

The land here in my mind looks like it's sketched, drawn in with ballpoint and splashed with watercolor washes. It's patchy - parts of it are vivid, others are merely two colors and a horizon line. It spans out over the course of seventeen years, nearly eighteen now, a world immense and yet forgotten.

The land isn't barren, though it looks to be; at the very beginning is a bustling metropolis, the center of this small universe, the movements of the automobiles and silhouette-inspired inhabitants like a beating heart. The city is basically a copy-and-paste version of every city that I've ever been to, multiples of the same blocks of San Francisco over and over and over, hundreds of Golden Gate Bridges over the partial bay. And my house, multiplied so many times it's like a fungus, taking over, my school the same. But not all of these houses are inhabited, I move from the old to the most new all the time, refiguring my memory as the others are erased into only familiar shapes, frameworks, floor plans.

The people that live in this world don't live in houses; they wander about the landscape as if with no worry. They convene, they meet and chat, they laugh and sing and yet fight and hate each other and separate once more, fading in and out of existence with the landscape itself. Few stick, strong personalities of the mind, taking each blow and dealing with them for better or for worse. Each one has stayed so long that they accumulated faces and names, distinctive personalities, ranks in the imagined hierarchy of this world. I attempted to recreate these personas before, to draw them out in a way that I could see them as tangible, but they're ever changing people. I can't place a clear face to the names anymore, so their personalities and titles represent them.

Who knows if I truly have DID or MPD? I've never been diagnosed. But looking at the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR*, I fit the bill for most of the criteria listed. The four points of diagnosis seem congruent. "Diagnostic criteria for 300.14 Dissociative Identity Disorder. A- The presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states (each with its own relatively enduring pattern of perceiving, relating to, and thinking about the environment and self)." I have three- Marluxia, Guy, and myself but in the past I have recorded up to seven voices filling up my head. "B- At least two of these identities or personality states recurrently take control of the person's behavior." Now this I know for a fact is true. When I'm overloaded with stress or depression, I'll wake up to boatloads of exchanges between friends with responses from me that I won't remember, often much more stern, dark, or playfully scary than I could ever imagine myself to be. "Inability to recall important personal information that is too extensive to be explained by ordinary forgetfulness." If you ask me about any of my early teenage years, childhood, most of it is nothing but a blur or a smudge. ADD explains some, but not all. My most prevalent memories from those times reside in nightmares. "The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., blackouts or chaotic behavior during Alcohol Intoxication) or a general medical condition (e.g., complex partial seizures)." I've never been under the influence of any drug, any alcohol, and never experienced any medical conditions that could explain my extensive memory loss.

Maybe, honestly, this entire project is just reaching for something to call the things I experience mentally. Maybe I'm just striving to name the fear I have of myself and my inner workings, the ones I can't explain. This disorder seems to, on many fronts, address the issues that I find myself questioning when I'm alone in my own head, to bring to light the problems I find and cannot solve.

But perhaps it isn't. Perhaps my self-diagnosis is relevant and truthful. On any front, I do want to find a way to visually display my findings of my mind and myself. In this realm of

thought, I keep coming back inspired by the works of Nick Cave and his sound suits. While I have no idea what they may mean to him, I can imagine they're more than swirling colors and repeating shapes. I want to find a way to display my insides on the outsides, to make my many personalities tangible and real.

My thoughts then rested on the thoughts of tribal masks. In classic use, they were used in traditions for ritual, ceremony, religion, entertainment, and status. Every mask was suited to mean something different, something special. And so I plan to represent the different parts of me in the form of multiple masks, ones that I can wear and remove and replace to signify my changes, signify them in a way others can understand through outward expression.

The masks I make will be personal, of course, but I also wish to make them relatable to the larger audience. While they will be representative of who I am as a person, they will also cover the main feelings that any human being feels - loneliness, depression, mortality, love, fear, bliss, and lust. These main parts of myself are parts that others have as well, the difference being that these emotions have become more than words and have manifested themselves into personalities with names and traceable faces, ones that I can map in my mind's eye as they traverse the landscape of my memory. I wish to capture them as they are now, so that I may track their progress and rotate through them to see which ones break the surface of my mind and enter the real world with me, what triggers these changes, what makes them whole.

After I wrote this, I figured out that truly, my multiple facets hadn't been the focus of my mind in a long time; many personalities and characters had faded into the expansive landscape, leaving me alone with my thoughts for the most part, the reasons for this I believe to be the absence of strong depression and dramatics. For a while, things were at an emotional low for me, and I could relax. Ever since I came to Oxbow, my depression's spiked, but don't take that the wrong way- I love being here more than anything, it's just... Not home. Most of my friends have left or gotten kicked out, and I've felt more alone and depressed than I have in a long time. I miss home, my friends, my house, and I miss feeling like I actually live for others. I know most people say to live for yourself, but other people are too important to me to say that I truly live only for myself. Anyway, the loss of human contact and loneliness has slowly led me to believe that one of the worst parts of me has been reincarnated.

I created a character named Kyros, a *synx* (a terrible parasitic eel known for eating children in the night). I've known of this fabricated species for a long time, and in the past was extremely disturbed and frightened by them. But as soon as Kyros spawned in my mind, he's been the subject of all my stories, the controlling personality of my thoughts, the model for most of my recent artwork. I've craved darker and darker things from people, from myself, and let them happen. At least this personality doesn't seem self-destructive, or strong for that matter. But if my fears are real, if Kyros is the reincarnation of my darkest side, I know that as soon as he gains power, he'll attempt to destroy my world.

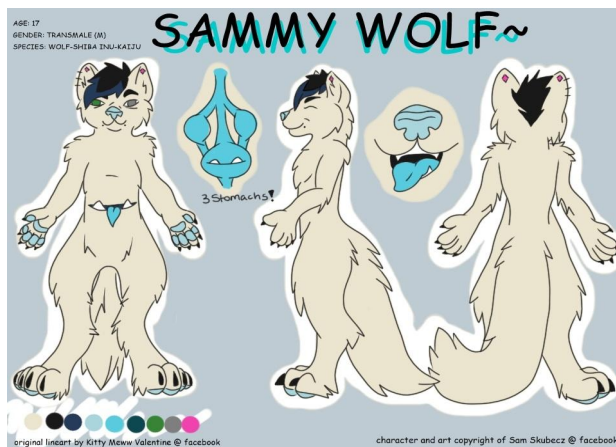
That's one part of the landscape I forgot to mention. Years ago, Guy came through and destroyed a large part of the city of my mind, scrubbed it all out. So I was forced to build a prison for him to live in until he rotted away to death, and we swept his bones out into the street for stray dogs to chew.

As the project progressed, I decided to do something I'd wanted to do for so long... Bring these characters I envisioned to life. At the time, the only one on my mind was Kyros. So naturally, I began to gather the supplies to create him. However, shortly into it I was advised to pursue multiple characters, and so I chose my character Sammy, one I have stuck with and developed for three years now.

Three years ago, I began a part of something widely known as the Furry Fandom, which involved making my own “furry”, a humanoid animal character with intelligence to equal a human’s, maybe extending further. For having a character for three years, he hasn’t changed all that much. His base design has always stayed the same, with minor variations and changes due to real events in my life.

His original design was a simple tan wolf with two green eyes and brown hair with bright green tips. I kept this style for a very long time, until around the time I was dating one of my most significant partners. During a fight we had, the one that caused our decision to split, his left eye went completely grey, to signify his depression. After that spell, he began to cut his bangs to cover that eye completely, and hide his bad side from the world.

After that came a further development of his character somewhat inspired by the film Pacific Rim. I wanted to expose a certain darker side of myself through a parasitic medium, coming up with an alien symbiote that created two extra stomachs inside of his body, as well as an evilly grinning mouth protruding from his stomach.



When it came to making a second head, I immediately jumped at the idea of making my oldest and most beloved character come to life, and as the project raged on I fell out of the idea of making my *baddest* side. After all, I’d taken the bad side of Sammy and exposed him in more than a couple ways already. Most characters came and passed, but standing the test of time for three years was something only Sammy could pull off. I call him, in my own way, a classic character of my own.

There were many stumbling blocks along the road with this project- many indeed. First of all, this was my first time doing *anything* of this caliber. I’d drawn furies and feral animals for years and worked with simple costumes before, but never did I imagine succeeding at fur suit making. First of all came sculpting the base for the head from clay, then casting it in plaster tape. This would be the base mold, acting like the skull of the head. Next came attaching it to a balaclava and sculpting it with foam to build up good shape on the sides and back of the head. Then it was time to tape up the head and cut the individual pieces from fur. After that, I reattached the eyes-, which had sunken into the head under the mass of fur- and completely re-sculpted the nose from high-density foam. The teeth came next, a set I bought from another maker and sadly had to decapitate quite a bit to get them to fit. The piercings were made from diamond shapes of high-density foam, pinheads, and large eyelets.

All in all, the head came together much better than I expected. Even having it sitting on my bedspread next to me as I write is a comfort- I keep looking over at it and smiling. This head was no easy task - constructing it was not the biggest obstacle. Waiting for online orders and being short on money really came into play with this project. A ton of money came out of pocket for this project, the total reaching most likely over \$200, without full reimbursement, however somehow I managed to pull through the home stretch.

At the end of the day, I’m walking away from this with a physical representation of a deeply personal and internal view of myself, one that’ll hold up in the outside world. It will be a

display of something more than my normal appearance and body language can provide to a viewer, something to hopefully spark curiosity in those that find me. I'm not alone in the slightest; either- as I travel and expose this character I've brought to life, I'm sure to find hundreds of others on their own personal journeys. In a large part this piece is an interactive piece- the physical form is important, sure, but what I'm really going to remember are the experiences I have in it around others, being myself with another face.

As I write, I delve into my own mind and I look across the expanse of four months. Oxbow's now a sizable city on the landscape, a small one consisting of the same few rooms over and over, mostly my own dorm and the dining hall - food and comfort, can you tell what I value?

Past my laughably lonely existence at Oxbow, there's light on this area, much more than usual. It's a hopeful sort of light, yellowish in aura and bright, making the setting pleasant and less distant. Somewhere in my mind I know I'm going to have to leave this place someday soon, and I try to push away the notion but it's there, clawing at my mind like a cat at a marionette, playing to indecision and past mistakes. If I'd known where I was now, would I have gone through Oxbow differently?

Perhaps, indeed... For some reason, I feel like I didn't learn much here at all. I feel like I existed in a limbo for four months and the time kept skipping by like a broken record- It's Friday now, but I could swear it was Monday the date before. The thing I learned most about my time here, strangely, was my inability to cope with the environment presented. I learned that, long after I passed through my angst-ridden middle school trauma years, I still feigned a smile whenever I felt less than "okay." I wish I could go back and redo Oxbow more honestly instead of being a hypocrite. I did a social experiment on that very thing, honesty, and yet I went around for four months pretending things were fine and dandy. I maintained better friendships on the Internet than I did with the people I lived with. I felt alone even surrounded by the company of the people I lived with.

Did I change at Oxbow? Not really. I just pulled the same old stunts with brand new people, and they fell for it. I wonder if, by reading this, they'll be surprised. But I blame no one but myself, if I'm being honest. Maybe my own self-exploration and secrecy is what has led me to produce nothing but self-portraits for the past while, maybe I'm still trying to find something hidden deeper than my arms can reach, and friendship is to be my tool. I just couldn't find that help here at Oxbow, or maybe I didn't even make the effort to look for it. However, I don't have any regrets with this project or with coming to this school. It was helpful, just not in the ways I was expecting it to be.