

NUKES DE ALMEIDA NUKU-GRAVES

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ARTIST STATEMENT (LONGFORM)

My artistic practice explores diverse relationships among minority groups, the idyllic Midwestern mundane, and accessible play both in and out of video games. I use the digital medium of video games to tell stories, create narratives, and develop character studies that not only provoke personal enrichment, but enrichment and self-realization within the players of my games. Currently, the theme of relationships has been something I've been exploring heavily, particularly platonic and romantic relationships between minorities of many different races, nationalities, ethnicities, and LGBTQ+ identities. I like to focus on queer joy and slice-of-life casual play within my games, a sort of idealized feeling that leaves players hopeful for what they can attain in their own lives.

With video games as my main medium, I'm able to give my audience a carefully tailored experience through a specific, directed narrative format. Player agency and the option of choice is a critical part of my game design practice, as it allows players to feel like they have a say in how the story takes places, regardless of if there is only one final outcome or not. I am heavily influenced by internet culture, particularly fandom spaces and the online community that comes with consuming media. Dating simulators and visual novels, especially ones that center experiences of a minority cast, are big inspirations in my practice as well. Games like *Blush Blush*, *Dream Daddy*, *Butterfly Soup*, *Our Life: Beginnings and Always*, and *Monster Prom* have been incredibly inspirational and influential as my artistic practice continues to grow and develop.

My current ongoing project, *Cryptid Coffeehouse*, combines all of these influences, interests, and concepts. By exploring the intricacies of a budding romantic relationship set in a Midwestern environment, I give players the opportunity to experience a romance that could possibly give them hope for their own futures. By juxtaposing the mundane of the Midwest with a colorful cast of characters inspired by cryptids, fantastical creatures, and mythological beings, there's lighthearted fun within the deeper relationship analysis, all while maintaining the game's identity as a casual play experience. I have several future games planned that are based off a similar model, but follow stories of different characters found within *Cryptid Coffeehouse*.

In the future, I plan to explore different video game genres and play styles, perhaps shifting from the visual novel medium to experiment with PVE brawlers and physical card games. I believe there are many ways to tell a story, and games in all their forms provide that outlet for designers like myself to spin carefully woven narratives for their players. It's with this knowledge that I have the confidence and motivation to move forward within my practice.