

OVERLOOKED COMPANIONS

By

Ellen C. Morris

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Psychology.

Thesis Advisor: Kenneth Smith

April 2021

© 2021, Ellen C. Morris



May 21, 2021

Ken Smith, M.F.A.
Thesis Advisor

Date



May 23, 2021

Joseph O'Connor, M.S.
Committee Member

Date

Roann Barris

May 22, 2021

Dr. Roann Barris
Committee Member

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter 1: Fundraising Campaign Components and Techniques.....	5
Mural Experience: Blacksburg, VA.....	5
Mural Process and Techniques Used.....	6
Acrylic Painting Components and Process.....	8
Website and Digital Media.....	10
GoFundMe Campaign.....	13
Chapter 2: Social Influences.....	14
Project Influence and Rationalization.....	14
Chapter 3: Self-Assessment and Future Plans.....	16
SVASC Impact Analysis.....	16
Future Business Opportunity.....	17
Bibliography.....	18
List of Figures.....	19

INTRODUCTION

Many graphic designers are also fine artists at heart. The graphic design field is based on creating products for a particular client, usually with the intention of making the client money. A fine artist creates work usually meant to be appreciated through aesthetic or intellectual means. I've been contemplating this concept of creative intention for a long time. I want to find a way to use my skills, not only to make money for a client, but to also contribute to my community in a more positive and compassionate way.

Most of my illustrative and design experience has been founded on the intention of making a profit, whether it was for me or for someone else. It didn't matter what the content was, as long as it resulted in someone making money. During my time as a graduate student, I found that this reality wasn't enough for me. To feel fulfilled as a creative professional, I needed to find a way to use my creative passions to initiate a positive change among my community instead of feeling as if I was commercializing those passions.

Before starting my graduate career, I worked as the Graphic and Multimedia Designer for three years at Wintergreen Resort in Nellysford, Virginia. This position required me to learn how multiple forms of technology could work together across multiple platforms to convey a consistent, unified message. After working long hours in front of a computer, sometimes I needed to decompress by revisiting traditional art materials. This led me back to exploring my love for acrylic painting.

After sharing a few paintings on social media, I started getting requests from family and friends to create custom paintings of their pets. Because this was a great chance for me to keep painting while also making a little money, I took on every request.

During the summer of 2020, I was granted the opportunity to paint a large-scale mural in downtown Blacksburg. After seeing the direct impact this mural had on the Blacksburg community, I realized this new skillset was a chance to accomplish my goal of initiating positive societal change through using my design and illustrative experience.

Knowing I had the skill set to paint animals, I began brainstorming which local business could benefit the most from these paintings. This is when I came to the idea of creating a mural for a local animal shelter, the Shenandoah Valley Animal Services Center (SVASC). After discussing this idea with my committee, I decided organizing a fundraising campaign for SVASC would offer the chance to utilize many of these skills I had obtained. The forms of media I planned to include in the campaign would consist of a large outdoor mural, several physical paintings, video clips of animals at SVASC, and a website to tie everything together.

This paper is from my personal perspective and explains my journey of developing this comprehensive project using a wide range of skills and techniques.

Chapter 1

Mural Experience: Blacksburg, VA

In March of 2020, the City of Blacksburg hosted a mural design contest with the goal of inspiring hope during a time of uncertainty while the COVID-19 pandemic was starting. Using the program, *Google Earth*, I took a snapshot of downtown Blacksburg's main intersection. I used this snapshot in Adobe Illustrator to design an abstract representation of the image. Because of my marketing experience, I knew including a short phrase on top of the illustration would be a powerful tool for engaging the viewer. I decided to add a two-word phrase to my final design, which can be seen in *Initial Blacksburg Mural Design Concept* (fig. 1).



Figure 1. Initial Blacksburg Mural Design Concept

Downtown Blacksburg Inc. (DBI) notified me that my design was chosen in May of 2020. Initially, the design was meant to be 6' x 6' in size. However, the City of Blacksburg decided to enlarge the mural to 21' x 15' – eight times bigger than the original size. Even though this would be a much bigger project than I anticipated, I decided to take on the challenge to

expand my skillset as a creative professional. The final mural can be seen in *Completed Blacksburg Mural* (fig. 2).



Figure 2. Completed Blacksburg Mural

After finishing the mural in September, I felt a sense of accomplishment I had never experienced before. Realizing that I was capable of accomplishing such a large and complex project gave me the confidence to seek out another opportunity to create another mural, and my MFA thesis became this opportunity.

Mural Process and Techniques Used

Having experience painting colorful animal portraits for friends and family, I knew I wanted to partner with an animal-oriented establishment that would be willing to let me paint on their building. I came to the conclusion an animal shelter would be the most appropriate place for a colorful mural of animals. With this in mind, I visited our local animal shelter, the Shenandoah

Valley Animal Services Center (SVASC), and presented this idea to the shelter director. After receiving permission from the director, I began preparations for creating the mural.

The first step in the process of mural development is to create the mural design. Dogs are the most prevalent animal in humane shelters, so I wanted the mural to accurately represent them. To do this, I included dog breeds that are most commonly found in animal shelters: pit bulls, rottweilers, German shepherds, hounds, and mixed breeds. For reference, I used photos of actual dogs that were at SVASC at the time I designed the mural concept. This decision became very important to me because I wanted this project to be as authentic and realistic as possible. This realistic detail contributes to my goal of societal transformation through developing an emotional attachment to the animals.

To ensure I had plenty of photographic reference material, I visited SVASC and took several dogs out to the yard so I could photograph them in the midst of having fun. Then I used these photos as the subject matter of each physical painting and the digital mural mockup. Unfortunately, the only animals the shelter allowed outside were dogs, so I collected photo references of their cats on social media with the permission of the SVASC director.

The ability to proportionally resize an image is imperative to most graphic design projects, especially when working with outdoor projects. I took detailed measurements of the chosen wall to be painted so that I could design a proportional mural layout using *Adobe Photoshop*. This would allow me to create a composition of the animals with the assurance the design would fit within the dimensions of the wall. Once my design was laid out, I used the *Procreate* program on my iPad Pro to digitally illustrate my composition. The finished illustration was digitally placed on top of a photograph of the wall using *Adobe Photoshop*. This step of the process can be viewed in *SVASC Mural Mockup Draft* (fig. 3).



Figure 3. SVASC Mural Mockup Draft

Acrylic Painting Components and Process

In addition to promoting the center through use of public art, another goal is to raise funds for the animal center. To accomplish this goal, I produced large acrylic paintings, miniature paintings, and photo prints to sell online to SVASC customers. To make sure the shelter benefits from these sales, 30% of all profits will be donated to the organization.

Each painting depicts a dog or cat that was available for adoption at the time the paintings were created. I used my own photography as well as photos published on the center's social media page with permission from the director. The images were projected onto each canvas using a *BenQ TH671ST* projector while making sure to keep the design elements in mind to form a balanced, yet interesting composition. This technique can be seen in *Image Composition Placement Using Projector* (fig. 4).

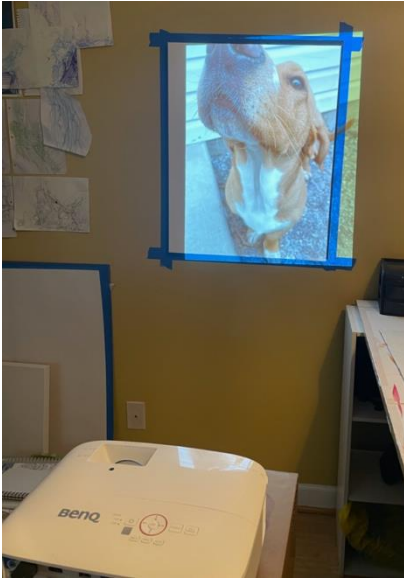


Figure 4. Image Composition Placement Using Projector

I chose the unique canvas sizes in consideration of the gallery space available for this series of work. When placed next to each other in the gallery, the contrast between sizes inherently causes interest among the viewers because of this absence of consistency.¹ However, if there is no consistency at all, there is a chance the body of work will lack cohesion. To achieve this cohesion, I chose a consistent color palette to use in the visual elements of the fundraising campaign. These colors are used throughout the acrylic paintings, as well as the digital mural mockup.

When I start a painting, I paint the background color first, followed by the darkest shadows of the subject. Mid-tones are painted next, and the highlights are then added on top of the mid-tones. From personal painting experience, GOLDEN Fluid Acrylics have been the most consistent in quality because of its opaqueness and its versatility with other GOLDEN products. To slow down the drying time of the acrylic paint, GOLDEN Retarder is added, therefore

1. Cameron Chapman, "The Principles of Design and Their Importance," accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.toptal.com/designers/ui/principles-of-design>.

allowing time to blend all layers of paint. As a way to bring more attention to the subject, I add a touch of color around the animal. I finished the painting with a second layer of color on the background, making sure to cover up any white canvas that was missed when adding the first layer. I used the name of the animal being represented to title each painting. This allows viewers to associate each painting with a living, breathing animal, thus strengthening the emotional connection between each viewer and the shelter animal represented.

Website and Digital Media

An online presence is essential in running a successful campaign. Creating a website is the perfect way of establishing that presence. One of the goals of this project is to persuade a call-to-action response from the public, and a website allows for this opportunity. Using the website builder, Squarespace, I created an ecommerce online portfolio to sell the acrylic paintings, miniature paintings, and photo prints.

When someone donates to a cause they feel is important, they usually want to know their donation is making a direct impact to the cause they are supporting.² Because of this, I wanted to let the customer know that 30% of all profits will be donated to the animal center. In the “SHOP” section of the website, this information is listed at the top of the page. This knowledge will help the customer know their contribution is directly helping the cause. Having smaller paintings and photo prints available for purchase gives the option for those who can’t afford the larger paintings to feel like they are also contributing to the campaign. Another benefit of having a website is the opportunity to elaborate on the cause itself and why it is important. This message

2. Will Schmidt, “Surefire Ways to Run a Successful Fundraising Campaign,” accessed April 13, 2021, <https://www.classy.org/blog/8-surefire-ways-to-run-a-successful-fundraising-campaign/>.

will be available to anyone who has access to the internet, which gives the campaign a chance to reach those outside of the local community.

While constructing this website, my experience in marketing and digital media became a valuable asset. Not only was my experience helpful in designing the website, but also in creating the elements within the site. When a visitor arrives at the homepage, they are welcomed with a lively video clip of dogs at SVASC playing and running around outside. My decision to do this was based on the fact that humans process images 60,000 times faster than text, with up to 90% of all information processed being visual.³ Therefore, introducing the website with a video immediately captivates the visitor, which encourages further exploration of the site. The footage was obtained during the same visit to SVASC when reference photos were taken. Showing the dogs displaying affection and energy was the most effective way to show shelter animals in a positive light. In order to obtain this footage, I needed to move around and play with the dogs while having my hands free. Wearing a head mount with an attached *GoPro* action camera was the most efficient way to get this footage. *Adobe Premiere Pro* was used during post-production to combine the best video clips, which resulted in the final video.

Quality presentation of sale items is also a high priority when developing an online store. I purchased and downloaded mockup files from a stock website and used them for presenting the paintings and photo prints. These mockups are helpful for the customer to envision the artwork in a similar environment to where they plan on displaying the painting or photo print, thus encouraging the purchase of the particular item. An example of this presentation technique can be seen in “*Space-Jam*” *Painting Mockup* (fig. 5).

3. Harris Eisenberg, “Humans Process Visual Data Better,” accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.t-sciences.com/news/humans-process-visual-data-better>.



Figure 5. "Space-Jam" Painting Mockup

Presenting the miniature paintings would require a different approach. Pulling from past photography experience, I knew constructing a lightbox would provide the best lighting to photograph each painting, especially because I didn't have the access to professional lighting equipment. The lightbox was created using an empty cardboard box, white tissue paper, and white posterboard. Large holes were cut into the sides of the box, then covered with the semi-transparent tissue paper and kept in place using tape. Large pieces of white posterboard were laid across the back and bottom of the box to give the illusion of a seamless background. After completing the lightbox, I placed two lamps on the left and right sides of the box. The tissue paper diffuses the light, which provides consistent lighting on every perspective of the object that is being photographed. This technique is an effective way to light a small object when professional equipment isn't available. Once this setup is ready, each miniature painting is placed inside the lightbox and photographed using a camera attached to a tripod. Each painting is

photographed in the same position to maintain consistency throughout all photos. This lightbox setup can be seen in *Self-Constructed Lightbox for Photographing Small Objects* (fig. 6).



Figure 6. Photographing Miniature Paintings Using Self-Constructed Lightbox

GoFundMe Campaign

Ironically, funding this campaign required the development of a personal fundraiser using the crowdfunding site, *GoFundMe*. The marketing logic I used to design the website was used to design my *GoFundMe* webpage. A time-lapse video showing the creation of my largest painting is presented first. Videos portraying demonstrations or “how-to” information are more likely to add value to the site as well as enhance retention rates.⁴ An overview about the fundraising campaign for SVASC is listed immediately after the video to explain why the *GoFundMe* campaign is worth donating to. Supplemental photos of the paintings and mural mockup are included as well. To conclude, a description of what the funds will be spent on is listed at the end.

4. Torrey Tayenka, “5 Reasons Why You Need Video in Your Marketing Strategy,” accessed April 16, 2021, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/333562>.

Chapter 2

Project Influence and Rationalization

The concept of the “backfire effect” can play a part in why some members of society don’t consider new perspectives on particular topics. The “backfire effect is when a correction leads to an individual increasing their belief in the very misconception the correction is aimed to rectify.”⁵ In regard to the stigmas against shelter animals, two of the most common misconceptions about shelter animals are that they’ve been surrendered to a shelter because of inherent aggression and the inability to be trained. People who believe in this myth don’t realize that when a dog shows a negative trait, such as aggression or timidity, it is usually caused from stressful conditions the animal goes through while at the shelter, not because they are inherently aggressive or disobedient. However, when facts like this are shared with society, more often than not, these facts aren’t enough to change someone’s ingrained beliefs.⁶ This is when emotional marketing becomes a better option for influencing one’s experience to a particular message.

The Subaru automobile manufacturer presented an event campaign in 2008 where they partnered with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The event uses the strategy of emotional motivation to market their product and promote their brand. During the months of November, December, and January, \$250 is donated to the ASPCA for every new car purchased or leased. Since the campaign started in 2008, over \$32 million has been donated to the ASPCA. This money has helped nearly 64,000 shelter animals. Seeing the

5. Briony Swire-Thompson, Joseph DeGutis and David Lazer, “Searching for the Backfire Effect: Measurement and Design Considerations,” PsyArXiv, May 15, doi:10.31234/osf.io/ba2kc.

6. Bethany Adams, “Shaking Off Stigmas,” accessed April 22, 2021, <https://humanepro.org/magazine/articles/shaking-stigmas>.

success of this campaign gives me hope that my own fundraising campaign will benefit SVASC, as well as bring awareness of this social problem to those in my community.⁷

7. ASPCA, “The Annual Subaru Share the Love® Event,” accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.asPCA.org/about-us/strategic-cause-partnerships/subaru/subaru-share-love>.

Chapter 3

SVASC Impact Analysis

As mentioned before, I will be donating 30% of all profits from my paintings to SVASC. The paintings will be available for purchase through the website, www.overlookedcompanions.com. After two months, the remaining paintings will be put on display and available for purchase at the local veterinary clinic. Once all paintings are sold, the shelter will have received approximately \$850. To reassure SVASC of my loyalty to this fundraiser, I created a formal, detailed contract for us both to sign. This legally requires me to follow through with our agreement, which helps SVASC have more faith in our partnership.

The physical location of SVASC is on a remote road about 10 minutes outside Waynesboro City. Even though the building can easily be seen from the road, the building itself is gray in color and visually dismal. Because of this and the lack of signage, not many people in the community notice the shelter. Adding the mural to the most visible side of the building would help passersby notice the shelter, which would encourage them to stop and take a closer look. According to the director of SVASC, the mural would also provide an attractive backdrop for adoption photos, which would then be posted on social media. Using the mural as a consistent design element in their social media marketing would further establish their brand while also peaking the community's interest in the shelter.

The director and I also discussed the benefits of painting the mural in downtown Waynesboro. Even though a mural would bring more attention to the physical shelter, there isn't much traffic on the road it is located on. If the mural is located in a more populated area like downtown, more people would see it, therefore increasing the community's awareness of SVASC. To see if this would be possible, I contacted the City of Waynesboro's Tourism and

Recreation Department. I was then directed to Terry Ward, Art Director of Waynesboro's Virginia Street Arts Festival. After presenting this idea to Mr. Ward, he assured me that he will find wall space for the mural in or around downtown Waynesboro. He also invited me to participate in the upcoming Virginia Street Arts Festival as a new muralist. This opportunity will allow me to gain more connections in the professional mural and art community.

Future Business Opportunity

When I first started painting pet portraits for family and friends, it was a way to enjoy using traditional art materials again while making a little money on the side. However, seeing the interest my community has had in the campaign, I'm hoping for the chance to continue developing this project into a substantial business that solely supports the issue of unwanted shelter animals.

This fundraising project has shown me how important it is to not only create high quality artwork, but also how to use technology to promote my artwork. Creating an ecommerce website where I could sell my paintings was the most important element of the campaign to ensure the fundraiser's success. Now having created this established website, I have an online platform to expand on for a personal business. There is a lot of competition among small art businesses; however, I am confident the skills I've obtained will help me be successful with this goal. My paintings are more than just an attractive piece of art to hang up in someone's home. My art directly supports the "overlooked companions" in our local animal shelters. This emotional incentive to purchase a painting is unique because the client knows they are personally contributing to a good cause, as well as getting a colorful piece of art for their home.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, B. W. "Shaking off Stigmas." *The Humane Society of the United States*, December 2016. <https://humanepro.org/magazine/articles/shaking-stigmas>.
- ASPCA. "The Annual Subaru Share The Love® Event." *Strategic Cause Partnerships: Subaru*, accessed April 20, 2021. <https://www.aspca.org/about-us/strategic-cause-partnerships/subaru/subaru-share-love>.
- Chapman, C. "The Principles of Design and Their Importance." *Designers*, 2019. <https://www.toptal.com/designers/ui/principles-of-design>.
- Eisenberg, H. "Humans Process Visual Data Better." *Thermopylae: Sciences + Technology*, September 15, 2014. <https://www.t-sciences.com/news/humans-process-visual-data-better>.
- Schmidt, W. "Surefire Ways to Run a Successful Fundraising Campaign." *Classy*, 2019. <https://www.classy.org/blog/8-surefire-ways-to-run-a-successful-fundraising-campaign/>.
- Swire-Thompson, B., DeGutis, J. and Lazer, D. "Searching for the Backfire Effect: Measurement and Design Considerations." *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition* 9, no. 3 (2020): 286-299. <https://doi.org10.1016/j.jarmac.2020.06.006>.
- Tayenka, T. "5 Reason Why You Need Video in Your Marketing Strategy." *Entrepreneur*, May 13, 2019. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/333562>.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 7. Initial Blacksburg Mural Design Concept



Figure 8. Completed Blacksburg Mural



Figure 9. SVASC Mural Mockup Draft



Figure 10. Image Composition Placement Using Projector

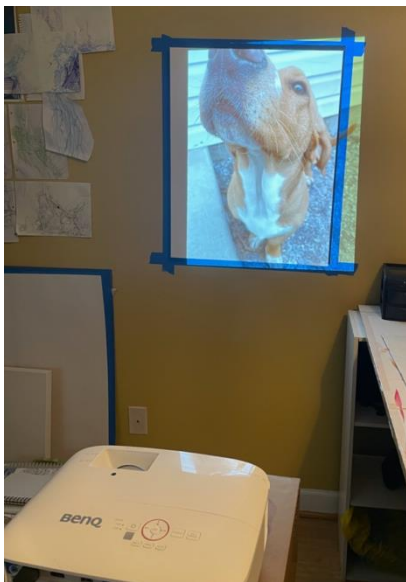


Figure 11. "Space-Jam" Painting Mockup



Figure 12. Photographing Miniature Paintings Using Self-Constructed Lightbox

