PROFILE

Desmos invites Elena Miinea '29 to all-hands meeting after WKND feature

// BY LEONARDO CHUNG

When Elena Miinea '29 first began using Desmos to make art, she was working in a medium most people associate with homework, not creativity.

In January, I wrote about how Miinea turned the graphing calculator into a tool for visual composition. She layered equations into intricate digital forms and then translated them into physical works, like her piece "Diatom Mandala."

A few days later, I received an unexpected email from a reader of the News. Desmos CEO Eli Luberoff '09 reached out to me to say that the piece made his day and asked if I could pass his message along to Miinea, inviting her to share her experience.

After I forwarded the email to Miinea, she told me the email felt almost unreal.

"I thought it was so crazy," she wrote. "I never thought something like this would happen." Until recently, she had not publicized her art beyond her immediate community. The fact that one article led so quickly to a much larger opportunity felt, to her, both surprising and fitting. "This is the type of thing that would only happen at Yale," she said, reflecting on how the news of her work traveled into entirely unexpected places.

Miinea said that, over email, the Desmos team expressed their enjoyment of her unconventional use of the platform. They especially admired her combination of digital art with physical media, she said. The Desmos team told her they are always looking for people who use Desmos in unanticipated ways.

Soon after reaching out by email, the team invited Miinea to present on Zoom at an "all-hands" meeting.

Her presentation focused primarily on "Diatom Mandala," the piece she had built by generating forms in Desmos, collaging them in Procreate, printing the composition onto a linen canvas and drawing diatoms herself with a white paint and a toothpick. But the talk expanded beyond "Diatom Mandala." Miinea also discussed "Evolving Gossamer," a virtual reality piece built around spiderweb-shaped fractals, as well as another work that used 2D Desmos to create a floral collage.



COURTESY OF ELENA MIINEA

Across all three artworks, Miinea focused on the same underlying idea: Desmos had become part of the way she learned, experimented and arrived at the final work. The openness of Desmos, she said, was central to her portfolio and the way she thinks about math — as both an academic subject and a visual language.

Preparing to speak was, in some ways, harder than the talk itself, Miinea said. Part of the challenge was deciding what to emphasize in her presentation. "It was hard to decide exactly what to focus on," she said. But once she narrowed in on the specific role that Desmos played in her sustained artistic investigation, the presentation began to take shape.

The meeting was looser than Miinea expected. She said she logged onto the Zoom preparing for something formal, even dressing as though she was guest speaking at a conference. But the atmosphere quickly dissolved her nerves. The team, she said, was welcoming from the start, and their meeting opened with shoutouts celebrating each other's accomplishments from the month. The Desmos team said they had even mailed a custom notebook for her with her artwork printed on the cover, along with a shirt and stickers.

Some of the comments she received have stayed with her.

One person told her they would love to have a print of her work in the office. Another said that they would enjoy taking a course taught by her. Miinea said these responses motivated her to think more seriously about what it might be like to share her work publicly. Since then, she said she has begun thinking about product creation and building a digital space where people can view her pieces. She's even contemplating making art content on YouTube that explains her process.

What stayed with her most was the team's interest in seeing the platform used in ways they would have never imagined. That, she said, is now part of her artistic motivation going forward. She wants to keep making work that catches her audience off guard.

Miinea is interested in experimenting with newer features, including custom color for 3D graphs, and continuing to explore the relationship between mathematics, nature and culture that already exists in her work.

Looking back, Miinea never thought her art could be more than a hobby. But Desmos' invitation to present to the team widened the scope of what Miinea imagined possible. What began as private experimentation on her laptop has become unexpectedly far-reaching. Miinea was already an unconventional artist, but this wider recognition has made her more excited to continue working outside of the box.

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CULTURE

A first year's guide to Camp Yale

// BY LEONARDO CHUNG

If you're a newly admitted Yale student, choosing which Camp Yale program to participate in is one of the first decisions you will make. The orientation program form arrives in your inbox far before you choose your classes or enter shopping period. Each Camp Yale program promises to build community and tries to sell you a different version of what that pivotal first week could look like. Yale describes Camp Yale as a required part of the opening days, with the programs meant to connect new students to one another, with upperclassmen, the University and, in some cases, New Haven.

First-Year Outdoor Orientation Trips, or FOOT, is by far the most popular Camp Yale program — over 600 first years participated this past year, according to the FOOT website— and it attracts an obvious kind of energy.

FOOT includes four days of backpacking in the Northeast filled with campfires and conversations on the trail. Each FOOTie also shares what's called a "hometown," an opportunity for them to tell their life story to the rest of their group.

It's clear how a bonding experience arises from being collectively sweaty and underslept. Notably, FOOT is designed for all levels of camping experience. The options range from six-mile hiking days to short base-camp hikes and even arts or journaling trips. There is certainly something to be said for outdoor bonding, but the results are mixed: I know FOOT groups that still get dinner every week, and some that rarely reconvene.

Harvest has a similar outdoorsy closeness, but instead of hiking, students spend several days on farms across Connecticut harvesting, planting, cooking, camping, and also sharing hometowns. Both of these options are for people who would like the kind of friendship formed without phone service.

While FOOT and Harvest boast tight-knit communities, other on-campus programs have a reputation for getting students acquainted with the larger social scene. It's the first week after all, so Old Campus suite parties run amok. You might not meet your future best friend there, but it might be nice to get a head start on accumulating the people you'll wave to for the foreseeable future.

These on-campus programs can be interest-based. BUILD is for the students whose ideas of fun include creating things with code, 3D printers, laser cutters and microcontrollers. While no experience is required, Yale notes that a programming background can be an asset. To be honest, I don't know anyone who participated in BUILD.

Meanwhile, LAUNCH leans toward innovation and entrepreneurship. The program includes workshops in Tsai CITY, alumni examples and even a trip to Six Flags. It is the choice for people who enjoy saying "yes" to projects before knowing how exactly they will be done. This program is significantly smaller than FOOT or Harvest, with only about 75 frosh participating this past year.

Camp Yale Arts is likely the easiest program to picture if you'd like a soft landing. Its official description promises sketching, remixing, sculpting, improv, movie screenings, museums and "real beds" — perhaps the strongest sales pitch on the whole webpage! Camp Yale Arts seems built for students who would like to integrate themselves into a creative community but who may feel intimidated by the prospect of diving into the deep end of the on-campus arts scene. Yale says no art experience is required.

Other programs are less hobby-focused and more about creating connections specifically within New Haven. Aptly named, Cultural Connections prioritizes relationships, support systems and the importance of identity, with traditions like a poetry jam and talent show. More difficult conversations about privilege and belonging are also integrated into the program.

Orientation for International Students, which is run by international students in conjunction with the Office of International Students and Scholars, is available for students coming to Yale from abroad. The program includes social activities, information about Yale resources and an exploration of New Haven.

Out of the entire Camp Yale lineup, Yale Reserved is possibly the most self-aware option. Designed for more introverted students who may enjoy quieter, lower-pressure environments, Yale Reserved helps build a community that doesn't force participants into nonstop extroversion — what sort of community that is, I'm not sure.

Other programs turn outward. FOCUS on New Haven, hosted by Yale's Dwight Hall, is grounded in service, local exploration and venturing beyond the gates of Yale. I did FOCUS, and I would definitely say that your experience will depend on what your FOCUS activity is — my group was, strangely enough, assigned to the same farm as a Harvest group. The program's diversity certainly makes it a mixed bag.



JANE CALLANAN

Yale Campus Recreation introduces students to the Payne Whitney facilities, athletic activities, club and intramural sports and fitness education.

The truth is that none of these programs are true "personality tests." Plenty of introverts do FOOT. Plenty of artists do FOCUS. Plenty of others pick at random. None of these programs are a permanent label. Some programs throw you immediately into the woods, some into workshops and difficult conversations, and others into art-making, service or a quieter community. Many people will tell you that their pick ended up mattering less than who they met once they had chosen.

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