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Final Artist Statement

My work is powerful in its ability to target an audience who is most apt to sink deeply into a created and imagined world—children. A child, unburdened by the practical, is more open to believe in the unbelievable and imagine the unthinkable. I find myself amazed by the inexhaustible visual imagination of the child and their deep desire to invent and create through this ability to “make believe”. As a child, we imagined these unreal circumstances through play and storytelling. In response to this, I find that my work is playful in its ability to engage through humor, yet compelling in its ability to bring the unreal to life through word and image. It provokes the visual imagination while leaving some interpretation up to the imaginative creation of the viewer.

What better a way to reach my desired audience than through the creation of an illustrated, hand bound children’s book? Children love the tangible qualities of books and the interactive physicality of turning the pages to reveal the narrative scenes. The book format is something quite powerful—it allows several works, combine together, to function as an entity or a whole. Each individual illustration and text block is certainly important in and of itself, but when combine together, they become a single work that must be viewed in the way the book is constructed. My two most powerful works, *Alex’s Alphabetical Book of Adventures* and *Descend/Ascend*, were both created in book format, though varying in style of binding as well as illustration. In these two works, as with most of my artwork, I harness this bound representation of a story and make it an entity in itself. The

book becomes an item that tells the story, almost like a friend that vocally weaves a fantastic tale. It contains the work—the illustrations and the printed words—but it also becomes a vehicle through which the child receives the information. The varied structures can provide this information in varied ways, but ultimately the book brings forward the information from the author or artist to stimulate and engage the mind of the child.

On one hand, I want to use my work to tell a story to the child, and I effectively do this through the organization of consecutive illustrations and text. On the other hand, I am conscious of finding the right balance between what I present to the child and what he or she must create using their own imagination. Providing information in differing ways—for example some through text and others through image—can determine how the audience “sees” the story. In some ways, the images in my work tell the viewer what it is I want them to see with detail and intricacy of the scene that I have imagined. In *Descend/Ascend* I give the viewer a succession of painted images that form this imagined world, leaving very little of its fabrication up to the audience’s own imagination. The only text used is on the front and back cover and simply gives the viewer a direction, to ascend or descend through the work. These terms plant a seed of the work’s content without fully taking control of the audience’s thoughts about the story. In other works, I explore the ability of words to paint a picture with minimal support of the illustrations. In this way, I engage my children-based audience without completely usurping their creative control. The balance is delicate between free reign of the child’s imaginative creation and my own ability to guide them with text and image.

At the heart of the child's imagination is their ability to see the familiar in new ways. In their flexible, inventive minds the tree becomes a fort, the sand castle a beautiful palace, a shadow of a tree that of a snarling sharp-toothed monster. To me, this *re-seeing* of the known is an important aspect of imaginative transport. It is a way to bridge the real and the imaginary and can be transcribed into my artwork through characterization. In a majority of my work, I alter the forms of figures to exaggerate certain memorable moments of my illustrated characters. The term caricatures can easily be used to describe this issue, though in reality, it is more about personifying those creatures that I choose for my narratives. By providing the characters with a personality and perhaps some fantastic alterations of form, they become readily relatable to the audience and also engaging in their ties to the imaginary. They playfully bring the child's attention to the whimsical world of "make-believe". In my character sketch entitled *Cardinal Bigglesworth*, I take the common form of a cardinal and personify him to show emotion and identity. This causes the viewer to engage in his story as though he were a person. His obviously negative disposition is conveyed through his feathery furrowed brow and it elicits questions from the viewer such as, "What is this bird's story? What has caused his displeasure?" These thoughts prove that the cardinal has come to represent something much greater than a sketch of a bird on a branch. He has become a sentient being, carrying a story with him. With one image, this has become a narration of a story and a created world of a character.

The child has the ability to imagine that these characters exist beyond their physicality as a drawing on a page. I view each of my own works as a world in itself,

embodying the characters, settings, and stories ongoing within the illustrated space. The audience can reach these worlds by engaging the content through reading, and ultimately empathizing with those characters that exist within the story. My goal is for my audience to see each of my works as a “portal” through which they can travel into this separate world. I want them to believe, on some level, that these fantastic creations and humorously unbelievable characters actually exist within their own paralleling narratives. With children, the concept of another world is elementary—they read stories to gain an adventure and to believe in fantasy. In this way, they are “re-seeing” the familiar in a new way, as through their own play and “make-believe” time. In the same way, I want to convince the viewer that travelling into this “portal” can allow them to fully experience the world of the characters. In order for this experience to occur, there is a necessity for an active imagination, a key feature in the mind of the child. *Alex’s Alphabetical Book of Adventures* is a particularly strong example of my use of the illustrated “portal”. As the child reads this hand bound story, they are drawn into the world of the little boy, Alex, and his fantastic adventures. This “drawing in” occurs through the portal-like images that repetitiously appear on each page containing a snapshot of the world in which Alex lives. I am interested in each piece of my work containing this same “portal” quality that provides the viewer with an entrance point into the world of the depicted characters, whether in the form of a storybook or a simple character sketch. By gaining access to the world within each work, the imagination of the audience is further stimulated and engaged, providing the potential for boundless creation.