Although I tackled two very different projects in my thesis, a few guiding themes still emerged that weren't apparent until stepping back: examining our relationship to the environment both past and present, and an enthusiasm for learning. More than anything, I want to impart how important it is to care, how there are so many large, mysterious systems that govern our world that we can't ever fully unravel, so many old bones beneath us and new stars above. But while you certainly don't have to know everything to be happy, it’s really worth your time to be curious. There’s so much to learn right under your feet; rocks, animals and the weather are some of the few things that don't demand our attention nowadays, which is why it's even more important to give it. Dinosaurs feature so prominently because they encapsulate a lot of this concept; they represent both mystery and nostalgia, and are simultaneously understood as a complicated scientific field of study and a fictionalized movie monster. But somewhere in the middle of those two perceptions, or maybe divorced entirely, are real animals who once existed. Since it's unlikely we'll resurrect them any time soon (nor should we), us and dinosaurs will continue to remain at an unbreachable temporal distance, and we’re left with nothing else to do but speculate, and I’m interested in the various ways we’ve tried to close that gap. Another important aspect of this project was reflecting on my homeschooled upbringing, with its focus on hands-on learning rather than formal assignments. That approach fostered a passion for ecology and science in a way that was far more formative than I'd realized at the time. Animals, curiosity, and investigation have become a significant driving force in all of my work; in a way, I’m now making these pieces for my younger self.

What I take away from that upbringing now is that we are a part of nature, and to pretend the human species has somehow transcended the environment it exists in is belligerent ignorance. Whether we’re aware of it entangling us or not, that web cannot be severed. Humans don’t control nature, we just sculpt it around a little; we’ve domesticated plants and animals, pruning their behavior and appearance to suit our way of life, but we haven’t created anything new. We’re just rearranging the blocks that have been there the whole time. My hope for the viewer is that they leave after viewing these pieces feeling a little more curious, a little more connected.
Although I tackled two very different projects in my thesis, a few guiding themes still emerged that weren't apparent until stepping back: examining our relationship to the environment both past and present, enthusiasm for learning, and the importance of tactility in an increasingly digital age. More than anything, I want to impart how important it is to care, how astonishing it is that there’s so much nature and so much world out there, the vastness of time and of the smallness of people, and how the main way we can honor all that is by giving it all a close look and reflecting back what we see. There are so many large, mysterious systems that govern our world that we can’t ever fully unravel, so many old bones beneath us and new stars above. But while you certainly don’t have to know everything to be happy, it’s really worth your time to be curious. There’s so much to learn right under your feet; rocks, animals and weather are some of the few things that don’t demand our attention nowadays, which is why it's even more important to give it.

For the fall semester, I set out to take some time to explore methods of production and repetition, of integrating craft and illustration to play toward the strengths of both. The end result is what I’ve been calling a “tabling collection”, because these would optimally be items to bring and sell at an art fair or ecommerce platform rather than the traditional avenue for licensing where the image rights are bought out and the production is outsourced.

I chose to focus on dinosaurs as my subject matter; they represent both mystery and nostalgia, and are simultaneously understood as a complicated scientific field of study and a fictionalized movie monster. But somewhere in the middle of those two perceptions, or maybe divorced entirely, are real animals who once existed. Since it's unlikely we'll resurrect them any time soon (nor should we), us and dinosaurs will continue to remain at an unbreachable temporal distance, and we're left with nothing else to do but speculate. In fact, speculation and extrapolation is all dinosaurs are, in a way, be it in the form of an elegant reconstruction or a rubber suit. I’m very interested in how we think of all that distance, and the various ways we’ve attempted to bridge the gap. So with this project, I'm bridging that gap in my own way by pulling these big unknowables close, lovingly painting and printing them over and over again.

My goal in ceramic production is to create objects that are functional and have a simple, user-friendly construction, but also don't deny their handmade roots. Vessels are thin and
balanced, but are rarely symmetrical, with gesture and prominent throwing lines present. The wavy handle on the mugs gives them an iconic silhouette while remaining inviting and ergonomic. In addition, it reinforces the shape language of the surface design, implying a feather or a claw. I worked in wheel-thrown Stoneware and cone 10 glazes with high iron content—notably Celadon—for this project. I'm drawn to these materials because the end result is sturdy, smooth, and easy to care for, but the glazes are quite reactive and stylishly unpredictable without interfering with the drawing too much. I approach the act of throwing a bowl much like capturing a gesture in midair; the spinning of the wheel is a very kinetic act which transfers that energy into forming a vessel. In other words, the circular nature of bowls and cups inherently has an implied perpetual movement; a circle is a very active shape that makes them uniquely suited to active surface design. Thus, the vessels are painted with figures that are flying, swimming, and running. Even the sleeping Tyrannosaurus lilts with the curved surface of the bowl. I love the blue-green Celadon glaze over the gray clay body because it leaves a lot of things muted, like you're peering through fog or rain at the subjects. The finished result are these quiet but saturated colors that require you to lean in close and let your eyes adjust, which thematically ties into the mystique and temporal distance of the prehistoric subjects. I made 20 velociraptor mugs, with the concept that they're all individuals within a pack. But now, as they're all sold and separated, they'll move on to their own hunting grounds. In this way, the mere gathering and dispersing of them becomes a narrative.

The other major aspect of this project was my work in wearable textiles, notably t-shirts. I had never done screenprinting before this year, and with the help of Jessica Pinsky and Praxis Fiber Workshop, I developed a distinct process for textile design: I first started with a pencil rendering, which was then bitmapped and exposed on the screen. With how much fine detail was present in the bitmap, I didn't want to print in ink, which sits on top of the fabric and can sometimes flake off if small details. Instead, I used a mixture of dye and alginate that allowed the pigment to permeate the fabric and produce very defined details. In the end, I did discover that this technique was more successful on woven fabrics like cotton than the slightly uneven, ribbed surface of T-shirts, but it nevertheless produced a very unique final product.

I learned a lot of great skills by the end of this project, and am very proud of the final result. But now in hindsight, there's many things I would like to further iterate on and tackle in the future that this project has set into motion. For example, I would like to explore figurative, sculptural ceramics further, utilizing the shape language and colors I've established here. I
would also like to get more familiar with sgraffito techniques to give my drawings more dimension. In fibers, I would love to further examine the dye screenprinting technique with multi-layer prints that make proper use of the transparent, optical mixing nature of the dye. There are many doors that have opened thanks to this project, and I look forward to further integrating craft into my Illustration work.

For my second project, I decided early on to choose something that would bolster my Illustration portfolio itself rather than continue to experiment with multimedia applications, so that both aspects of my body of work would have their time to shine. For inspiration, I looked back to my younger self, and started thinking about education. Growing up homeschooled, I didn't read many textbooks; Instead, a lot of my learning was either hands-on field trips or "edutainment" media such as documentaries, interactive websites, and nonfiction books. Even TV series like Mythbusters encouraged a spirit of investigation and curiosity. All of these things really fostered a passion for ecology and science in a way that more structured classroom settings often don't, and these experiences were far more formative than I'd realized at the time. Animals, curiosity, and investigation have become a significant driving force in all of my work. But with this project, I set out to involve ecology and education into my portfolio in a meaningful way that reflects that upbringing and enthusiasm; in a way, I'm making these things for my younger self.

In the end, we are a part of nature, and to pretend the human species has somehow transcended the environment it exists in is belligerent ignorance. Whether we're aware of it entangling us or not, that web cannot be severed. Humans don't control nature, we just sculpt it around a little; we've domesticated plants and animals, pruning their behavior and appearance to suit our way of life, but we haven't created anything new. We’re just rearranging the blocks that have been there the whole time. Although humans have done and continue to do irreparable damage to the planet, that doesn't mean our entire species is some sort of parasite at odds with the "natural order". Like any relationship, it's a constant give and take for the viewer to leave after viewing these pieces feeling a little more curious, a little more connected.

My workflow utilizes the strongest of both digital and traditional mediums; I will first sketch out my compositions digitally, where I can move and resize elements with ease, and fidget with the lines and shapes as much as they need. It isn't unlike piecing together a puzzle, with the intent to minimize negative space without making things too crowded. I'll then transfer the lines to paper and render with acrylic, colored pencils, and wax pastels. I believe that traditional media has a warmth and imperfection that's sometimes tough to replicate in digital
art, and its limitations often become its strengths. The end result is a piece that has both precision and spontaneity in precisely the right amounts.

Concerning text, I became more interested in supporting the energy of a piece rather than playing by established rules, so I ended up utilizing a lot of soft, organic text bubbles and gestural hand lettering. There are even a few places where text runs through the gutter, which is usually a grave graphic design sin, but even this was intentionally done to help keep the energy of the piece up. Several magazines I looked at in the research phase, such as Aquila and Illustoria, had text and important graphics sitting within the gutter, which is why I felt comfortable using it in my own work.

Although this was an editorial project, I was more focused on playing to my own strengths as an illustrator than playing by established rules within the format, and I’m very satisfied with the end result. In the future, I would love to do another series of this style of illustration that focuses more intently on a single topic rather than exploring a wide breadth. This would give me the chance to linger a little longer with atmosphere and progression, as if the topic were a short story.
The Mesozoic Collection
Ceramics and Textiles
Grace Bohlen
Class of 2021

May 3-7 Illustration Studios Defense Monday, May 3rd 11AM

WELCOME!

Little Things in a Large World: Ecology Editorial
May 3-7 Illustration Studios Defense Monday, May 3rd 11AM
Stop by for some free stickers!
Grace Bohlen
Class of 2021

yay!
THANK YOU

To my committee,
Suzanne McGiness
and
Beth Halasz

And of course, you, for being here!

Special thanks to
Alberto Veronca
and
Jessica Pinsky
the Mesozoic Collection

Grace Bohlen
Fall Thesis
WHY DINOS?

I chose to focus on dinosaurs as my subject matter because they represent both mystery and nostalgia, and are simultaneously understood as a complicated scientific field of study and a fictionalized movie monster. But somewhere in the middle of those two perceptions, or maybe divorced entirely, are real animals who once existed. Since it’s unlikely we’ll resurrect them any time soon (nor should we), us and dinosaurs will continue to remain at an unbreachable temporal distance, and we’re left with nothing else to do but speculate. So in painting and printing them over and over again, I aim to pull them a little closer.
THESIS

A licensing collection for personal use, coined a “tabling collection”, with the purpose of melding illustration and craft into one cohesive body of work that can become the basis for a larger brand and practice.
THE TYRANTS
Process Photos at Praxis Fiber Workshop
Sketches
THE RAPTORS
Sketches
THE Pterosaurs
Dearly departed angels...
THANK YOU!

Most of what you've seen is for sale!

But more on that later. For now, let's move on to...
Little things in a Large World: Ecology Editorial
Why Science Editorial?

Growing up homeschooled, I didn’t read many textbooks. Instead, a lot of my learning was either hands-on field trips or "edutainment" media such as documentaries, interactive websites, and nonfiction books. Even TV series like Mythbusters encouraged a spirit of investigation and curiosity. All of these things really fostered a passion for ecology and science in a way that more structured classroom settings don’t always arrive at, and these experiences were far more formative than I’d realized at the time. Animals, curiosity, and wonder have become a significant driving force in all of my work. But with this project, I set out to involve ecology and education into my portfolio in a meaningful way that reflects that upbringing and enthusiasm; in a way, I’m making these things for my younger self.
THESIS

A series of editorial illustrations for the middle grade market, centered around natural science topics, with the goal to promote curiosity and enthusiasm for learning.
Seed Magazine - Two-person risograph zine for kids. Very small, but packs a punch.

Illustoria - Major emphasis on the art itself. A lot of artists I really respect have worked with them!

Ask - from Cricket, who hire a LOT of freelancers. Just a little younger than my target audience.

Aquila - what first inspired this project! Science-focused, informative and fun, and doesn't compromise with the art.
The font!

I made my own handwriting into a font for some of the body text. I found that anything else just didn’t feel natural, and having the flexibility to choose between hand lettering and a custom typeface opened a good few doors design-wise.
WHAT'S IN YOUR SAND?
Billions of years of your feet!

TRASH!
Man-made material, often from plastic, rubber, or glass. This material is not naturally occurring and can harm marine life.

Rocks!
Sand is mostly tiny bits of rock. It can be very old, too–millions, or even billions of years old!

Pink!
Ireland is famous for its pink sand, which is formed with the remains of blue-celled animals called Pyrodictium. Even though they look like tiny pinkish, this sand is actually white!

Black!
This means nearly no life activity, and the sand comes from deep water areas.

White!
It's usually white because it's formed by the remains of dead corals and then eroded into sand, or by looking like sand from the crystal sand.

Bones!
Crushed up bits of more living creatures, like corals and shells, become part of the sand.

Color can tell you a lot!
Sand is mostly made of granular particles of rocks often quartz, can also have biomaterial like shells and single cell organisms, and ever increasingly manmade material like glass and plastics.

Single piece of quartz sand can be millions of years old. Beaches hold a massive amount of history and information about surrounding environment.


Aeronomologists: study, "read" sand
There and Back Again:

Amazing migrations

Monarch Butterflies' journey is 3-4 generations long.

We know that all Freshwater Eels travel to the Sargasso Sea, but we don't know what exactly happens there.

All sorts of animals go on yearly migrations, and for many different reasons—some move with the seasons in search of food and warmth, while others travel many miles to rear their young. But no matter the reason, migrations are an astonishing example of the delicate rhythms that make earth so special.

Zebras, Wildebeests, and Antelopes are constantly on the move together in a massive, year-long cyclical journey through Central Africa, not unlike a giant clock.

Arctic Terns take their seasonal migration from the North to the South Atlantic, which is equivalent to flying around the whole globe 5 times.

Salmon undergo a shocking physical transformation on the way back to their ancestral spawning grounds.

Common Swifts go non-stop for ten months straight.

They eat, drink and even sleep in the air.
the incredible EGG

An egg is one enormous single cell, much like any other animal cell. It's big because it's stashed full of nutrients for a developing chick (or your breakfast). It's literally all baby food.

A healthy hen will lay 5 eggs every week year-round, save for a short break in the fall when they put all their energy toward laying and re-growing their feathers.

Chicken eggs can be white, brown, blue, green, streaked, and any color in between. The color of the shell doesn't affect the hue or look of the inside; that's influenced by the hen's diet. You can tell what color egg a hen lays by looking at her earlobe.

Albino

Yolk
All about eggs

Eggs are a highly specialized, VERY large single large cell, similar in structure to any other animal cells but thousands of times bigger. Think of the yolk like a nucleus, and the shell as the cell wall. They only split into more cells and become a chick if they’re fertilized. It’s mostly so big because it holds so many extra nutrients for a developing chick (or, if unfertilized, a healthy breakfast).

What’s in an egg? An egg’s main purpose is to feed and protect a developing chick. All the genetic material itself is confined to a tiny white dot on the yolk—everything else is nutritious baby food. Or, your breakfast!

A hen lays about 5 eggs per week, year round, save for a 3ish-week-long molting season, in which they put all their energy toward growing shiny new feathers.

Chicken eggs can be white, brown, speckled, blue, green, or any color in between. The color of the egg doesn’t affect the look or taste of the inside. Rather, the yolk color relates to the hen’s diet—the deeper the orange, the more tasty bugs. You can tell what color egg a hen lays by the color of her earlobe.

Broody: most of the time hens leave their eggs for the farmer to pick up, but they’ll sometimes go “Broody” and try to hatch them. A broody hen becomes very protective of the eggs, and only leaves the nest for food and bathroom breaks.

All animals start as an egg. Mammal eggs are tiny, since they grow inside of and get their nutrients from their mother. Since reptiles and birds grow outside, they need a stockpile of nutrients, which is why the eggs are much much larger.
Smallpox had followed humans around since the dawn of time, taking massive numbers with it. So common, in fact, that roughly 1 in 13 people died from it, and those that survived were often left with lifelong scars. It was a terrible way to go, and something had to be done to prevent it.

The main method used to combat the onslaught was Variolation, in which you’d be exposed to a very small dose of the virus in a controlled setting. Although this did help build up immunity, side effects were harsh and around 2% still died (a major improvement from 30%, but still not great).

in 1796, Edward Jenner, a physician trained in Variolation, observed that milkmaids in his English village didn’t contract smallpox due to their exposure to the much milder disease Cowpox, a common ailment of dairy cows. Both viruses caused itchy bumps on the arms, but Cowpox was never life threatening. He believed the two viruses were closely related, and that the immune system had been "trained" by Cowpox to recognize and fight off Smallpox as well. To test his theory, he enlisted the help of the milkmaid Sarah Nelmes, her cow Blossom, and the son of Jenner’s gardener, 10-year-old James Phipps. Jenner took a tiny amount of pus from a lesion on Sarah’s forearm and incised it into James’s shoulder, and the treatment worked! James never fell ill or contracted Smallpox. Within a few years, the first vaccine (the Latin word for cow is vacca) was widely available, and eventually, the millennia-old blight was completely eradicated.
Edward Jenner: considered father of immunology. Born in Gloucestershire England, 1749. Trained in variolation, which introduces a body to a low dose of smallpox in a controlled setting via 3-5 scratchings, but this method still had significant risk and side effects. Learned that milkmaids didn’t contract smallpox due to their exposure to the similar but less severe cowpox.

Sarah Nelmes: in 1786 Jenner used cowpox pus from this milkmaid’s arm to create the first vaccine.

Blossom: cow that nelmes contracted cowpox from.

James Phipps: 9-yo boy, son of Jenner’s gardener, who received the first vaccine.

Variolation vs vaccination: direct vs indirect exposure. Variolation has been practiced around the world since 19th century, notably in China. Intentional exposure to directly smallpox to build up immunity. Around 2% of variolations resulted in death (far better than 30% contracting naturally). Vaccination is exposure to a similar but less harmful variety of the virus, be it weakened, a less dangerous strain, or even just a benign particle. Side effects are greatly reduced and death is incredibly rare.

Blossom -> Nelmes -> Phipps. Jenner facilitated.

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You're not seeing spots! Black and white Piebald, is present in every domesticated species.

Pigeons are feral, which means they were once kept by people but were left to fend for themselves. They still instinctually hang around human cities.

Dogs are a great example of Selective Breeding, where aesthetic traits are chosen and intensified over many generations.

Domestic Life: our closest friends

Cows were domesticated two distinct times from the now extinct Auroch, becoming Taurine (European) and Zebu (South Asian) Cattle.
Words to know:
- Selective breeding
- Piebald
- Feral

Floppy ears
Black and white, piebalding. Present in almost every domesticated species, and never in the wild. You’re not seeing spots! One of the most common traits of domestication is piebalding, or a black and white splottchy pattern. This color is incredibly rare in the wild, but everywhere in domestic animals. You’re not seeing spots! Piebald, a black and white splottchy pattern, is incredibly rare in the wild, but everywhere in domestic animals.

Dog, cat, goat, horse, boa, chicken (or duck?), beets, squirrel, mouse
Cattle were domesticated twice into distinct species. Bovidae vs. zebu and taurine
Corn was edible in its natural form. Many crops in general. Bananas
All rock pigeons in the Americas are a feral population, which means they were once kept by people but were left to fend for themselves.
Get Ready for Cicada Mania!

Once every 17 years, the East Coast bursts into song, but the musicians aren’t up on a stage or playing on the radio. Instead, they’re crawling up out of the ground and blanketing every tree trunk. You might hear a few cicadas every summer, but in 2021 the Brood X Cicadas, also known as the Great Eastern Brood, will be making their cacophonous appearance in the billions.

Although they might look a little creepy, cicadas don’t bite or sting, so they’re completely safe to handle. But at the ripe old age of 17, there’s a good chance these little bugs are older than you, so have some respect for elders and be gentle!

Males sing by flexing a special muscle called a Tymbal.

Cicadas spend their adolescence underground, tapping into tree roots and slurping up sap as they grow. Once they emerge, they shed their skin and transform from little brown grubs into jewel-eyed fairies, to sing for just a few weeks before laying their eggs and dropping dead. Those eggs fall to the ground and take the place of their parents, sipping sap and patiently awaiting their turn in the sun.
First Pass...

Five More Minutes...

Draw-over

Re-paint
WHAT'S NEXT?

This summer I will be traveling a lot, and from that I hope to embrace more observational and atmospheric work. In general, I want to be more comfortable with spontaneity. Beyond that, I’ll work on fleshing out my personal branding. My goal is to double down on social media, open up an online shop, and get into the rhythm of making and selling goods (screenprinting and ceramics will be the focus) while also expanding my middle grade portfolio, with the end goal of finding an agent and getting some proper freelance work under my belt.
THANK YOU, CIA!