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Find a Way to Hug: A Multi-discipline Design for Mother-Daughter Relationship

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**Find a Way to Hug: A Multi-discipline
Design for Mother-Daughter Relationship**

by

Jinyi Liao

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design

School of Design

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology Rochester, NY

July 12, 2023



Thesis Approval

Find a Way to Hug: A Multi-Discipline Design for Mother-Daughter Relationship

Thesis Title

Jinyi Liao

Thesis Author

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of **Master of Fine Arts**

The School of Design | Visual Communication Design

Rochester Institute of Technology | Rochester, New York

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Abstract

The project *Find a Way to Hug*, or FWH for short is a personal project that tries to think about the influence of the mother-daughter relationship on the author's growth. The author's relationship with her mother changed dramatically after she came to the United States from China, prompting a re-examination of this relationship and inspiring this project. The author tries to tell a story of a mother and daughter looking for the possibility of understanding, forgiveness, and moving forward after going through various situations through multidisciplinary design. She presents this story of personal experiences and reflections in the form of board games, trying to share this growth experience with players. The author also expresses a part of her personal experience and understanding of her mother-daughter relationship through handicrafts, completing the installation "Ahnun." In the exhibition of the work, she also used the method of investigation to try to understand the diverse mother-daughter relationship of audiences. The project's goal is to reconstruct the author's lived experience with her mother through a process of design and reflection. In the process of exploring the form and medium of storytelling, multi-angle thinking and experimenting with various design methods have expanded the author's understanding of the mother-daughter relationship and visual design.

Keywords: Mother-Daughter Relationship, Visual Design, Design System, Personal Experience

Find a Way to Hug: A Multi-discipline Design for Mother-Daughter Relationship

1 Introduction

In recent years, popular culture, such as films and TV shows, has drawn attention to the East Asian mother-daughter relationship in the Western context. At the same time, I felt a resonance with these stories after coming to America. This made my mother-daughter relationship a topic I wanted to explore further in my thesis. From a personal aspect, the project's goal was to reconstruct my lived experience with my mother through design and reflection. In the project, I want to create a new story of the mother-daughter relationship based on my review to help me understand the reactions and feelings of both my mother and me, exploring the form and medium of storytelling, multi-angle thinking, and experimenting with various design methods. From the aspect of the audience, the project's goal is to expand the audience's understanding of the mother-daughter relationship through my experience.

2 Problem Statement

The mother-daughter relationship problem is a theme I have always been longing to discuss in my art and design works. Recently, the emergence of many film and television works has aroused people's attention to the relationship between mother and daughter, especially in the context of East Asian culture. *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (Kwan and Scheinert 2022) has received widespread attention for its imaginative description of a cross-cultural mother-daughter relationship crisis. Similarly, when *Turning Red* (Shi 2022) tells a story about the growing pains of a young Chinese girl, the mother-daughter relationship is also an important aspect. It can be seen that the mother-daughter relationship under the influence of East Asian culture has its particularity. Lee (2004) pointed out that the measure of personal worth in the East Asian context depends more on the extent to which one meets mainstream cultural values than on one's achievements. Chan and Leong (1994) suggested that under such a value system, women are daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers rather than independent women pursuing self-realization. However, the younger generation in the family, influenced by the West, does not agree with traditional values. Therefore, the coexistence of multiple cultures within the family can lead to cultural dissonance (Hong and Ham 1992).

From a personal perspective, my experience with my mother affected me profoundly and gradually developed into a trauma and life issue for me during the growth process. In 2021, I came to the United States to attend graduate school. This was the first time we had been separated for such a long time and distance. However, the tension in our relationship has started to weaken, which provided me a space to recollect the memory between us and re-examine this relationship. Besides, since this is the last year of my school and I will go back home after graduation. Finding the possibility of reconstruction of the trust is necessary and urgent to me. Roz (2008) indicated that the process of artmaking helps victims seek out patterns of trauma and help their "unreal" sense become real. On this basis, Hogan(2013) acknowledge that art therapy can help women rebuild their new self-identities by viewing women's responses as understandable. Therefore, I want to create a new story of the mother-daughter relationship based on my reflection to help me understand the reactions and feelings of both my mother and me.

3 Methodology

As mentioned above, the main goal of this project is to tell a story of a mother and her daughter going through various situations and looking for a possibility to understand and forgive each other and move forward. In this project, I set myself as the research subject, so the storytelling is based on my personal experience and feelings. Therefore, I expect to rebuild the story of my mother and me through the design and reflection process. Furthermore, I think this project is a good opportunity for me to explore multiple forms and mediums of storytelling. Beyond graphic design and digital tools, I experimented with writing, board game design, installation, and fabrication, which expanded the dimensions of my understanding.

3.1 Solution One: Find a Way to Hug Board Game

Firstly, I chose the form of a board game to narrate the story of a mother and her daughter. Compared to basic graphic or motion graphic design, a board game offers viewers the opportunity to get involved in the story, making their own choices and experiencing the process. However, one thing I have to point out is that the main objective of adopting the form of board games is to present the story interactively. Besides, I am a beginner in designing the board game mechanism, so I decided to use simple game mechanisms in the game and focus more on the visual presentation.

3.1.1 Design System

FONT

Century Gothic

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJj

Comfortaa

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJj

Open Sans

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJj

LOGO



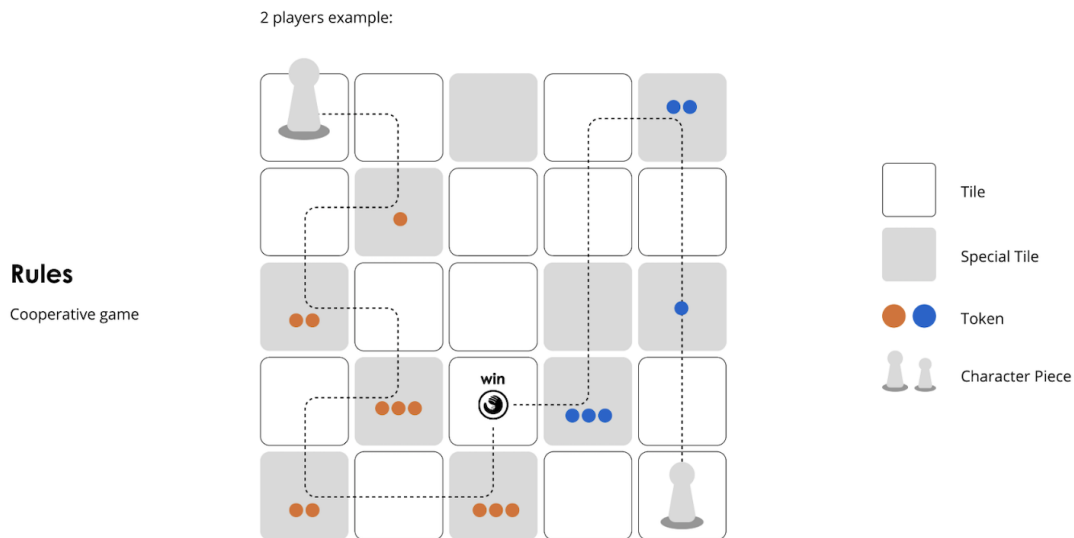
COLOR



The background story of the board game is about a mother and her daughter who got lost in a forest, and they have to seek out a way to find each other. During the game, they will face different situations which would either improve or exacerbate trust in their relationship. This game is designed as a cooperative game. To win the game, players have to gain enough trust so that they can reach each other with reconciliation. To present the idea of seeking and reconciliation, I picked the name *Find a Way to Hug*, which also means character pieces need to find a path to win the game.

When designing the logo, in order to reflect the theme of the mother-daughter relationship and hugging, I designed two hands, one big and one small, to embrace each other. The graphic is composed of curves to remove any sharp feeling. In terms of typeface selection, I chose Century Gothic, Comfortaa, and Open Sans, which are modern, round, and gentle sans-serif typefaces. In terms of color selection, in order to express contrast and conflict, I used red and green, but to weaken the tension and tension, I chose softer colors and used gradients.

3.1.2 Rules



FWH is a cooperative board game for more than two players. The game set includes character pieces, tiles, and tokens. In each round of the game, the players randomly arrange 25 tiles face up to make up the board. Take two players game as an example:

1. To begin the game, two players choose one tile to flip and move their pieces to the tiles in turn.
2. The game has two kinds of tiles: coin tiles and damaging tiles. If a player flips a coin tile, they gain a token; if a damaged tile is flipped, they lose one token. Note: The minimum number of player tokens is zero and cannot be negative.
3. In each turn, play flip one tile beside, which are the tiles that are adjacent to the square's four sides, excluding the corners, and move the piece to the tile flipped.
4. To end the game, two players must gain six tokens in total and reach the same tile on the board.

3.1.3 Tiles

The tiles of FWH games include normal tiles and special tiles. There are five sets of special tiles, and each set of two tiles has different functions. The design of the Tiles was inspired by some of the deepest

memories I had growing up, where things happened that made my mother and my relationship sour and took a toll on both of us. So, in the game, I imagined other interpretations and versions of these stories, trying to create the possibility of reconciliation, which is the main purpose of the game.



Static and Ambiguity

"Static and Ambiguity" is a theme of my myopia. I have been myopic since I was about five years old and then developed into high myopia. In my memory, my mother always blamed me, even though the doctor believed that my nearsightedness was partly genetic. I couldn't control my physical condition. I took a lot of medicine and had to face pressure from my family and the environment, which made me very anxious. Physical examination and eye hospital became my nightmare. So in the design of the damaging tile, I drew a chaotic eye that stared menacingly at me from afar. But in the coin tile, the eye has evolved in its own way with a strong life force, which is what I expected from it.

Daydream and Hallucination

"Daydream and Hallucination" is about the theme of depression. I had a severe bout of depression in high school, and I was in such a bad state that I would easily fall asleep during the day and then fall into a nightmare where I couldn't wake up. Sometimes I can't even distinguish dream from reality. I used a hallucinatory flower called the mandala to represent this theme. The Daydream (Coin Tile) side is the hopeful life I fantasized about before high school, while the Hallucination (Damaging Tile) side is my struggles in real high school life.

Trap and Peace

"Trap and Peace" is a summary and hope of FWH's story. In this group of tiles, I depict a desert full of cacti, which is like the relationship between my mother and me, hot and dry, but sometimes there is hope for life. In the past, we were always misled by this beautiful and peaceful scene and stepped into a trap full of thorns, so we never stepped into this desert again. However, I did not design the damage of this tile to lose a token but to skip the next turn of movement. I hope that the player will not treat this tile as damage but take a rest and move on until they encounter the desert without traps.

Cloud and Night

"Cloud and Night" is my mother's mood in my memory. My mother took her work very seriously, which I admired. But at the same time, work has brought tremendous pressure on her. Her emotions are always elusive when she comes home from getting off the job. She seemed peaceful, but sometimes it comes rainstorms and overcast clouds, and sometimes it comes the clear sky of a summer night.

Fission and Rebirth

The concept of "Fission and Rebirth" is "We have the same scars." My mother gave birth to me twenty-four years ago, and the process caused her scars, which made me always ask myself if I should not be in this world, and this questioning process caused my scars. In the damaging tile, the fission of the cells is accompanied by tears and pain, so I imagined a kind of gratitude for change and growth in the coin tile.

3.1.4 Character Pieces and Tokens

There are two roles in the FWH game, mother and daughter. Since warmth and reconciliation are the themes of the game, I designed the character pieces in an adorable style. They are curved, without edges and corners, with big eyes and a heart on their heads. I modeled with Cinema 4D and made a prototype with SLA printing.

I chose to make the FWH logo into a token, which will better echo the theme and maintain unity with other design elements. When designing the logo, I had already considered the token, so the edge shape was designed as a prototype. In addition, I also tried laser cutting to make acrylic prototypes.

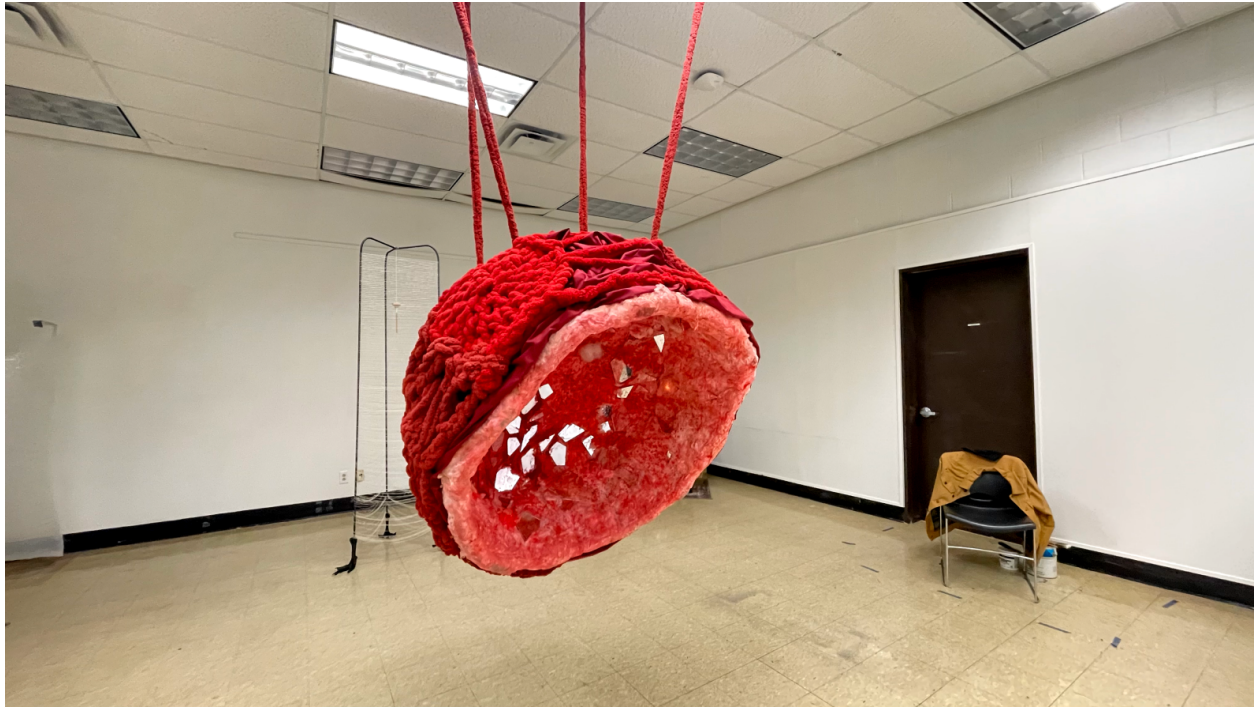


Character Pieces



Tokens

3.2 Solution Two: Installation



This installation was inspired by my thoughts on my mother's life choices. I tried to guess how she gave birth to me twenty-four years ago or how she "has been giving birth to me" in these twenty-four years. Childbirth has been ongoing for twenty-four years. My relationship with her and my current personality was formed during these twenty-four years. But it wasn't just my body that I inherited from her, and also her scars. "We have the same scars" is the concept of this installation. I want to create a "womb" that connects my mother and me. The exterior of the installation is scarred but also soft, and she contains people who have inherited all her traumas through such a body. Additionally, I have drawn inspiration from artworks such as Quipu Womb (Vicuña, 2017), Abakan Red (Abakanowicz, 1969), Manfrin Project (Kapoor, 2022), and others. I used cloth and coarse yarn to crochet the outer layer of the installation and used fibers and mirrors for the inner layer. I hope that the installation will construct a special connection with the audience through the mirror. The name of this installation is Ahnum(阿囡). The word "囡" means little girl in Chinese. From the shape of the characters, it depicts a girl surrounded by a circle which is consistent with the concept of this installation. I also used the same concept in the design of the tiles when I was designing FWH, that is, the "fission and rebirth" section. But unlike in FWH, "Ahnum" expresses a more negative side in a direct and sharp way.

4 Exhibition

The FWH project was showcased at Imagine RIT, and the audience responded enthusiastically. Most of the audience left evaluations of "adorable graphic design," "very interesting story," and "hope to play this game with family." In the presentation, I also planned a "Leave a word about your mom" campaign, trying to get the audience involved in telling the story of myself and my mother. During the event, I provided sticky notes and pens to the audience, and I received a total of more than one hundred sticky notes with feedback. These texts I received touched me a lot. People wrote "awesome," "my mom rocks," "baddie(heart)," "Young Soul," "unique," "STRONG," and many other interesting comments from multiple angles. These replies made me realize that the mother-child relationship itself is diverse, each

relationship is unique, and the state of each relationship is also diverse. This awareness allows me to see connections more dynamically and experience different stages.

5 Conclusion and Forward

On the one hand, as mentioned at the beginning, this project helped me reflect on my relationship with my mother through the process of research and exploring various design methods. By asking over and over again why the relationship between my mother and me is like this, I try to recall her growth process, empathize with her, and understand all the hurts between us from the perspective of growth. In the project, I wasn't looking for a cause for the problem because some part of my trauma was healed in the iterative of answering the question. On the other hand, I received positive feedback from the exhibition's audience. Viewers of different ages, children or mothers, told me they found connections in my story and they wanted to play this board game with their families. Some of them also shared their stories with me, which expanded my understanding of the mother-daughter relationship. I began to understand relationships as a dynamic growth process instead of static, unchangeable memories.

Find a Way to Hug is my first board game design. There is still much room for improvement in its oversimplified game mechanics and plot, which requires further user testing and research. *Ahnum* is also my first installation work. The shape, material, texture, and other aspects are not well done, resulting in a lack of clarity in concept communication. In addition, in this project, because of the "leave a word about your mom" activity, I found it interesting to listen to other people's stories and integrate them with performance art, and these methods can be used in future projects.

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Appendix B: Semplice Screenshot



Problem

After I came to the United States, my mother and I experienced the best period of our relationship in nearly five years, which made me very optimistic about our mother-daughter relationship. However, this year we experienced a serious breakdown in our relationship, which made me feel disappointed and anxious again. Therefore, I began to reexamine and reflect on our relationship in different ways. But until now, neither of us has found a way to reconcile.

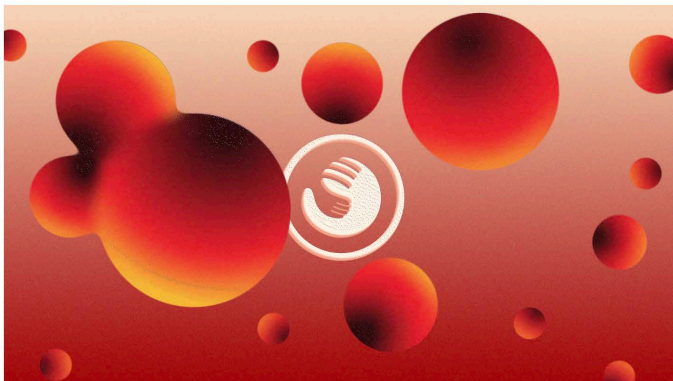
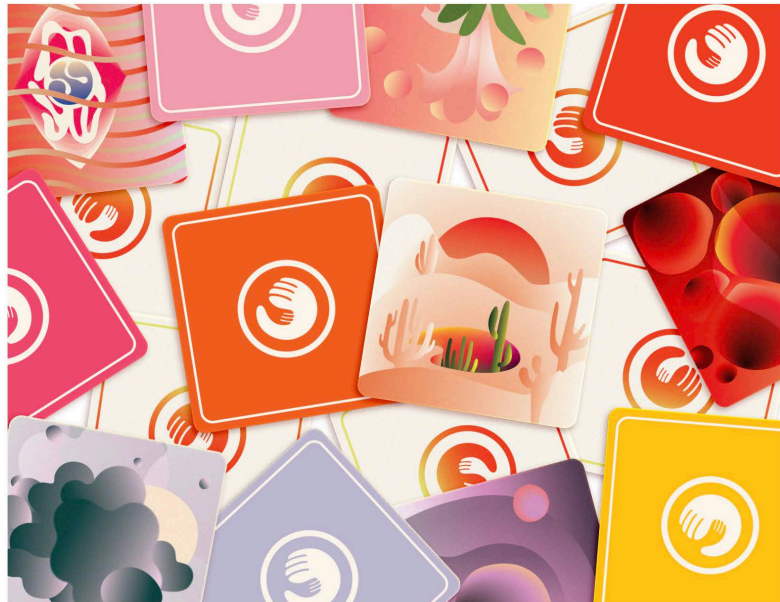
Concept

Overall, this is a very personal project, in which I aim to explore the complexity of my relationship with my mother. As part of this project, I have designed a board game called "Find a Way to Hug", where a mother and her children in an alternate universe must constantly explore the board, encountering traps and opportunities, until they find each other. Another component is an installation art piece called "Ah Nan", in which I critically examine our fraught mother-daughter relationship. These two projects have been developed almost simultaneously, which has allowed me to constantly shift between fantasy and reality, positivity and critique.



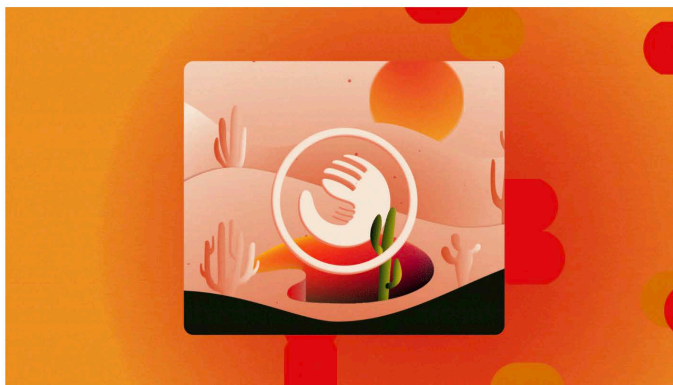
Tiles

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Character Pieces Tokens

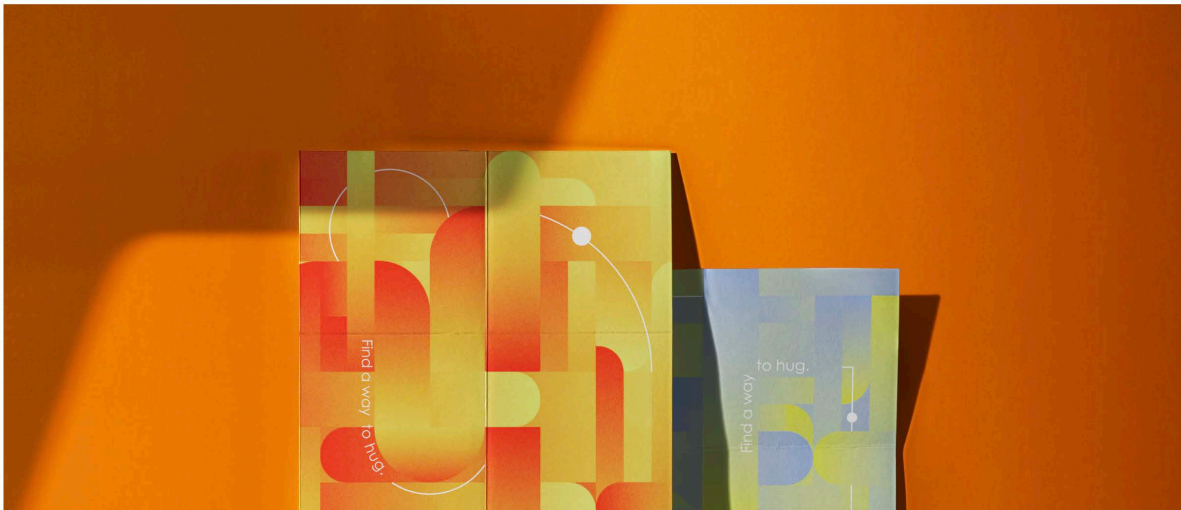


Acrylic, SLA 3D Printing

There are two roles in the FWH game, mother and daughter. Since warmth and reconciliation are the themes of the game, I designed the character pieces in an adorable style. They are



Posters



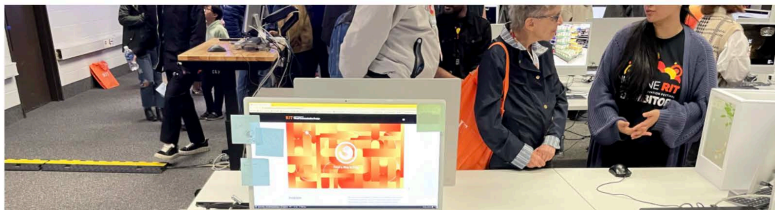
II. 阿囡 Ahnum /Installation



This installation was inspired by my thoughts on my mother's life choices. I tried to guess how she gave birth to me twenty-four years ago or how she "has been giving birth to me" in these twenty-four years. I believe childbirth has been ongoing for twenty-four years. My relationship with her and my current personality was formed during these twenty-four years. But it wasn't just my body that I inherited from her, and also her scars. "We have the same scars" is the concept of this installation. I want to create a "womb" that connects my mother and me. The exterior of the installation is scarred but also soft, and she contains people who have inherited all her traumas through such a body. I used cloth and coarse yarn to crochet the outer layer of the installation and used fibers and mirrors for the inner layer. I hope that the installation will construct a special connection with the audience through the mirror. The name of this installation is Ahnum(阿囡). The word "囡" means little girl in Chinese. From the shape of the characters, it depicts a girl surrounded by a circle which is consistent with the concept of this installation.

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Appendix C: Expanded Thesis Defense Presentation



Find a Way to Hug

Thesis Defense Presentation

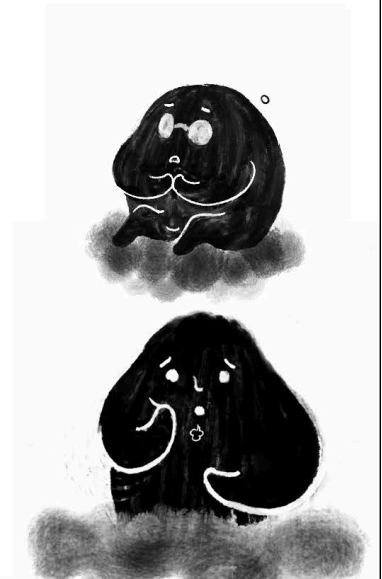
| Jinyi Liao

Prompt

The project Find a Way to Hug, shortened as FWH, is a personal project trying to contemplate the relationship and experience of my mother and me. I have always been longing to discuss the mother-daughter relationship problem in my art and design works for a long time.

From a personal perspective, my experience with my mother affected me profoundly and gradually developed into a trauma and life issue for me during the growth process. In 2021, I came to the United States to attend graduate school. This was the first time we had been separated for such a long time and distance. However, the tension in our relationship has started to weaken, which provided me a space to recollect the memory between us and re-examine this relationship. Besides, since this is the last year of my school and I will go back home after graduation. Finding the possibility of reconstruction of the trust is necessary and urgent to me.

Therefore, I want to create a new story of the mother-daughter relationship based on my reflection to help me understand the reactions and feelings of both my mother and me.



Concept

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- 
- Boardgame
 - Installation
 - "A Word about my Mom"

Identity

FONT

Century Gothic

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJj

Comfortaa

AaBbCcDdEeFfGgHhIiJj

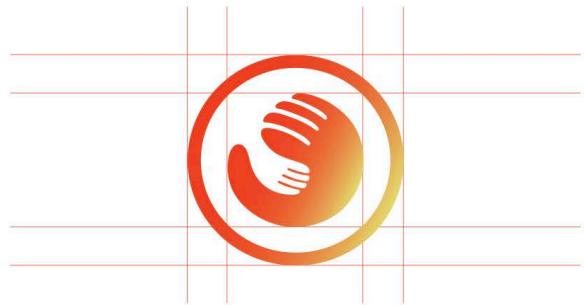
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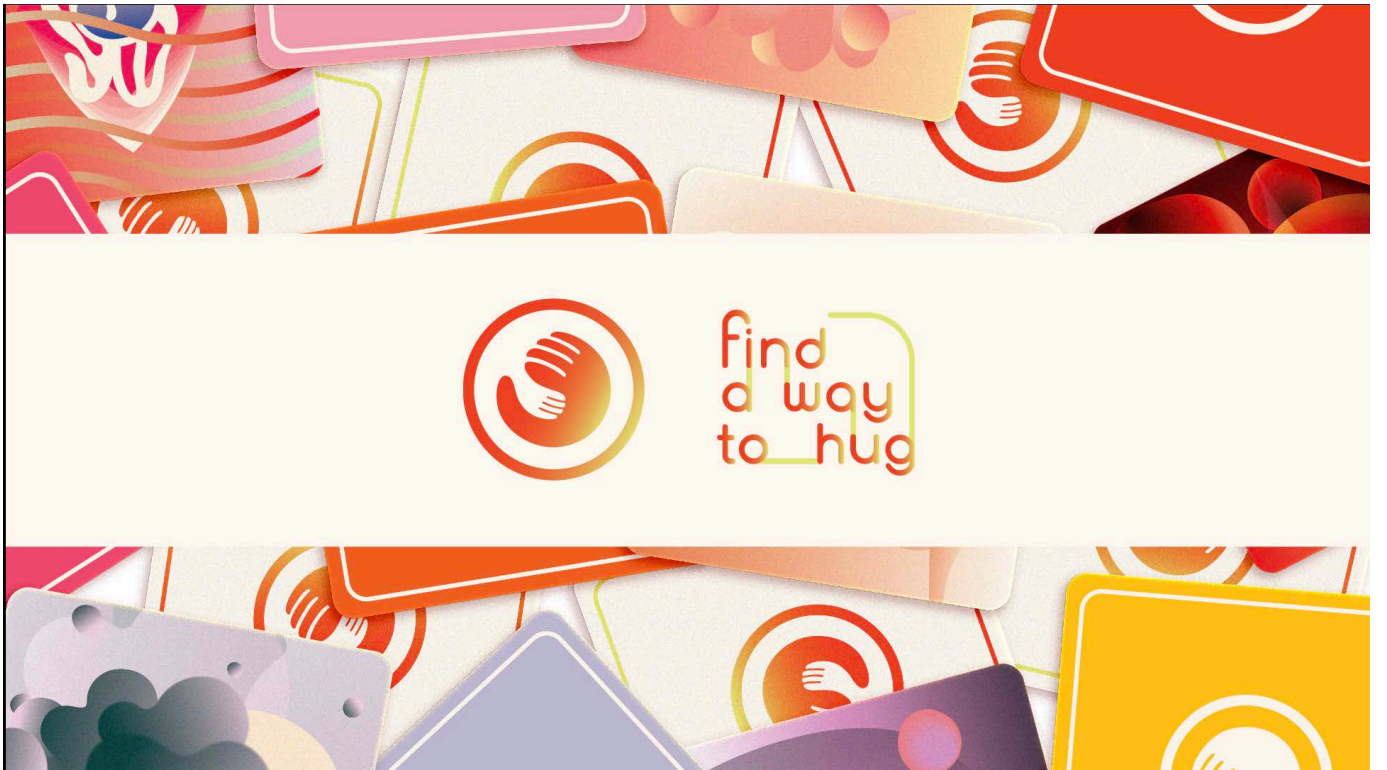
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COLOR



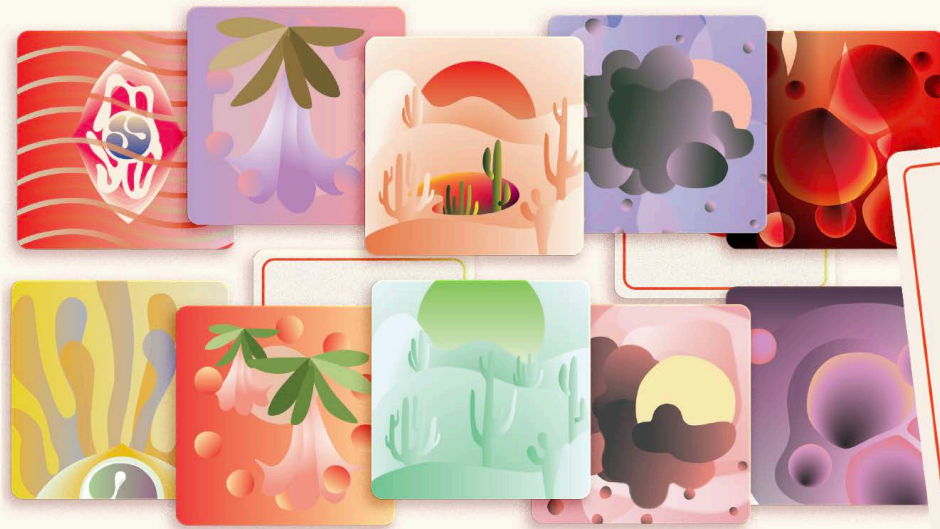
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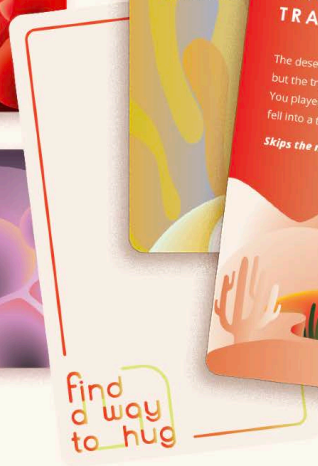
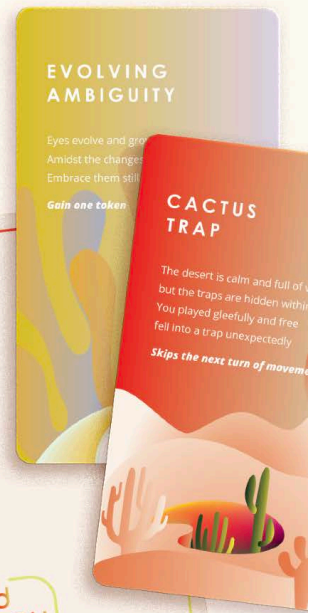


find
a way
to hug

Boardgame



Tiles



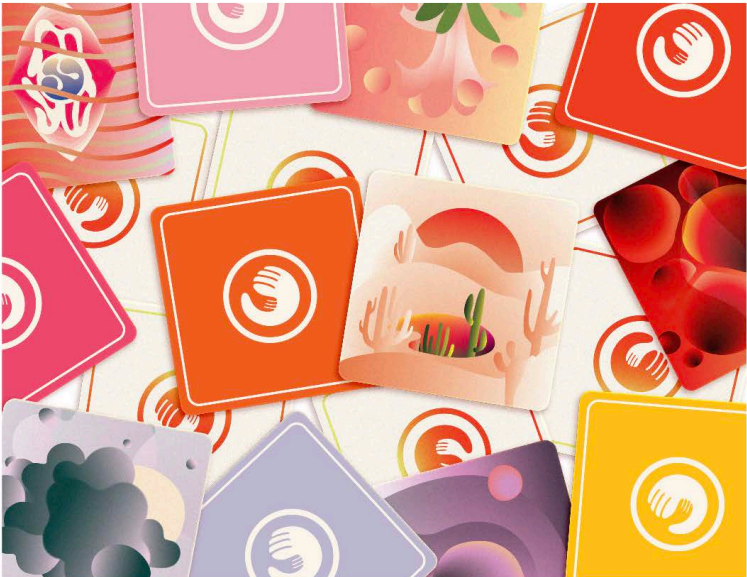
Prototype



Character Pieces



Tokens

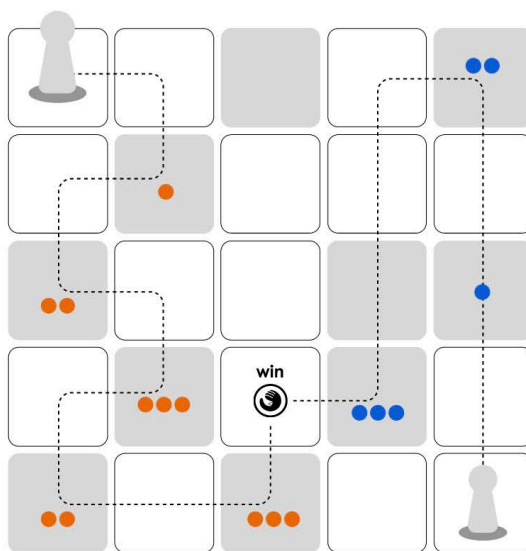


Tiles

Rules

Cooperative game

2 players example:



Tile



Special Tile

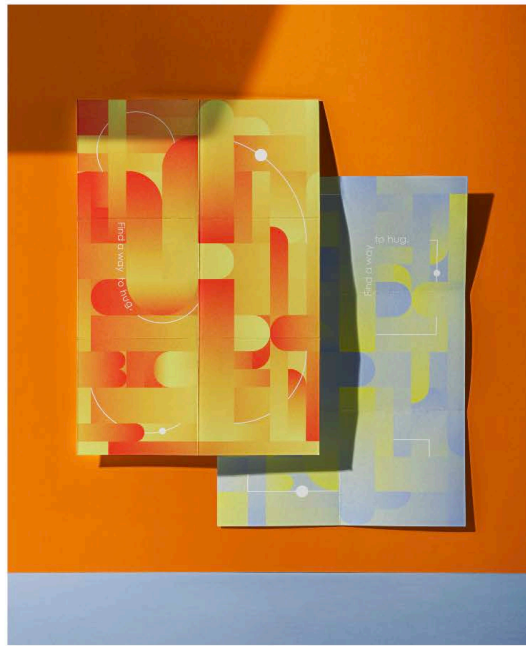


Token



Character Piece

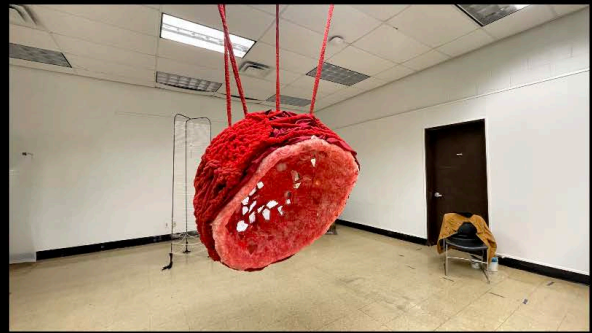
Commercials





Installation

The word “囡” (Nan) in Chinese means a little girl, and from its character form, it depicts a girl surrounded by a boundary. My initial concept for “Ah Nan” was to create a uterus that connects me and my mother. The uterus is painful and suffering, while shattered mirrors in the uterus would reflect the individual who inherits all of her traumas. Unlike “Find a Way to Hug”, “Ah Nan” is more direct and cutting. Interestingly, sometimes while creating her, I also saw her as my daughter, my little girl.

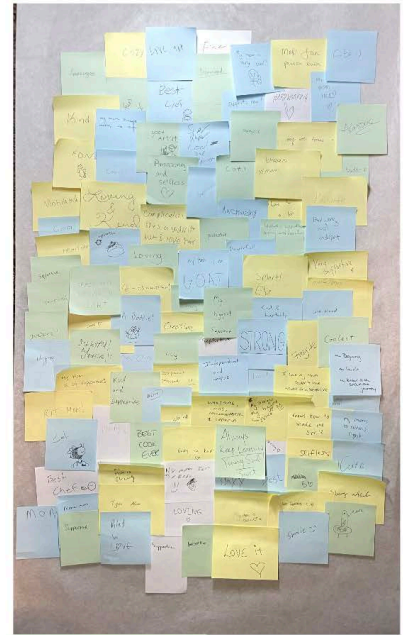
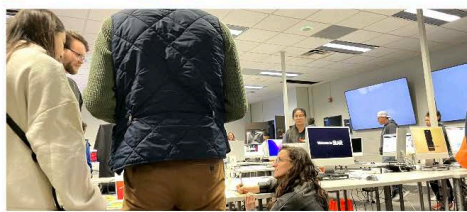


A Word about my Mom

9:00



17:00





The FWH project was showcased at Imagine RIT, and the audience responded enthusiastically. Most of the audience left evaluations of "adorable graphic design," "very interesting story," and "hope to play this game with family." In the presentation, I also planned a "Leave a word about your mom" campaign, trying to get the audience involved in telling the story of myself and my mother. During the event, I provided sticky notes and pens to the audience, and I received a total of more than one hundred sticky notes with feedback. These texts I received touched me a lot. People wrote "awesome," "my mom rocks," "baddie(heart)," "Young Soul," "unique," "STRONG," and many other interesting comments from multiple angles. These replies made me realize that the mother-child relationship itself is diverse, each relationship is unique, and the state of each relationship is also diverse. This awareness allows me to see relationships more dynamically and experience different stages.

Thank you!

Q&A

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