

PRESENTATION - OPEN IN SAFARI

Cultivating Chaos: why your art depends on the unplanned

- first i'll go over my work, and how i got to where i am today
- then, i'll go over my guiding philosophy
- but first:

Thporth! - 1 minute

- this is called Thporth!
- i made my first summer at school

Who am I?

Marcie LaCerte

- I'm from Minnesota, went to the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.
- I live and work in NYC as a motion graphics animator and video producer
- but i moonlight as an **experimental artist**—i've dabbled with websites, games, sketchbooks, and improv

My life's work, in three phases

phase one: DISCOVERING MYSELF IN SCHOOL

- i wanted to go to art school to study illustration, but i quickly moved into animation after watching a lot of experimental indie films on vimeo
- at school, my **attention was divided between experimentation and narrative structure**

here are some embarrassing things i made in school

THE LITTLE SHIPS, 2015 - 2 minutes?

- this is an abstract experimental animation, set to a song

by jean-jacques perrey. it was inspired by the visual music animations of oskar fischinger.

HUBERT MILFORD, 2015 - 2 minutes

- this was my stop motion final and the first film i ever storyboarded. it's unfinished, however, since i was never able to figure out the ending

AN AFTERNOON RIPPLING, 2016 - gifs, 1 minute

- this is my graduation project
- it's a 2d click-and-point game that **combines animation, illustration, and written dialogue**
- it's the first time i successfully **united traditional storytelling with experimentation**
- i graduated with this project **ALSO unfinished**, because, i literally had to learn how to program in unity. however...

LITERALLY LAST WEEKEND, I FINALLY FINISHED THE ENTIRE GAME. So i just want to say that IT'S OK TO FINISH PROJECTS YEARS AFTER YOU PROMISED ALL YOUR FRIENDS THAT YOU'D FINISH

phase two: UNEMPLOYMENT

- after graduating i moved from minnesota to the great state of new jersey
- i was suddenly thrust into the world of freelancing for pennies. and i had to make art that wasn't just for myself, but for CLIENTS
- my mom gave me some advice then. she said that i should learn coding, because that's how people make money
- little did she know that i was already into coding—just not the kind that was employable

SOCIAL MEDIA BIO GENERATOR, 2016 - 1 minute

- this is a generator of social media biographies
- it was a parody i made in my free time for fun and to learn coding basics

MARSLIZARD.NET, 2016 — 1 minute

- this is my personal website. a lot of people were like, i don't know about this, it's not a good portfolio— but...if an employer can't handle me at my WORST, then they don't deserve me at me BEST!!!
- also i made this in 2016 and it basically looks the same today because i mostly forgot how to code

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE, 2017-2018—show gifs? - 1 minute

- i made two films for The School of Life, which is a youtube channel of animations set to long philosophical monologues by this british guy ALAIN DE BOTTON.
- this client also paid pennies - relative to the amount of time it took to finish, since these videos are 5-7 minutes long - but they were great opportunities to practice and experiment

SUMMER OF LOVE, 2017—show full - 3 minutes?

- when i was in school, i had this idea that i would work full time by day, and by night, i would be an indie animator
- little did i know that after graduating i would actually just have a lot of time and very little motivation and money
- but after months of restlessness and sketch-booking i managed to cross something off my bucket list and make an independent short film
- it was lightning in a bottle. the idea —and script— was generated in a single night, and it only took 2 weeks to finish.
- its success was unexpected, but it helped jumpstart my career, kind of

phase three: AM I A JOURNALIST? KIND OF

- so i landed an animation internship at NPR—how? my manager liked my WEIRD WEBSITE

- i taught myself motion graphics on the job, basically. i mostly worked on videos for NPR's youtube channel.

- but i also did some illustration and design. i even acted in a video, but i'm not going to play that

my manager was cool enough to give me almost full creative freedom over one project:

THE MARSHMALLOW TEST, 2018 — 3 minutes

- this is a mixed media stop motion animation for the psychology podcast Invisibilia

- i spent a lot of time painting at my desk and buying/eating marshmallows

- it was fun to make and i learned a lot about nonfiction storytelling

- after npr, i landed a full-time contract gig at Quartz, which is another media company

- i honed my motion graphics skills even further at this job, and my animation output went from primarily hand-drawn to primarily collage-y. this was mostly to accommodate for the time crunch, since i had to make around two minutes - of explainers every week. and collage is also kind of trendy.

- but whenever possible, i tried to insert some of my own weirdness into my motion graphics.

- while i was working at NPR and Quartz, i started getting more interested in explainer videos. which are basically video essays about newsy things. so...i made this.

SHREK, 2018 — show until 4:35

- this is an 8-minute long documentary about shrek, but i'm only going to play half
- just want to clarify that NOBODY asked for it. nobody wanted it.
- the only reason it exists is because i had a supervisor who trusted me enough to helped me write and edit this video, even though i had no prior video-making experience
- i will never make anything as good as this so this presentation is downhill from here

KIDS ON YOUTUBE (2018) — show until 1:25

- i co-produced this "proper" documentary about the perils of kids content on youtube—i pitched the idea, did the interviews, wrote the outline, and did most of the animation
- so, almost a journalist?
- it's 10 minutes long, so i'm just going to play the introduction

- at this point, i wanted to expand my journalism skills, and establish myself at quartz as a **video producer** with an animation background.
- to that end, i pitched a wrote a few articles
- i wrote a newsletter about bricks, one about tik tok, and an article about the Fyre Fest documentaries
- I was trying to legitimize myself in the eyes of my coworkers and manager
- but all my ideas were about internet culture—which basically means memes, but longer
- also i don't have a degree in journalism so it kind of makes sense that i was never able to break through my role as "weird artist troll in the corner"

GEOCITIES (2019)— show until 4:56

- i finished this about a month ago. it's the last thing i made at quartz and it's an explainer about the early internet - and the importance of preserving it

- i produced this with a friend, since we were both interested in the origins of internet culture
- this is about 9 minutes long so i'm going to play a little more than half

CONCLUSION ON MY LIFE'S WORK

- i'll probably keep making art about the internet, on the internet
- almost everything i get paid to do was self-taught after school
- the best things i've made were fostered by an elder who trusted me and gave me structure. this is true both in school and out
- even if i work really really hard at something, if people think your subject matter is silly, they won't respect me for my time or creativity
- as a result, there is a perpetual push-and-pull between my desire to be irreverent and absurd, and to make work that is "respectable" and conforming
- in other words, chaos and order

QUESTIONS?

5 MINUTE INTERLUDE—there is a bag with collage elements. gather whatever images speak to you. maximum 30. if you like only a part of it, that's ok, i have scissors

ON CULTIVATING CHAOS

THE MUPPET THEORY OF CHAOS

- In 2012, Dalia Lithwick published an article in

Slate where she postulated a theory of human behavior.

- Her thesis was that in our world, there is a dialectic between two types of people—order muppets and chaos muppets.

[CLICK]

- Order muppets are neurotic, regimented, and averse to surprises. "They resent the responsibility of the world weighing on their shoulders." That's Bert.

- Chaos puppets are emotional, volatile, warm, fuzzy. "They make their way through life in a swirling maelstrom of food crumbs, small flaming objects, and the letter C." That's Ernie.

- To find out what you are, look at your long-term relationships and collaborative partners. If your partner is an Order Muppet, you are likely Chaos, and vice versa.

LET'S TALK ABOUT CHAOS: What is chaos in art?

it is not mania or anarchy — though if you're naturally inclined towards any of those things you're probably a chaotic muppet

it is absurdity — a truthful randomness

it's the feeling of being drunk on creativity

it's subconscious influence, the id
it's collages and sketchbooks and mood boards
it's making intentionally ugly art
it's made up words by teenagers — yeet, scrappy
it's the feeling of losing your keys inside your
house
it's the internet—good and bad parts
examples

paul mccartney, geocities, yellow submarine the
movie, the carousel scene from strangers on a
train, the actress gong li, daisies, longform improv,
oskar kokoshka, the priest from fleabag, the book
priestdaddy, florine stettheimer, curb your
enthusiasm, truffaut's character antoine doinel,
nina simone, st. vincent, william blake, the song
dionysus by international boyband sensation bts,
the artist lynda barry, and the youtuber
contrapoints

This presentation is heavily chaos-biased, but I
don't want to imply that order doesn't have its
place in art. In fact...

NO CHAOS WITHOUT ORDER

- Let me give you an example.
- Susan Sontag's seminal essay "Notes On Camp" is a collection of vignettes that aim to describe the sensibility of camp
- (it's a fun essay, i recommend reading it)
- But let's talk about how she delivers her message. her writing is articulate. dense. she divides her paragraphs numerically.

[CLICK]

- but her subject matter, "camp", is playful, weird, outrageous, fun.
- in other words, the formality of "notes on camp" contradicts its content. yet her structure is precisely WHY people understand camp, and why her essay is THE essay on camp.
- this tension, between structure and content, reminds me in a lot of ways of something else that artists are familiar with: mood boards

- i make all of my mood boards on this website called are.na.
- it's way better than pinterest because you can have pictures, videos, writing, gifs—it's multimedia
- i make mood boards for basically all my projects—usually for work or freelance

- but i also have mood boards for as-of-yet-unresolved ideas for future projects

- this is something i call [fever dream]

- not sure what it is yet. but it might be something one day.

- i think mood boards are an INTELLIGIBLE chaos. i start with feverish image-gathering, framed impulsively around a vague theme. and then, i cull through the content, picking away at cliches and assumptions, smooshing together unlike things, until i come away with a collection that feels both inspirational and original

IN PURSUIT OF A DEEPER CHAOS

- when i was younger, i didn't think i was capable of being an artist. i loved art, and i loved art class, but i could never draw on my own. i didn't feel creative when i drew—i could only draw from pictures, or with a grid.

- i think as artists we crave beauty. so we have high expectations for it. which can make our own art-making very difficult.

- i wasn't able to break free of these expectations

until AFTER college, when i started keeping sketchbooks.

SKETCHBOOK C

- this was the first sketchbook i kept after school. i started out by drawing from pictures
- but since it was summer, and since i was unemployed, i started going outside and drawing from life a lot
- i listened to podcasts while drawing, which helped occupy that judgmental part of my brain. so the drawings started coming from a more subconscious place
- that helped loosen me up but i still couldn't really conjure anything from my imagination. when i did, it felt stiff, or artificial

SKETCHBOOK B

- i was employed when i started this sketchbook. my commute was an hour each way, so i had a lot of time to draw.
- i think trains are the best place to draw. there are a lot of very still people, and the constant movement of a train really stimulates my brain in a

productive way.

- you don't even have to like the train that you're on. my train of choice was also the literal bane of my existence: new jersey transit. (this is a joke for the new yorkers)
- by drawing in sketchbooks pretty consistently for about a year, i started getting these mystical inclinations towards art and creativity
- there was this one time when i was drawing on about two or three hours of sleep. i was barely a person. but my drawings.....they were some of the best drawings i've EVER done. to this day. they were weird and swirly and completely from my imagination
- (forgot to scan them so you'll just have to imagine something like this, but better)
- i started becoming less and less interested in drawing people from life, and more interested in composing quasi-religious compositions, drawings of figures in a spiritual ecstasy. it's also where i came up with this "chaos" philosophy that i'm presenting right now
- this was weird to me because i've never been religious, or even spiritual
- what's up with that? is this #relatable? anyway:

SKETCHBOOK A

- this is my latest sketchbook. it's mostly collage
- these collages are very intuitive — it takes a lot of time to cut up the pictures, but it takes no time to paste them onto the page
- i've collected old photos since high school for the PURPOSE of eventually collaging them, but i've only recently really dug my hands into my collection
- these collages take shape based mostly on instinct—i look for unique compositions, funny juxtapositions, and colors. ultimately, i trust my gut.
- the more i work in sketchbooks, the deeper i feel that subconscious influence has a far larger part to play in creativity than almost anything else.
- collage is one way to get at the subconscious. another way...

FREE WRITING

- in the artist's way, julia cameron came up with an iconic free writing exercise called "morning pages" — you're suppose to fill up three pages, front and back, by hand, with stream-of-consciousness writing, first thing in the morning.

- i've only done this a few times because i hate waking up early. but i like incorporating writing into my mood boards

- for example: [show an afternoon rippling script]

—

- this is my mood board for an afternoon rippling.
- it started as pictures.
- but since this project was a STORY, i also needed to write an outline
- that outline started as stream-of-consciousness brainstorming.
- the final project isn't a lot like what i had planned here. but that's ok. since i literally worked on this game for YEARS, it was incredibly helpful to go back and see what i was thinking at the start, and recapture my original, much angstier feelings

IMPROV

- but one of the best ways of channeling your inner chaos is through the ART of THEATER:
specifically IMPROV
- [click]
- i took my improv class at UCB. it's an iconic

theater so i had high expectations

- i literally had my class performance last weekend so it's VERY fresh

- some thoughts on improv:

[click]

- i'm pretty bad at it right now which i was NOT expecting, and it's very humbling

- it's better to be cringey and commit to a scene than to be ironically detached. i think this is like finishing a bad drawing instead of ironically X-ing it out

- we did exercises in class where we literally just had a conversation with another person, but on a stage. because that's basically what improv is: being a person on a stage

- this is a pretty famous improv thing. for those who don't know, a fundamental tenet of improv is to respond to your scene partner with "yes, and", not "no, but." my main takeaway from this is that improv is basically not only being a creative person with good and funny ideas, but ALSO trusting that the OTHER person is a creative person with good ideas

i'm paul! - 1 minute

- since i don't have any improv to show you i will show you something that i made in one night with my boyfriend
- he improvised it but i made the video so my name is ultimately the one that gets credit

- to recap what i've talked about so far: chaos is a state of being that every creative person should utilize in their own work.

- in MY work, i am trying to approximate this feeling of bridled mania. of something unhinged boiling beneath an intelligible surface.

- i have not yet attained this chaotic ideal. i'm saying it out loud right now in a karmic attempt to self-actualize it.

- but this is just MY goal, informed by art that i love.

[click]

- but YOU should also care about chaos.

- here are TWO reasons why.

YOUR GUT

- i have a lot of friends who are artists or who work in creative jobs, and when we critique each

other's work, i often hear from them: "oh, i was thinking about changing that, but i wasn't sure if i should."

- not to knock on my friends—but i think this type of attitude is ultimately detrimental.

- if we don't trust our own gut instincts, then what are we relying on to make decisions?

- i think the answer to that is we are relying on what we think we **SHOULD** do.

- for example, at work, i might gravitate towards colors like pink and orange and turquoise, but i know that i **SHOULD** stick with something more palatable in journalistic animation, like greys and blues.

- in my own work, i try not to let that "should" knowledge affect my art. i do what i feel like i want to do. and i do it decisively.

[click]

- when i was in school, i had a really great teacher who told me that i had good instincts.

- i don't think my instincts are necessarily better or worse than anyone else's—but i do think that i trust my instincts more than a lot of people.

- and i think i do that, because i really believe that instincts are the foundation of our inner creative worlds. instincts are what make our art both unique

and relatable.

[click]

- instincts can be fostered intentionally, by exercises like free writing and sketching and making mood boards. but it's just as important, i think, to ingest content—because the more you know about the world, the more you're able to build on it.

- i watch a lot of movies and read a lot of essays and listen to a lot of podcasts not just for inspiration, but to stow these stories away in my subconscious. so that when i am creating my own art, my gut instincts will be stronger and more decisive.

- the adage of "learning the rules before breaking them"—i'm kind of advocating for that, but for the part of your brain that lies dormant.

here is a depiction of my subconscious. not really. but it's dreamy and floaty in the way that i think all our subconsciouses are. i call it "the cluster." it's where i digitally organize all my notes, loose ideas, processes, and intentionally bad artwork, like "i'm paul!"

as much as i'd like to say that by fostering my

subconscious, i can pump out the world's most beautiful and unique and inspiring art on the reg, i can't. most of my output is pretty bad, objectively. but, if there's one thing that i want you take from this presentation, it's that the MAGIC is in the UNPLANNED.

[click]

THE MAGIC IS IN THE UNPLANNED

[click]

- here's what i mean by that. in my improv class, our scenes were based on monologues that were inspired by audience prompts. these monologues weren't MEANT to be hilarious—they were like funny little stories that you'd tell a friend or on a date.
- most of the time, the scenes that bloomed from these monologues were plucked from the CORE of the story. so if the monologue happened in a grocery store with a clerk, the set up for the first scene would usually also be set in a grocery store with a clerk.
- but the moments we laughed the hardest were in the moments where we felt surprise. which isn't to say randomness—that comes naturally in improv—

but in **surprise that felt truthful**. which is the absurd.

[click]

- a lot of improv beginners will try to plan their scenes and characters from the get-go. i do this, too. it's really hard not to, because it's scary to be thrust into the unknown, especially when that unknown is on a stage under a spotlight in front of people.

- but the moments i got the hardest laughs—or when i FELT the most “in the zone”—were when my lines or actions were unplanned. when i was reacting to the other person or situation in a truthful way. in improv, this is called “top of your intelligence”

- this is when improv is at its best—when the actors on stage aren't actors on a stage. they're people.

[click]

- here's another example. In Aristotle's Poetics, he writes about what makes a successful tragedy.

[click]

He says that the stories that induce the most fear and pity are produced by “incidents which, though unexpected, are seen to be no mere accident but the inevitable result of what has gone before.”

[click]

- In other words, the best endings are the ones that are both surprising and inevitable.

[click]

- Most of what we do is in service of the inevitable. Writers write outlines so that they know where their story—or presentation—is going. Artists make mood boards and sketches and character designs so they can know what their art will look like.

- But the best part of any project is when our brains react to our own plans, and say, “fuck that.” because that’s where the truth of the human experience is—not in anything we can predict or plan for. it’s in the chaos.

ACTIVITY

- with chaos and collaboration in mind, i’d like you guys to do this exercise

- you have images in front of you. here is a sheet of paper with two halves. take those images and start collaging.

- trust your instincts. be playful. have fun.

- feel free to create two separate collages or one that spans the page. but know that it WILL be

folded.

- i'm going to play a very good podcast for you while you work on this

- there is a swear word so be warned

- you have 10 minutes

(stop at 11:50)

- ok STOP what you're doing.

- glue down the last things that need to be glued down.

- now fold your papers in half, so that you can't see the collage.

- write your name on the back in pencil.

- get up

- trade your sheet of paper with someone else

- NO PEEKING

- when you get a new collage, write your name in pencil on the back

- then, finish the collage with your images

- again, have fun, be playful, and don't worry about steamrolling, or being precious with other person's collage

- treat it as if you are receiving RAW materials with which you can transform in ANY way

- and in the back of your head, try to figure out WHAT principle you are being guided by while collaging—what your theme might be, or what you

notice when something "clicks" on the page

- you have 10 minutes to finish

(finish podcast)

now let's go around the room and briefly present!