

Ronan Lynam  
IP Thesis  
4/24/13  
Prof. West & Inuzuka

*Duck and Friends: A Series of Digital Illustrations*



*Duck and Friends* – a series of satiric portraits that place animals in common human scenarios – originated almost by accident. A mid-senior freak out made me revisit my duck and after a re-working of the drawing, I had fallen in love with both a new process and new result, two criteria I deem important for any creative venture. Portraiture has been a dear interest of mine since before attending art school, and the drive to perfectly capture character and emotion in a portrait has always fascinated me. A particular pose of the head or a twitch of the eye can speak more than words can, and as people we pick up on these subtleties well. Twelve portraits later, I have created an experience meant to challenge our ideas of portraiture and, to a greater extent, the way artwork is made.

My series of animal portraits illustrates our own narcissistic fascinations with ourselves. Strangely enough, I felt a series simply portraying people would not be as effective as illustrating these themes through animals. I think that a visual analogy to humans is more interesting, as the world of visual art is over-saturated with sharp, perfect portraits of beautiful people. These attractive pieces of artwork amplify the importance of a figure, and mirror our egotism of self-declared significance.

I parody this phenomenon through the illustration of personified animals. By plugging in a non-human figure into a human context, I allow viewers to step outside the normal framework of portraiture and re-conceptualize our fascination with ourselves. These personified animals rest in the same shoes as our selves, and the result is often humorous and ridiculous. Personifying animals in place of humans re-contextualizes the viewer's relationship to portraiture itself.

In an effort to further push this impression, I have presented the illustrations in cheap, worn and used frames. These frames present the portraits with distressed wood, dirty glass and chipped plastic - reminiscent of portraits kept in homes to augment the figures significance. Relating to such portraits allows for a re-interpretation to occur in which we tamper with our expectations of the idea of portraiture.

The other significant characteristic of my series comes from my approach I took to drawing them. I have been an avid digital illustrator for four years now, and I have just now began experimenting with techniques that may end up composing all my current and future works. To further explain, insight into my influences in digital illustration is necessary.

Renowned concept artists Feng Zhu, freelance illustrator Sam Spratt, and Argentinian caricaturist Nico Di Mattia all influence my digital technique. Nico Di Mattia was one of the first digital illustrators that captured my interest. Four years ago, I began my search for new illustrative tools that I saw Mattia's works using a digital drawing tablet. However, Feng Zhu was probably the most 'traditional' digital illustrator I became severely obsessed with. Feng works as a high-profile concept artist, and his approach to digital painting relied on more traditional values rather than on lots of elaborate computer tricks to create his intricate compositions, showing me that the best tool for a digital artist is a strong traditional foundation.

I approach my drawings with a technique that intends to bridge the gap between digital and traditional mediums. I illustrate this is through the idea of *trompe l'oeil*. *Trompe l'oeil* is commonly associated with imagery that is executed so realistically,

it distorts the senses into thinking it's the real thing. As drawing personified portraits of animals is obviously a fictitious effort, trying to draw them very realistically eludes the point. Instead, I apply the concept of *trompe l'oeil* to the medium in which a drawing is composed.

Digital illustration often comes under the criticism of appearing too plastic and digitally produced. Part of this is due to the virtual brushes and tools lacking the spontaneous and organic nature of traditional media. No physical pencil stroke will ever look the same, yet a digital stroke is capable of yielding an identical result every time. I value traditional drawing and painting mediums very highly, so I bring over some of their exclusive characteristics into my own digital practice. I believe the most powerful distinguishing attribute traditional media has is the power of stroke, and I translate that into my own drawings through custom brushes and techniques. Tactility is lost in digital media, and I add that dimension through including this missing attribute

*Trompe l'oeil* questions what really constitutes as an artists mark - why not just paint something with 'real' paint? These pieces explore the significance of something being 'real' and what that means. The experience of drawing these portraits with the stroke of my hand and a state of creative concentration has produced a real mark. Digital media is nothing more than another tool in an artist's arsenal.

My Integrative Project utilizes digital illustrative technologies and digital illustration in order to create a body of work that captures my identity as a visual illustrator. Self discovery and growth have taken a high priority in every piece I have

made, and my role as an illustrative artist has been under examination since even before IP. In entering IP this semester, I feel that I have had the chance to spend a year examining who I am and what I am capable of doing as a creative individual. *Duck and Friends* has been a chance to reflect on my abilities, what and how I learn, and how I can manifest myself through doing what I love more than anything.