Student Gabby Borges Illustrates Book Cover for CSU Professor

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Student Gabby Borges at work in her MSA Visual Art Class
MSA student artist Gabriella Borges had no idea she was being observed while she was working on a drawing on her tablet during a long flight to Hawaii in 2013. While she was completely absorbed, her artwork had caught a fellow passenger’s attention.

“She was in her own world. She would create this really beautiful image and then she would erase it and I thought ‘Oh my God, how can you erase something so beautiful,’” Armando Arias, a professor, recalls of the flight he and his wife were taking on their way to vacation. “We went through the plane ride, going in and out of sleep, and poking each other to see what she was creating,” he recalls.

Finally, Dr. Arias couldn’t sit idly by anymore. He struck up a conversation with Borges. A professor of social psychology at the University of California, Monterey Bay, with keen interest in how people interact with and relate to art, Dr. Arias decided then and there to ask Borges if she would illustrate for an upcoming class project.

That chance meeting two years ago led to Borges’ first paying job as an artist, creating illustrations for a project by Dr. Arias involving psychological studies of how people come to see themselves based on their interactions with animals.

“Gabriella drew a picture of me lecturing at the board, based on my descriptions of teaching on my ranch where the horses are near,” Dr. Arias says of the image of a horse peeking through a window in on his lecture. “Maybe it’s my ability to articulate things so clearly or maybe she just gets it,” he says of the finished drawing that “blew him away.”

Dr. Arias recalls the artwork “was remarkable in its’ overall composition, attention to detail and ability to capture the feeling what the book was trying to convey.”

For Borges, the experience helped shaped her decision to pursue illustration as a possible career path.

“We didn’t speak for about a year (after completing the first project). Then I got on Linked In and used him as one of my contacts and he emailed me to ask if I wanted to work on a book project,” Borges says.

Dr. Arias asked Borges to take on the bigger challenge of illustrating the cover of his newest book, due out this summer. The book takes an interesting perspective on Cesar Chávez. “We collaborated over the course of about four months, he told me what it was about and told me to add my ‘Gabbynosness’ to it,” she recalls.

The book has the rather long title *Theorizing César Chávez: A New Way of Knowing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics).* According to Dr. Arias, it examines “what if we took César Chávez’s values and beliefs and use them to theorize or to re-envision both true and meaningful fictionalized accounts in his life?”
The cover illustration depicts Cesar Chavez in stages of life, real and imagined, by Gabby Borges.

In short, “it’s about turning César’s values back on themselves as a method for understanding the man, particularly his subconscious mind. Doing so allows for a method of applying his values in developing a lens to view and analyze his future Self—the Self that never was, but might very well have been,” Dr. Arias explains. “It’s about how might he have looked at STEM using his value and beliefs.”

So, how would an artist go about creating cover art to convey that message? Borges and Dr. Arias decided the cover art should depict Chávez in his youth, in middle age and what he might look like as an older man addressing STEM ideas, had he survived, with mathematics and other scientific equations represented on a chalkboard behind him.

“I completed the painting over 42 hours and there was a lot of communication and some revising. He said he had a really emotional response to it,” Borges said of presenting the finished work to Dr. Arias, who later confirmed that reaction.
"Gabriella sent me the painting and I put it in my office at home where I’m facing it. It’s very curious, the interaction we have, but she totally gets it. My knee jerk response is it’s the best depiction of him (Chávez) I’ve ever seen and I’ve met him several times and have seen many images of him,” he says.

For Borges, the experience has cemented her decision to continue book illustration as a possible career and says she’s now also interested in illustrating for children’s books.

“I feel really lucky. I never thought in a million years that this would happen. I’ve always wanted to be an illustrator — so I’m really thankful,” Borges says. “He has another project I might work on. I feel like he’s really helping me with the beginning of my career,” says Borges who just finished her junior year in the MSA Visual Arts department.

“I’ve started thinking about branching out and maybe doing some corporate design. I’m trying to keep an open mindset, whereas a couple of years I only wanted to draw for myself,” she says.

To see more work by Gabriella Borges, check out her portfolio website at https://gabriellachristineborges.carbonmade.com/

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