



# Roman and July

*a graphic novel pitch packet*

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## ◆ Artist Statement ◆

Kiara Juliette Lime is a Filipino-American author and illustrator based in Spokane, Washington. In the spring of 2022, she will receive her BFA in Illustration from the Pacific Northwest College of Art located in Portland, Oregon.

Kiara's work focuses on conveying and evoking sentimental emotions through visual storytelling and interpersonal character dynamics. She takes inspiration from Japanese shoujo and josei manga, pop music, and historical and personal history. Kiara's recent narrative work focuses on the super specific *post-high-school-but-not-yet-Real-Adult* flavor of contemporary young adult drama. She is also passionate about character design, book covers, and editorial illustration.

Outside of art, Kiara is a huge nerd who enjoys travel and making memories with her loved ones. She has a special place in her heart for Germany's Neuschwanstein Castle and Venice, Italy.



## ◆ Written Proposal ◆

For one of my final projects in my junior year at PNCA, I briefly touched on a part of my past that I've been aching to properly convey for years, and I am now finally ready to talk about it in its entirety. My thesis project will be a pitch packet for *Roman and July*, a 64-page graphic novel that chronicles one hopeless romantic's descent into turmoil when she is asked to make amends with her high school love and is confronted with her imperfect past. The final pitch packet will consist of a full script with accompanying thumbnails, visual development of the cast, and a completed excerpt in the form of a fully illustrated chapter. Drawn with character-driven illustration in a symbolically limited color palette of pinks, blues, and violets, this contemporary coming-of-age comic aims to challenge unrealistic tropes of "true love" as perpetuated by mainstream societal expectations of heteronormative relationships by exploring themes of co-dependency, the importance of friendship, and the messiness of healing.

This project is a fictitious retelling of a ten-year period in my life where I stubbornly wanted to believe I was in love

and the turbulent journey it took for me to realize that I ultimately wasn't. At its core, the story is about unlearning the idealistic yet unrealistic expectations of love that have persisted as the norm in mainstream society and popular culture through enforced heteronormativity because that's what I grew up learning. This can be seen in how I devoted my entire childhood to primarily consuming Disney fairytale endings and love song manifestos, how I so strongly believed that because my parents made it as high school sweethearts that meant I was destined for the same fate, and how for all my life I've felt as though I was meant to personally embody the concept of love because both my first and middle names are inextricably linked to one of the most recognizable archetypes of the lover in Western culture: Juliet Capulet herself. Therefore, the reason I'm looking to deconstruct these tropes and challenge their pervasiveness is that I believe the inexplicable pressure of trying to obtain and successfully maintain such ideals as these set me up for failure in my first pseudo-relationship of my adolescence and teens, which in turn stunted my emotional development heading into my early adulthood. I eventually learned through all of this that I conflated what I thought were imperfect but fixable manifestations of love with what was actually co-dependency.

However, ultimately, I was able to discern the difference between the two which allowed me to reconcile with my ex, genuinely value our friendship, and finally move on, the importance of which is at the center of why I want to tell this story as thoroughly and earnestly as possible.

With all this in mind, my vision for this project is to portray and critique the dangers of romanticizing infatuation that are often overlooked in mainstream depictions of love in the hopes that being honest about what I went through can help other people in ways that my younger self needed and never truly understood. Conceptually, I see this project as existing within the legacy of both the coming-of-age and romantic comedy genres due to the subject matter, wherein its connection to rom-coms is revealed to be more of an inversion of the genre as the story unfolds, as well as primarily appealing to a young adult demographic in between mid-to-late teens to early 20-somethings. Narratively, the story explores various kinds of love story tropes such as meet-cutes, high school dances, and references to Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet to critique how the main character's romanticism of these tropes are so extreme to the point of being detrimental to her wellbeing. Visually, I want

the overall art style to live in the realm between Japanese manga and anime-inspired stylization and semi-realism since the reason my art continues to derive from those styles is due to my lifelong interest in those types of media, which is especially relevant to this project as it is tonally inspired by types of Japanese manga aimed towards women known as shoujo and josei manga which I will elaborate on later. Meanwhile, I want the color rendering to be limited to the use of three monochromatic color palettes that correspond to the three main timeframes featured in the narrative—that being blue for the present day, pink for the flashbacks, and violet for the resolution—all of which also serve as a reference to the colors of the bisexual flag as both the main character's bisexualities play a part in the themes of critiquing heteronormative portrayals of true love. Lastly, I envision the majority of my comic panel compositions and layouts to be comprised mostly of down-to-earth character studies, as opposed to intense and fast-paced action sequences, since the story's focus on introspection and drama is conveyed mainly through dialogue. This allows me to focus on the strengths of my art style that pertain to things such as character acting, interactions between characters, and emotional weight through both atmosphere and mood.

I plan on delivering this project as a graphic novel pitch packet with a full 64-page script, supplementary visual development in the form of character sheets and polished thumbnails, and one completed chapter to show in the form of printed spreads for the oral defense at the end of next semester. I am planning to utilize the printing services at PNCA for the printed material. Each page of the excerpt chapter will be formatted at 6.877 x 10.44-inches to be printed as 11 x 14.5-inch spreads, and both the character sheets and polished thumbnails will be printed on 11 x 17-inch paper. The current trajectory of the project's timeline is to finish the the script and thumbnails over the winter break, using that time to reorganize and edit the story as well as starting to pencil the excerpt chapter, and then beginning the supplementary visual development pieces going into the spring semester.

The most significant influence that I will be bringing into this project is the visual style and narrative tropes of Japanese shoujo and josei manga. While both of these categories are primarily concerned with exploring romantic relationships and feelings, shoujo often has a lighter approach to romance and is geared towards younger girls and high school teens whereas josei is aimed at older teens and women and

incorporates more mature themes and tones. The overlap of these two categories appealing to the target demographic I have in mind of post-high school young adults who are often left out of the predominantly teen-centric YA genre. Furthermore, since neither shoujo nor josei are technically genres in a traditional sense, this allows for these kinds of stories to have various genres overlap with one another, the most relevant to my project being that of the coming-of-age and slice-of-life genres that both cover themes of growing up and living day-to-day lives in the real world. A prime example of this work that has majorly inspired my art for years is the josei series *Princess Jellyfish* by manga artist Akiko Higashimura. Illustrated in the traditional manga process of using ink and screentone, Higashimura's rendering of figures and clothing comes off as effortlessly stylish in a way that also enhances the fashion-centric story. This attention to detail and fusion of visual characterization and storytelling are things that I have found myself aspiring to emulate in my work for years. The second biggest influence that is pertinent to the origins of my project is Marc Webb's 2009 romantic comedy-drama *500 Days of Summer*, which follows the story of a man infatuated with a woman who he does not end up with despite all his efforts to make their relationship work.

This film was one of the first pieces of media that introduced me to the idea of subverting traditional rom-com conventions and tropes to critique unrealistic expectations of love, and this aspect has always resonated with me as feeling eerily similar to what I went through. On the flip side of this, with my inability to relate to the protagonist of *500 Days* in how he is a straight, white man, Mariko Tamaki's graphic novel *Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up With Me* is another significant influence on this project that also deals with the messiness of relationships but through a younger, queer perspective that features an Asian American protagonist and a lesbian relationship at the center of the story. Reading this comic has enormously enhanced my understanding of the need for more YA stories that not only continue to talk about this specific subject matter but are also made more accessible to marginalized audiences by depicting messy relationships that aren't exclusively heterosexual. Lastly, the memoir approach of this project is heavily inspired by the songwriting of musicians Taylor Swift and Nate Ruess. What I resonate with most in both of their music is how they each convey tales of heartache and love through an intimate vulnerability that is honest about their strives to find connection and the hurt they've experienced in doing so. This sense of introspection and romanticizing the

past is manifested through my main character as a reflection on how these styles of songwriting shaped my perception of love and catharsis growing up, and thus is essential to the central themes of the narrative.

This project signals a shift in my work from focusing only on images that convey an isolated narrative within just the work itself to utilizing my art as one element apart of a more extensive process of longer-form storytelling. During the time I spent at my previous college up through my first few semesters here at PNCA, my work was primarily focused on honing my drawing and rendering skills with little emphasis on furthering the conceptual development of my subject matter. While the years of technical practice have gotten me to a place where I'm now more consistent and comfortable with my process and visual style, it has only been in the past two years that I've realized my true drive in making images comes out in my desire to tell stories about my personal experiences and feelings. As such, my recent work has leaned more towards a visual development approach through character concept art, key visuals, and storyboards that serve as supplementary material to personal projects I've been writing outside of school as opposed to solely being standalone

pieces. With this in mind, I aim to develop *Roman and July* as a fully realized pitch since I have yet to bring any of my previous work up to an industry standard level of finish, with my hope in doing so being that working on this project will give me more experience with the realm of publishing and better prepare me for venturing into comic and entertainment work in the future.

In conclusion, the goal of this project is to critique heteronormative standards of love that persist within mainstream society and pop culture through a narrative that showcases the detriments of problematically idealizing those standards, as well as the value of platonic friendship that can come out of romantic failure. I also aim to bring a nuance to the larger conversation surrounding deconstructions of idealized love and messy healing within a post-high school YA demographic that is indicative of my lived experiences as a bisexual, Asian American artist through my strengths of introspective, character-driven storytelling. My sincere desire in carrying out this project is that in doing so, the years of heartache I endured in my past will ultimately be able to bring catharsis and hope to others.



## ◆ Thesis Abstract ◆



*Roman and July* is a 64-page contemporary young adult graphic novel about the messiness of healing, the importance of friendship, and mistaking co-dependency for “true love.”

The story follows a 19-year-old hopeless romantic named July Cantos who receives an unexpected text from her first love, Roman Mosca, three months before she is set to graduate community college. This startling reunion sends July down a dark spiral that she is only able to pull herself out of when she finally learns to confront her unhealthy, years-long infatuation with Roman.

Designed to be an industry standard pitch packet for graphic novel publishing, this pitch packet includes an 8-page excerpt, character sheets, concept art, and a cover mock-up.

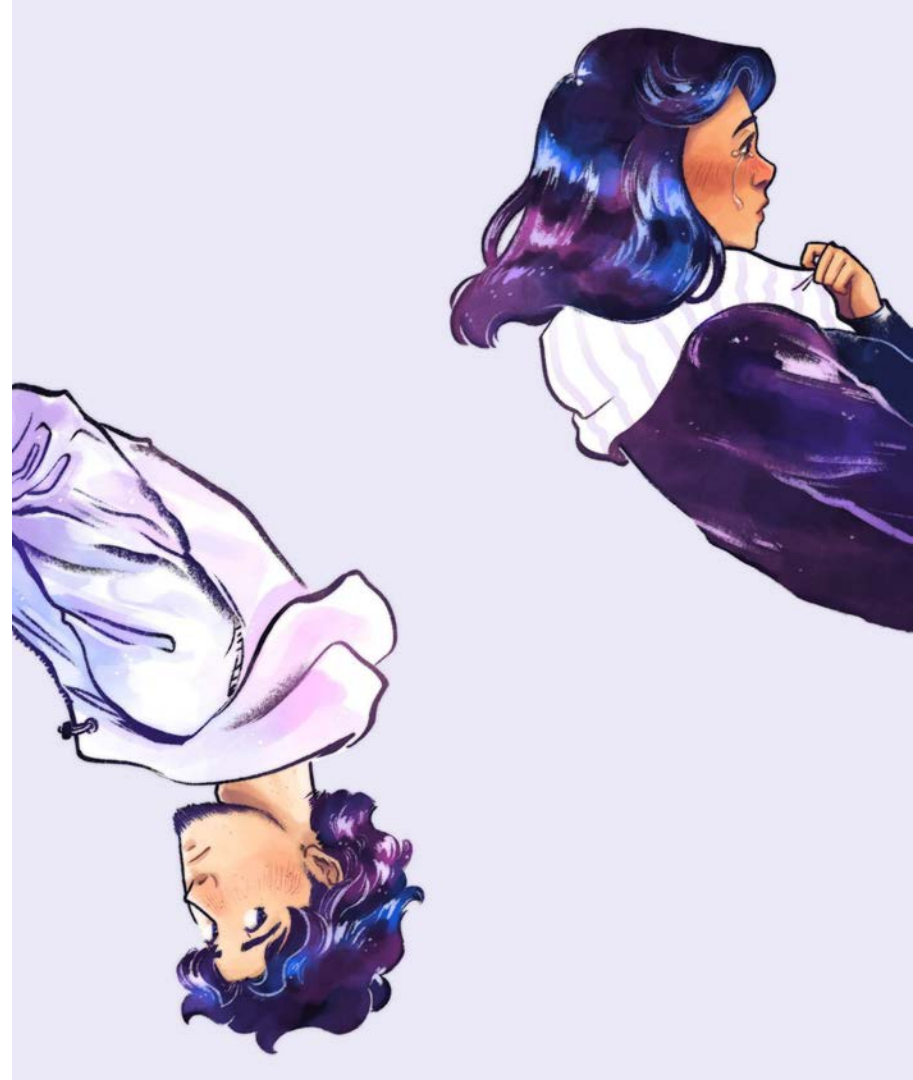


## ◆ Oral Defense ◆

Hello, good afternoon and welcome to my thesis defense! My name is Kiara Juliette Lime and I am an illustration major with a love for character-driven art, storytelling, and sparkles.

My thesis project, *Roman and July*, is a contemporary young adult graphic novel about the messiness of healing, the importance of friendship, and mistaking co-dependency for “true love.” The story follows a 19-year-old hopeless romantic named July Cantos who receives an unexpected text from her first love, Roman Mosca, three months before she is set to graduate community college. This startling reunion sends July down a dark spiral that she is only able to pull herself out of when she finally learns to confront her unhealthy, years-long infatuation with Roman.

Designed to serve as an industry standard pitch packet for graphic novel publishing, this project includes an 8-page excerpt, character sheets, concept art, and a cover mock-up.



As a semi-autobiographical book, my connection to *Roman and July* is extremely personal: it's about unlearning unrealistic expectations of love because those kinds of ideas were what I grew up with learning to be the norm. This understanding is rooted deeply in my childhood, from the significance of my first and middle names having direct and indirect connections to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, growing up on Disney princess films, and being raised by two loving parents who have been together since high school. Paired with the constantly bombarding cultural expectations of being in (preferably straight) relationships always looming in the background, I grew up with the subconsciously enforced idea that finding my prince and falling in love with him was something that I could do—something I *had* to do—preferably as soon as possible. However, what I eventually learned over the span of ten years, from the start of middle school to about halfway into college, was that the inexplicable pressure of trying to obtain *and maintain* these unrealistic ideals only set me up for failure when it came to the first pseudo-relationship of my adolescent and teen years, which in turn stunted my emotional growth heading into my early adulthood.

To recap, I met a certain someone in 7th grade whom I

became very close friends with over the next five years all the while having an intense, borderline-obsessive infatuation with him that I mistook for as love. Then, after a never-ending cycle of on-and-off and are-we-aren't-we, he met someone else not long after we graduated high school. So, after all the years of vying for his attention with the belief that he would eventually choose me if I just *tried harder* to be enough for him, the rejection shattered every sense of self I had since so many of my formative years revolved around him... And yet, despite blocking him and unfriending him to try and save myself from hurting further, I *didn't want* to move on from him either. I was so deluded into thinking we were something like soulmates as a result of my hopeless romantic stubbornness that it wouldn't be for another two years until I was finally faced with the truth that we just weren't meant to be and that I had to let him go. Towards the end of my time at community college, he reached out to me through a mutual friend wanting to apologize for what he'd put me through in the past, and I was so surprised by this change in character that I somewhat impulsively invited him to my graduation exhibit opening towards the end of May in 2018. We reunited for the first time in almost two years and continued to amend our friendship afterwards, which I was only capable of doing because I was

finally able to discern that the “love” I had for him in the past was actually a problematic codependency. I didn’t even really know this person that well, not his *true* personality anyway, because I was so blinded by an idealized version of him that I had invented in my head as a tween. Once I figured that out, I was then able to recognize the benefits of maintaining a friendship with him because he genuinely was (and still is) someone who cares about me and someone whom I care about in return—it’s just that the love we still have between us isn’t romantic, but platonic. And that’s more than okay by me.

At its core, I am telling this story in the hopes to pass its message onto someone else who needs to hear it in the way I wish my younger self had. Since these kinds of complicated stories don’t fit the easily marketable commercial mold of idealistic high school romance, I didn’t grow up with any resources on how to critique the pitfalls of young love or hardly any understanding on the importance of platonic relationships and how meaningful those are when transitioning into adulthood. I struggled for years figuring all of that out on my own, and now I want to talk about it. As an artist, I *need* to talk about it. I *need* to expunge all this baggage from my being and the only way I can do that is to make art

about it. Therefore, my goal in putting *Roman and July* out into the world is to write a story that reflects my lived experience, and to bring a nuance to the larger conversation surrounding deconstructions of idealized love and messy healing for a post-high school young adult demographic.



My biggest priority in approaching this project was to make it feel as authentic to my identity as possible. As a plus sized, heavily American-assimilated third gen Filipino immigrant who grew up in the white suburbs of Eastern Washington, I've never exactly seen myself represented in any media I grew up with. And any time I have come close to relating with a fictional character in a film, TV show, or book, they usually only share one facet of myself and not the whole thing: if she's chubby, she's not even the main character but the fat best friend, or if she's brown, she's not Filipina. I have a plethora of movies and shows that I cherish because of how I was able to resonate with a certain character and their struggles with adolescent-teenage drama and finding love, and the vast majority of them are thin, conventionally attractive white girls. After growing up internalizing Eurocentric beauty standards and white suburban culture, I realized that part of what made me feel like I never quite belonged was that I never felt represented anywhere. I didn't grow up with people like me outside of my immediate family, and I was never exposed to any stories that navigated what it felt like to have my exact identity. I was never seen, and that made me feel exceptionally alone at times. With this in mind, I wrote my main character, July, to be a direct stand-in for myself, emotionally and

physically, from various points of my life between the years 2010 and 2018. I want her story to be relatable as a coming-of-age story about messy heartbreak and self-discovery like all the things I grew up reading and watching, only this time someone actually like me will be front and center. I need more stories about chubby teen brown girl angst, so I suppose I'll take matters into my own hands and write one myself.

The core concept of the project has remained consistent throughout the entire semester, though the deliverables I originally proposed to have completed are substantially different from what I have to show for today. This isn't just because I was overly ambitious at the start, though that is *absolutely* a factor, but also because of a certain physical limitation which I will expand on later. Early on, I chose to work with the pitch packet format as opposed to only writing and illustrating something like a completed book dummy because I've recently found that I really love story and concept writing as much as I love drawing. A pitch packet would allow me to not only work on sequential art in the form of comic pages, but also focus on written character dynamics alongside visual development pieces exploring character design and key



visual illustration. In my proposal, I originally wanted to have a completed manuscript for the entire 64-page book, a 20+ page chapter excerpt, and an undetermined number of visual development reference sheets that were going to depend on how much I could fit in after getting all of the written stuff done first—I was *just that excited* about story writing last fall. However, after taking winter break to actually *take a break* and remembering that I only had a little less than 13 weeks for the actual execution of my proposal, I drastically recalibrated my deliverables so as to not overwork myself to death, like I would have done in my high school honor student days.

So instead, what I have today is an 8-page excerpt, 2 character reference sheets for the titular characters, 2 full body cast lineup reference sheets, cast headshots, a mock cover illustration, and a very blue promotional key visual. As for the writing that I was once so eager to show off, I realized since my degree is in illustration and *not writing*, and that the script isn't necessarily something anyone outside of myself and my collaborators would ever see, I've decided to keep the manuscript to myself for now. The entire story outline and initial beat sheet are currently in a decent first draft stage, while the first half of the story has been scripted and mostly

thumbnailed. I plan to work on the rest of the story after graduation, which sounds a lot better than my initial idea of trying to cram all that into a measly few months just for school.

A few weeks ago, my mentor asked me what it was like to keep revisiting this journey I went through relatively recently as I worked on this project for the last seven months. As the subject matter is so heart wrenching and delves into the pain I experienced in order to learn my lesson, it may seem that choosing this to be the thing my entire thesis revolves around has been nothing but torture. However, since I've been removed from all that happened for the past few years now, and that my friend whom Roman is based on is someone I'm actually on good terms with again, writing about this has been more therapeutic than agonizing. As an artist, the vast majority of my work is derived from my intense need for catharsis. I've never been too succinct with words and my thoughts sometimes feel messy and overwhelming, so all my life I've found art to be the thing I use to process my emotions. In this regard, now was the perfect time for me to start writing *Roman and July*. I wanted to be able to sift through everything logically and, no longer feeling affected or hurt by it, be able to

turn my experience into something positive and beneficial.

The story primarily follows July and starts at the beginning of her last quarter of community college. The present-day college time period, represented in blue, takes place during the spring of 2018, while the flashbacks, represented in pink, range from Roman and July's 7th grade year in 2010 to their senior year of high school in 2016. The third color, violet, is reserved for the resolution of the story and the first prelude scenes of the first and second parts of the story. Aside from this color coding system, the choice in these colors also references the bisexual flag as both the main character's sexualities play a large part in the themes of challenging mainstream portrayals of true love that have historically been and are still majorly depicted as heterosexual.

In the present day, July is busy prepping her final oil painting series for her graduation exhibit until her world gets turned upside-down when her ex, Roman, suddenly reappears in her life. Although he reaches out simply hoping to make amends to their friendship, July mistakes this for a chance at *getting back together* with Roman and begins to delusionally reminisce on their history together from their middle school

and high school days. However, once she learns that Roman has actually moved on with someone else, July slowly loses it until she hits rock bottom. After an impromptu intervention from her college professor, July recovers from her irrational fit of jealousy and eventually stabilizes herself enough to where she is able to meet Roman again in person at her graduation exhibit opening. After apologizing for their past mistakes and acknowledging their romantic incompatibility but also the platonic care they still have for each other, the two manage to reconcile and move on as close friends.

My process in developing the narrative first started with reexamining the true events in my past that the story is based on. Once I remembered everything that actually happened, I then began to rearrange, edit, and embellish various details to better streamline the story regardless of historical accuracy. During this story writing phase, I slowly began to figure out my characters' personalities and interpersonal relationships in tandem with the plot outline. Something important to mention is that each character is named after a character from William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which is something I mentioned earlier was an important influence on my upbringing as a die-hard hopeless romantic. The first names

of my two main characters, Roman Mosca and Juliette "July" Cantos, are derivatives of the names Romeo and Juliet.

This isn't to adapt the original play but to invoke the iconic association with love that the play has since *Romeo and Juliet* starts out under the guise of being a romance story. This also serves a characterization purpose in highlighting how July herself romanticizes this naming symbolism, among other arbitrary things, so much to the point of delusion. This naming convention follows throughout the rest of the cast: for example, July and Roman's friends Bennett and Marc are named after Benvolio and Mercutio, the teachers Ange and Francis Law are named after The Nurse and Friar Laurence, and July's older sibling Tybre is named after Tybalt. Wilma, July's community college classmate, is named after William Shakespeare as a type of meta-commentary due to how she functions as an audience-proxy when learning about July's life and her history with Roman in the first half of the story.

The visual development part of the project wholly consists of four character reference sheets in total, the "Blue Period" key visual, a mock up cover, a few drawings to test out the overall style and many, *many* pencil sketches. The two other main

illustrations, the “Blue Period” and the cover, were designed with opposite philosophies. Whereas I made the composition and lineart in “Blue Period” to be as complicated as possible with an overall blue color palette that follows the book’s thematic monochromatic color scheme structure, the cover was in turn kept as simple as possible and in true full color.

The various character reference pieces showcase the difference between the 2018 college time period and the past high school time period, specifically the 2015 period as that pertains to the excerpt. Meanwhile, the cast headshots demonstrate how each character appears in the color scheme of the book’s interior art. My character design approach for a contemporary story like this was to find a balance between my anime-influenced stylization and ways to base these people in reality, resulting in grounded fashion choices but with subtly shape-based silhouettes and, of course, exaggerated hair.

When it came time to develop the excerpt, I chose a scene that is crucial to understanding the titular character’s relationship to each other since the whole story revolves around how that relationship fell apart and why July wants it back so badly. In the first half of the story, there are four flashbacks that explain

Roman and July’s prior history starting from their first meeting in 7th grade up to their first “I love you’s.” The latter flashback, which takes place before their senior year, is the one I chose to show since it’s the crux of understanding July’s entire personality and point of view for the rest of the story.

In this scene, which flashbacks to the summer of 2015, July, Roman, and their friends Bennett and Marc are abroad for an Art Club field trip in Venice, Italy. On the last day of the trip, Roman spontaneously suggests they head out to the nearby island of Giudecca but no one takes him up on the offer, not even July. When Roman leaves, Bennett and Marc know July secretly wishes she had gone with him so they convince her to chase after him anyway. Though July initially hesitates to act on their suggestion, she panics once Roman’s boat departs and hatches a plan to run and intercept his boat at a station on the very edge of Venice’s south side. Miraculously this plan works, leaving Roman and July in Giudecca alone. There, they have a conversation that eventually turns into July revealing her anxieties about all things ending. In an attempt to comfort her, Roman encourages her to live in the moment and reassures her that he’ll always be there for her if she forgets. This, piled on the past five years of July yearning for Roman and being





hopelessly in love with him, stirs her heart. Before they leave to rejoin the others, July decides to finally confess to Roman. Although he is briefly caught off guard, which makes July hesitate, he then kisses her, reciprocating her love.

The excerpt was meant to be brought to full finished art, but I was only able to achieve this for one page for reasons I will further explain in a moment. The finished page is Page 32, codenamed "Sinking in Giudecca," and features the proper lineart and coloring style I envision for the rest of the book. The rest of the pages are brought to a rough pencil and color test stage, which are the stages that I typically get to right before the finished stage of art, as demonstrated on Page 32. The entire excerpt was lettered by the best letterer I know, Jason McNamara, since I've decided I don't really like hand-lettering my comics after trying it out myself a few times. My comic writing process is a constant switch between script and sketch. Going off a general summary outline, I start with writing out dialogue. I then sketch out page layouts and thumbnails that I then edit the script to better match the visual pacing of. After that comes the rough sketch phase and first lettering attempts to see how much wordy dialogue I need to cut down on, then lastly comes final art and lettering!

Now for the bigger reason I ended up not bringing the entire excerpt to finish like I had originally intended. In the week before and during the first four weeks into the semester, I thumbed the excerpt and sketched it out, drew all 12 of the figures for my cast lineups and all 6 of Roman and July's expressions, as well as sketched and rendered the "Blue Period" key visual to high heaven, all on top of doing all the necessary daily chores that entail living in an apartment by myself. The result of this was an incredibly sprained wrist which I ignored the symptoms of for the next two weeks, until I ate pho with chopsticks on the last Wednesday of February. I knew when I proposed last semester that I was aiming to finish a ridiculous amount of work that I would inherently have to cut down on for this term, but I wasn't expecting the *drastic* downscale that came from my injury. It not only forced me to take a break from drawing for the sake of being able to finish this thesis project, but I also had to seriously reconsider how my mentality towards art has impacted my health and how that will continue to affect the longevity of my art career. I realized my hubris in wanting to achieve more than I can handle was rooted in my high school straight-A honors student past, as well as in the past three years of building up hype for my thesis to be a long-time coming moment of glory.

Thanks to constant reassurance from my mentor, as well as an incredibly constructive mid-term review with fellow comic artists Ibrahim Moustafa and Justin Hall who both thought my readjusted workload was already robust, I've come to terms with accepting my limits in a way that doesn't make me feel like I've failed. So, although it's a bit of bad luck that this was a lesson I ended up learning during the most important semester of my school career, I'm glad I was at least made aware of my limits *now* so that I can keep them in mind as I enter the larger art industry.

Back to the project itself, the biggest influence on my art style and sense of storytelling is Japanese shoujo and josei manga, such as Keiko Iwashita's *Living Room Matsunaga-san* and Akiko Higashimura's *Princess Jellyfish*. Visually, what inspires me most about shoujo and josei manga is the emphasis on rendering figures in a beautiful and delicate way that reflects the character's inward feelings about the situations they are in, whether they be joyful or sorrowful. This shows not only in Roman and July but in the rest of my work through the emphasis on character-driven visuals that convey emotion in facial expression and body language. Conceptually, the careful consideration of character writing in series' such as Natsuki

Takaya's *Fruits Basket* and Bisco Hatori's *Ouran High School Host Club* have heavily shaped how I approached the story writing process of creating my characters. While shoujo stories are primarily aimed towards younger girls and josei stories are aimed at older women, what I love about the overlap in each is the focus on how various interpersonal character relationships, such as romantic, platonic, and familial ones, drive the momentum of the story.

Since *Roman and July* has elements of shoujo and josei stories by depicting both teenage and young adult time periods, this blend allows my story to speak to the specific demographic I have in mind of young adults who aren't high schoolers anymore but aren't yet fully fledged adults either. After growing up on stories that hyped up the high school experience, I've noticed a severe lack of conversation within media surrounding what it means to have coming-of-age experiences after high school in your early twenties, compared to the oversaturation of Western TV shows, books, and movies that continue to tackle coming-of-age content using strictly teenagers in high school. And when there are stories set in the college-varsity era, I've always felt a disconnection from the complete separation of teenhood

from characters who are only 18, 19, or 20-years old, as if immediately turning those ages is supposed to indicate you were now a Real Adult which is not at all what I felt like during that time of my life. Despite this, I also grew up with plenty of anime and manga that do tackle this nuanced dynamic of transitional-teen-adulthood, such as the aforementioned *Living Room Matsunaga-san* series, so I would like to see more of that nuance in American-made media. In writing *Roman and July*, it was important for me to keep these observations in mind since I have been watching anime and reading manga since I was five years old, and that influence has undeniably crept into every ounce of my work.

As for influences on the narrative, both Marc Webb's 2009 romantic comedy-drama *500 Days of Summer* and Mariko Tamaki's 2019 YA graphic novel *Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up With Me* have inspired me with their similar themes of problematic infatuation and idolization. Since these two narratives remain some of the only few fictional stories that have really resonated with me and what I went through in my experience, I knew at some point I wanted to channel that energy I relate to within these works into my own story. This is especially because of how I *don't* relate to certain aspects of



each narrative: despite relating to Tom in *500 Days* and how he handles his fixation on Summer, I don't exactly see myself in him because he is a straight, white male; and on the other hand, although *Laura Dean's* Freddy is Asian American, I don't entirely see myself in her either since her relationship with Laura Dean is specifically lesbian. Seeing how these two stories both overlapped and differed from my specific experience further clarified exactly how I wanted to go about writing my characters and their specific qualities in *Roman and July*. Lastly, other influences I revisited and newly discovered during early research for this project included films such as older iconic romcoms like *When Harry Met Sally...* to more recent coming-of-age works like *The Edge of Seventeen*, in order to gauge what has been done before in the legacy of both these genres I'm working with. I also took inspiration from various lyrically-driven songs as the tonal vulnerability in both this project and my personal work stems from the kind of music I grew up listening to, especially Taylor Swift's entire discography and both Nate Ruess' *Grand Romantic* and Olivia Rodrigo's *Sour* albums. I've always been drawn to music that intimately convey tales of striving to find love while also being honest about the hurt that comes in failing to do so, and this type of emotional response correlates

directly to the earlier mention of how catharsis drives my art process.

Since this thesis project is only a pitch packet, I anticipate that I will continue working on the rest of *Roman and July* long after graduation. My ideal situation is that I would send out this pitch packet to potential publishers while fleshing out the rest of the book's second half in the meantime. I believe the overall tone of *Roman and July* would be suitable for publishers such as First Second, Oni Press, or the recently launched Surely Books, all of which are known to have an appeal to YA audiences and a value for creators of marginalized identities. However, with this *book publishing*-based route in mind, this means there are certain details I will have to figure out later, such as potentially expanding upon my original 64-page pitch to better meet the more common 200-page graphic novel standard, as well as the knowledge that I will need to find literary representation if I plan to get more into book publishing rather than strictly trade comic publishing. These are all very daunting things that I have decided I will figure out further down the line when I'm trying not to balance it all on top of finishing school. In the event that this ends up not being the route I choose to go

down, my backup plan is to finish *Roman and July* on my own and find a way to self publish it. The most accessible option for me in this case would be to publish it online as a webcomic since I am already comfortable with my online presence, or I could go the Kickstarter route if I still wanted to bring the book to print right away. In my initial proposal, I was dead-set on simply getting a pitch packet down for a traditional publishing process, and although I still would like that to be the situation that *Roman and July* is brought to fruition in, I am glad to also now have a number of other options available to me after leaving PNCA.

The past decade has seen an uptick in certain stories that *Roman and July* easily fits in with. First, the increase in comics and graphic novels such as Mariko Tamaki's *Laura Dean* and Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* indicate that there is growing audience demand for contemporary fiction that explores coming-of-age themes through a queer lense, with the latter of these two examples having become a highly regarded Netflix series adaptation as recently as this past weekend. I didn't have access to these kinds of stories as a kid in the 00s (aughts), but the cultural shift in attitude towards accessible LGBTQ+ media that occurred in the 2010s made it so that I was

able to be exposed to more queer themes in fiction throughout my early and late teens into my young adult years. Recognizing this formative influence on me over the past ten years has reiterated to me the importance of getting *Roman and July* out into the marketplace some time within the next ten years as a continuation of canonizing queer stories in contemporary young adult literature for accessible audiences.

*Roman and July* also follows the recent boom of Western works that are heavily inspired by Japanese anime, manga, and pop culture. Since the 1970s and 80s, Japanese media has been steadily permeating all types of American pop culture, and now many kids who grew up on mecha anime and magical girls have been making much of the media we see today. This has been even more apparent in the past 20 years with works such as the Italian comic series *W.I.T.C.H.* and Rebecca Sugar's *Steven Universe* having direct anime influence while also still being distinctly Western. Once considered an extremely niche interest, anime and manga have now become a more widely understood, more normalized facet of contemporary pop culture in America, which allows for more creators with clear anime influence such as myself the reassurance that their art will be well received among a contemporary audience. This is

important for me to acknowledge because I grew up being shamed by adults for how disapprovingly *anime* my art style is which in turn has occasionally made me doubt my ability to succeed out in the "real art world," and I have only recently started to get over that. Therefore, I would like to be a part of the proof that weeps can have thriving careers in the contemporary art market too.

As I further my illustration career, I envision *Roman and July* to be my big creator-owned debut as an *author-illustrator*. I first came to PNCA with an Associate in Fine Arts degree and had no idea I'd be leaving with an interest in something like sequential art and *writing*. However, in discovering a more serious love and appreciation of narrative-driven art during my time here, I've found these more recent developments have greatly enriched my portfolio and approach to illustration in general. Creating images with *storytelling* as the primary objective in mind rather than technical skill alone has improved my ability in rendering figures expressively and in a way that feels human. This pitch packet serves as a proof of concept that demonstrates my skills as not just a comic artist but as a story writer, and the amount of material I have presented today proves I have the means of carrying out

larger-scale book projects as I move forward with my artistic career in the future.

I ended my initial proposal with reciting a quote that I found in my research that I am once again going to share with you all: “The love story is the tribute the lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it.” In its simplest form, *Roman and July* started as my attempt at reconciling with my baggage. But in working on this project over the course of the past seven months, I’ve also realized the importance of turning this one pitch packet into something even more developed in the future. My sincere desire in carrying out this project is that by doing so, the years of heartache I endured in my past will ultimately be able to bring catharsis and hope to others that this story may one day resonate with.

With that, I would like to give thanks to everyone who supported me through this past year. To my thesis mentor Jason, thank you for not just your expertise in guiding me through all the ins and outs of comic creation, but also for your unwavering belief in my talent and skill. You’ve quelled a lot of the self doubt I started the semester off with and you have helped me become more confident in my identity as a

creator, and I hope to keep that energy going for years to come. I would like to thank the friends I’ve made and the teachers I’ve had here over the years, you’ve all contributed to my growth as both a better artist and a better person. Thank you to my sweetheart and my family who aren’t here physically but are here in my heart, especially my big sister, who is the reason I started drawing at the age of five in the first place. Thank you all for listening!



## ◆ Creative Brief ◆



### Project Vision

*Roman and July* is a 64-page graphic novel that chronicles one hopeless romantic's descent into turmoil when she is asked to make amends with her high school love and is confronted with her imperfect past. Marrying character-driven illustrations with a symbolically limited color palette, this contemporary coming-of-age graphic novel aims to challenge unrealistic tropes of "true love" as perpetuated by mainstream societal expectations of heteronormative relationships by exploring themes of co-dependency, the importance of friendship, and the messiness of healing.

### Audience

This project is aimed at post-high school young adults who are often left out of the broader YA genre. While there is a plethora of coming-of-age stories for high schoolers in the mainstream there are seldom as many for college kids, especially those who have yet to become Real Adults because they're still tethered to their teenage identity in some way. Through the two titular characters, there will also be representation of queer (specifically bisexual) and Southeast Asian American identities.



## Methods & Materials

The final deliverables will be presented as a pitch packet compatible for print presentation and digital distribution in the form of a slide deck. The finished comic pages will be drawn digitally with traditional-textured brushes in Procreate and edited in Photoshop and InDesign for final export and future printing. Accompanying visual development will consist of character reference art and compilations of concept ideation sketches done throughout the previous semester.

## Comparative Media

The story follows the legacy of coming-of-age narratives and inversions of romantic comedies, such as Stephen Chbosky's *Perks of Being A Wallflower* and Marc Webb's *500 Days of Summer*, while also taking inspiration from Japanese shoujo manga like Natsuki Takaya's *Fruits Basket*. The naming convention of the characters has roots in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to follow the historical canon of romance stories linked to that iconic work.

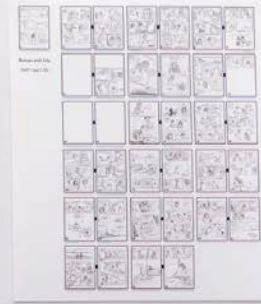
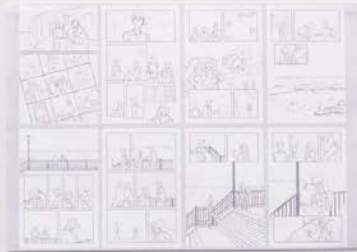
## Marketplace Application

*Roman and July* will fit into the recent increase of graphic novels focused on exploring LGBTQ+ and coming-of-age themes through contemporary fiction, such as Mariko Tamaki's *Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up With Me*. It will also appeal to fans of modern Western media that have taken influence from Japanese anime and manga in both visual style and tone, such as Rebecca Sugar's *Steven Universe* and Alessandro Barbucci's art style for the *W.I.T.C.H.* comic series. *Roman and July* would be suitable for publishers such as Oni Press, First Second, and Surely Books.



# ◆ Documentation ◆







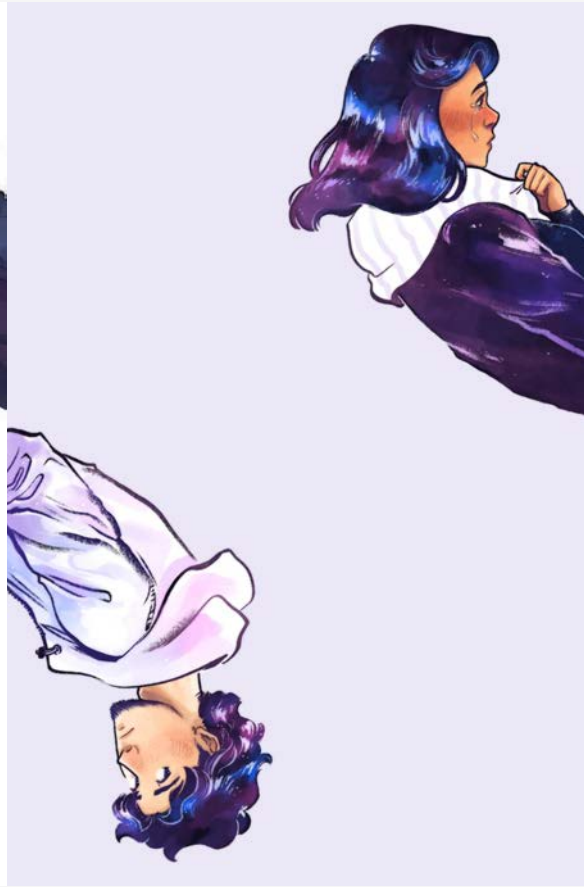














JULY CANTOS '18

ROMAN MOSCA '18

ROSIE BENNETT '18

MARC SALAZAR '18

TYBRE CANTOS '18

WILMA DAY '18

ANGE WILSON '18

FRANCIS LAW '15



JULY CANTOS '15

ROMAN MOSCA '15

ROSIE BENNETT '15

MARC SALAZAR '15

# Juliette "July" Cantos ✨



Spring 2018, Summer 2015

# ✧ Roman Mosca ✧



Spring 2018, Summer 2015



Juliette "July"  
Cantos



Roman  
Mosca



Rosie  
Bennett



Wilma  
Day



Professor Ange  
Wilson



Tybre  
Cantos



Marc  
Salazar



Juliette "July"  
Cantos



Roman  
Mosca



Rosie  
Bennett



Marc  
Salazar



Mr. Francis  
Law



PAGE 31 (4 PANELS) - Flashback (cont.'d): Arrival in Giudecca!

- **Flashback**, July intercepts Roman's boat, to Roman's surprise. They both head for Giudecca.

**PANEL ONE:**

INTERIOR. VAPORETTO, SAN BASILIO STATION.

ROMAN is inside the boat sitting on the outer seat of one of the rows. He's holding his backpack in his lap and he's looking out the window when a figure approaches him.

**PANEL TWO:**

JULY stands in front of ROMAN, a little bent over from being out of breath. ROMAN looks up and is completely shocked to see her.

ROMAN: July!? What are you—

JULY: Please. Scoot.

**PANEL THREE (INSET):**

JULY, leaning down to sit next to ROMAN, glances at him longingly as he scoots over a seat.

ROMAN: Yeah, of course.

**PANEL FOUR (BORDERLESS):**

EXTERIOR. GIUDECCA.

WIDE SHOT on the island of Giudecca from over the Giudecca Canal. The *vaporetto* is docked at the station.

WILMA (CAP): Wow... You are insane.

Where's Giudecca?

JULY (CAP): It's just south of Venice proper. It's more residential.

Quieter.







WE'RE  
HERE!



THE TRIP STARTED AS  
A JOKE BETWEEN MY  
FRIEND MARC AND I.

I BET HIM THAT HE COULDN'T CONVINCE  
OUR SCHOOL TO ORGANIZE A FIELD TRIP  
FOR ART CLUB ON THE SAME LEVEL THE  
BAND KIDS WERE TREATED WITH.

WE SPENT THREE WEEKS STUDYING  
CONTEMPORARY AND FINE ART OVER  
DOING REGULAR TOURISTY STUFF.

ON THE VERY LAST DAY OF THE TRIP, AS MY FRIENDS  
AND I WERE ABOUT TO BOARD A BOAT BACK TO OUR  
HOTEL, ROMAN SUDDENLY TURNED TO US AND SAID...



PIAZZALE ROMA STATION.

LET'S GO TO  
GIUDECCA!

HUH?  
WHY?



I  
DON'T WANNA BE  
LATE FOR THE FAREWELL  
DINNER JUST FOR A  
LAST-MINUTE  
DETOUR.

I  
HAVEN'T  
GOTTEN OFF THE  
ISLAND YET  
THOUGH!

JULY?  
DON'T YOU  
WANNA COME  
WITH ME?



UH... I'M  
WITH MARC ON  
THIS ONE.

WE  
SHOULD  
PROBABLY GET  
GOING...



YOU  
BETTER MAKE UP  
YOUR MIND BEFORE  
YOUR BOAT LEAVES,  
ROMAN.



WELL, TELL  
LAW I'LL CATCH  
UP LATER!

BYE!  
BYE!

HAVE  
FUN.





OKAY! IF THE BOAT ROMAN IS ON IS GOING AROUND THE ISLAND ON THE WEST SIDE, WHICH WILL TAKE APPROXIMATELY 20 MINUTES. AND I LEAVE RIGHT NOW AND BOLT SOUTH, WHICH WILL TAKE 15 MINUTES. I CAN INTERCEPT HIS BOAT AT SAN BASILIO STATION BEFORE IT HEADS OFF TO GIUDECCA!



GIUDECCA.





I'M SORRY.  
SORRY FOR WHAT?  
FOR REJECTING YOUR INVITE EARLIER.



I WAS MORE SURPRISED THAT YOU SHOT ME DOWN BUT I WASN'T MAD AT YOU FOR DOING SO.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.



BESIDES, YOU'RE HERE WITH ME NOW, RIGHT?

ISN'T THAT WHAT MATTERS?



MAN, I DON'T WANNA HEAD BACK.

WISH WE COULD JUST STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER, YOU KNOW?



YEAH... BUT WE CAN'T.



EVEN IF WE TRIED TO STAY LIKE THIS FOREVER...

AND?

VENICE IS JUST GOING TO SINK ONE DAY ANYWAY.



DOESN'T THE THOUGHT OF THE END SCARE YOU?

THE FACT THAT EVEN SOMETHING AS BEAUTIFUL AS VENICE--

--IS SLOWLY DECAYING INTO MOSS AND GRIME AND WILL ONE DAY FALL APART?

JUST LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE?



BUT THAT DAY ISN'T TODAY, IS IT?

WHAT'S WITH THIS EXISTENTIALISM ALL OF A SUDDEN?



HEY, VENICE MAY SINK ONE DAY BUT YOU'RE HERE NOW.

YOU HAVE TO APPRECIATE EVERY MOMENT YOU'RE GIVEN AND MAKE EACH OF THEM COUNT.

AND IF YOU FORGET THAT, I'LL ALWAYS BE HERE TO REMIND YOU.



I PROMISE.



ROMAN, I--

PING!

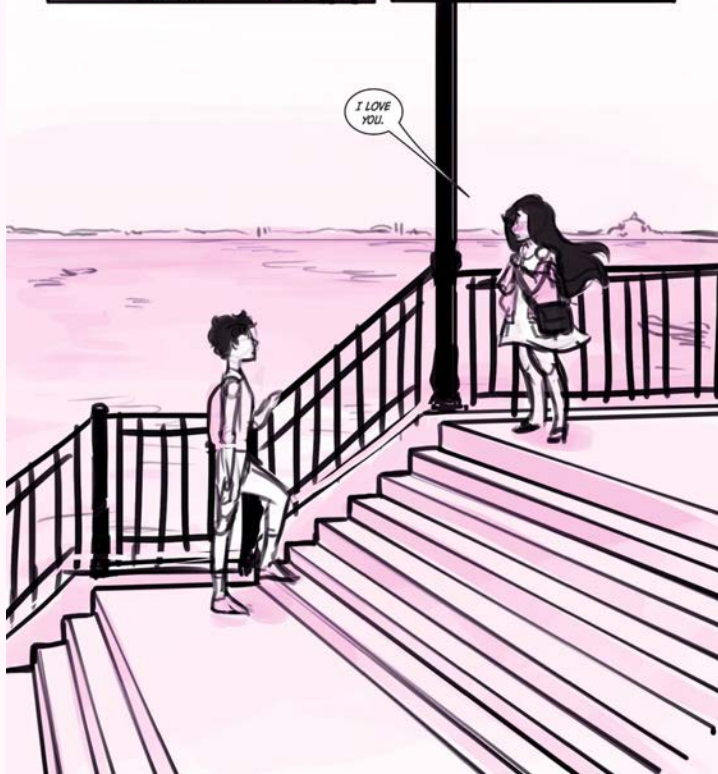
AAAND THAT'S LAW.

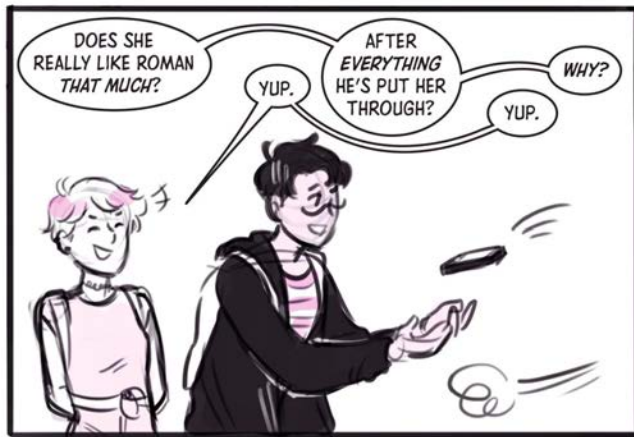


WE'LL DEFINITELY BE LATE FOR DINNER IF WE MISS THE NEXT BOAT.

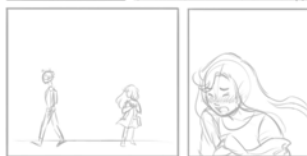
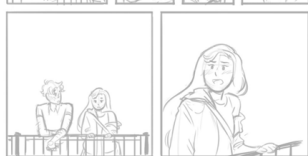
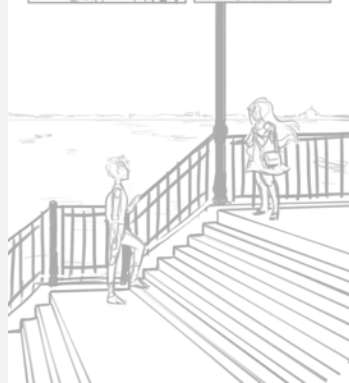
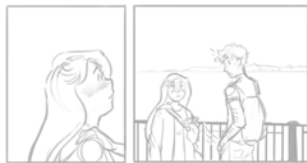
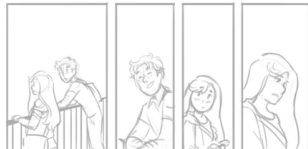
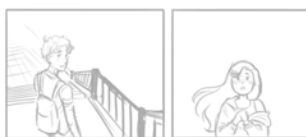
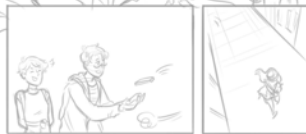
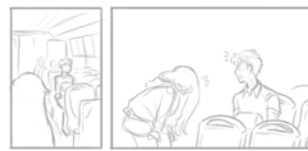
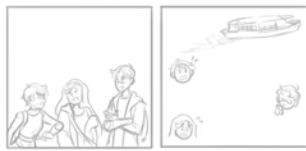


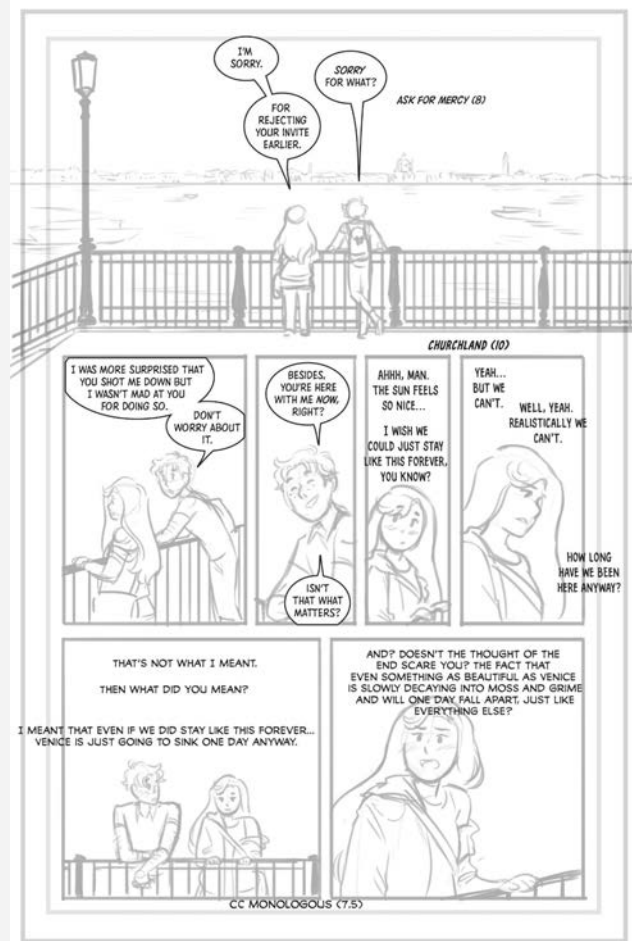
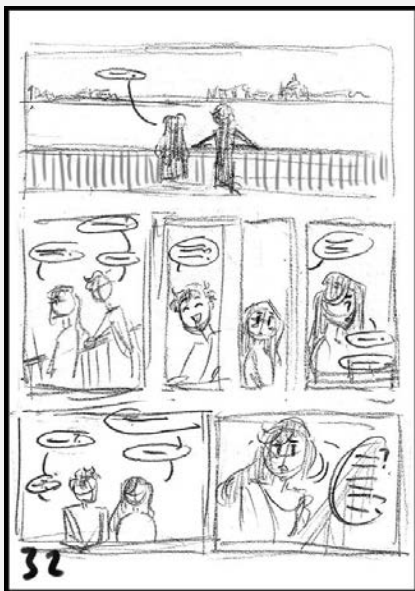
ROMAN!







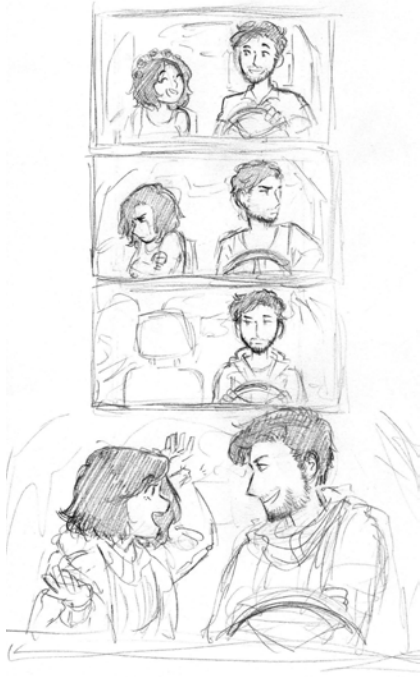








# ◆ Thesis Journal ◆



"yuri & DREW"



yuri murasaki (20)



DREW RASSIER (22)



i had to accept that i was selfish.



and that, in the end, i just wasn't the person you wanted.



but it wasn't as simple as "i'm jealous" i was scared of losing you.



15/17

because you were home. and i was scared of facing a new truth that rendered everything i'd ever known as irrelevant

as if i didn't matter anymore. and that hurt so so much





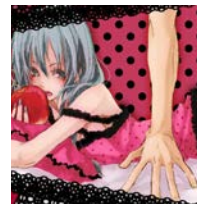
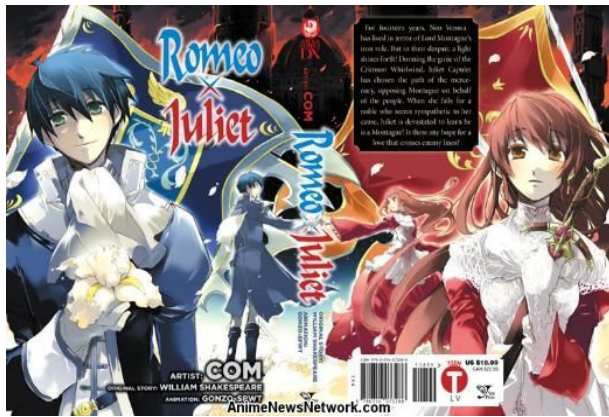
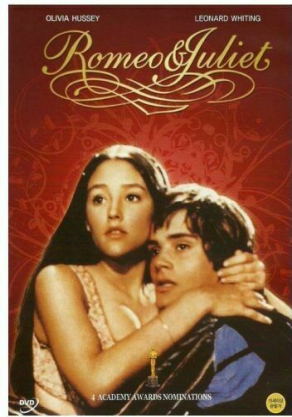
July  
as JULIET



Roman  
as ROMEO

Roman & July 1.2

lesm + romeo/juliet + lizzie mcguire music + escape '15/'19



# DISSECTING Juliette C.

## ♡ co-dependency on Roman

- stems from dysfunctional family: emotionally distant & depressed sibling, unintentionally neglectful parents. Hybre's rocky relationship with their parents led to July growing up caught in the middle, forcing her to be the peacemaker.
- She desires attention (and reciprocal love) from Roman, the one person willing to give it to her.
- with Roman, July can relax. He's her escape from home.
- \* - but when things are rocky w/ Roman, her instinct is for her to be the one to fix it — which is: WHY SHE CAN'T EASILY LET GO

the main thing is a big deal to July bc it makes her feel like Hybre's relationship as a couple... like Hybre's apartment. like she will spend the rest of her life with Roman. it's not like this... and her healthy and she want it to stay like that.



READ: "Spirit of Place: Venice (1979)"  
Russell Ash

Why Venice? (After Her that I went Her lol)

- Decay In Venice ("The Improvisatore", 1845, Hans Andersen) p 44
  - "The magnificent Venice lay like a dead swan upon the waves."
  - juxtaposing the opulence of Venice's exterior w/ the truth of its decay — "greenish slime upon the walls"
  - all water, no people — descent of life
- Cosmopolitan Venice (Venice Observed, 1961, Mary McLaughlin) p 24
  - "[Venice] is all for the ear and eye, this city, but primarily for the eye. Built on water, it is an endless succession of reflections, and echoes a mirroring."
  - constantly surrounded by water, always reminded of your reflection — but on the water is mirrored

- Impressions of Venice (letter, 1844, Charles Dickens)
 

- "The gorgeous and wonderful reality of Venice is beyond the fancy of the wildest dreamer." p2

the idea that being in Venice feels unreal reinforces July's tendency to live in fantasy. the high of being abroad in Europe with her crush puts her more and more in the mindset of wanting things work out with Roman

but also...  
with Water Rising And Its Population Falling  
Apr 11/30/2019

"Acqua alta" high water. Exceptionally high tides believed that deep canal excavation in 60s forced loggers' coagulation balance between human + nature thrown out of balance create highs of 6-7 ft high tides

inspires the connection J.P.R. reveals  
"3/2 hrs of the end and it's better to die than the present" — is his factor to why it's better than the present  
so that's why compromise with other  
"What Is Venice's Future?"  
climate change  
↓  
dramatization of  
New Venice  
from "In Her Vein"

READ: "All My Exes Live in Texts: Why the Social Media Generation Never Really Breaks Up"  
Maurine O'Connor, (2013) thecut.com/newyorkmag

- "Older generations didn't have a word for this kind of thing — they couldn't have. But these are, in fact, relationships... Online, you watch your exes' lives unfold parallel to yours — living, shifting digital portraits of needs not talked with partners you did not keep."
- \* - Etiquette can't keep up with us — not that we would know it anyway — so ex relationships run on lust and impulse and passion and easy attachment with fantasy. It's a dozen soap operas playing at the same time on a dozen different screens, and you are the star of them all. It's both as thrilling and as sickening as it sounds." ending with pressure renders total separation from each less scary
- "Unexpected texts carry the subtext of the sender's whereabouts and state of mind." → the inciting incident occurs via texts
- "There was no middle ground, only uncomfortable extremes. And that's what ex management feels like all the time."
- or cyberstalking or fantasizing, "I'm ultimately pining around their lives because it might feel to live there again for a little while." J.



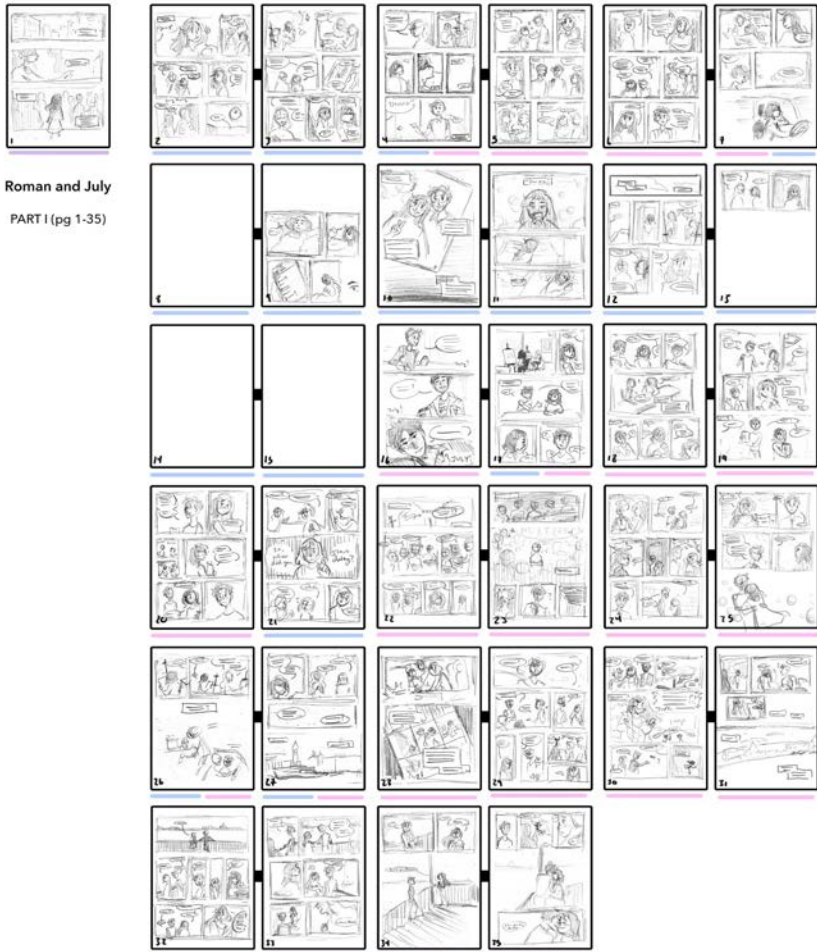
July @  
Roman @ Himselshoran —  
More @ outmore.maher

every one feels a universal thing... what makes it so?



Picrewの「エリーのメーカー」でつくったよ！





Roman and July  
PART I (pg 1-35)





Roman + Julia



Roman Moore, 20  
from Chicago

Julia "July"  
Campanella 19



Julia Campanella  
from Chicago



July's lookbook



Sept '14  
Blackhawk  
15 → 14y



July '15  
Blackhawk  
16 yo

young love?

with Roman

it's over,  
isn't it?



why can't i  
move on?



i'll spend forever  
wondering if you know



i was enchanted  
to meet you

but I always knew you'd be the one to understand me  
I guess that's why it took so long to get things right.



(chapter images? the only favorite thing orange (currently reading Alice Hyperkinetic's Black Cross) with orange page count)



Chapter I



Chapter II



Chapter III



Chapter IV

- Chapter I - intro
- Chapter II - meeting flashback, before, before being seen, getting july, fight intense
- Chapter III - july speaks - stills, before calls her out, she shows up, calls roman, what's - / surge
- Chapter IV - gallery opening

July - April 2018  
three months from graduation!  
(senioritis)



ROMAN AND JULY  
NOT YOUR FEEL-GOOD ROM-COM!



PARTS

- part I - intro
- part II - romance / reveal
- part III - spiral / break / confrontation
- part IV - resolve

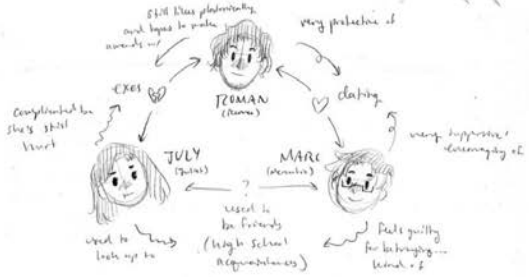
message bag (to take for journal supplies)



July contos

medium bob

still uses an iPod nano  
judgen



July's affect for Roman are fueled primarily not by how compatible they are w/ each other, but by July's reliance on the way Roman makes her feel loved

↳ so... is this dependency?

what's why it's hard for her to let go of him... it's not that she's a cooey or girlfriend without no feeling and marriage, she's just... scared of losing him he has to intermind w/ the identity that's been forming him past six years that's not easy to just get over right away.



"Dependency is a romantic relationship in which one person needs the other July person, who in turn, needs to be needed. The dependent person known as "the other" feels trapped unless they are needed by and making sacrifices for - the enabler, otherwise known as "the father."  
- Dr. Exelberg, original.mad.com  
- Roman







DUCKSHIT!



Torah's don't look at each other like that!



Yikes! I promise the water will gonna boil up!  
304V-3660 LET ME COOK!



Autumn 2012



Roads! Don't worry, we're only in the school parking lot.  
Just be sure none of your papers end up in the actual road.



Because Torah is a big deal to Jilly he is wearing her but the figure showcasing as a couple - like they're gonna be like the pink flower the rest of her life with Torah. It is like they are with their hands. And the words to be Song like that.

middle school (2010)



• 11-12



• 12-13

- work in 3rd grade art class



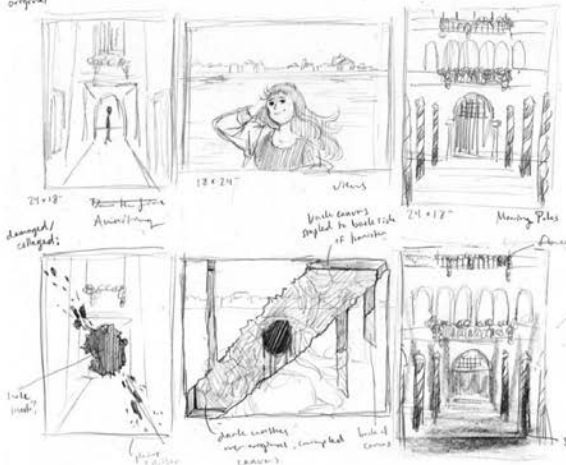
Renee's portrait of Torah  
- cartoon  
- drawing  
- graphic design



Torah's portrait of Renee  
- anime (2011-2013 era)  
- graphic design

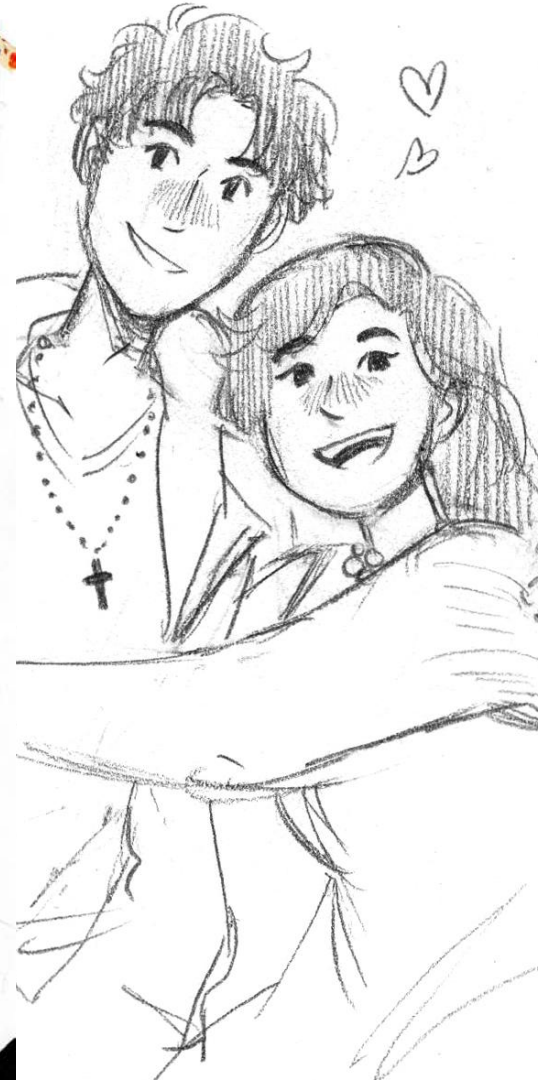


original



February 2015  
ART CLUB: Mr. Lee, July, Rebecca, Bernadette, Maria

@Kiera J., no feedback



ROMAN  
AND

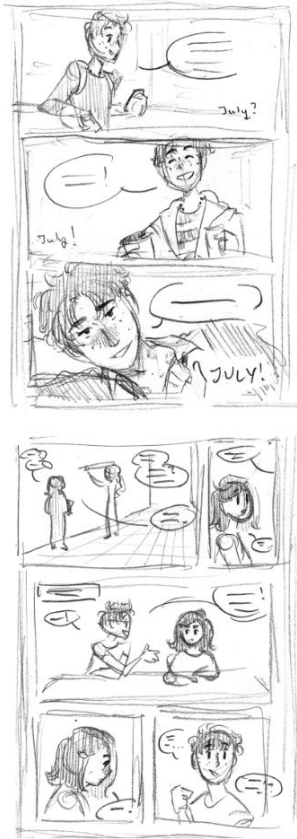
July

THESIS PROPOSAL

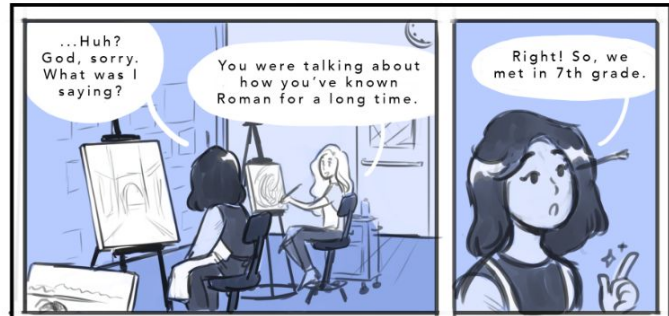
Kiara Juliette Jime



Thinking Fondly Of You (p14)



Backstory / Flashback: Sept 2010 (p15)



sometimes:



Sometimes:







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