

Olivia: Hi everyone. My name is Olivia Luo.

Chloe: My name is Chloe Wang. We are from Tenaflly Middle School.

Olivia: I'm in seventh grade.

Chloe: I'm in eighth grade, and today, we are excited to do our first interview!

Julia: Hi everyone. I'm very glad to be here for this interview. My name is Julia, I recently graduated from RISD, which is the Rhode Island School of Design. I majored in animation, and yeah, I'm excited to be here for this interview about art and all things art.

When did you decide you wanted to follow art? Did you start drawing from a young age, or did you pick it up sometime like middle school?

I've been drawing since a very young age, for as long as I can remember, but I think I really decided to pursue it for studies at the beginning of high school, early on in high school, so I started taking classes outside of the school. I started talking to people to see where that path can lead to.

Did you apply only to RISD or also other schools like FIT or Parsons? Was it hard to get into the school you wanted?

Other than RISD, I applied to a bunch of other art schools, such as SVA School of Visual Arts, which is in Manhattan. I did not apply to FIT or Parsons. I think those schools are more geared to apparel design or fashion design, whereas when I actually first applied to college, I was applying to go into graphic design. But later on, I switched to animation.

Why did you decide to switch to animation?

I initially applied to be in graphic design because I thought that my skill set fit design more, and also that there would be more career paths or opportunities for that. But freshman year was more of a foundation year for me and the other students, where we didn't go into our major yet, so I decided to take a web design class to kind of prepare myself for graphic design. I thought it would be on the design side. Turns out it was more of a coding class, and it was a lot of coding. I realized that it was just not a good fit for me— I hate coding, and a big part of the graphic design industry is to know website design. In my heart, I'm a storyteller, and animation would be a better fit for that, where I could tell stories and express myself that way.

What was it like to be in art school? Did you learn a lot and what was your favorite class or project at Rhode Island School of Design?

Art school was a really fantastic opportunity. The one thing I would say I value the most is the student community. Being surrounded by other people who share the same interests and passion as you is very valuable. Not only to have other people to talk to and work alongside of, but just being in that kind of environment is incredibly encouraging, and it is something I miss

now that I've graduated. My favorite class was a class on something called storyboarding. If you don't know what storyboarding is, it's a step or a role in like the animation production pipeline, where before something like a show or movie gets animated, and after the script first gets written, it first gets converted into a storyboard, which maps out all the visual elements, and all the shots. Afterwards it gets animated and edited and all that. So the way I describe it, it's like visual script writing. It's just writing, but it's visual, and so you get to have a lot of creative control. After graduating, I'm currently taking a more advanced class on storyboarding, because that's the role that I want to get into to work in the industry. So I'm building a portfolio with work surrounding that.

So when you were in class, did you convert scripts into storyboards?

We had exercises like that. Most exercises were more prompt based. We were given a prompt or lines of dialogue to try to board. It's kind of like taking a part of the script and then making visuals to go along with it. It was really fun.

What was the hardest part about getting into RISD? How did you keep up with all your work and hobbies while in school?

Art school can be tough. RISD specifically, I think, gets a reputation for being kind of rigid and busy. With college applications, you typically only have your essay, your transcript, stuff like that. But with art school, on top of that, you also have to submit a portfolio of work— basically a collection of your own work, so that they can see what kind of work you do, and that affects your application process. So that definitely takes a lot of time to build up. I spent a lot of time during the last 2–3 years of high school, aside from dealing with homework from high school at Tenafly, also taking time to draw and do my own portfolio work so that I could be ready for college applications. So it was very busy, because you need to set aside time specifically for that.

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Was it hard to get into RISD?

A lot of art schools have different requirements. Some schools care more about the major you want to go into than others. For example, if you're applying for animation at a school called CalArts, which is an animation school in California, they have very specific requirements. CalArts makes you do a sketchbook assignment. And with RISD, the nice thing about them and a lot of other schools is that they don't really care too much on how specific your portfolio is for the role that you're applying for. For example, when I sent in my application, I listed that I wanted to go into graphic design. But because RISD's freshman year is a foundation year where everyone does the same thing and you only move on to your major in the second year, it allows you more freedom in what your high school portfolio can consist of. RISD cares more about students or prospective students having a strong foundation in observational drawing and for example, realistic anatomy, being able to draw from life well. And also, I think RISD

tends to care more about grades than other schools. I just know that it is a fairly competitive school. Having strong observational drawing skills and showing down your portfolio while also maintaining your grades is important for RISD specifically.

Were the students at Rhode Island School of Design more competitive or did they work together to help each other out? And you said you liked them. Is it because the friends you make have similar personalities to you or did you contrast?

Before I went in, I was kind of nervous about how other students would be because I heard it would be competitive. And it's true that there is a degree of competitiveness, but I honestly will say I didn't really feel that while I was there at school. If anything, I felt so much warmth and encouragement from the student community. Everyone was just really nice and fun to hang out with. I was lucky I made so many friends and I think part of the reason is I also involve myself in a lot of extracurricular activities, so I got to meet more people outside of just the class setting. But I would say the competitiveness from RISD mostly comes from the institution itself and the class culture. I know there are students who are very competitive by nature, but most people I found were very nice and open. I guess artists tend to be introverted. So when I went there, I considered myself an introvert, but I feel like I was pretty extroverted compared to a lot of other people there, but the students there were hardworking and just incredibly talented and nice people. And I would give the advice to join some extracurricular activities. Don't fully immerse your life in just the academics, it would really benefit to open up your social life.

What job are you currently looking for, and why?

After I chose to major in animation during my second year at RISD, I was unsure of what role I specifically wanted to pursue, because animation is a very big field — there are a lot of roles that can exist within it. You can be an animator where you actually animate things. But there's also a lot of roles like character design, designing props, 3D artists, background painters, et cetera, visual development. I became interested in storyboarding specifically because it gives me the most opportunity for storytelling. You are literally one of the first people to have an impact on the story after the script is written, and you get to control to some extent what characters do, how shots go, et cetera. So I gradually became more interested in that. And then after graduation, I decided that is what I want to go in, so that's what I have to rebuild my portfolio around to be specifically just a storyboard portfolio so I can apply to jobs like that, which is why I'm currently taking an extra class for that right now.

What's it like to pursue a career in art? Is it hard?

Definitely. As people say, it is very competitive right now. There's a lot of reasons for why pursuing a career in art can be difficult. Trying to get a career in art can mean a lot of things. There's fine art, there's design, and all of those have their own unique difficulties. But I'll just speak specifically about the difficulties pertaining to trying to find a job or break into the animation industry. Animation is a very small and tight knit industry. I've heard from

professionals that it's currently much more saturated than previous years, and what that means is that there are more people with the skills and the training that are trying to break into it. So there's more competition, which means that it can be harder, especially if you don't have experience. The other thing is networking can be difficult. I think networking and talking to people who already work in jobs you want to work at can be difficult, depending on a myriad of things— where you live, who you meet, et cetera. And I would say in general, It can be difficult to just improve your skills and get good work. It's something that takes a lot of time, and you need to set aside that time to improve your work on whatever area you're interested in.

Do you know what company you want to work for yet? And what kind of media do you want to animate for, like short films or animated movies?

I don't have a specific company in mind, any animation studio I would be very happy to work for. There is one studio, though. It's called Titmouse Studios. I've been a fan of their work for a while, so I would be honored to work for them.

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How do you feel about the advancement of AI?

Generative AI produces fake images, video content, that kind of stuff. I'm not an expert in this, because I'm not in those fields, but I think it's primarily impacting the field of graphic design and illustration. Sometimes I'll see ads outside in the city, and like you can tell they're AI generated. But with animation specifically, it's actually not really having an impact yet— primarily because it's really bad at animating. You can't make it animate anything substantial or good or long running and have a character still have the same face after moving around. People in the animation industry, at least on the artist side, recognize that AI is stealing. It pulls images from all across the internet without artists' permission to use it in its algorithm, and its model. I think many people in history are very much (and I think rightfully so) against AI. We have a lot of good shows that have been coming out over the past few years, and none of it was made with AI. I don't think AI has any place in the animation industry. I can't speak for how good it will become in the future, but it definitely can't make a good story or animate a whole show. There are other issues that are affecting the animation industry more and making the industry hard to get into, way more than AI, so I would say it's not an issue for us. A big thing with the animation industry in the US is that a lot of production work, the animation work itself, is getting outsourced to studios from outside of the US. Instead of animating things in house (in the studio itself) if a studio is producing a show, oftentimes they'll outsource animation works to other studios in Korea that take on work. The reason that studios do this is for money. I don't know the logistics of this, but somehow it's cheaper to do. I think it's because they don't need to hire animators themselves, and it cuts production costs. And other things that can make the animation industry difficult are just minute things. When you're working on a production like a

show or a movie, it's not just the artists and directors themselves just making things. There's higher up executives. A lot of shows and movies right now are on streaming services, like Netflix, Hulu, Disney plus, those are really big companies that have studios do work for their platform. Artists and directors have run into issues with scheduling, shows getting canceled or not approved, because ultimately, those bigger companies have the final say in controlling what shows get put on their platforms.

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Do you know what company you want to work at yet, and what kind of media do you want to animate, like short films or animated movies?

I would honestly be very happy to work for any animation company, I don't have a specific preference. There's a lot of great animation studios out there, and there's a lot of great work being made. There is one studio called Titmouse Animation that I actually had the opportunity to get a tour of their studio in New York City, actually, and meet a lot of people working there, some interns, and I've been a fan of their work for a really long time. So if I could work for them specifically, I would be, really, really stoked. But I think any studio would be a fantastic opportunity, particularly if they offer any sort of apprenticeship or internship type program. And as for what type of media, I guess I'm more interested in TV animation, meaning studios that make shows. So television shows, but I would also be interested in working in a feature film one day. The reason I say TV and shows first is because those tend to be easier to get into than feature film projects. Those tend to have a smaller pool of people, so they can be more competitive and take a long time to make and to plan for. So those projects don't appear as often as shows being made, which have a long production time and often get renewed because there's multiple episodes, and there can be multiple seasons, so it's more long running.

Lastly, what was your life in middle and high school like? And is there advice you'd like to give to younger students like us?

I guess life in middle school through high school was pretty normal, like any other high schooler or middle schooler. I was just trying to do well in class and wasn't really thinking about what I wanted to do with my future that much, which is perfectly fine. Just enjoying the moment that I'm in and hanging out with friends, other than spending the last half of high school also working on college applications and my portfolio. I think I really enjoyed being in school and with friends specifically, and also some of my classes, not just doing art all the time.

My advice for people your age, for middle schoolers, high schoolers, and anyone, is to enjoy the moment, because time will always move forward. And I think making the most of what you can do now and specifically what you want to do now, is really important. I would say, if you're in middle school and you're stressed about the future, please don't be. Just take time to

nurture your own hobbies, whatever it is you're interested in, don't be shy from pursuing it, even if you don't want to make it a career. If it's something you're interested in that's really valuable to you, you should be able to pursue it to whatever degree you want to. So don't be afraid of other people's judgment. Don't be afraid to fail, because that's only going to help push you further. And give yourself the freedom to explore what you like, and take care of your health, especially when you go into high school. Don't pull all nighters.

You mentioned all nighters. Did you pull any during college? You got projects that are kind of long.

Unfortunately, yes, which is why I'm giving this advice to you guys now. I think almost everyone I knew has pulled at least one or several all nighters before. It is the unfortunate reality that students go through. I wouldn't recommend it, and I don't think anyone you talk to who's done it would recommend it either. Sometimes, when push comes to shove, that's the decision that I make, but that's why I would give you advice, since you're young, to set good habits early, and hopefully those will carry through.