

Donna Letterese

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Artist's Statement and Bio:

I am an artist and educator who has split my life between the East and the West Coast. I love the ways in which the Pacific Northwest is entirely its own wondrous and unique place, while also having elements that call me back to the homes I've had before.

I grew up in the suburbs of New York City. For college, I chose to stay close to the general area where I'd grown up, and went to Sarah Lawrence. My junior year, I got the chance to study abroad for half the year at Goldsmith's College, University of London. That opened up my life to travel, theatre, and art, while reinvigorating my childhood love of reading and creating comics. After graduating from college, I moved to Los Angeles. I worked as a teaching artist at art centers and libraries, largely focused on Cartooning. I also made my own work, such as zines, art books, greeting cards, and minicomics. Pre-2020, I showed work at juried and group art shows and comic conventions, primarily in Southern California, but also in New York, Philadelphia, and Portland, Oregon.

I began my MFA in Illustration at California State University, Fullerton, in 2018. I'd planned to move to Washington upon graduation. However, I came up to stay during the March 2020 shutdown-- and when my university went virtual for the rest of my program, I essentially moved far earlier than I realized I would be able to.

Exploring the forests and beaches of my new home influenced my art a great deal, giving me comfort in my first two years here when more isolation being practiced. In October of 2021, I was lucky enough to have my final MFA show in person at Cal State Fullerton. My degree was conferred in January of 2022. Since then, I've finally gotten the chance to further explore my surroundings. Connecting with people in my community has been wonderful; as well as attending local art walks; taking the ferries between Bremerton, Port Orchard, and Seattle; exploring the many parks and gardens all around the Kitsap Peninsula; and continuously being inspired by the intertwining blend of nature and city life here. I'm very happy to have continued teaching Cartooning for L.A.'s Barnsdall Art Center via Zoom, and to have been working at Silverdale's Kitsap Art Center since February of 2023. At Kitsap Art Center, I teach Cartooning as well as other classes in the curriculum, online and in person.

In regards to my work, I believe that everything in life needs its counterpart in order to exist. And so, duality is something I explore. In comics and children's illustration, I create stories and characters that are more stylized and sometimes fantastical. I'm exploring bringing together the more traditional rendering inherent in botanical illustration, with the more cartoony/experimental world of comic book/sequential art, and children's books. Mediums such as accordion books and tunnel books help bridge this gap.

My piece in the BIMA Spotlight show, "Calla and the Dark Woods," is a narrative tunnel book. Tunnel books are three-dimensional artist's books, like a cross between a book, a diorama, and a three-dimensional scene from a comic. The tunnel book displayed here is one book from a three-book edition with variation editions, chronicling the stories of Calla the Sprite. The scene depicted here allows viewers to get a more immersive peek into her world. The Dark Woods are full of Shadow Creatures, the unknown, and flickers of light and dark, when you peer into their world.

This 11" tall, 17" wide, and 17" deep tunnel book has been hand-cut, and glued by hand with PVA glue. On some partitions, sections of background illustrations previously drawn have been printed out, cut to fit, then glued in requisite spots. Some partitions are cut out of black cardstock, while some are cut out of white Bristol board. The back wall of trees in the tunnel book has been hand-drawn, using Kuretake and Tombow ink pens on white Bristol board, mounted on black cardstock. The folded sides where the partitions/silhouettes fit into are all made of black cardstock. There are hand-drawn elements in order to accent and/or edit details. The centerpieces where Calla is atop a blackberry leaf and flower, and the logs below those, were printed from original illustrations via an inkjet printer, cut to form, and glued atop white Bristol board. The Shadow Creatures are either cut to form from previously done inkjet drawings then mounted atop Bristol board cut to the same shape, or, cut as shapes out of black cardstock, with white Posca pen features drawn atop. The Colophon signature is printed with an inkjet printer and glued with PVA glue to the back of the book.

In this piece and in my work overall, through the flora, fauna, characters, and narratives I create, I want to continue to create art exploring the idea of finding one's self-- and surviving the wonderful, as well as more difficult, solitary parts of life.

Resume Highlights:

EDUCATION

California State University at Fullerton. Fullerton, CA. MFA in Visual Art, January 2022.

Concentration: Illustration. GPA: 4.0. Graduate Academic Honors.

Sarah Lawrence College. Bronxville, NY. BA, May 2006.

Concentration: Art, Psychology/Dramatic Writing. GPA: 3.8.

Goldsmith's College University of London. London, United Kingdom. Semester Abroad, January to June, 2005.

Concentration: Painting/Comics, Psychology. GPA: 3.8.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2021. Duff Gallery, California State University at Fullerton: "The Only Way Out is Through." MFA Thesis Exhibition. Fullerton, CA.

2016. Pop Boba Gallery: "Of Inky Cities and Colorful Creatures." Torrance CA.

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESS

2023. Strait Up Magazine, Selected Contributor, with two illustrations and one short story being published in upcoming issue.

2021. SHOUTOUTLA, Artist's Profile.

2019. "The Vietnamese Children's Literacy Project" Published by the National Resource Center for Asian Languages at California State University at Fullerton, Selected Illustrator for Children's Story.

2016. LA Art Zone Instructor and Center Feature through LA 36 Local Television Station, Selected Arts Instructor to be interviewed about Barnsdall Art Center, as well as "The Art of Cartooning" and "Zine-Making" classes taught specifically.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Puget Sound Book Artists (PSBA), Los Angeles Society of Illustrators (SiLA), Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) Western Washington Chapter, and the American Society of Botanical Artists (ASBA), specifically the Botanical Artist's Guild of Southern California (BAGSC) and Pacific Northwest Botanical Artists (PNBA) Chapters.

