Beauty Consumed

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Beauty Consumed

Erika Galvin

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Commonwealth Honors in Art

Bridgewater State University

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Prof. Alain Blunt, Thesis Advisor
Date: May 6, 2022

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Date: May 6, 2022
BEAUTY

CONSUMED

Erika Galvin
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Origin Story
Representation in art is very important. It helps us realize who we are and what we want to become later on. For me, art is an escape from reality where I can be who I truly want to be, no matter the gender or sexuality. Ever since I was a young child, I would consume art through comics and shows, hoping to see myself in what I was watching. As I grew up, I decided to create my own art and representation.

My childhood was fairly isolated. My mother and father neglected me for substances while my older sister would take care of me even though she was only four years older than me. We were not the best of friends since she was given such big responsibilities at a young age. I was not sociable in school either. Forgetting names and severe social anxiety made it hard for me to make any long-lasting friends. Therefore, I turned to comics and television for comfort. I would consume all manners of media to outweigh the isolation that I was experiencing. There were plenty of times that I would dissociate and escape to a make-believe fantasy world that I created to feel safe and welcomed.

As I grew from a child into a teenager, I started to feel the effects of this isolation. I would pretend to be the fictional characters I saw on television or read in comics. Pretending to be something that people loved helped me feel like I was loved and cared for, even if I knew I was not that same character. There was never a character that perfectly fit me, so I ended up creating my own characters. I started to create original characters, or OCs, in my mind that I could insert into the stories I was consuming. This was the first time I ever created my own representation, though it was just for myself.
I did not just create these characters in my mind and leave them there. I instead started drawing out my ideas. At first, I drew characters from the media I was consuming while thinking about my OCs, but I soon ended up drawing and designing my own characters. All of these were drawn with traditional media, mainly pens and pencils on paper. Since I was just starting out, my art was bad. My designs were complicated and chaotic, with no real thought behind them other than to look cool or edgy. There was this false idea in my head that if I was able to find a way to draw my art digitally, that I would improve immediately and be able to create my characters exactly as I saw them in my head. Even while I was improving with my traditional art, the dream of a quick and easy improvement option never left my mind.

Once I was able to get a cheap tablet to finally draw digitally, I realized I was half right in the idea that my art would improve quicker. I finally had tools that could help me deal with my shaky and heavy hand that plagued my traditional drawing. Plus, years of watching and studying other artists create digital art online through tutorials and timelapses allowed me to put my knowledge to use immediately. However, my art and characters still did not look like the beautiful pieces that other content creators were making. I still needed practice and passion to push me to get better.

I dove back into creating fan content for shows and comics I consumed. Moving away from creating my own characters for representation, I instead forced representation onto already established characters. I would create my own versions of these characters with stories I created that were plausible in the original source material. Playing with background stories and different designs for popular characters was very important for me to gain the proper skills and passion for character design.

It wasn’t until the game Cuphead: Don’t Deal with the Devil came out in 2017 that I decided to start creating original characters again. These characters started off as fan characters that were in the same universe as the Cuphead characters. There would be occasional doodles or short animation about these characters, but nothing truly substantial for the meanwhile. The two main characters that came from this time were Ash Acer and Par Affin.

Even though these two characters started off as original fan characters made to be placed in the same universe as the Cuphead characters. There would be occasional doodles or short animation about these characters, but nothing truly substantial for the meanwhile. The two main characters that came from this time were Ash Acer and Par Affin.

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The main catalyst for this separation actually came in a dream I had. I was inspired to create a new character, Emi, that would end up being the antagonist to Ash and Par's story. This story idea came so quickly and with so much inspiration to me, that I sketched out my first real comic strip. I had always dreamt about creating comics, but this was the first time I ever wrote my own from scratch. Even with a dark undertone and gore to this short story, I knew that I wanted to expand upon it.

The darker story was my way of dealing with the isolation I felt as a child. I had always gotten darker thoughts in my head, so this was a new outlet for me. It would not be until I started college that I realized it was not just my past social isolation that brought me to this darker theme, but also the questioning of my gender and sexuality.

Without realizing it in the moment of creating my characters, I found that I unconsciously made all my characters somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum. There was no plan for this kind of representation at first, because all I was doing was putting parts of myself into my characters. This is when I realized that I was not cisgender or heterosexual. It was through my own characters that I was able to explore my gender and sexual identity enough to figure out I am a genderfluid asexual individual. This realization felt amazing and showed me just how truly powerful representation can be. I ended up deciding to fully integrate even more queer identities into my story and characters in the hopes of helping others see themselves in media online.
Reasons for Representation
Representation is one of the most important things that an audience needs when they consume media. A good storyline or animation can help keep viewers interested but being able to see oneself in what they are watching will help greatly with self-esteem and creativity. This is especially true in animation which is usually directed towards the youth. The younger generation can be greatly influenced by what they read and watch, which is why seeing different kinds of representation is so important. There are plenty of marginalized groups that still need constant representation, but one of the most underrepresented groups now would be the LGBTQ+ community. Whether it is watching cartoons or reading comics, having representation for marginalized groups, especially the underrepresented queer community, is extremely important for their mental health and livelihood.

To people who have never interacted with the queer community, or someone who is a part of that community, representation might seem like a small action. However, being able to see oneself in official media can mean the world to a young queer individual. For some, that media representation, whether it be in the form of a comic, show, or movie, can be the only support they get along with being a crucial lifeline. A 2021 study showed that “nearly 35,000 LGBTQ youth ages 13 to 24 across the United States, 42% had seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year” (Cox). The fact that such many queer youths have considered taking their own lives, mainly from lack of support, is a terrifying subject to come to terms with. Cox goes on to talk about how when there is representation in the media, it is mostly about the trauma and aggression that members of the LGBTQ community face. Though this is at least some
form of representation for queer people, if
the only thing they see in media is trauma
and aggression against them, then there is no
joy to the media that they consume. There is
no healthy version of themselves to look up
too. Constantly seeing yourself portrayed
as a victim or villain creates stereotypes and
isolation for queer individuals. There needs
to be good representation that shows healthy
and supportive queer relationships and proud
people who shamelessly identify as queer. This
will show people that “it is a beautiful thing
to be brought along on the journey of self-
discovery with another, or to see oneself in a
new light and watch the pieces click into place”
(Cox). The queer youth need stories that they
can grow with and be happy to see themselves
in. Not every young person has a supportive
family, so seeing good representation of queer
people in media will help them find that
support they might not have.

In the early 2000s when I was
growing up, the TV representation of
the LGBTQ community could be boiled
down to a bunch of jokes or nothing
at all. I had no real healthy media to
consume on screen. A show that I
adored to watch was Sailor Moon which
was a Japanese cartoon, or anime, that
depicted magical girls saving the day
similar to American superhero shows.
Two characters in the English version
of this show, Sailor Neptune and
Sailor Uranus, were shown as cousins.
However, the show depicted them as
getting uncomfortably close to each
other in almost romantic situations. The
reason for this is because the US censors
thought showing the depiction of almost
incest would be more appropriate
than a lesbian couple since these two
characters were “lesbians in the original
material who very much enjoy the company of
each other” (Bergado). The only reason I found
out about this is because I read the original
manga, which is like comic books or graphic
novels, that the anime was based off. This
manga showed me one of my, and many other
young children’s, first introduction to a healthy
queer relationship and it was through a comic
instead of mainstream television.

Television and movies are held to
higher standards and censorship policies than
graphic novels are. This is due to the extremely
long time it takes and the vast amount of
people that are needed to bring a show to life
(Harvey-Gurr). If a show is seen
as too risky, too expensive, or not liked by test
audiences, then it can lead to its failure. This is
vastly different from people who create comics.
Creating a comic for physical publication still
go through an intense screening process,
but there is much more leniency that allows
comics to depict a wider array of content, as
seen with the Sailor Moon manga being able
to show Sailor Neptune and Uranus’ lesbian
relationship while the English version of the
show could not.

When it comes to self-publishing
comic creators, many will choose to
post their work online as a cheaper
alternative to physical publication. This
also allows younger and less skilled
creators to share their own stories more
easily with the world. They can create
the representation that they have not
been able to see in the mainstream
media. Popular sites such as Tapas and
Webtoons have become popular sites
to submit original comics. However,
many other sites can host comics such
as Tumblr and DeviantArt. The ease
at which people can create and share
their own stories is far greater and
faster than ever before. Fans creating
content for shows are some of the
easiest content for new creators to
make. A content creator known by the
username Chekov, has created a comic
called Pearls Before SW1N3 based off
the television show Steven Universe
(Chekov). Here they were able to create
lesbian representation of two characters
from the show with much more explicit
romance between the two characters
than the original source material
offered. After gaining a larger following,
Chekov was able to go on to create other
stories, including original stories not
based off any shows, that allowed them to dive deeper in different queer representations.

Since being able to see yourself represented in media is so important, and with how easy it can be to create comics online, I have been motivated to create my own comic series. There have been years of research and dedication to the queer community that I spent trying to learn who I was. Seeing how little representation in media there is for most of the more known LGBTQ labels, such as bisexual or transgender, I felt there needed to be more representation of lesser-known labels that usually get forgotten about. This is the reason why I started my honors thesis project. I wanted to create a world where I could explore not just the darker parts of the mind, but the different kinds of relationships and identities that people can have. Most of my characters are not cisgender or heterosexual because I want to represent the queer people that have never seen themselves before. There needs to be more stories that show minority groups and I plan to create representation and help those that can never find representation so they can finally see themselves.
Inspirations
Inspiration can come from all kinds of sources. Growing up, I consumed all kinds of media, from comics to games to shows and movies. It was these different media that I grew up with that encouraged me to start creating art to tell my own story with the representation that I did not see growing up.

I remember vividly reading different graphic novels throughout my childhood. The most prevalent that I remember was a graphic novel from Japan, known as a manga, called *Tail of the Moon*, by Rinko Ueda. As a child, I was drawn to these graphic novels because they were easier to digest but also felt like they had a deeper storyline to them than the average American comic book.

The story that *Tail of the Moon* told was of a young, female, failed ninja who had to win over the heart of a man while also learning how to become a better ninja. It combined action and romance together seamlessly. This story was one of the first love stories that I enjoyed reading about when I was younger. Though I always wished there was more relationships of different kinds and not just the average heterosexual beauties falling in love. Knowing that there were other kinds of relationships that could be created helped push me to start making my own stories that could show all different kinds of relationships.

Just as any other young individual, growing up I loved watching television. There have been plenty of shows that I have experienced, but only one that really left a mark on me. *Steven Universe* is a show about a half-human, half-gem hybrid named Steven. He had to grapple with the fact that his gem mother had to essentially die to give up her form for Steven to live. The way that this shows delved deep into the different
familial, romantic, and platonic relationships gave importance and meaning to the friends and family that Steven knew. I was blown away by the storytelling and the depths that each character had to them. Not only was the characters and relations well written, but there was a plethora of healthy queer relationships in the show. Steven’s mother had an implied romantic relationship with another female lead, a nonbinary character was given great character development and not played as a joke, and there was an official, on-screen wedding between two female leads. The fact that there were so many kinds of LGBTQ+ relationships being shown on screen for a children’s show felt like a game changer. It made me realize that mainstream media can push more representation and that this was just the beginning of queer representation in the media. Steven Universe has been one of my main inspirations for wanting to create an in-depth story that has realistic queer relationships between characters.

It is not just media meant to watch and read that inspired me to create this project, but also interactive media such as video games. Undertale, by Toby Fox, is a game that puts a whole new spin on a fighting, role-play game filled with monsters. Instead of emphasizing fighting every monster that you see, it pushes a pacifistic ideology on the player. It felt like this game put a whole new spin on what kind of story a game could tell and how it could tell it. It was one of the first games I played that had multiple different endings based on your choices as a player. Playing the game again for different endings would create alternate text lines and situations to show that your actions in the past does affect how the game will be played in the future. This was an amazing feature that brought back a lot of replay-ability to the game. Even if the different paths were not in this game, the story of a child going through a monster filled world and befriending enemies to survive was so
entertaining that the story alone was enough to replay the game multiple times. Being able to represent multiple characters and have a story that people would read multiple times because they were invested or saw themselves in the characters is a major inspiration to why I started making comics. It is one thing to create simple pictures, but another to create entire worlds that people can get lost in.

The reason I was able to gain the courage to even start creating my own stories with representation was because I saw other individual artists creating their stories. It is one thing to see a mainstream company create a story with representation, but another thing entirely to see a small individual artist create their own content. One of the biggest inspirations for me to start making my own original story is a person who goes by NinjaHaku21Art online. They started off by creating art for different media such as Sonic the Hedgehog and Cuphead: Don’t Deal with the Devil. I had been following them for years before seeing them switch from fan made content to original works. Seeing the support and love that this content creator got for their own story ideas was an inspiring thing to see. Even though they were much better established than I was, I still saw this as a sign to create my own stories and begin posting them online. Even if I only had a few people who cared about what I had to say, it would be a few more that could potentially see themselves in my story.

There have been many other things that have inspired me to create art and stories with different representations. It would be impossible to list every single one. But knowing that I have seen many different types of stories already, helps push me to create a new story that other people can find interesting.
Meet the Characters
These are the characters to my comic that I began to create for a comic series called Beauty Consumed. This comic would be about Ash Acer, a plant creature known as a Florella that has to navigate the world through many different obstacles and enemies while figuring out who she truly is as an individual.

The reason for creating this comic was to explore the differences between black-and-white thinking along with morally grey characters. Many of these characters also identify as queer to some extent as they are an extension of myself. I wanted to create an interesting story for queer individuals to enjoy and potentially see themselves in.
Ash Acer

Pronouns
She/Her

Age
16

Species
Florella (Plant creature– specifically a maple tree seed)

Relationships
Best friends with Par Affin, terrified of Hysfix Emi and Viscre, trusts Fifi and Eve

About
After losing both of her parents in a fire, Ash is stuck living with her aunt and grandfather. She travels around the city with her friend Par to try and go on adventures. She is trying to find out who started the fire that killed her parents and because of that she is being followed by Hysfix from the shadows.
Par Affin

Pronouns
He/Him

Species
Otadject (Object creature specifically made of candle wax)

Relationships
Best friends with Ash Acer, follower of Hysfix

About
Lives on his own in the woods because his parents died when he was very young. His mother was an Otadject candle like him but his father was an Umbra (Shadow creature). Trouble maker that loves to mess with things. Has a habit of pushing Ash too far without realizing it and making her cry. Can be very mean. Unknowingly follows Hysfix’s orders because of a shadow curse placed on him. He hides his right eye at all costs.
Anahita Mimicus

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<td>Animalia</td>
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<th>Relationships</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ash’s private tutor</td>
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About
Ms. Mimicus is a private tutor. She teaches Ash all the different school subjects she would learn in a traditional school environment, along with how to navigate the world properly in the eyes of society.
Fifi Bole

Pronouns  Age
She/Her    25

Species
Otadject (Object creature-specifically made of soft clay)

Relationships
Dating Eve, unofficial caretaker of Ash and Par

About
Runs her own ceramics business with her partner Eve. Has cut ties with her mother for being a rude and uncaring bitch that disapproved of her relationship. Can be very tough on others but also very caring. More like a mother figure who wants to help people out but won’t take crap from others. Ends up letting Ash and Par stay the night at her shop because a turf war broke out between Umbra (shadow creatures) and Lucere (light creatures) which resulted in her becoming a source of information for Ash to figure out what is going on in their world.
Eve Subulata

Pronouns: They/Them
Age: 27

Species: Florella (Plant creature—specifically an Eve's Needle Cactus)

Relationships:
Dating Fifi, unofficial caretaker of Ash and Par, ex-friend to Alous

About:
Co-owner of Fifi’s ceramics business. Very kind and soft, but can kick someone’s ass if needed. Does a lot of the heavy lifting for Fifi even though Fifi says she can handle it. Has two piercings on their face, on their lower lip and their nose bridge. Saved Ash and Par from getting in the middle of a turf war between Umbra (shadow creatures) and Lucere (light creatures), and managed to convince Fifi to let the kids stay so they would not get hurt leaving the shop. Ends up being a nice parent figure to Ash and Par.
# Alous Aceph

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<td>She/Her</td>
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**Species**
Animalia (Animal creature- specifically a human)

**Relationships**
Ex friend to Eve, secretary to Viscre, follower of Hysfix

**About**
Works at Viscre’s cosmetic company as a secretary and advertiser to fulfill a debt she has to Hysfix. Does not have legs, arms or a head. Her gloves, socks and head are made of a special latex that fills up with black smoke and uses her life energy to form functional limbs for everyday use. She can speak perfectly fine but is usually quiet unless talked to first or has to sell a beauty service to a customer.
Hysfix

Pronouns
They/Them

Age
Unknown

Species
Umbra (Shadow creature)

Relationships
Works with and leads Viscre and Emi, owner of Par Apis and Alous’ lives, stalks Ash, hates Jeihsiel Ereznel and Amedeel

About
Hysfix is an unmasked Umbra, a shadow creature that does not try to blend in with mortals. They are able to hypnotize and force mortals to do their bidding against their will, but prefer if mortals follow on their own will so they threaten or trick them to follow their lead. Hysfix was the one to set fire to Ash’s home which caused the death of her parents. Now they stalk her to see if she would be a good follower or not. Uses Par as a spy to keep an eye on Ash as she tries to figure out what happened to her parents. Has bloodily fought with Ereznel for getting in their way when and the only reason they didn’t kill Ereznel was because other Lucere (light creatures), Amedeel and Jeihsiel, stepped in to stop the fight.
Emi

Pronouns
She/They

Age
Unknown

Species
Umbra (Shadow creature)

Relationships
Works under Hysfix with Viscre, leads Grace and Faith, hates Ereznel

About
Emi is an Umbra that cannot fully disguise herself as a mortal so she wears a mask to look like a doll Otadject (object creature). She has a vertical mouth that takes up their whole face under their mask and will use that to rip people’s faces off for food. They can then make the corpse into a follower which she did for Faith and Grace. She has no regard for mortal life and will kill and eat whatever and whoever she pleases. The only thing that stops her from going on a murdering spree is Hysfix’s order to remain on the downlow as much as possible.
Viscre

Pronouns  Age
He/They    Unknown

Species
Umbra (Shadow creature)

Relationships
Works under Hysfix with Emi, Alous’ boss, acquaintances with Jeihsiel

About
Viscre is an Umbra disguised as an Animalia (animal creature—specifically a human) who owns a cosmetic business where he will bring happiness and change to people in need with high quality surgeries for extremely low prices. The only catch is that to get the surgeries for such a low price, people have to give parts of their souls away. This makes people come back for more and more surgeries until they look absolutely perfect in the eyes of society but are left as hollow husks that can never find peace once they die. Viscre never takes on any of the dirty work of their job, leaving that to Hysfix’s minions or Emi herself. He feels like he is too good to be dealing with anything he deems imperfect.
Ereznel

Pronouns
She/They

Age
Unknown

Species
Lucere (Light creature)

Relationships
Hates basically everyone and everything

About
Ereznel is a creature of light that wants to watch the mortal world burn to the ground. She was summoned by an unsuspecting mortal girl who Ereznel killed almost immediately. After that, Ereznel went traveling around the world causing havoc and murder just for the fun of it. As she was using her light powers for such destruction, Amedeel was sent to capture them. Unfortunately, Amedeel didn’t care about her mission so Ereznel was able to continue on her rampage until Jeishiel was sent after them. They kept evading the two other Lucere until she landed in Hysfix’s city. There they were stopped by Hysfix and would have ended up under their control if it wasn’t for Jeishiel stepping in to try and capture Ereznel. She was able to escape in the confusion but stays close to the city to try and find a way to hurt or even kill Hysfix.
Amedeel

**Pronouns**  She/Her  
**Age**  Unknown  

**Species**  Lucene (Light creature)  

**Relationships**  Coworker to Jeihsiel, interested in Emi, sees everyone as a potential friend to use  

**About**  Amedeel is a creature of light sent to capture Ereznel and bring them back to the dimension of light. The only problem with that is Amedeel didn’t care about her job at all, instead she spent her time having fun and partying with mortals. There was nothing that Amedeel wouldn’t do or try that the mortals around her would offer, she was having so much fun until Jeihsiel was forced to come to the mortal world and work with her to hunt down Ereznel. She is annoyed with Jeihsiel for ruining her fun and making her work when she wants to play.
Jeihsiel

**Pronouns**
He/She/They

**Age**
Unknown

**Species**
Lucere (Light creature)

**Relationships**
Coworker to Amedeel, hunting down Ereznel, dislikes Hysfix and Emi, respects Viscre

**About**
Jeihsiel is a creature of light that was sent to hunt down and capture Ereznel to bring them back to their dimension of light after Amedeel failed to do so in a timely manner. He is always upset and annoyed because he does not want to be in the mortal world at all. She was forced to take the job because Amedeel was playing around and goofing off instead of tracking down Ereznel. Even though they hate being in the mortal world they were able to find a respectful individual who shared their morals of business first with Viscre. As he was tracking Ereznel, he found them fighting Hysfix and intervened so he could take Ereznel back to their dimension. Their job would have finally been over if it wasn’t for Hysfix attacking Jeihsiel and Amedeel which allowed for Ereznel to get away.
Finished Pieces
These are fully rendered and finished pieces that I have made of the characters presented in this book. The first few pages are of individual illustrations depicting the characters in different situations. While the rest are small parts of the characters introduction comics with Emi being introduced in “Smile,” Fifi and Eve being introduced in “Hello?” and Ash being introduced in “Burn.”
Software Used

- Medibang Pain Pro: Art and illustrations
- InDesign: Layout design

Fonts

- Titles, captions and page numbers: Arial Rounded MT Bold
- Body text: Book Antiqua

Special Thanks

I want to give a special thanks to everyone who has supported me throughout this project. My family and friends who helped listen to me while I explain certain aspects of my story and thought process. My mentor, Alain Blunt, for pushing me to create this extensive project. To the readers for taking the time out of your day to look through years of my hard work. I appreciate everyone who has been there for me through this whole process.
Works Cited


