work (and some of his contemporaries).



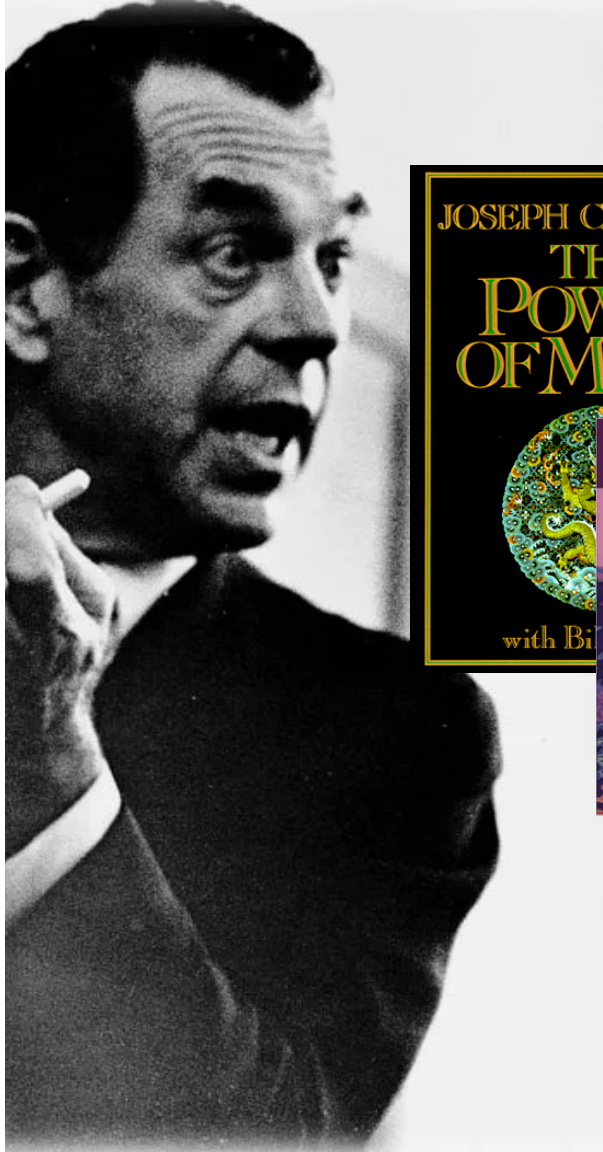
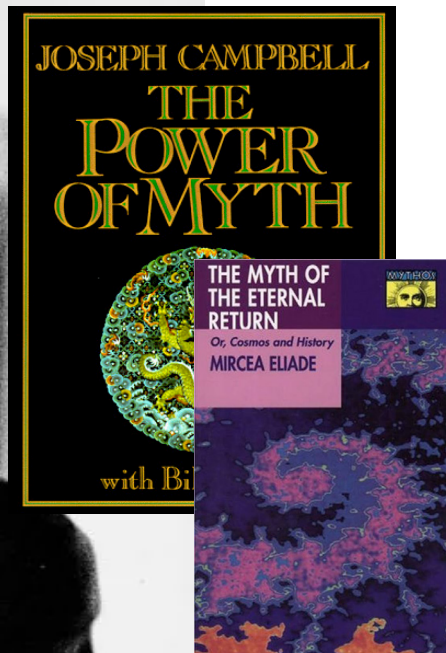


# Mythology in Childrens Literature

I am about to make a gross generalization. It is that as I grow older, the picture books I see on the shelf tend to be more and more literal with their story content. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Many of these books are some of the best pieces of childrens media I've read as an adult, and have a valuable place on that shelf.

That being said, I can't help but wonder where the fantasy, where the fiction of it all went? Why is the symbolism so on the nose? I suppose that's just the way the pendulum swung, but I think it's true too that symbolism is an incredibly effective way of communicating all of those same lessons, morals, and comforts.

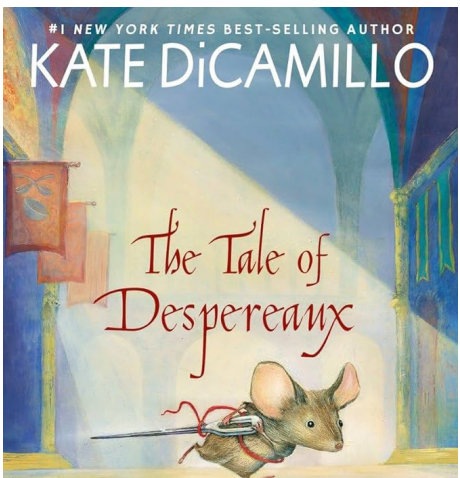
What I'm talking about is myth. It is not the first time I've mentioned it here, but it deserves attention. Myth has been the storytelling medium for centuries. We are our myths. Preferentially, it's what I would want on my shelf.



## Narrative Inspiration

I didn't want to exclude these things, just as many myths are the earliest stories we're told they often the most frightening. I didn't want to make something absent of symbolism or danger or metaphor.

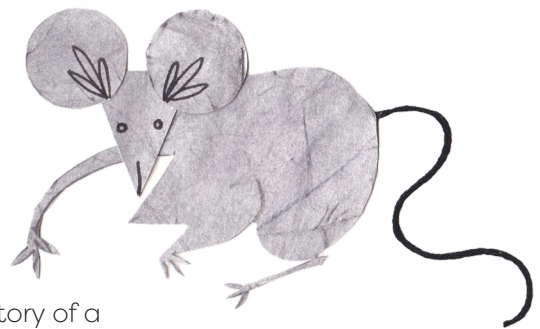
There were moments writing that first draft where I was tempted to eliminate danger. Should it really be scary? Should it be more fun? But often childhood is indeed scary. In fact, it is usually good and sweet and awful all at once.



The book is deeply inspired by mythology, and flood myths in particular. Across cultures there are countless flood myths, many of which include symbols like a vessel that carries people to safety, and a surveyor bird that scouts ahead for when the flood has quelled. I took many of these common aspects and worked them into my own manuscript.

In a more general way, there's an undeniable influence from many properties from my childhood. Stories like *The Tale of Despereaux* and Mr. Rogers segments in particular showed up in this project in ways I didn't expect. I quickly realized that I was drawing from stories like *Despereaux* that have a palpable sense of danger, misfortune, and unfairness.





There was a point in the fall semester when a professor asked what this project would be about. I hadn't come up with any narrative ideas yet, so I said the first thing that came to mind, at the time it was a lie—

“I'm thinking a mouse that survives a flood event”

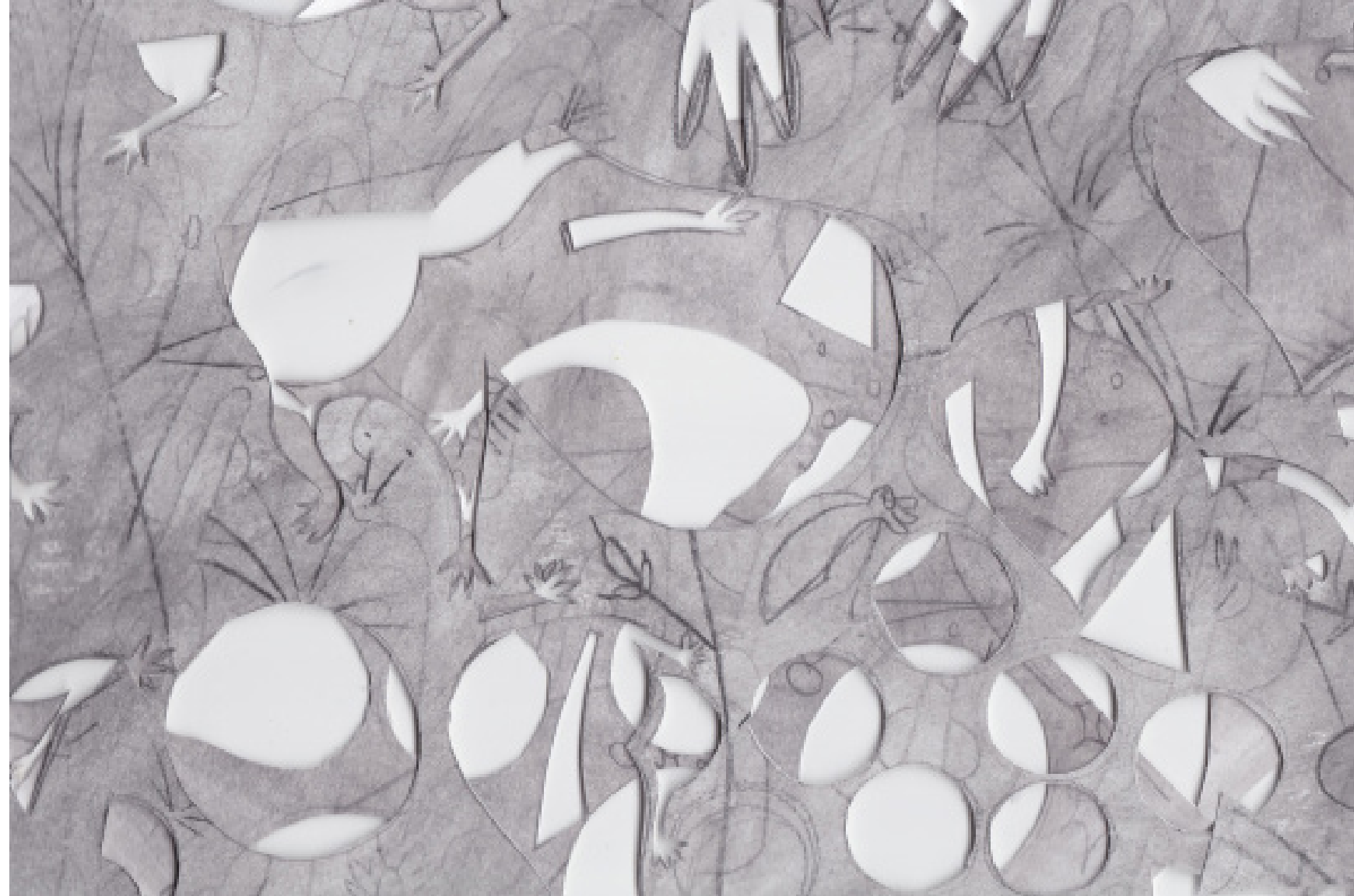
I didn't like anything I came up with after that nearly as much.

Back in California for the holidays, I wrote the initial manuscript in about a week over winter break. I wrote him sitting on the floor of my mother's pink bathroom next to the clawfoot tub. I wanted to be his height.

Dagobert is the story of a mouse, who essentially, purely, is lonely. He wants friends. He emulates the behavior of the people in his house to make this happen, and steals things to mimic their parties.

He steals an oyster (I will have no comments about the Freudian implications of this, they don't exist...) and hopes to find a pearl. Instead an ocean falls out. I'm not sure the metaphor needs much explaining, but at its heart Dagobert is a very Nietzschean thing. Embracing suffering, paradise always at your fingertips. Bleak as it may seem, it may be a fairytale in its own right.

## So...Who is Dagobert?





# Materials

Anyone who stopped by my desk this semester saw it at its worst. A complete whirlwind of pencils and paper scraps shredded to lace. I made my book with all this...



(The artists sustained only one minor knife injury, by the grace of god.)

# The Making



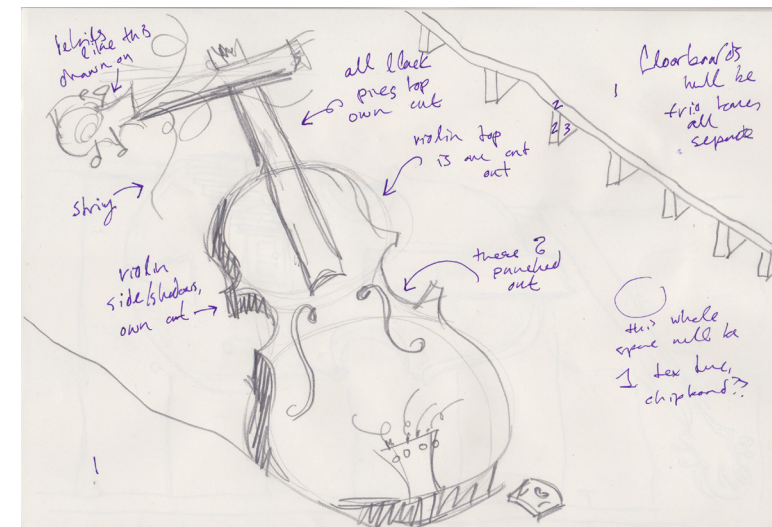
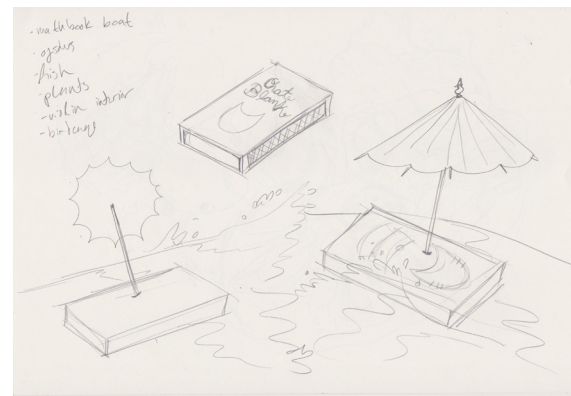
There were many weeks of iteration that went into setting up the foundation for character and environment at the beginning of the semester. What started with one handful of very realistic multimedia collages saw round after round of sketching.

Most changes that came up during this time had to do with materiality, and what kinds of illustration and form would make sense when translated to cut paper.

The best sketches would be made into prototype cut paper pieces to get an idea of what the final artstyle would be.

A regret of mine is how some of the looseness and more complex perspectives were lost to the final renderings.

## Material, Environment & Character Studies





DAGOBERT



THE FINCH





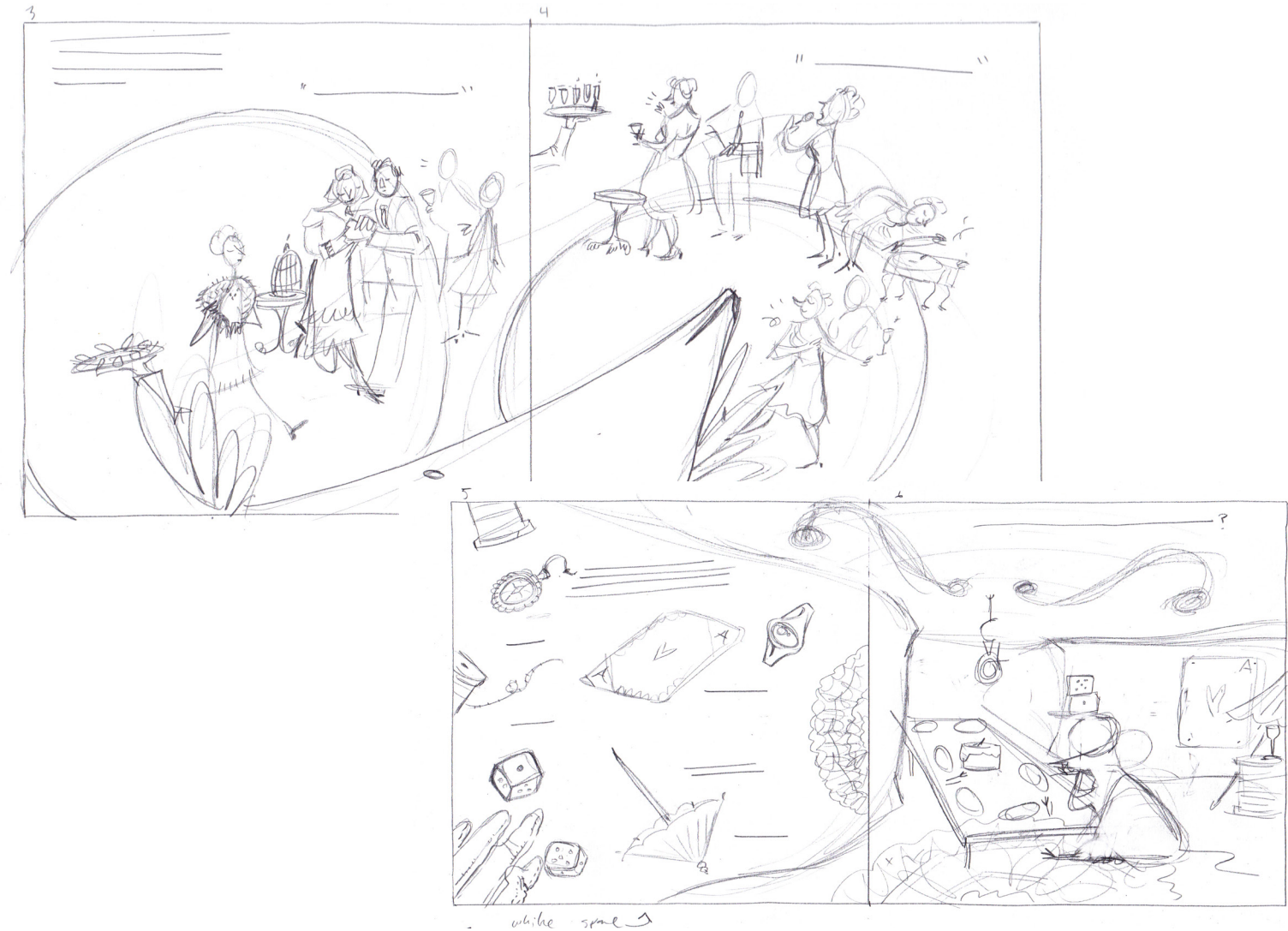
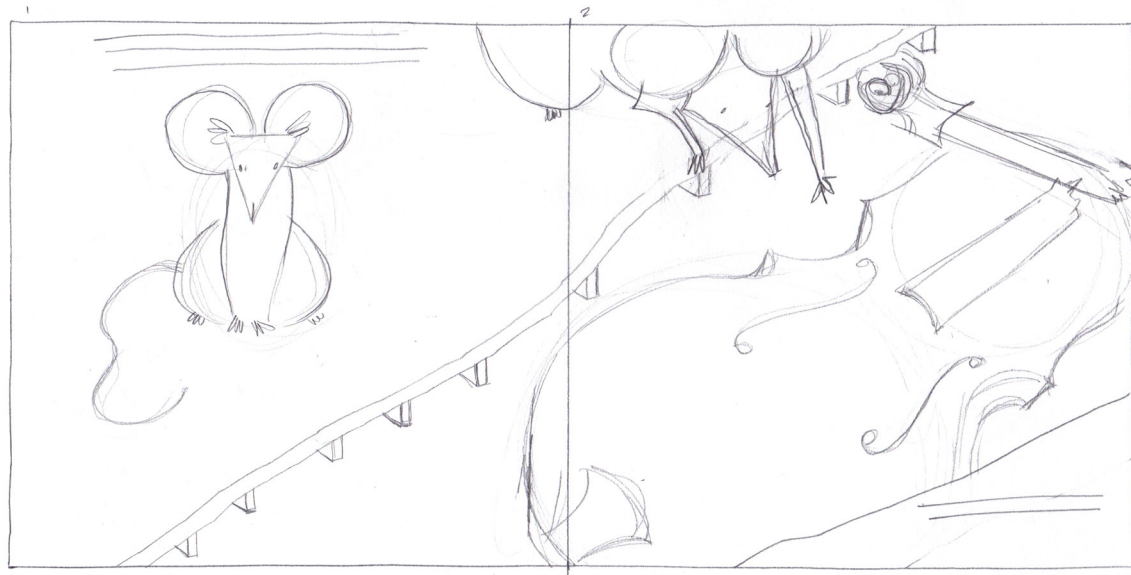




# Thumbnails, Drafting, Dummies

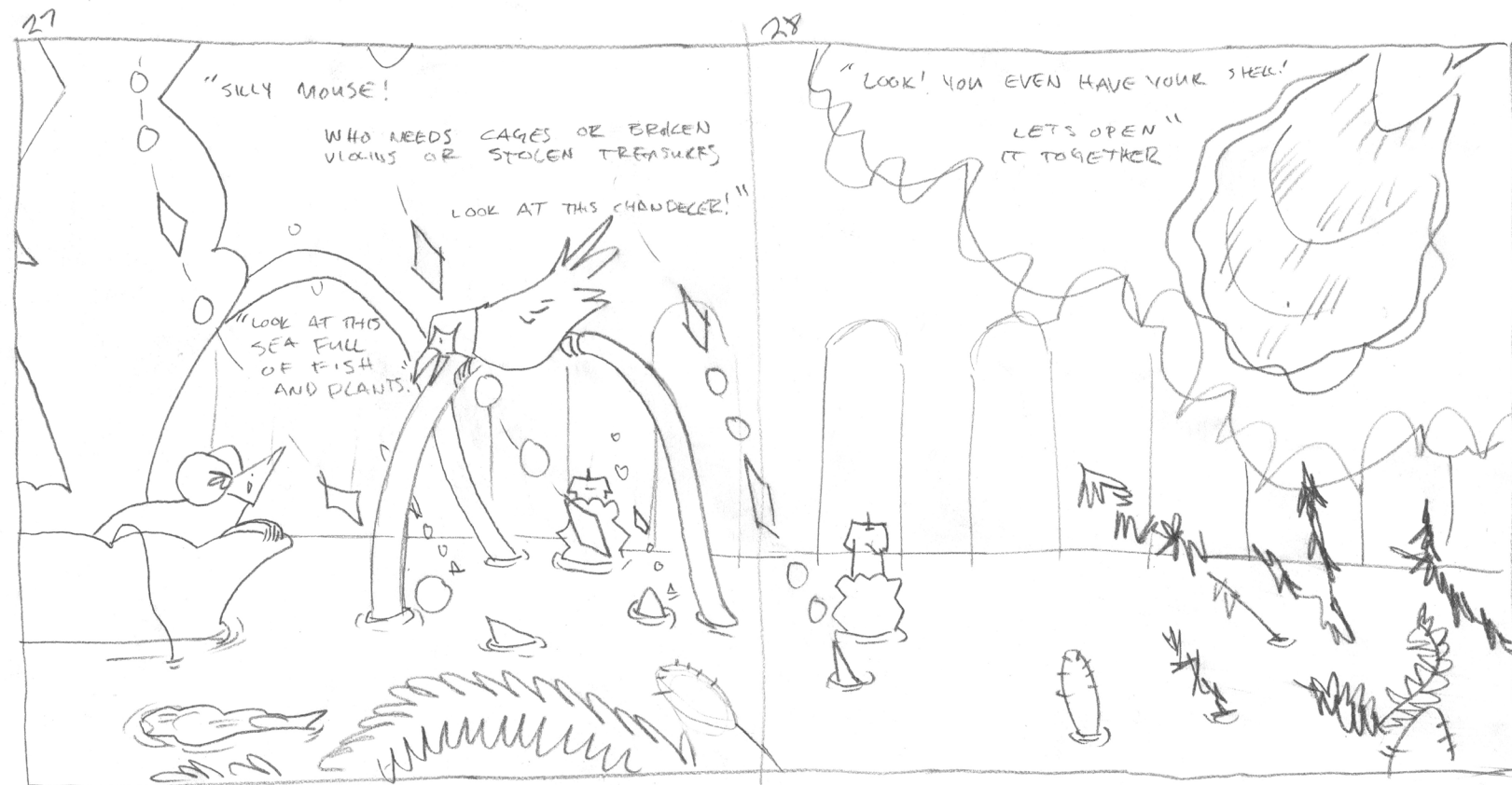
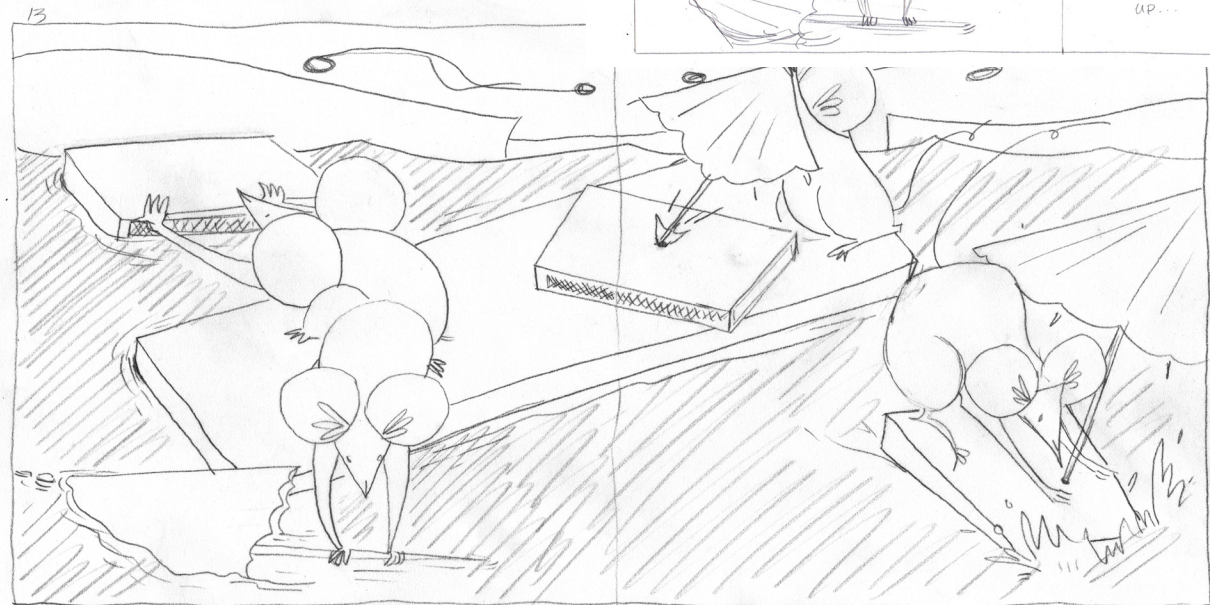
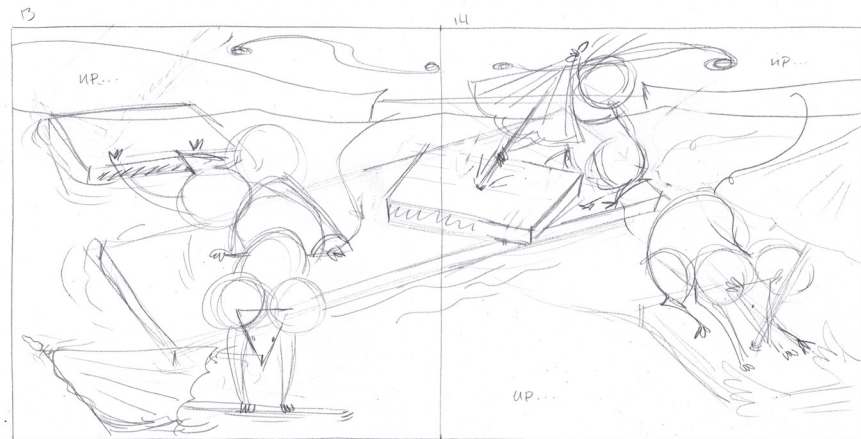
I already mentioned the double-edged sword quality of the drafting process. I pulled, pushed, thumbnailed and rethumbnailed, to the point where it would be excessive to show work here from every iteration and change that happened.

I started with the manuscript, and then the pagination. From there thumbnails and more refined sketches were made. Changes were made frequently, and this part of the project was the most heavily critiqued.



Despite the heavy editing, some pages were pretty solid from the start.

This spread for instance didn't change at all from the second draft to the refined dummy.





# Pattern Studies & Pattern Process



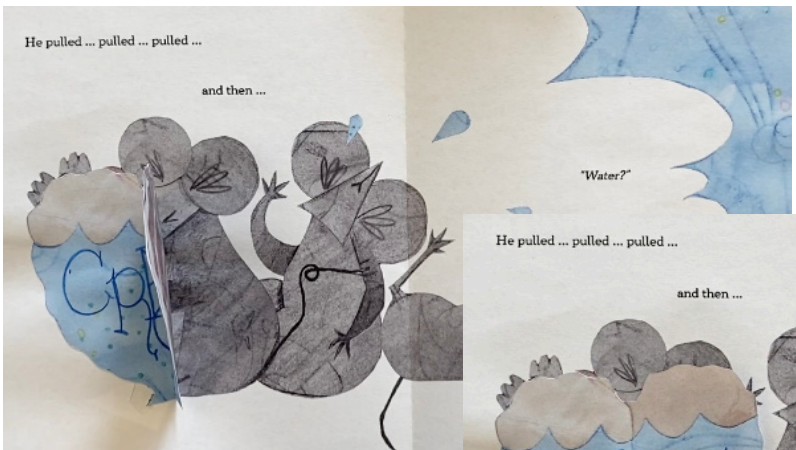
Some Werkstatte patterns that were used as bases for pattern stock.



## Insert Prototyping

Having these elements required clear prototyping to figure out how to structure files as to best print for the final book. Not to mention the illustrative logistics of working these moments into the drafts themselves.

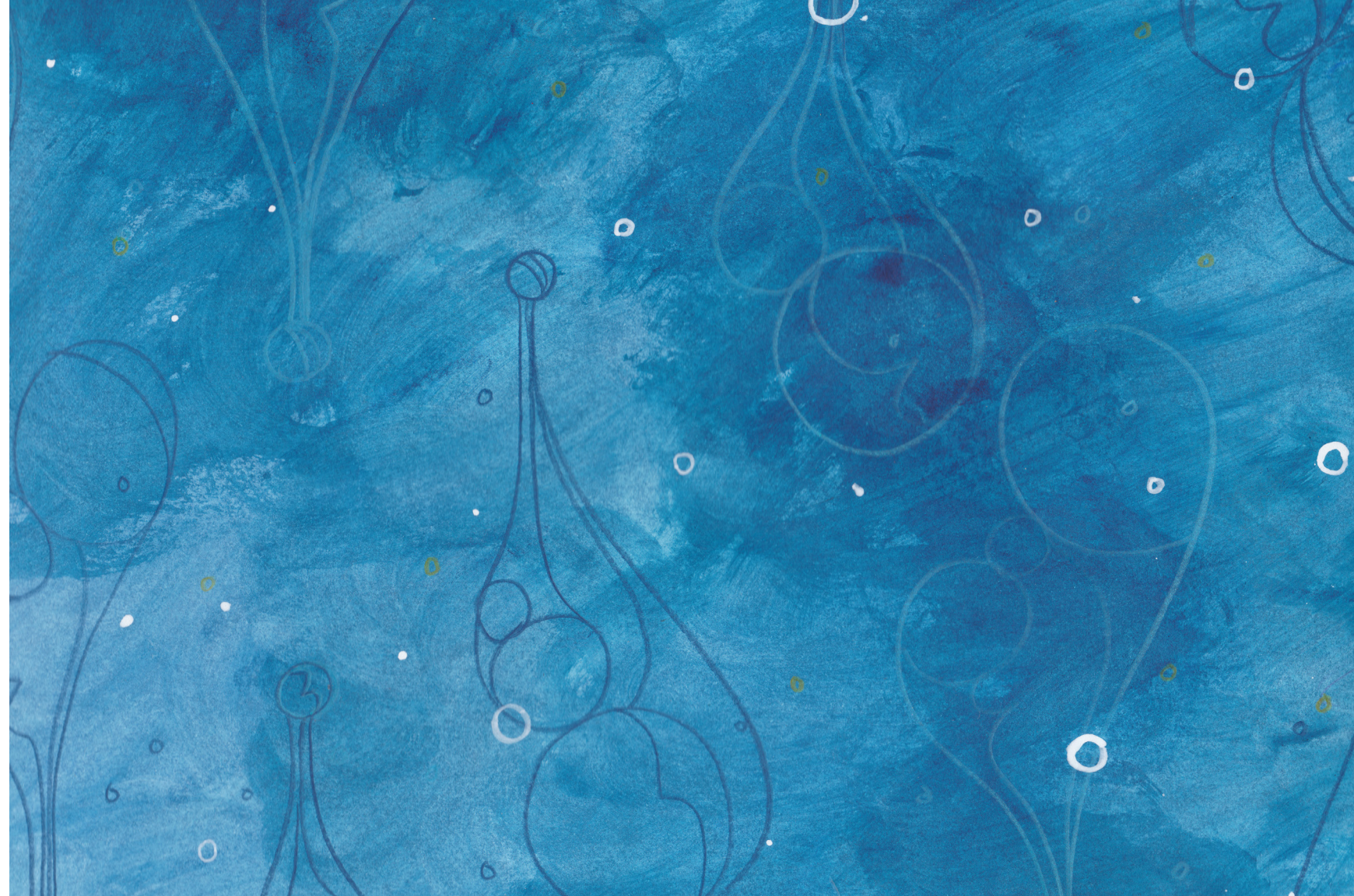
Some spreads include booklet inserts. I wanted to include these because of the added tactile and narrative quality.





Some patterns used in Dagobert,  
finished and uncut.

Most patterns had to be recreated in  
batches to create a stock of 2-8  
12 in by 16 in sheets per design.





# Collage Process



Patterns were made by layering dry watercolor pencil and washes of water/ink/gouache mixtures.

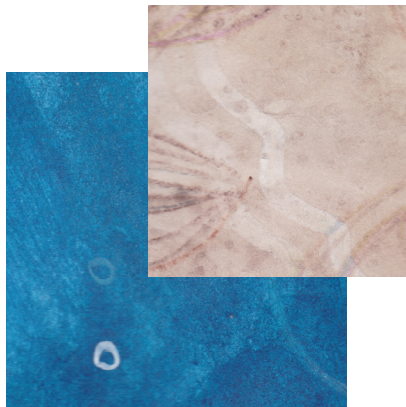


Some patterns use materials like salt to provide extra texture. Just like those elementary school crafts of old.

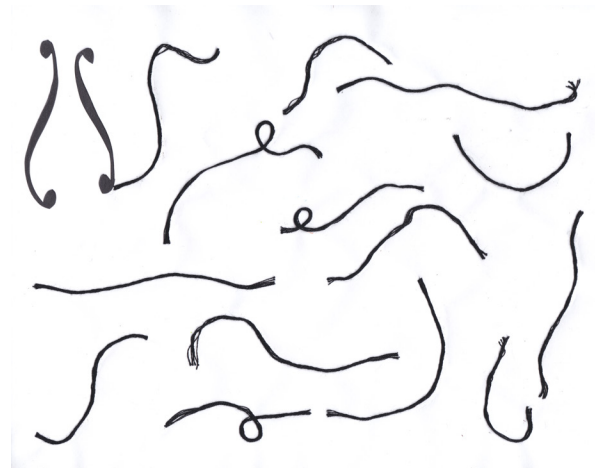
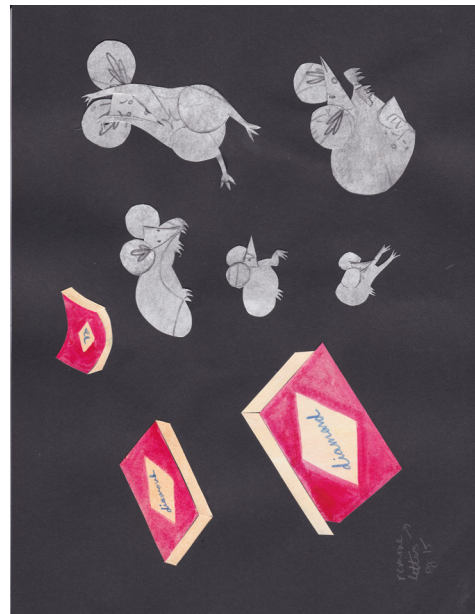
Dagobert's texture in particular includes a layer of charcoal.



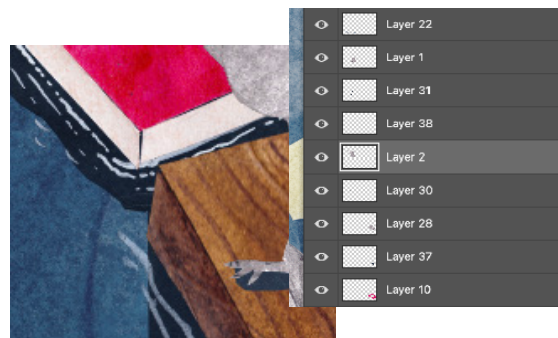
Many patterns include white acrylic details as both highlights or resist patterns.



All patterns were hand cut and glued onto black or white sheets as separate assets.

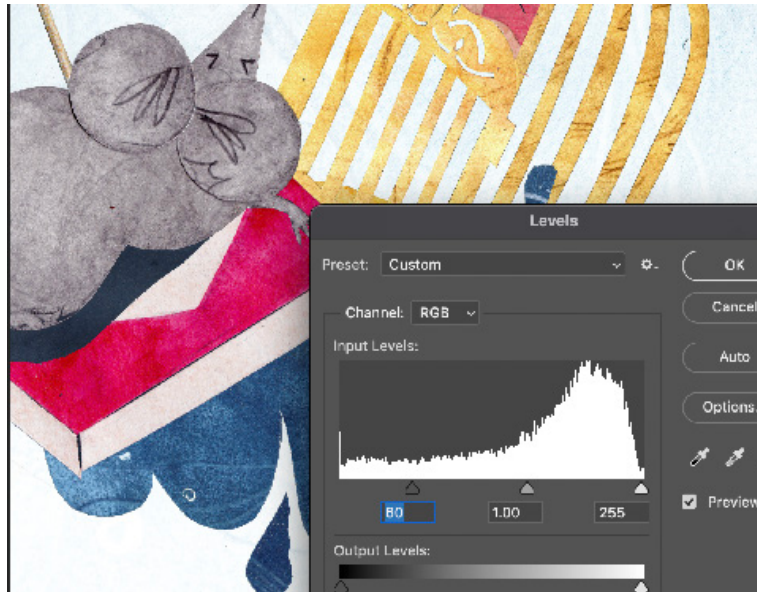


Physical pieces, like string and toothpick parts, were glued and scanned separately from characters and objects.



They were cut and scanned sometimes by page order and sometimes by order of asset. (the water assets for three pages cut at once, for example.)





Analog assets were scanned at high dpi into Photoshop where they were separated into their own transparent layers.

They were arranged, adjusted for color/contrast and exported into Indesign, where type was added.

Even water ripples were their own separate assets.



## Physical to Digital



The cover was created last, using the same methods. This was the most heavily proofed part of the book as the dust jacket has odd and specific measurements for fold and trim. (Despite diligent iteration, there are still minor problems.)



Ironically it also took the shortest amount of time to make

## The Cover



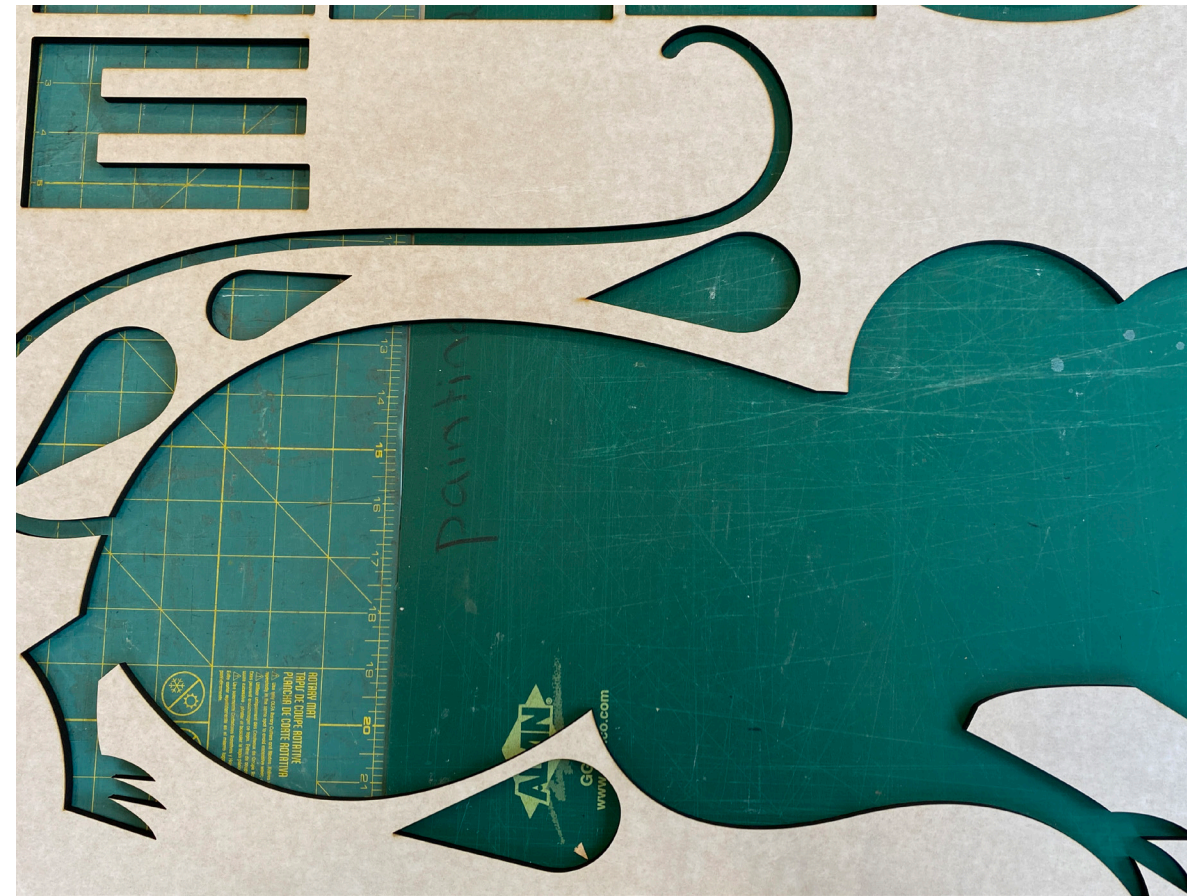
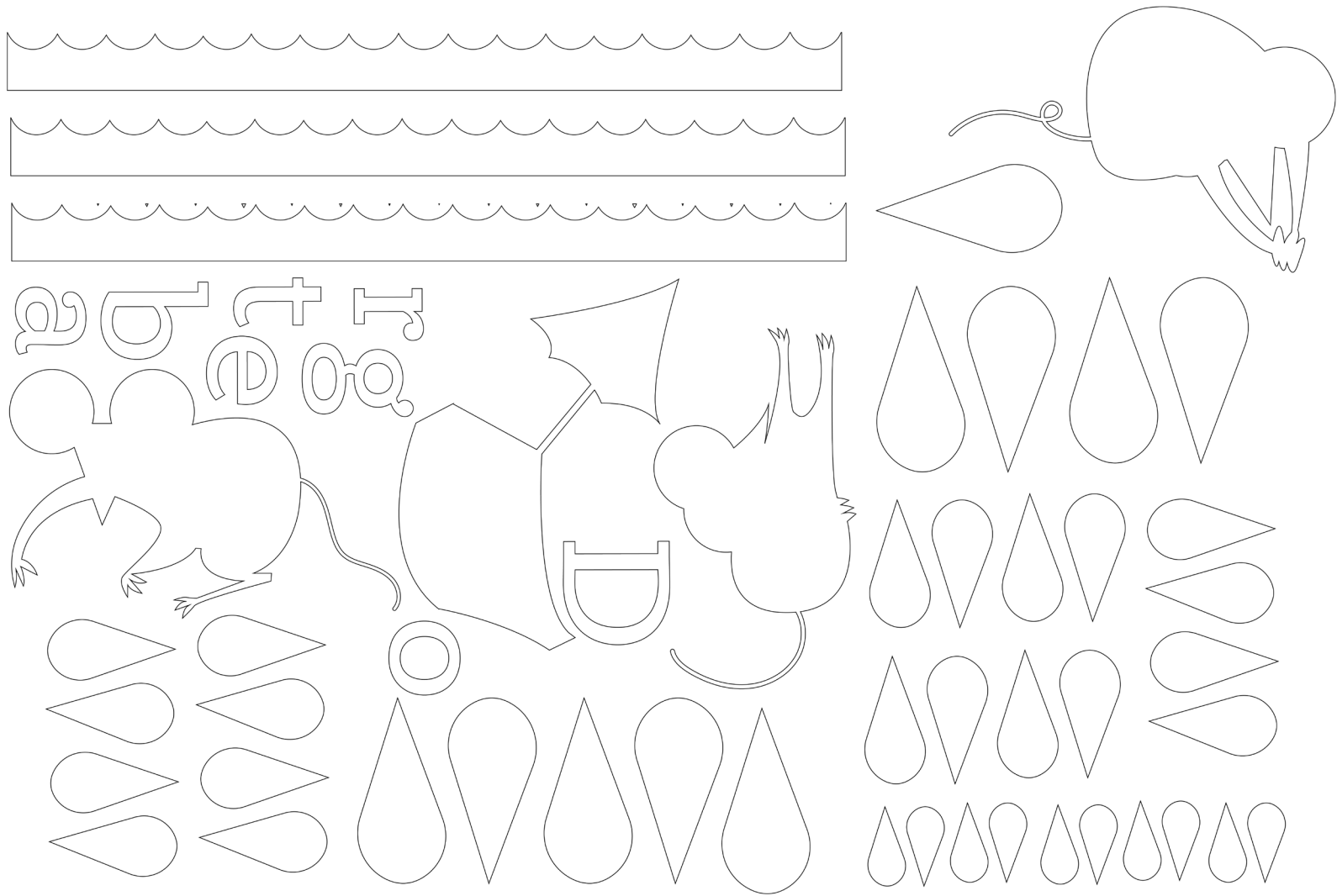
# Exhibition

At the start of the semester a friend and I did a grand tour of Seattle area bookstores. I scoped out their childrens sections to see what kinds of books were on the shelves and how they were displayed and advertised.

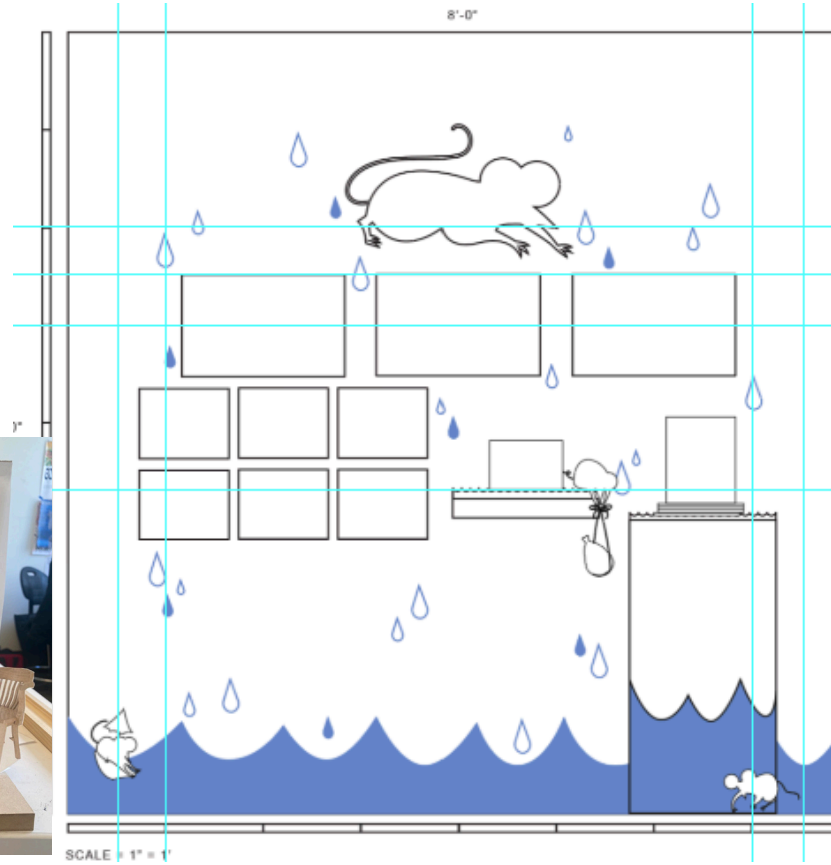
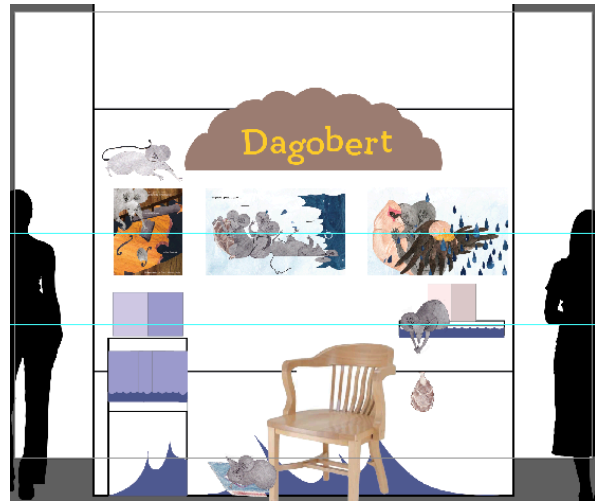
Childrens displays are allowed to be cute, representational, and a little over the top compared to other book marketing. Thats exactly what I wanted to mimic with the exhibition of my project.



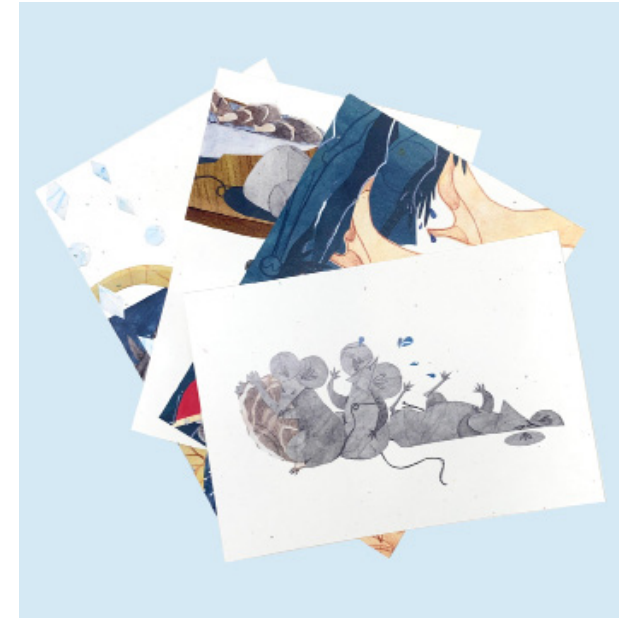




This display was created with the use of lasercut MDF, handpainted images, and 'cozy' furniture. Things like chairs, rugs, and the utilization of three dimensional assets and presence of character captures that childrens section feeling.



The spaces were mocked up first at 1in:1ft scale, then at full scale, and once more at small scale with exact measurements and specifications.



Products including sticker sheets, letterpressed bookmarks, and art prints were made in the final weeks of the semester for purchase at the departments opening show case



Product



The best part of this project was my proximity to my passionate and talented peers and faculty. Working alongside people in a context like this is a gift, and I hope all of our careers live up to the studio experience we had this semester.

The End

