

A proof of concept for a picture book collection by Eva Wrzesinski



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Artist Statement

Eva is an author and illustrator working out of Portland Oregon. Eva enjoys quick turnaround illustrations and spending time on long-term book and narrative projects. Growing up on a farm in Oregon, Eva has always found inspiration in the natural world and its creatures surrounding her.





Proposal

Memories are something everyone has, but they are not always something everyone holds on to. In the past, I have neglected to look back on my childhood due to the distance I feel from the person I once was. In an attempt to explore the depths of my experiences, and to grow from the positive and negative memories I can recollect, I will be creating a single handmade illustrated book of 5 short stories for my thesis. Based on my memories as a child, the stories will follow the journeys of me and several animal companions. These stories are exaggerated and exist in a fictional realm. They contain special moments and the truths of my growing up as seen through the lens of my childhood imagination. I will create a single hard-bound book illustrated with a mix of digital and analog media, such as ink, colored pencil, and watercolor. There will be text, as well as comic panels and full bleed drawings for layout. This book is a self-reflection that serves as a nostalgic collection of tales. Anyone reading can relate their childhood experiences and imagination to the motifs present in this book; feelings of independence and aloneness are essential, but they are not representative of trauma, like from family issues or rough friendships I endured growing up. These memories represent some of the happiest times of my childhood, highlighting moments when I was alone, with animals, or in nature. Even if these memories are portrayed here as fantastical explorations of my mind, they represent me and who I was, or who I want to be as a creative individual. When I was young, daydreaming was always my favorite pastime. I think I have had to grapple with escapism ever since I can remember. I repeatedly find myself having trouble with being fully satisfied. I always look to the future, or imagine how else my life could be. This is not to say that I'm unhappy; I consider myself quite content, I just find it odd that I always have to be dreaming and I can never just be present. As a child, this way of thinking was tenfold. Sometimes I feel as if these stories I thought up for this project came to be because of how much I believed they actually occured when I was little. I love that now the connections I have to my old homes, my days playing alone, or being in nature with animals, are all told through my illustrations. Even if I don't have time to do those things now, I can create entire worlds full of creatures, plants, and versions of myself I couldn't even picture when I was little. With the talent I have now of being a visual storyteller, I want others to know that being imaginative and childlike can still occur in your daily life as an adult.



The book's visuals will be colorful and expressive but palettes limited, with textures and play with line art and flat colors. Exaggerated and stylized characters and animals are key to representing these stories as being exaggerated memories of mine. The type will be placed within the images, or in text boxes or word/thought clouds. The external body of the book will be bound by myself and will have a hard cover. The images inside will be printed on a natural/textured paper to convey feelings of old fairy tales and storybooks. The layouts of the pages will vary between full-bleed drawings and spreads to comic-style panels in order to show more dynamic scenes in a shorter number of pages. The most extensive research portion of this project will be the task of physically hand-making this book. It is important to me that this is the way in which I display the tales, because it directly relates to the feeling I want to convey through my stories. This artist's book will read more like a picture book or graphic novel, but it will still have the abstracted edge that will entice not just those interested in children's literature, but a gallery presentation as well. The interactive quality of the single book lends itself again to these childhood memories. My past can be experienced by others in a childlike manner, poking and prodding through the piece to find hidden elements that would be missed in a manufactured or digital version. I want the viewers to be able to feel the book, literally--just like I wish to feel the same as I did when I was a child.

I will be making the book by hand by repurposing a used book as the base or making the cover from scratch with materials like leather, fabric, embroidery, fabric paint, and cardboard. The size will be around 8.5 by 11 inches. I will be binding or rebinding the book and attaching the pages. The book's pages will be the first thing I produce, and the illustrations will be drawn on natural papers or paper with pronounced texture on the surface, which will lend to the handmade aesthetic. Some of the drawings will be made directly on the pages with mixed media elements, and others will be created using a combination of analog and digital by scanning pages and altering them in Photoshop or Procreate. Text will be handwritten on the pages or will have superimposed typeface edited on to scanned pages. Elements of collage and painted textures will blend on certain pages with printed illustrations, specifically to focus on important parts of the stories or in moments of action or movement. To educate myself and start practicing book-binding and book-making on a smaller scale, I will be following books like "How to Make Books" By Esther Smith1, "Book + Arts" (Handcrafting Artists Books) by Dorothy S. Krause2. I will also be taking the Book Arts elective at PNCA in the Spring semester to help me in a more handson instructional setting while I am in the process of book completion. The final book will be presented on a pedestal or table so viewers can look through up-close. High-quality photos of the book will be documented, and close-up scans of my favorite moments in the piece will be projected behind me to showcase them.

I am taking inspiration from many artists, as well as bookbinders and makers. My biggest inspirations have been older fairytale books with intricate cover designs and illustrations, as well as folk art and the vast world of artists books, contemporary illustrated novels, zines and picture books. Books like "The Princess Nobody" or past movements like the Toy Book period or French Romantic Style3 are a heavy influence on this piece. I want to combine all of these ideas to make something that I hope will be unique to me and my experiences writing this fictional storybook. I want to capture the structure and integrity of traditional fairy tales and folk art, as well as some of those same aesthetics. As I am not a professional bookbinder or maker, the external hardware of the book will have more of a crafted, handmade look. Artist's books have a looser form than that of the established concept of what a book or picture book is supposed to look like. I am looking to Laura Soto4, an abstract book arts artist, and works like Louise Bourgeois' handmade fabric book, "Ode to Forgetting" 5. For some of the inside visuals, I am looking for artists with analog focus, such as Melissa Castrillon's graphic works "Through the Night," or her books such as "Che Bello!"6. I am also looking at digitally-formatted works like in the case of Daniella Sosa's digital graphic zine "Wildlife"7. Most of my work focuses on natural environments, femininity, the human form, animals, magic, and surrealism. While these themes will be strong in the project, I want to use this work as an opportunity to grow, and loosen the constraints I feel myself creating as I start to have a more distinctive style. I want this work to have expressive brush strokes and pencil markings, as well as more experimental choices with color, character design, and drawn environments. There have been times recently where I have felt stuck or restricted in the ways that I create. Specifically in terms of analog (ink, watercolor, colored pencil) and digital work. I have blended these in the past, but have done exclusively one or the other most often. I feel like I have lost touch with how I authentically want to create art; working in a way that will still serve me best in a practical manner, but also in a way that brings me true joy when drawing. My goal for this book is to combine my new technical skill set and stylistic evolution from working digitally this past year with my favorite aspects of traditional mark-making. This will theoretically keep the feeling of the pages and the book itself alive while maintaining a vintage touch.



I think most books have the intention of being a sort of time capsule, and I think that this book will fit that description, too. The visuals and actual crafting of this book will make the personal stories from my life into a real time-traveling piece of art. I want anyone reading it to be able to interact with the physicality of the work, flipping through the pages of each story and feeling the nostalgia I hope to encapsulate within the project. It is quite a fascinating reflection on my memories for me, because they are not being told truthfully; they are exaggerated and tweaked to create a world that I wish I had when I was little. The funny thing is, this theoretical world will now exist, in a way, by being in my book. I feel like the more I work on this project and the more it becomes fully realized, the better the connection I have to my childhood is. Instead, I feel excitement and happiness when I look back on my life growing up.



Abstract

The Child and the Very Large Gosling, is the first installment of a three part picture book collection, Tales of Childhood. Each story is a part of an overarching theme of the journey we go through in our childhood from our most imaginative time, and the time when that starts to change or fade when we get older. The stories are chronological, and based on moments in which I used my imagination to comfort me in times of hardships with family and friends.

The stories are semi-autobiographical narratives, paired with fantasy elements as our character goes through strange environments, meeting magical animals, and learning lessons that are metaphors for growing up. The first book completed, The Child and the Very Large Gosling follows the journey of an adventurous and independent child based on myself, on a search to see the giant geese fly from the big red barn in the hills.



Oral Presentation

Hello and good morning, my name is Eva and I want to thank you all for coming to hear about my work today. I appreciate all of you. Part one of Tales of Childhood: The Child and the Very Large Gosling, is a proof of concept for a picture book, with the intention of self publishing the work regionally after graduation. Tales of Childhood as a whole is based on my memories as a child, and the stories follow the journeys of a personified version of my childhood self, animal companions and friends. These semi-autobiographical stories exist in a fictional realm but they contain special moments and the truths of my growing up seen through the lens of my childhood imagination. When I was young, daydreaming was always my favorite pastime. I think my illustration practice now satisfies a lot of that need. I have to always be thinking or imagining something else rather than being present in the moment I am in. I always look to the future, or imagine how else my life could be. As a child, this way of thinking was tenfold. Sometimes I feel as if these stories I wrote for my thesis came to be because of how much I believed they actually occured when I was little. I love that now the connections I have to my old homes, my days playing alone, or being in nature with animals, are all being reimagined with this project that has only just begun. Even if I don't have time to do those things now, I can create entire worlds full of creatures, plants, and versions of myself I couldn't even picture when I was little – I want others to know that being imaginative and childlike can still occur in your daily life as

an adult.



Using these foggy childhood moments from very early in my memories for this project gave me more creative freedom as I don't remember them all so clearly, and I was less tied to the reality of what these memories consisted of. Originally the project would be a large, 50+ page handmade graphic novel of 5 short stories, this got cut down to 3 and after midterms to 1, with the intention of making the following 2 after the release of the first, which I will get into right now. The first book The Child and the Very Large Gosling as you can see here is displayed in its spreads, With the accompanying text, which developed from a manuscript that started off as a 10 sentence short story, that transformed into a full length and metaphorical story of this time in my life and the lessons I was learning throughout my childhood.

We start following the journey of an adventurous and independent child based on myself, on a search to see the giant geese fly from the big red barn in the hills that she heard so many stories of before. The setting is in the first home I remember living in, in the valleys of southern Oregon, and one day the child ventures out to see the barn. On this walk through a storm and into a creek, she stumbles upon a very large and troubled gosling that is in need of some care. As she takes in this baby goose, they become the best of friends. The pair spend the day together through bubble baths, having worms and tea and an abrupt end to it all in an eventual conflict of the goslings mother. At the point of the story in which the baby goose is taken away from the child to return home, she feels sad and hurt for the loss of her best friend, but comes to understand on some level that she is far too young to take care of someone twice her size, that will only get bigger. The story concludes in a triumph of the child finally experiencing the flock of giant geese flying out of the big red barn, over the house, and past the hills. The intention of this project was to further explore my development of mediums and style when I illustrate, as well as working on my favorite type of project which is anything narrative. In the past I have loved working on projects that had a story or piece of writing to go off of to inspire the visuals. This process also showed me how much I love creative writing and to be in control of my own story. I further wanted to take those two things and connect them to something personal, from my past. Most of the personal work I do has something to do with reflecting on who I am now or what I am interested in now, but having the opportunity to reconnect with my childhood independence and imagination, turned out to be a really amazing look into my growth as a person and as an artist.

My original proposal stated that I would make 5 short stories based on my childhood memories within one book, that was also a handmade creative exploration into bookbinding and artists' books, this did not happen... I soon scrapped this big gallery concept idea and decided to focus on something more intimate and accessible to readers who could relate to the content of the story, or be interested in the artwork. I found a way to integrate my love for working with analog materials and drawing digitally. Identifying this early helped me determine how the final images might look. I narrowed it down to three stories, that all developed this overarching theme of the journey we go through in our childhood from our most imaginative time, and the time when that starts to change or fade when we get older. The stories are chronological, and based on moments in which I found my imagination to comfort me in places of hardships with family and friends.





The second story, The Child and the Glass Goldfish, is based on a pair of glass goldfish I had in a fish bowl on my kitchen counter in the second home I lived in. The story takes place mostly in the child's head, as we follow her and the goldfish through an ocean of memories, dreams and nightmares. The final part of Tales of Childhood, The Children and the Forest, is the first introduction to the child's best friend, based on my own life long best friend Grace here. The children spend time in a graveyard based on one we spent a lot of time growing up in. A small herd of deer lead them into a magic forest, in which the children come and go as they battle with growing up in this later stage of childhood.

Each story explores these pivotal times in my childhood and I'm sure many others, family conflict, going through puberty, realizing things about sexuality and self expression, as well as mental health struggles and further trying to find a place in the world as an almost teenager. Tales of Childhood concludes with the story ending in harmony between the child and her best friend, as they navigate growing up together and conclude the stories from Tales of Childhood.

I had a breakthrough moment during my midterm review, in which my panelists pushed me to identify the story out of the three that I pitched that was most developed, and make one book. The idea of doing three different stories within a fully written and illustrated novel was in no way a doable 6 week project, but these newfound limitations and specificity within the choice to narrow down my content, was paramount to the work turning out in a way that I am proud of and excited to share. The decision of choosing The Child and The Very Large Gosling out of the three was one I knew my heart was closest to. I love my two other stories, but I knew all the work would suffer if I were to try and complete them in a rushed manner. The Child and The Very Large Gosling is based on one of my very first memories I can recall. I was a baby in this house, but the story I tell in this project is one looked at through the lens of an older child around ten to twelve years of age. This was a way of further reimagining this space I grew up in, and is a reflection of parts of me now that will always want to go back, and explore that first home of mine. Between all three stories there is an overarching theme of the journey we go through growing up, they are chronological, and based on moments in which I found my imagination to comfort me in hard times. The absence of parents was something that I knew I wanted to be consistent in all the stories, even when I planned on making 5. While I am so grateful to have had a single mother that devoted so much of her time and love into raising me, I was still an only child, with only one consistent parent. These themes of loneliness are resembled visually and narratively as in all the stories, the child finds herself in moments where she is alone, in the presence of danger as she is often by herself trying to navigate this world in odd environments. In the story the child goes through a loss when the gosling is pulled away from her, while ultimately this is a good thing as she is not the actual mother of this creature, she feels sorrow for not just losing a best friend, but someone she taught herself to care for and love as any mother would in her mind. But as we see these other creatures that follow her through the story like the butterfly, ladybug and the frog, we see she is never truly alone, even when she doesn't notice – she still has those who are close to her.

These themes of feeling alone but not really ever being alone is present in not just these three stories but in my own life as well. As we can see here are some of the illustrations for The Child and The Glass Goldfish, and The Children and The Forest. I developed these along with a spread from The Child and the Very Large Gosling and a storyboard for the at the time graphic novel, for my midterm review, in an effort to nail down my process, style and voice within my visual storytelling, and get feedback on it. Choosing one story, was a way to distance myself from being so emotionally tied to the content of the project as it is so personal, and just focus on making the single book as great as it possibly could be, and follow in those footsteps in my future in completing the second and third parts of this great collection of memories I wish to share.

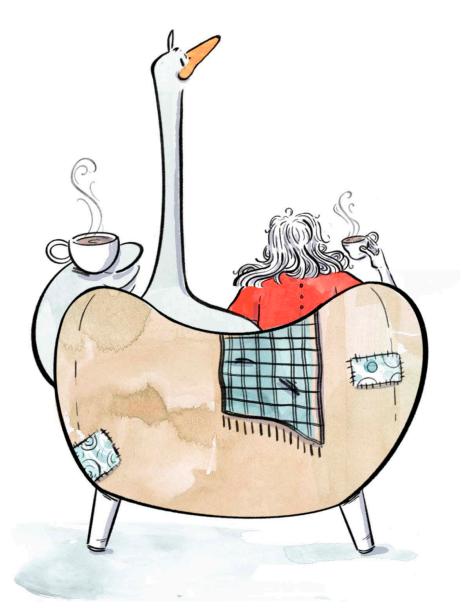


The development of the manuscript for the three stories was a long process, but one I was so happy to spend a lot of time on. The way I found myself communicating through these writings, and then having to identify images or symbols from that to draw on the page of the book was a challenge, but overall the biggest tool I had in fueling my inspirations for how the visuals would look.I then took a necessary break from my writing process to step away and really think about my storyboard sketches, and how they flowed from spread to spread. Originally when this was all going to be crammed into a much larger book, I was not thinking about space as an element of design I could play with. Through narrowing down to The Child and the Very Large Gosling, I saw that I had a certain number of drawings for spreads, and that I could now double that number, and disperse the drawings for breathing room across the complete composition of the book itself. This approach helped me envision the book as one piece, no words, just an image with an idea of where the text might go, but not in a super specific way just yet. Something I felt strong with from the beginning was my character design and how I was thinking about that surrounding environment for these characters to live in. I find it therapeutic to draw floral motifs, and I love breaking them down to flowy shapes that I really like to use to caress or frame an image or character. As I have areas that are super concentrated with color, action, movement and figures, I wanted to play with white backgrounds and space as I also see that in a lot of picture books - to allow for eye rest and areas to implement the text. While I was still testing the waters on what way I was going to create this thing, I did a lot of experimenting with painting, spray painting, mark making with ink, watercolors and more, I found a way to reuse and modify these visual elements underneath the digital line work as my colors, textures and shapes for this world. At first there were tests for completed images with purley analog materials, doing line with colored pencil, and layering watercolor overtop for saturated color, finishing with ink or darker colored pencil to further emphasize the lines. Through this, I found that I loved creating fluid shapes of color and texture with paints and having control with my lines in a digital space.

Once I figured this out, I went forth with creating the storyboards and value passes in digital as we see here, I then made moodboards for color, environment and style inspiration – to then combine all of that in fleshing out all the line work first, adding color through using shapes I made with watercolors based on the places I wanted to fill. I finished the images with a final pass with shadows, and miss registering colors for highlights. I also had fun exploring creating background shapes with the reworking of textures I made and repurposing a lot of those throughout the work, keeping that consistent white background.



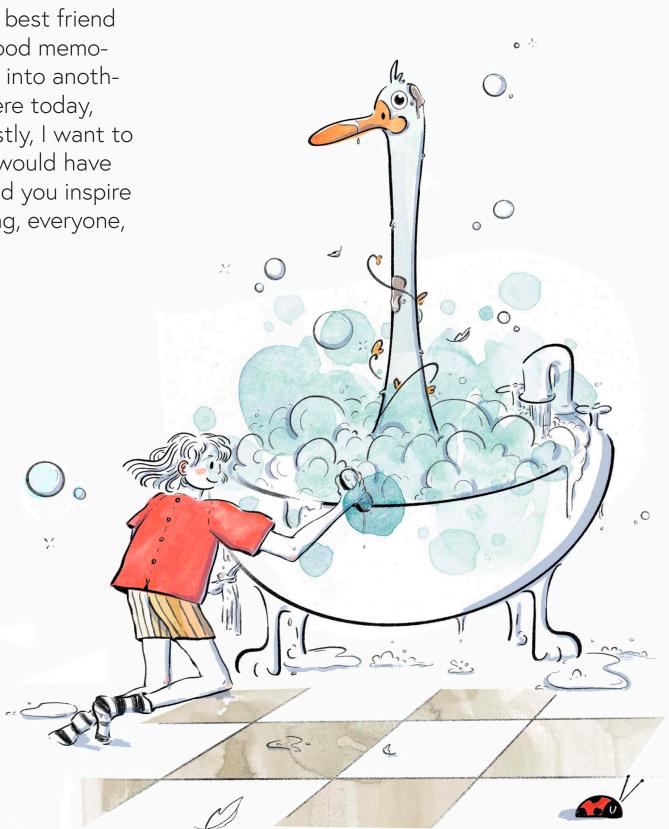
I feel my relationship with color, shape design and composition got really strong with this project, as I found I had more room to spread out my drawings. Something that I learned from this process was definitely going into a line drawing without an initial color plan, which doubled my time working through that process. With the development in the next books, color flats before throwing in textures and changing their colors a bunch of times until I am satisfied will be more productive. I really fell into a good and fast groove with producing my linework digitally. I think I will continue that same process of line work first, but working at a bigger scale than the intended book, to be able to get more detail and less pixelated delicate lineworks. As for specific pages there were ones that came very easy, like spread two which is the first I made, and the front and back cover as I did them last and already had my system for making each image down to a T. The last page was hard for me and took many passes and edits as I wanted to conclude with a full color image with no text as a triumphant moment for the child, and to leave the viewer feeling optimistic about what is the next to come for this character. I always knew that red would be my focal color for the Child and The Very Large Gosling, but had to go through plenty of rounds and edits to determine the exact limited palette that came to be in the end. The original lilacs transformed into light blues and the dark teals moved from being black and gray tones in earlier stages. I wanted a colorful but muted feeling that was abstract in some of the environmental forms to allude to that foggy feeling of memory, but playfulness as well. The text was added and further edited, and I spent time finding ways to use my drawings as a grid system and compose my paragraphs on each page to have balance with the illustrations they sat with.



One of my first picture books I can remember reading as a child that I've looked back upon for aesthetic inspiration is Olivia, by Ian Falconer. Not only is the white background apparent here but it is being used as a space to explore Olivia's home and the environments she finds herself in. I also am still so drawn to the black and white plus red thing we have going on, I find any way I can to implement red into some level of importance in any image I'm making, and for The Child and the Very Large Gosling, I knew it had to be my repeating focal color. While this book is a very different illustrative style than my own, Gnomes by Will Hugyen was one of my earliest introductions into a fantasy world, but as a child these field guide style images I saw as so realistic I considered it something that could exist in my own back yard. The Gnome book and this fairy book over here are completely responsible for my own belief in fairies and mythical creatures that persisted until I was way too old. I want to acknowledge some contemporary artist influence that really helped me determine my own artistic language in book form like Isabelle Arsenault, Matt Forsythe, and Violeta Lopiz. These artists' application of analog textures, color, and mark making evoking a tone and emotional quality in their illustrations, is something I strive to only get better at, as I learn to understand the characters and worlds I create more deeply.

While The Child and The Very Large Gosling's visuals are very much in that picture book visual language, the writing is for a more middle grade audience and is a bit longer than some standard ideas of text in picture books, just from what I see as patterns in that world. Where I go now, is to do some final passes of the full text, color, image quality and troubleshooting printing the book at a larger scale. My end goal is to outsource a small run of 100 copies and share them with local bookstores in the Pacific Northwest and promote the work on my social media. I want the opportunity to build community here in person and that's why this self publishing approach is important to me. I feel like I have not reached out to the local arts or book arts community past PNCA's walls, and I feel this would be a great opportunity for that. I want to step away from a digital view of this project, and reach out to children, teens or adults interested in illustration or picture books to be able to read and experience this work as a tangible book. I also want this work to serve as a portfolio piece and to reach out to clients in publishing to get more work like this in the future. As much as I love writing personal stories and building off them with my art, I love transforming others' written ideas into an image that respects their vision, and gives me room to explore my creativity.

I want to conclude by thanking those who made this project possible in their never ending support and love for the work I do and how I have grown as an artist in the last year with this book. I first want to thank my mentor Zack Rau. Since my first class with you at PNCA, you have always pushed me in directions with my art that have granted me so many aha moments, and you have helped me make my thesis better than I could have ever imagined. I want to thank my fellow friends in their own thesis Madd Kruidenier, Emma Wiseman, Lizzy Whitney and Brigit Galloy, I could not have asked for a better bunch to have gone through this time together. I want to thank my best friend Grace Jack and her parents for letting me have so many creative and beautiful childhood memories in their home growing up. I can't wait to keep navigating life with you as we move into another stage of growing up together. I want to thank my family, while they could not be here today, they continue to support my work as an artist, and they always knew I could do it. Lastly, I want to thank my partner Juliet Raedeke, you are my other half, and I don't think anyone else would have stuck by me the way that you did this past year. You are such an incredible person, and you inspire me everyday with your talents, and care towards others. Thank you so much for coming, everyone, and thank you to my panel, which I will now open it up to them for questions.



Creative Brief

Project Vision

The Child and the Very Large Gosling is the first of a picture book collection of three stories, all based on fantastical re-imagined moments from my childhood. One main character, the Child, goes through the journey of growing up, learning lessons as she interacts with strange environments and animal companions. With The Child and the Very Large Gosling complete, the next two will be proposed to be published after getting the first one self published or taken on by a publishing house.

Comparative Media

Similar mediums or uses of color and story would be "Jane the Fox and Me" by Isabelle Arsenault, or Mellisa Castrillon's "Che Bello!", as well as films like "Song of the Sea" from Cartoon Saloon.

Audience

The Child and the Very Large Gosling will be for children of around 9-12 years old, with the other books in the future aging up in demographic. The stories follow the Child aging, so I would love children to age with these books as they are released. I hope that readers who are familiar with the first will go one to follow the collection as they get older, or a child of any age will find the one they can relate to most.

Marketplace Application

My end goal is to source a small run of 100 copies and consign them with local bookstores in the Pacific Northwest and promote the work on my social media. I am open to working with publishers but I also want the opportunity to build community here in person and that's why this self publishing approach is important to me. I also want this work to serve as a portfolio piece and to reach out to clients in publishing to get more work like this in the future.

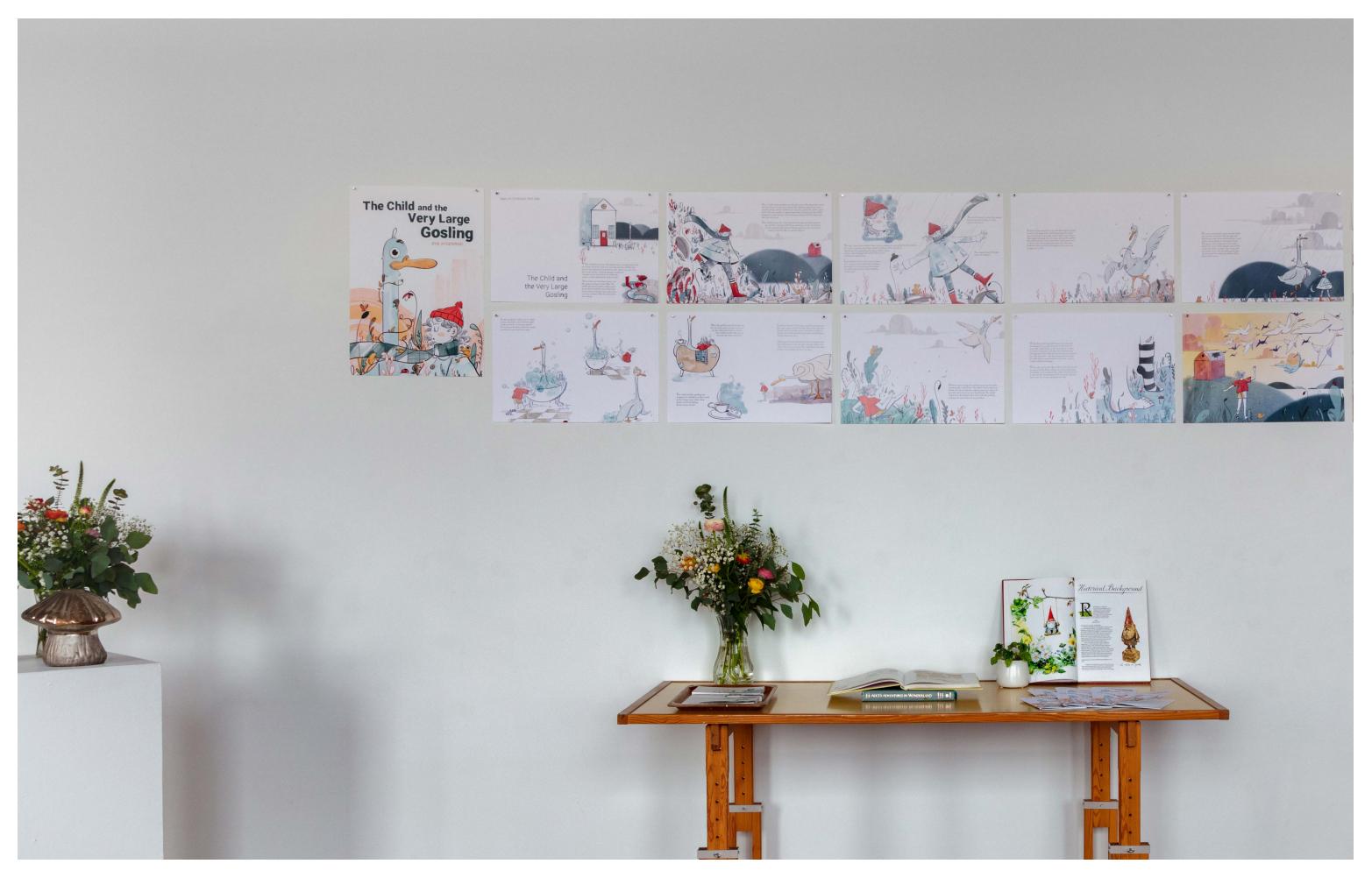
Methods and Materials

Following the same method I used to complete the first book, I sketch and complete the line work digitally, then do color and textures analog with shape-based watercoloring to implement color based on linework I want to fill. All the books will follow a consistent white background as well.



Documentation

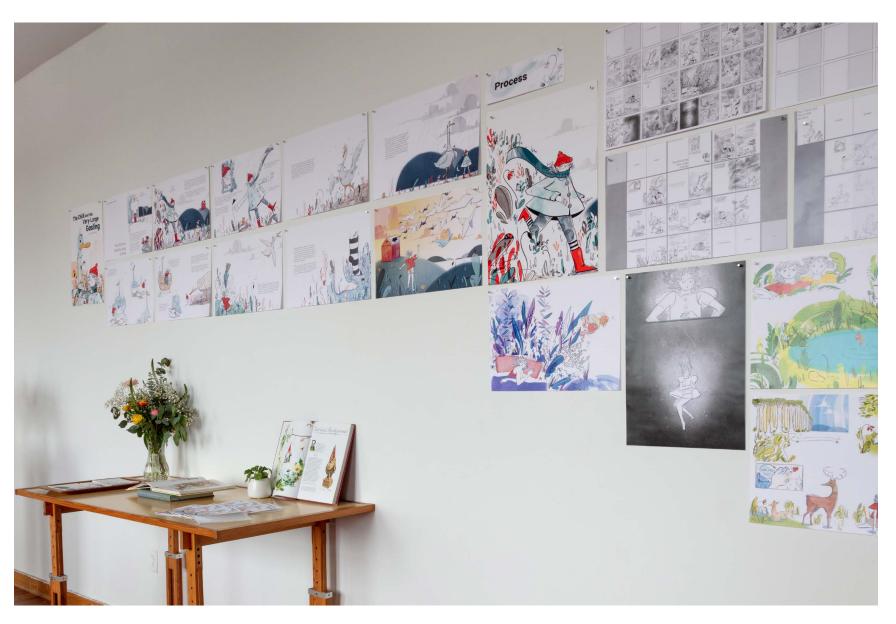




SP22 ₩ Eva Wrzesinski ₩ Tales of Childhood ₩ Illustration







Tales of Childhood, Part One

The Child and the Very Large Gosling



The child lived in an old white house. On the front were two large windows and one very big red door. While the house was imperfect and broken, the child only saw it as her lovely home. A lonely lamppost planted outside stood covered in ivy trails, the same ivy that climbed the sides of the

Across the way from her home was the giant red barn in the hills. The child had heard stories of the great geese that would fly out of the hole in the barn's rotting roof at the start of every autumn. But she had never seen them.



SP22 ₩ Eva Wrzesinski ₩ Tales of Childhood ₩ Illustration

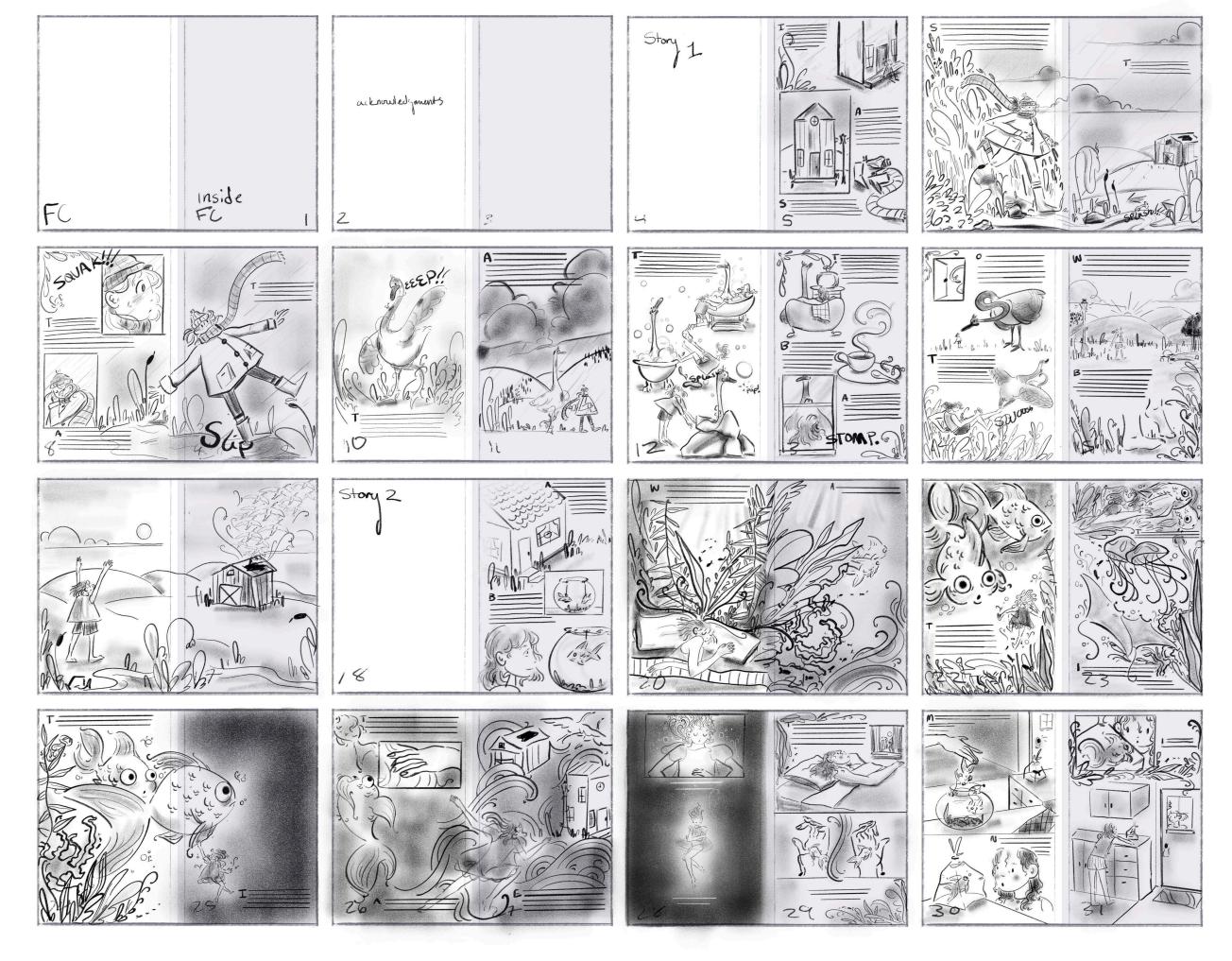




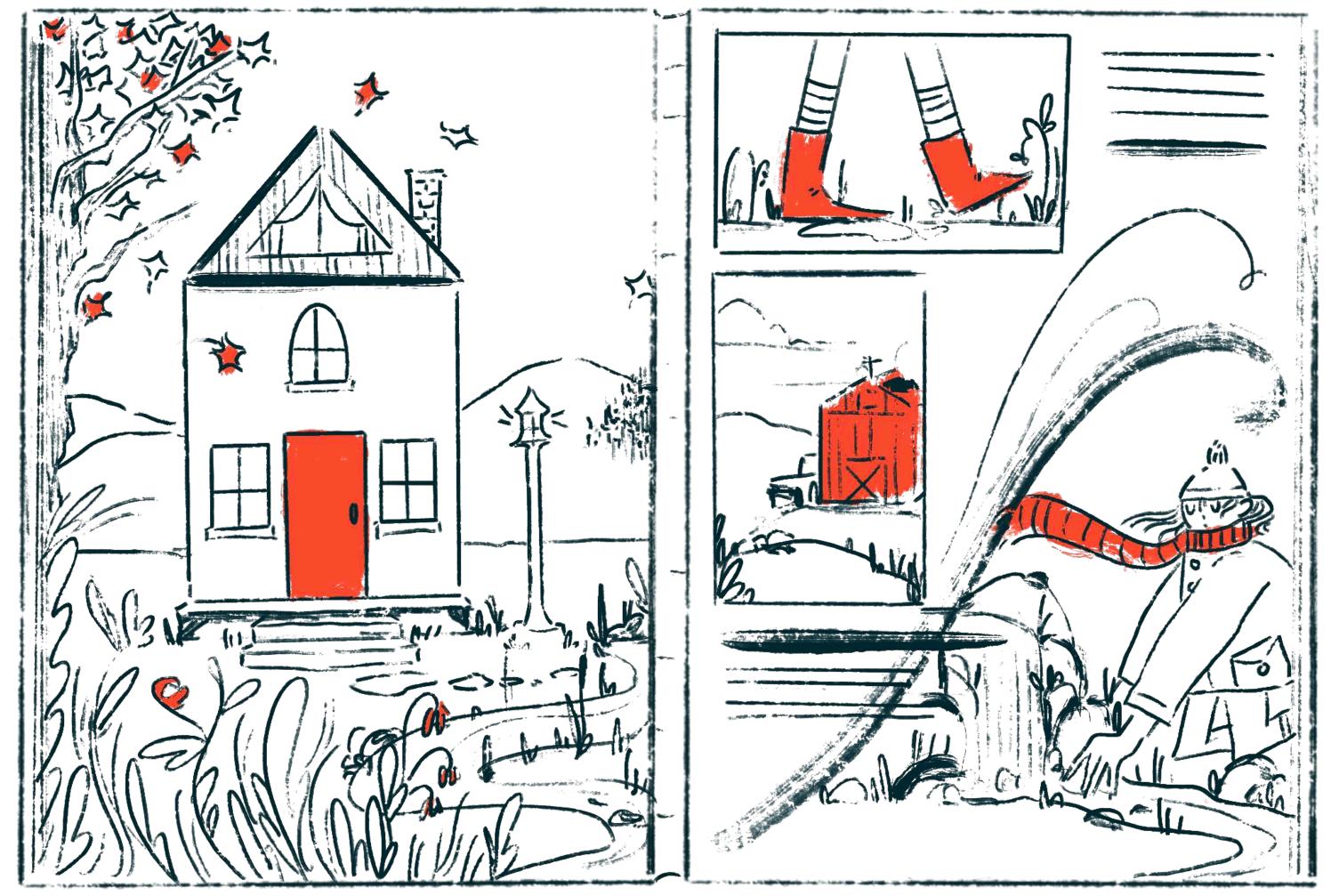
As the gosling's feathers were caked in dirt and leaves, the child thought a bath would be most appropriate. The baby goose had tracked in much muddiness onto the front steps.

SP22 ₩ Eva Wrzesinski ₩ Tales of Childhood ₩ Illustration



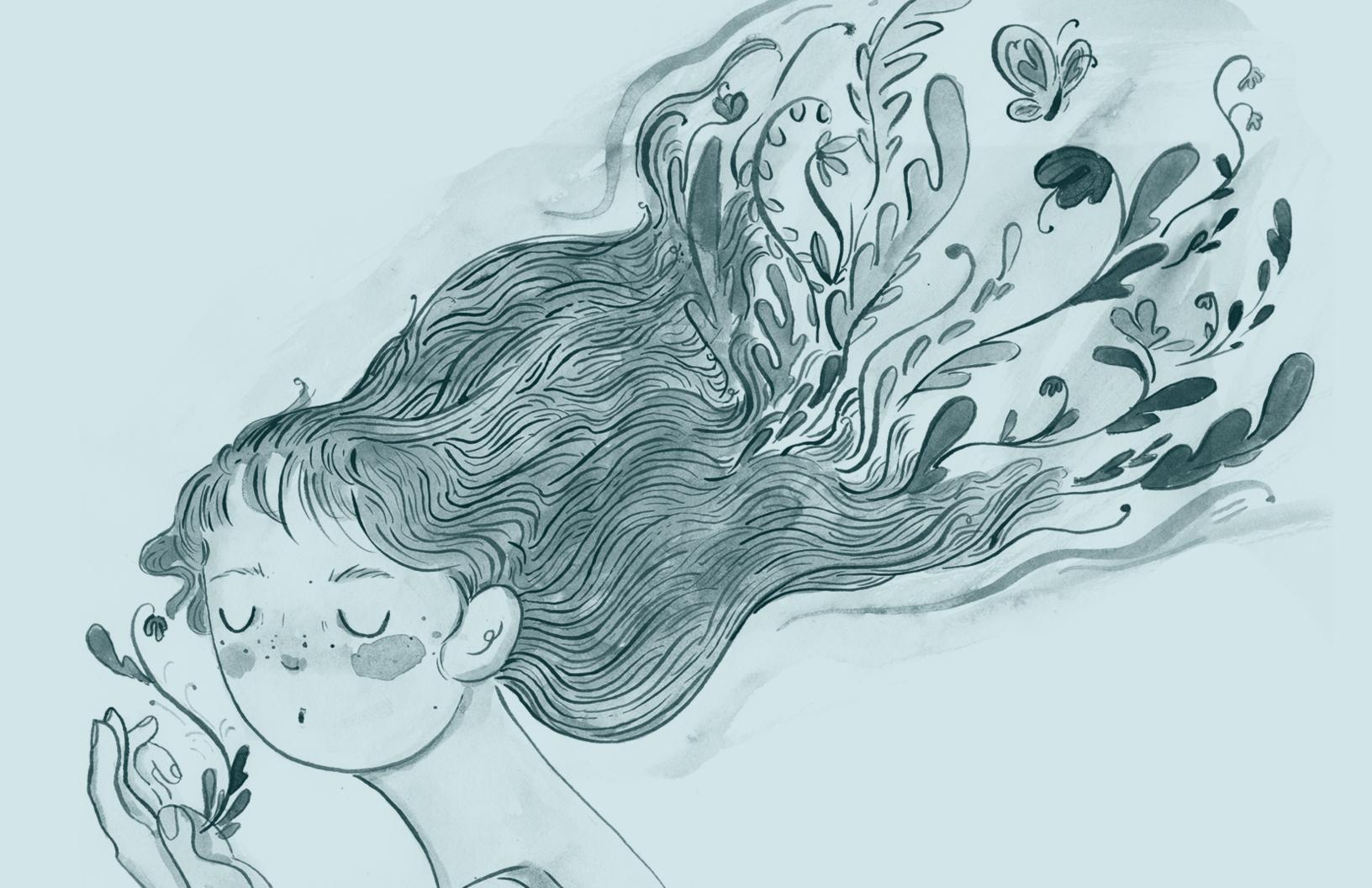












Eva Wrzesinski Thesis Portfolio SP22

