

*Hi, I'm Qiyun Woo, a climate communicator, illustrator, and National Geographic Explorer from Singapore!*

I grew up in a tropical city, that's also an island, in Southeast Asia called Singapore. People living in a country with many buildings and a high population are often not as connected to wild nature. Instead, the nature that I, and many in my community, am familiar with is **manicured** parks and nature reserves with paved roads. Our daily lives are made up of clean public transport systems and fast-paced **urban** jobs. They are lives that require high amounts of **consumption**.



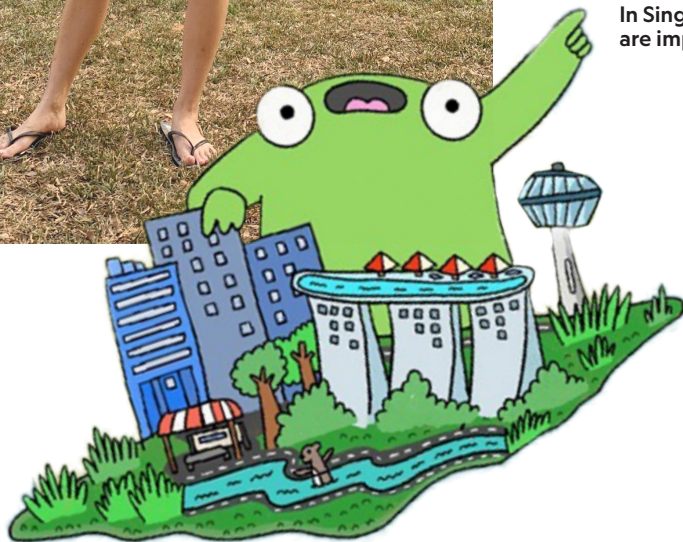
Photo: Mark Thiesen, National Geographic. All illustrations: Qiyun Woo



Photo: Qiyun Woo



In Singapore, I use my art as a way to communicate ideas that are important to me. Map credit: Erica Goldfinger, NGS Staff



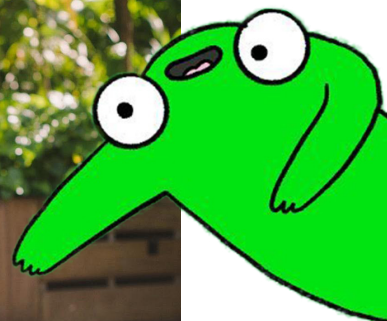
As a teenager, I noticed that this urban life we live can block the way we understand climate change. We bring so much of our food from outside. So, we barely see or know the land where it comes from. Our understanding of biodiversity may be limited to our parks or even the zoo. When I was younger, environmental issues felt distant and hard to act on. I knew I wanted to do something about this.

## Using Art to Communicate

I always loved comic books growing up and I realized that I learn better when information is translated into images. Comics have a way of helping people understand ideas that may not be written in text. Instead, visual cues like background design, colors, symbols, motifs show the meaning. One day at university, my peers kept asking questions about climate change. The answers to their questions could be found in the academic papers we were reading. But the papers were full of difficult language and were too confusing to understand.

I realized I had an answer to their problem! I combined my love of comics and a desire to help my peers. I created a series of small infographics, or images with drawings, charts, and a few words that quickly explain information. The infographics took the difficult information about climate change and made it easy for my peers to understand.

Here are two of the comics I made to raise awareness on how to co-exist with long-tailed macaques in Singapore! Photo Credit: Qiyun Woo



A lot of the comic books I read as a kid have influenced the way I communicate through my art. Photo: Xinning

## Finding My Voice

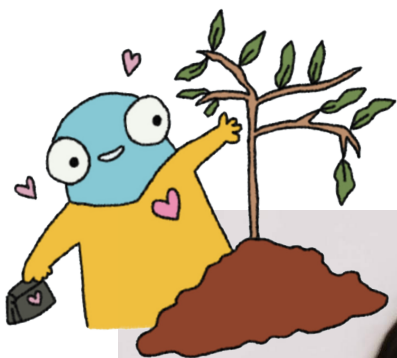
Since creating that first drawing in university, I've used my art to tell other stories of climate conservation and co-existence. Climate conservation is work or planning that tries to protect the planet. Co-existence is the idea that people, animals, and plants live well together on Earth, making sure humans share the space and don't harm each other or the planet.

One time I saw a viral video of a bad encounter between a long-tailed macaque and a young boy. In the video, the boy was returning home from school and met a monkey in his path. The monkey snatched his bag, and the boy desperately called for help. In Singapore, this behavior is common for macaques because many humans feed the monkeys. So, the monkeys think human bags always have food to eat. Watching this video made me think about one reality that we urbanites struggle with. How can we co-exist with these monkeys and what can we do to prevent these events from happening? I knew art was the answer. I worked with local primatologists, scientists who study monkeys and apes, to create a how-to guide. We made instructions about how to live or walk near the macaques in public areas or nature parks. I decided to make the comic pastel as a way to soften the strong and mean image many people link with macaques.

## Embracing the Weird and Celebrating the Wild

I created The Weird and the Wild as a way to display my comics and bright illustrations. The goal is to **empower** communities with the knowledge to act on climate change. I wanted people to notice that nature isn't always pretty or charming, but sometimes a little funky and weird. "Wild" stuck with me because I firmly believed that we need to keep nature wild, and not always managed by us humans. That's why I chose the name "The Weird and Wild."

Another challenge in a country like Singapore is that activism is not seen as positive. Comics have allowed me a way to share sometimes challenging ideas that might not be well received if written as text.



I've worked with a lot of different organizations to create comics and illustrations that help inspire action for my local and global community. Photo: Durva Bose

The Weird and Wild has become a space to help my community in Singapore understand the natural world they live in. It is a place to show that the human-wildlife conflict we face is not because of a misbehaving monkey. It is a direct cause of cutting down forests to make room for more human housing. The Weird and Wild also teaches how overconsumption is connected to pollution in our waters and landfills. It teaches how overconsumption often relies on **exploitative supply chains**. The Weird and Wild aims to share climate issues that are not easy to solve. This is especially true in our urban context. There is something so humbling about being in a wild space. It is so powerful that we should both be afraid of it and in awe of it. So, how will you help others learn about the environment you live in? To see more of my comics, follow me online @ TheWeirdandWild!

### VOCABULARY

**Manicured:** Something that is neat, tidy, and well cared for

**Urban:** An area that is in a big city, often with many buildings and people.

**Consumption:** The act of buying, eating, and using of things

**Long-tailed macaque:** A species of monkey common to Southeast Asia that commonly live near humans in suburban or urban areas.

**Urbanites:** People who live in a city or urban area.

**Empower:** The ability to protect people, cultural resources, and the environment by using knowledge, confidence, means, and ability to take action and make a difference.

**Exploitative supply chains:** Supply chains are the series of steps of bringing things from their start to their selling point. A t-shirt might start with cotton farming and picking, weaving, cutting, and sewing in a factory, shipping, and then selling at a store. In exploitative supply chains, the people at the beginning of the chain who grow or make the parts aren't treated fairly or paid enough so the people at the end can sell the item for a huge profit.

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