

Stars, stories and strategy: Graduating student Alex Lara brings the universe to life through animation

By Gigi Konecki-Brazeal, ASU News
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Editor's note: This story is part of a series of profiles of notable [spring 2026 graduates](#).

It started with a cartoon. In middle school, Alex Lara was sitting at home drawing while watching “Gravity Falls” on Disney XD when the realization hit: They could do that too. They could create worlds, build characters and bring stories to life. From that moment on, Lara said, they¹ became “obsessed with learning animation.”

“The power of animation,” Lara said, “lies in its ability to bring stories to life and enrich our world with art.”

Now a graduating senior at ASU, their childhood spark has grown into a sophisticated, award-winning creative practice that spans 2D and 3D animation, illustration, comic books and beyond.

A first-generation Mexican American digital artist from the Phoenix metropolitan area, Lara is graduating this spring from the School of Art in ASU's Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts, and Barrett, The Honors College with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in animation and a minor in film and media production. Their work is deeply shaped by a passion for astronomy and science fiction, influences that surface in richly imagined characters and narratives that feel both otherworldly and deeply human. Lara chose ASU specifically because it is the [No.1 school in animation in Arizona](#), and they said the Tempe campus and its community delivered on that promise in ways they could not have found anywhere else.

Lara's academic record has been exceptional from the start. They have earned a place on the Herberger Institute Dean's List every semester since arriving in fall 2022, received the Hispanic Scholarship Fund Scholar designation in fall 2024, and this spring, were honored with the Sun Devil Regalia Award. In their first year, they were already exhibiting publicly, showcasing sculpture

and 3D-printed models at Gallery 100 at Mirabella during the “Multidimensional” exhibition, an early signal of the range and confidence that would come to define their work at ASU.

But they also made time to rest.

“My professor for my computer animation and video class, Zeina Barakeh, taught me that it's OK to rest, and that doing so is important,” they said. “I often find myself running at 110%, but maintaining that pace for too long can lead to burnout. Taking breaks to care for yourself and reconnecting with what inspires you to create art are crucial. It helps you mentally and physically prepare for your next big step as an artist.”

Lara also recommends students explore the opportunities provided at ASU.

“Do the side quest, make an effort to go to club meetings, and meet new people because these connections will help you progress in your career and will lead to great opportunities in the future,” they said.

The connections Lara built through ASU's Women in Animation club led directly to an internship at TKMV Studio in Chandler, Arizona, where they contributed storyboards, character development and animation to the short film “Dream of Eta,” and a social media piece, “Winter Wonderland,” while also helping shape the studio's internship program for future artists. Their portfolio has since expanded to include original comic books and graphic novels, including “The CUIR Project” and “Project Umbra,” alongside an ambitious slate of animation projects.

Their capstone project, “Mission: Friend,” is a large-scale work Lara has been developing collaboratively over the past semester and a half. “This is my largest project to date,” they said, “and I can't wait to showcase it when it's complete.” For their Barrett Honors College thesis, Lara designed a board game: “Stars and Strategy: Developing a Board Game to Explore Astronomy Concepts in an Engaging Environment.” The project is a fitting symbol of everything that makes Lara distinctive: a conviction that art and science are not separate worlds, but the same universe waiting to be animated.

“Art has the unique ability to connect with a broader audience, fostering community and togetherness,” they said. It is a philosophy they have lived out, one frame at a time, across four years at ASU.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

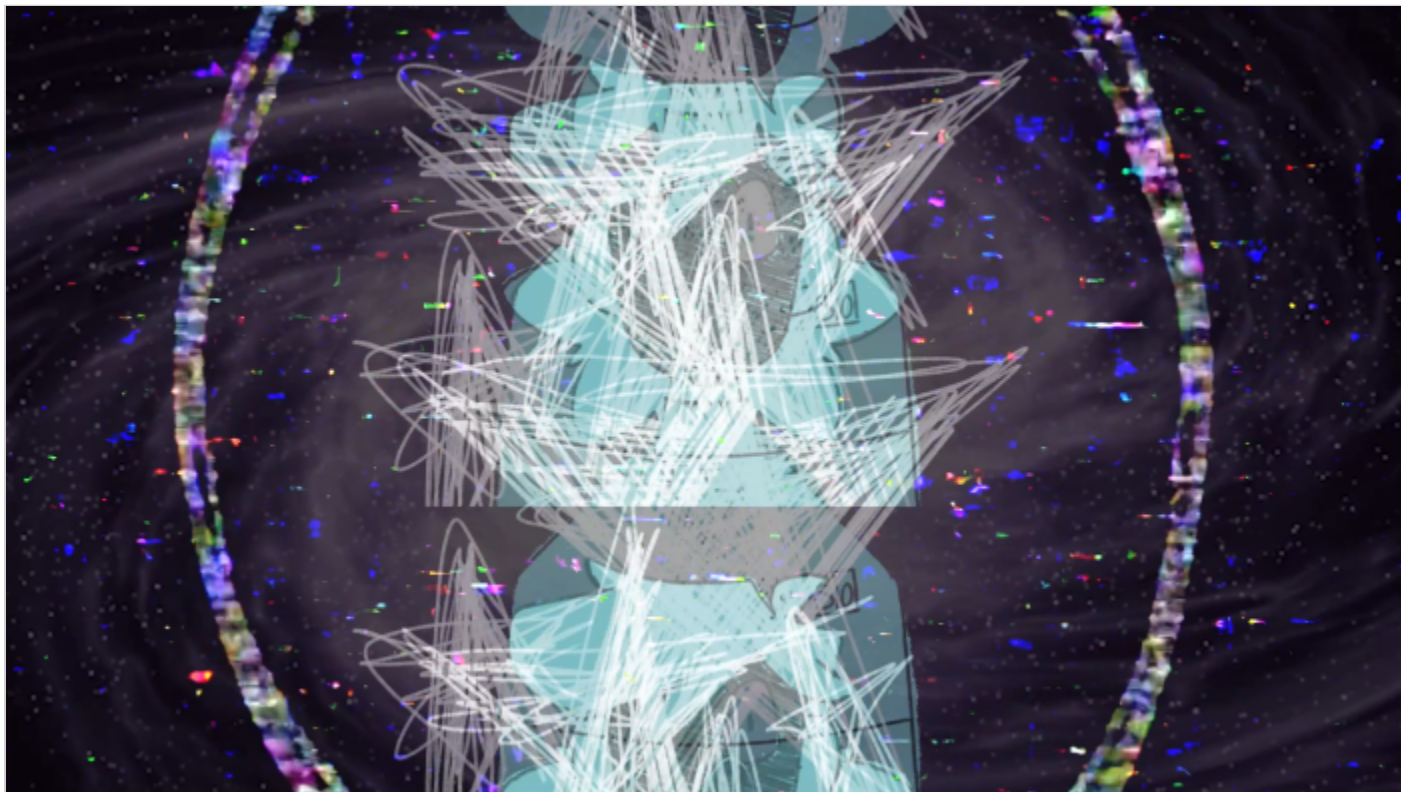
¹ Alex Lara uses they/them pronouns.

Main image



Alex Lara, self portrait

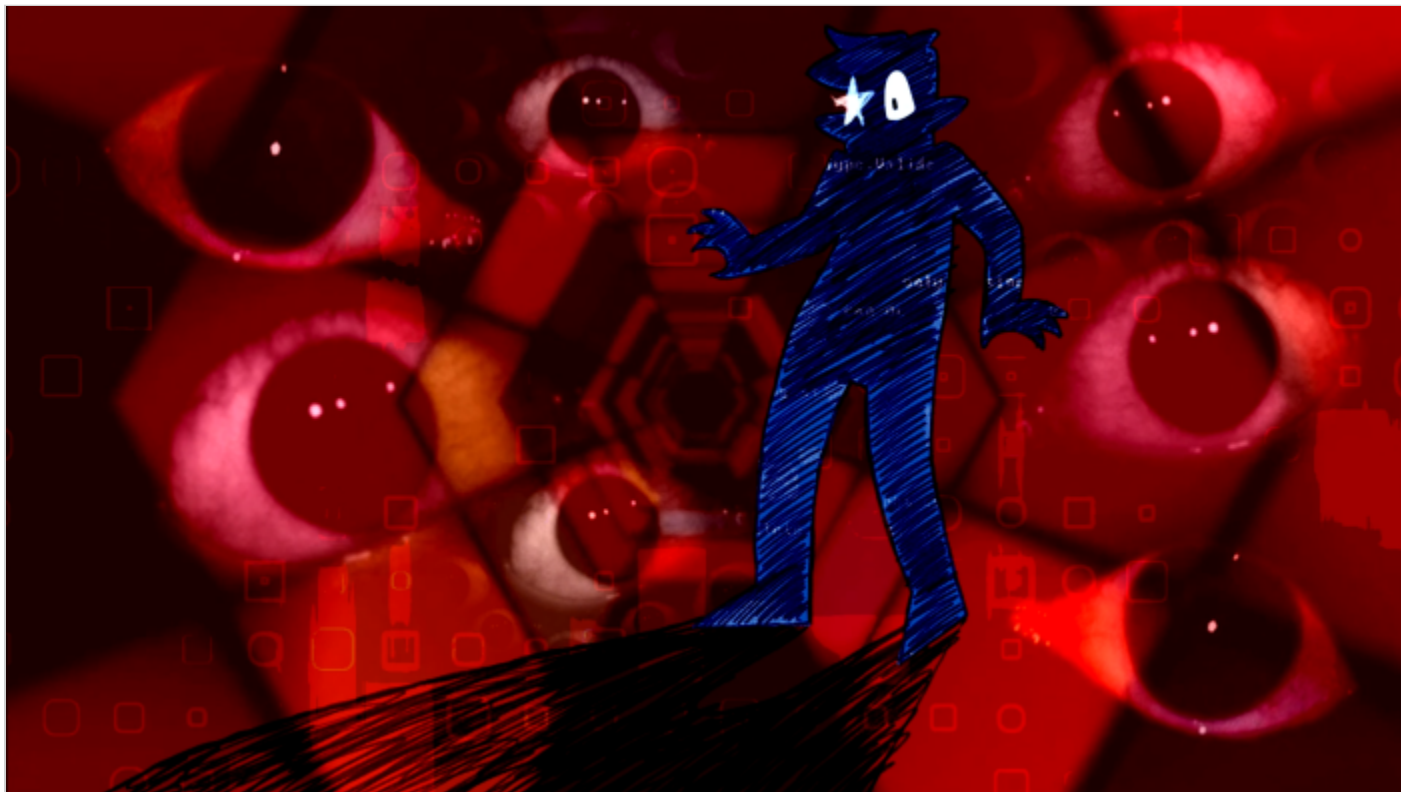
Gallery



Still from "Dysmorphia"



Still from "Disgust"



Still from "Dysmorphia"



Still from "Mission Friend"