I met you

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I MET YOU

Thesis

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in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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in

The School of Art

by
Momoko Kimura
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ABSTRACT

My goal for the work documented in this paper was to create and install an immersive multimedia environment, using animation and interactivity to express and communicate ideas drawn from personal experience of how people may meet, influence each other and enrich each other’s lives.

With my projects over the past few years, I learned that sharing personal stories is a powerful tool for communicating with others. The I MET YOU piece provided the perfect opportunity for me to pull together all my thoughts and tell people who have made difference in my life “I’m so glad I met you.” I sought to communicate my appreciation for all those people. I wanted to tell them that who I am today is a function of my meeting and getting to know them here. And at the same time, I have a hope that the audiences who come to see my work can experience my story and think about their own lives and the people who have affected them. My story is not just one person’s observation, but perhaps reflections that others may share. I want people to be moved and also stimulate the desire to tell others how they feel about them.

Since the main theme of my story is a narrative about growth—both internal and external—the central animation is flanked by two “digital books” in which the text, message or meaning expressed on the page changes as the pages are being turned, which is a metaphor for how both we, and our perception of the world itself, changes as we walk in it.
THE CONCEPT

I came to this country from Japan ten years ago without knowing much about the
world. The most important lessons I have learned from years of living in a foreign
country concern people: how people meet, influence each other and enrich each other’s
lives. The effect of this change in cultural and social context started to become clear to
me after I completed my undergraduate work five years ago and found myself working in
the “real” world. I met so many people who opened their hearts and shared their lives
with me. They helped me survive, encouraged me to grow and made me stronger. I found
myself thinking about all these people and their connections to each other. Many times
over the course of these years, I have felt that I needed to find a way to express my
gratitude toward them. And as I was considering subject matter for my thesis, I found that
using this opportunity to show how I feel about all the people who have been so
influential and personally supportive was very important for me. Coming to this country
and experiencing such a diverse group of people who readily accepted someone who
didn’t even speak quite the same language and came from a very different—and
significantly more uniform—culture, helped me recognize some simple facts about
human beings; the ways in which they influence one another, and the extent to which I
found myself appreciating them very deeply.

The I MET YOU piece provided the perfect opportunity for me to pull together all
my thoughts and tell those people “I’m so glad I met you.” I sought to communicate my
appreciation for the difference that all these people have made in my life. And at the
same time, I’m hoping that the audiences who come to see my work can experience my
story and think about their own lives and the people who have affected them. My story is
not just one person’s observation, but perhaps reflections that others may share. I want audiences to feel that they are lucky to have somebody who cares about them. I want people to be moved and also stimulate the desire to tell others how they feel about them.
THE WORK

The Process

Telling and sharing my experiences through my work has been my passion. With my projects over the past few years, I learned that sharing personal stories is a powerful tool for communicating with others. People will open up to you when you do the same. As a matter of nature and culture, I am not the type of person who can just talk about my issues, my deep thoughts to anybody. Revealing what’s happening inside of me with my work has given me a new freedom and a power. It let me discover that with my work, I could trigger the audiences to share their own stories with me. We could discuss the issue together. Communicating with people this way has been a great experience for me.

I MET YOU is a narrative based on my own journey. I decided to put my story together with a combination of several different media. The I MET YOU installation consists of four parts: “Part 1,” the introductory digital book; “Part 2,” the animation; “Part 3,” the concluding digital book; and the supporting video sequence. The introduction book sets up the purpose of the project; the animation tells a story about my experiences living in the United States; the conclusion book wraps up the concept of the project, talking about me in present time and the future; and the video sequence shows actual people from my life.

I began this project by taking pictures of people whom I have a personal connection. I wanted to create their portraits for my animation. After taking pictures, I experimented with painting styles, techniques and ways to manipulate the images on individual pieces with the computer. This process, of taking pictures and creating each person’s portrait one by one allowed me to talk to the people who I wanted to be in my
project and really think about them while working on the images of each person. While I was collecting images, I began to piece together the story. Everybody knows that the story is the most important thing for any books or animations. I needed to have a strong story line to express all my thoughts and make sense of the project. Even though the concept springs from my real life experiences, writing the story was the hardest part of the project. The story had to have just about the right number of words to be almost like a poem, as it had to flow well and tie all the other elements together. The words were also carefully considered. As English as a second language for me, this was especially challenging. I spent weeks working on the story. After I finished writing, I started to design the visuals.

**The Story, “I MET YOU”**

**Part 1**

It’s funny how people meet. Many people will walk in and out of your life. And some, they will leave footprints in your heart and soul. Think how much they mean to you, and make sure to tell them so. Here’s my story.

**Part 2**

I still remember about that summer, when everything started. I had just celebrated my 21st birthday. Two days later, I said ‘good-bye’ to everything, everything I knew. I flew away from Japan and landed here, the United States, my brand new life.

“Is that all you’ve got?” he asked me, looking at the one small suitcase I was carrying. “Yes” I answered. “I think I can get what I need here,” I said. That’s how it started.
It’s been a long journey to get here since that day. I had a lot of sunny days, a lot of rainy days, and some dark nights. The road wasn’t always smooth and straight. I got stuck, lost, stumbled, and fell. But I could always find a way to take another step forward. How? Because of the people I met, the people who opened their hearts to me and took me into their lives. They gave me knowledge and strength.

And now, I’m thinking about them, about her, about him, and about you.

• • •

She said you can when everyone else said you can’t.

He said not to hold back.

She stopped my tears.

Go for it.

I can listen she said. I can ask for help.

He said be patient.

Come over she said. She showed me the new world.

He validated my vision.

Take my hand he said. Step by step by step.

He gave me courage to move forward.

He made it seem easy. He went the extra mile.

You fail, so what? You’ll just try again she said.

She said don’t be afraid of failing. Keep your head up and keep moving.

I’ll be here for you no matter what.

You are my family she said.

She shared her warm heart.
She said it’s ok to be yourself.
I can’t dance I said, but you took my hands and spun.
She said you are a wonderful artist. Stop thinking too much and just do it.
She believed in me.
He made me stronger.
When you want something badly enough, you’ll work hard to get it.
You can’t solve everything, the only thing you can do is be stronger he said.
Being afraid of changing is worse than not changing at all.

• • •

I had only the one suitcase that day, and I lost it somewhere along the way. But
I’ve been given more support, more love than I could ever have expected. And my heart
is packed like a suitcase that I will forever carry with me.

Part 3

2007, time to open a new chapter of my life.
I’m flying away again, and I don’t know where I’m landing. I’M SCARED! But I know
I’ll be ok. Because wherever I go, I will meet you again, somebody like you. I met you
here. You accepted me as who I am and helped me grow. I met you here, and I’m moving
with all of you inside of me.

This is my story. I’m glad I met you and I know we’ll meet again.
Digital Books, Animation, and Video

“It’s funny how people meet. Many people will walk in and out of your life. And some, they will leave footprints in your heart and soul,” this is the beginning of the first book which introduces the concept of my project and provides a guide to the next animation. This book expresses the general idea about meeting people in our lives so that the audience can easily relate to the story I will introduce in the next section. To emphasize the distinct content of each section, I designed the book using generic icons representing people on first the few pages and then gradually added my own specific drawings and images towards the end. The book ends with my portrait and the text: “Here’s my story.”

“I still remember about that summer, when everything started,” the main animation starts with a text telling my story, how I started my long life “journey” in the United States and how I survived and grew here. I created this text animation with an atmosphere that a general audience could recognize as a reference to being in an old silent movie theater watching somebody’s story. Then, the movie turns into the narrative about the people I met, and the people who helped me grow. The animation uses images I created from the pictures of the people I took and my self-portraits. I combined the images with the words and phrases such as “She said you can when everyone else said you can’t,” or “She said go for it.” They represent the essence of things told to me by the people I met and who influenced me. Those are the words I carry with me in my heart. The whole animation sequence has a feel as if I am looking at the blue sky thinking, remembering about all these people. I placed people’s portraits in the picture frames.
(taken from the look of a Polaroid picture from the 1970s) to represent the process of capturing my memories of these people.

“2007, time to open a new chapter of my life,” the last book provides the conclusion to the project. I used images of birds as a symbol of new life. The title “I MET YOU” finally shows up here. Page by page, I wanted convey my gratitude towards people who helped me grow. I wanted to tell them that who I am today is a function of my meeting and getting to know them here.

Throughout the two books and the animation, I used a few key words and images such as growing plants, flowers, the suitcase, and birds. They represent my continuous journey and growth—both internal and external. The use of the motif of transparent pages is unique feature of the two digital books. Since a “digital book” is essentially just a metaphor that represents what we all know of a “real book”—its physicality and linear sequencing—the “book” in this instance becomes a metaphor of a metaphor. I carefully used transparency and digitally cut effects for several pages on both books, which successfully added a certain playfulness to the work. Clearly, it is counter-intuitive for the text, message or meaning expressed on the page of a real book to change as the pages are being turned, but in the digital realm there is no such limitation. In exploring how I might work with this metaphor, I was able to express something of how both we, and our perception of the world itself, changes as we walk in it.

The final element of the project is the video. I asked the people around me to say “I met you,’ and videotaped them saying it. Some people also gave me an additional message after understanding my project. In front of the camera, they are talking to me, but at the same time, their speaking the phrase “I met you” serves as a message to
someone important in their lives. The video segment, showing actual people and using their own voices, introduces a different effect from that of the books or the animation. The audience can see the various people, hear different voices and experience another layer of meaning of the project at the end. It is quite fascinating the way each person says the simple words “I met you.” You can really see the character of the individuals. I had a great time videotaping all these people about whom I care about a lot. The video soundtrack with its chorus of voices saying “I met you” became the background sound for the installation.

The Technique / Media

I use mixed media such as drawing, painting, motion graphics, and animation. As a graphic designer, I’m always interested in new technology and the varied tools of digital media. My special interest over the past few years has been to experiment with time based new media, motion graphics and animation. How I use the traditional media such as painting, drawing, and printmaking and new digital media to create my work is always an exciting challenge for me. Adding the elements of handwork to the digital work has made my project unique and interesting. The challenge of using new media technologies is not merely about using the software and making something that is shaped by it, but exploring how to be creative with it and making something that communicates both sense and feeling.

Making the interactive digital books to tell my story was an ideal solution to the problem of combining my love for traditional book arts, the print world, and the digital
world. I created the digital books using Adobe Flash. Flash is a vector-based\(^1\) animation software that was originally developed to produce interactive graphics for web sites, but now it is one of the most popular software tools for creating all manner of web graphics as well as desktop presentations and games. The most powerful part of using Flash is that with Flash’s scripting language called ActionScript, it can allow people an opportunity to interact with the animation. I designed the digital books with this program so that people can actually flip the pages of the books using the mouse and read the books on a computer screen at their own pace just as they would with actual books. They can also go back and forth through the books. The animation I created to fit between the two digital books was also developed with Flash. Here, I used Flash in a different way: instead of using ActionScript to program the interaction, I introduced a timeline and a sequence of frames in order to create the animations.

**The Installation**

I chose LSU’s Foster Gallery as the venue in which to present my work. At the entrance of the room, I placed a suitcase to represent my show and as a signal to condition the audience to anticipate the idea of a journey.

This installation consists of three parts; the computer station, the projections on the wall, and a computer monitor on a stand. When you enter the room, on the left, you see the computer station, which comprises three computers side by side on a large rectangular table with chairs. Each computer shows different parts of my story: the first

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\(^1\) Vector graphics (also called geometric modeling or object-oriented graphics) is the use of geometrical primitives such as points, lines, curves, and polygons, which are all based upon mathematical equations to represent images in computer graphics. 2 July, 2007 <http://en.wikipedia.org>
computer on the left has the introductory digital book, the second one has the main animation, and the third computer has the conclusion digital book. The audience could go through the books and animation by themselves at their own pace.

I created the digital books so that the audience could experiment interactively with them on the computer screen. However, it is fact that there are some people who are still not familiar with using computers. Such individuals tend to be intimidated by the presence of computers and would rather not touch them. I wanted to share my story with as many people as possible, so for the people who did not want to touch computers, I captured the computer screen going through the books and made movies. I projected those movies on the wall. I put the movie of the introduction book, and animation, and the movie of the conclusion book side by side on the biggest wall in the room. I tilted the movies of two books a little so that three projections on the wall can give the audience the sense of the movies being books on desk.

At the end of the room, I placed the computer with the screen to show the video clip of actual people saying “I met you.” I place this video as the last part of the installation. I also included myself in the video. Everybody’s voices saying “I met you” became the background sound and added another layer of expression to the whole installation.

The challenging thing about installing a show in the gallery with such a large space was how to place all the equipment. I used three projectors, each driven by a computer, three computers at the computer station, and one more computer to show my video. I couldn’t get all the equipment together until the day I started the installation. Therefore, I had to rearrange the setting many times in a few days of installation till
everything was placed correctly. I put the projectors on the stands in the middle of the
room and projected movies on the wall. I hid all the computers and wires for the projector
behind the stands so the audience didn’t see them. I also covered the stands with black
cloth so they would disappear in the dark room and people wouldn’t get distracted while
watching movies on the wall.

Another challenge installing in the gallery was how to show the audience a sense
of direction. My movies on the wall had an order that I wanted to audience to follow. I
found the solution for it with how to decorate the room. I decorated the walls using the
key elements from my story: the plants, flower, and birds. They provide a direction from
the right side of the room to the left side. I also used the same elements to hide the wires
on the floor. These were not merely decorations but also served to tie all the parts of the
installation together.
Figure 1 – Intro book layout, Selected Pages
Figure 2 – Intro book layout, Selected pages
Figure 3 – Intro book layout, Selected Pages
Figure 4 – Animation, Selected Scenes
Figure 6 – Animation, Selected Scenes

Being afraid of changing is worse than not changing at all.
You can’t solve everything, the only thing you could do is be stronger by said.

MORE LOVE
MORE SUPPORT
than I COULD HAVE EVER EXPECTED.
Figure 7 – Conclusion book layout, Selected Pages
Figure 8 – Conclusion book layout, Selected Pages
Figure 9 – Conclusion book layout, Selected Pages
Figure 10 – Conclusion book layout, Selected Pages
Figure 11 – Conclusion book layout, Selected Pages
Figure 12 – Video Stills
Figure 13 – Foster Gallery, Installation View
Figure 14 – Foster Gallery, Installation View
Figure 15 – Foster Gallery, Installation View
VITA

Momoko Kimura was born in Takamatsu, Kagawa, Japan. She received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Louisiana State University in 2002. She will receive the degree of Master of Fine Arts from Louisiana State University in August 2007.