An imaginary friend is a blessing and a curse. They won’t let you sleep until you find just the right shade between grey and pink. They wake you up in the middle of the night to jot down a dream. They hint that you’re not good enough, that your work is shit, that your ideas are boring. But mostly they keep you company during long nights in the studio, smack you suddenly with new ideas like a punch in the face.

We are Imaginary Friends, a collective of artists working to capture the inspiring, elusive and creative genius within each of us.
The BFA students pose the idea of the Imaginary Friend as an inner creative voice that has become so concentrated as to take on a character of its own. They write of their “friends” waking them up in the middle of the night, whispering in their ears that their work isn’t good enough, and also delivering new ideas “like a punch in the face.” Having had the pleasure of working closely with this group of young artists over the period leading up to their thesis exhibition, I can attest to the fact that I have seen their imaginations deliver ideas as powerful blows to the head as well as coming more gently like kisses on the cheek. They are all smart, rigorous, and dedicated artists whose imaginations have definitely become forces to be reckoned with.

The idea of imagined characters plays out directly in some of their works, so perhaps externalizing our imaginary friends is an essential part of story telling. There is one virtual reality project in the show and all of the students worked on VR projects in an Intel-sponsored class this last term, so perhaps technology has afforded us new spaces to escape to with our imaginary friends. Just as when writing this text, dear reader, I cannot help but begin to imagine you, the artists in creating these works, presuppose a viewer. So perhaps ultimately the gallery visitor and readers of this exhibition catalogue are also our imaginary friends. In returning to a vestigial childhood in naming this show Imaginary Friends, these artists ask us to open up and follow our own imagination where it will take us, inward or outward and always onward.

This show marks the end of a nine-year run of the University of Oregon’s Art & Technology program in Portland and it is also the last show in the White Box space. While we look forward to new opportunities that we’ll carve out for future BFAs, it is wonderful to have had such an exceptional group of artists in this final year. They have honored the space and the years that went before them with their immeasurable positive energy and talent.
My head is constantly awash with scenes and moments of stories from other worlds, filled with characters and their tales. As I spin my own new stories, these narratives are heavily inspired by mediums such as folklore, books, and cartoons. These tales often bleed into my reality allowing me a brief flight into these fantasies. I draw inspiration from these moments, and use my work as a means to share these stories with others, with the hope of transporting them there as well.
This particular story, *Lian’s Candle*, was originally inspired by an especially vivid dream that I knew must be brought to life and shared. I experienced the full process of producing a story, from concept and storyboards to final animations and voice acting. The tale is of the intertwining of two characters, Lian Facio and the Spirit Niol, and how there are always two sides to every coin.

*Special thanks to Omar Moreno and Jake Sullivan for all their help.*
When an idea is made into a physical object the idea is destroyed. A sheet of paper is often a physical demonstration of the idea of a plane. Because a mathematical plane has no thickness, a piece of paper can in no way be a plane. Similarly, an idea can never be a sculpture. Ideas can be discrete, while physical reality can only be continuous. I undertake the creation of objects from ideas at a scale where the imprecise nature of reality manifests itself. I use computer programs and mathematical diagrams in my work as references to ideas, but do not pretend that they are ideas themselves.
The mandibles of Lucanus Cervus are shaped to reach over the head and hook under the wing-cases of a rival during combat. Like all beetles, the pieces of their bodies are rigid and only moves at designated joints. They are animals made of definitions. I am envious of a body that is so clearly and purposefully defined. The possible uses for my own hands are too broad to be actionable. There is no definite point where my finger skin ends and my palms skin begins.
My work engages with the deconstruction of signs, symbols and senses. Primarily focusing on the synesthetic experience, I’m fascinated by the idea of visually representing senses that can’t be expressed otherwise. Using the computer as an objective, mechanical process and function, I deconstruct my sensory reality and reconstruct its inherent form.
My work explores the auto-genetic associations between sound, color, movement and time. It is through the creation and transcendance of audio waveforms to color specific reactive particles, that I hope to encapsulate an unmediated, sub symbolic space - where memory, signs and senses intertwine.
I love reading about incorrect models of the solar system. As much as I appreciate our current understanding of space, there is something so wonderfully defiant about old theories. They serve as a perfect example of how our emotions are never fully separate from our rationality. The fact we orbit the sun was at odds with our egocentrism, but we learned to accept it. I am fascinated by this battle - how the thirst for understanding is motivated and encumbered by emotion. My aim as an artist is to negotiate the space between the logical and instinctual.
Cumulus is a self-contained weather system. The clouds and rain are generated in a recursive loop, making the program self-propelled and unpredictable. This work is part of a series that recreates natural phenomena using code. I am fascinated by how we distinguish between the organic and synthetic. I only use basic shapes like circles and squares as to never hide the digital nature of the work. The aim is not to simulate clouds perfectly, but to decipher their structure.
I often think about the experience of time and how quickly narrative comes into play within it. I create contemporary visuals mixed with relics from other eras to convolute their position in time.

My artistic process revolves around repetition, iteration, photography, and collage. I’m deeply interested in conflict, collections, and the beauty in the ambiguity that they possess.

ELORA KELSH
Idiot Box is a culmination of my fascination with juxtaposing the old and new. I enjoy repurposing materials into outcomes which they were not originally intended, and challenging the need for linear narrative.

When it comes to visual experiences on screens, we have expectations to become hooked into a storyline, but I challenge this expectation by presenting short, looping, abstract narratives to consider in relation to each other.
I do not bottle up my emotions, I collect them. Experiences, interactions, expectations, and anxieties ruminate in my head beneath a thick layer of flesh and criticism. I am a hoarder. I am surrounded by trash but I have convinced myself that it is treasure. I hunt for these scraps and mementos - for shrapnel of personal and collective experience, so that I can piece everything together at a later point in time.

When I use a personal experience or memento in my artwork, I become justified in holding onto it, thereby appeasing my hoarder self.
Glub is an animated short about a young girl and her fascination with fish. Goldie, fresh out of her toddler years, desperately wants a pet fish and she’ll stop at nothing to get it. Tragically, her desires don’t always turn out so well for the fish. Glub deals with themes of responsibility, desire, naivety, and obsession, viewed through the eyes of a wily 4 ("4 and a half!") year old with her own agenda.

The sets and scenes of Glub have been collaged from my own childhood obsession with trinkets and backyard treasures. After 23 years they have finally made their debut.
I value abnormality. I constantly aim to create works that are both trendsetting and beautiful: design, interactive art, and creative thinking are opportunities to reflect the uniqueness of individuals in the world. I strive to adopt these techniques to challenge what is expected from ideas related to graphic art and design. I intend to creatively engage the public and the viewer without the constraints of what is ‘expected’ from art and design, and to confound existing preconceptions of creative work with the uncommon and new. I take seriously the ability of graphic media to make people think deeply about life’s minute or grandiose details, and this is my goal as an artist and a creative. I hope that my work will spark a conversation that makes someone consider something differently, in the way that I try to approach everything in my day to day life.

JALEN MILLER
I've always been attracted to iconography. It's intriguing to me that a symbol, text, or shape can hold enough meaning to invoke a feeling or start a conversation about interpretation. I experiment by questioning how I can take abstract shapes and symbols, which have no inherent meaning, and apply them to as many mediums as are available to me. My unique personal challenge throughout this exploratory project, titled "Shapes?" or "Shapes?" has been creating an identity for an individual, a brand, and a concept, while investigating how I can create a relationship between my interpretations of these random shapes and a viewer of the work.
When meat is made kosher through shechita, the blood is removed from the carcass in a process called kasher. The meat is salted, and the blood is drawn away. If it is not done quickly, the blood is said to have set in the meat, rendering it carrion. The exsanguination of kosher meat is an expelling, purifying gesture that carries with it mystical, historical, and alchemical significance and meaning. This Old Testament practice seems to have little to do with contemporary digital art, but my work explores the intersection between traditional faith practices, medieval and early modern literary theory and personal motifs of abuse and trauma.

BASIL PRICE
“Good Works” is a two-part project exploring modern-day fringe Christianity. The first part is a series of Bible tracts, mimicking the style of Jack Chick, which tells the story of the non-canonical Gospel of Judas. The second part of the project is a series of vinyl sticker gravestones for famous televangelists. Both the televangelists and the tracts adapt established Biblical canon to forward their own, often heretical beliefs, creating a parallel canon to traditional Catholicism. Good Works plays with notions of canonicity and adaption by using established Christian formula to canonize the non-canonical.
Through literature, film, and games, immersing myself in a story has always been my biggest passion. Story telling allows us to escape, even if just for a moment, to explore extravagant new worlds and interesting characters that we become attached to. We project our emotions onto them, have hopes for them, and maybe even see some of ourselves within them.

I am a story teller. I create worlds for others to lose themselves in, surrounded by echoes of narrative, and explore the imagination.
We all come from different backgrounds and experiences, only rarely do we allow ourselves to open up to one another to share our most personal stories. My work immerses us in a snippet of someone else's life, surrounded by evidence of who they are, and asks us to draw on our own experiences to create a narrative. Winter's Woe addresses where we are most vulnerable: tragedy. For it is in these moments of vulnerability that we can be at our most open, to share a story, and experience something together.
In my work I try to bring others to the forefront, those outside of a circle of family and friends. It takes another person from a similar situation to acknowledge similarities. I am intrigued by that need, which drives people to want a connection with another. As a society we have become self-involved and forget to deviate outside of the safety of what we know. I capture moments - seconds - a glimpse of someone struggling – to invite others to take a longer look, if only for a moment.
It is believed that the Aztecs depicted the Caracara as their "sacred eagle". Through time it was later misinterpreted as the golden eagle that is now on the Mexican Flag. The Caracara is known as an aggressive, opportunistic and feisty bird of prey - characteristics I sometimes wish to possess. In this series I explore themes of doubt, reassurance and struggles with self. The spirit of the Caracara helps me find freedom and strength within myself.
I am fascinated with the way that digital content breaks down over time, whether through repeated compression or corruption. I pull forgotten content from Internet archives as inspiration for my strange works. My obsession is creating fragments of a story in different mediums and combining them to create new interpretations and self-reflections. Featured in my works are big-eyed animals that seem to be unsettlingly familiar to picture book characters. My aim is to bring attention to the ambiguities between our waking and dreaming selves.
My work reacts to the romance and subsequent shortcomings of early virtual reality. This early iteration of VR was idealized as a tool to transcend humanity, escape reality, and experience the impossible. My process for building virtual spaces involves the conscious recreation of dream environments. This creates a feedback loop where I subconsciously revisit these environments in my dreams. By presenting the viewer with a headset, I invite them to be a voyeur into my dreams and fantasies - a delicate balance of trust and intimacy between the artist and participant.
Imaginary Friends would like to thank all of the Art & Technology faculty and alumni that have been of help throughout our journey at the University of Oregon.

Special thanks to:

Craig Hickman
Michael Salter
Colin Ives
Cris Moss
Kate Wagle
John Leahy
Dominic Cardoso

for mentoring us through our final year in Portland.

imaginary friends

Nathan Bergfelt
Jalan Ember
Susannah Feiler
Carly Hagen
Elora Kelsh
Ruby Lambie
Jalen Miller
Basil Price
Alexis Sanchez
Nancy Serrano
Maxwell Turpin