

OUT OF LEFT FIELD

Creative people discover passion projects in myriad ways. Nicole Melville found hers during a drag softball game. In 2010, Melville, who was playing in Cleveland's LGBT North Coast Softball league, had to create a persona for the *Beauty and the Beast*-themed game. She took the field as an androgynous character, introducing herself as Gay Gatsby, "a bathing beauty from the 1920s" who'd "like to take a dip in your sinker" or "give you a Bronx cheer in your cat's meow."

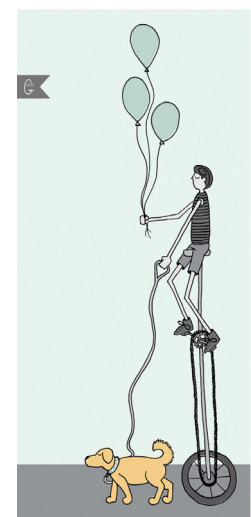
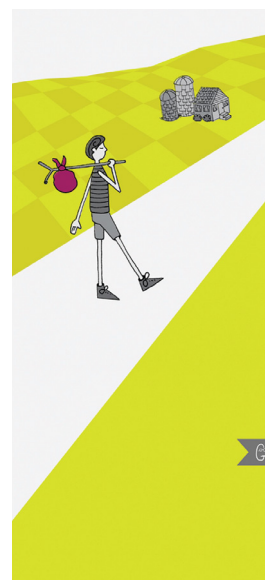
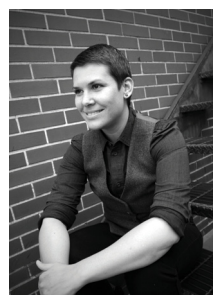
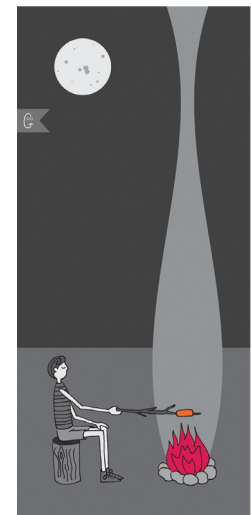
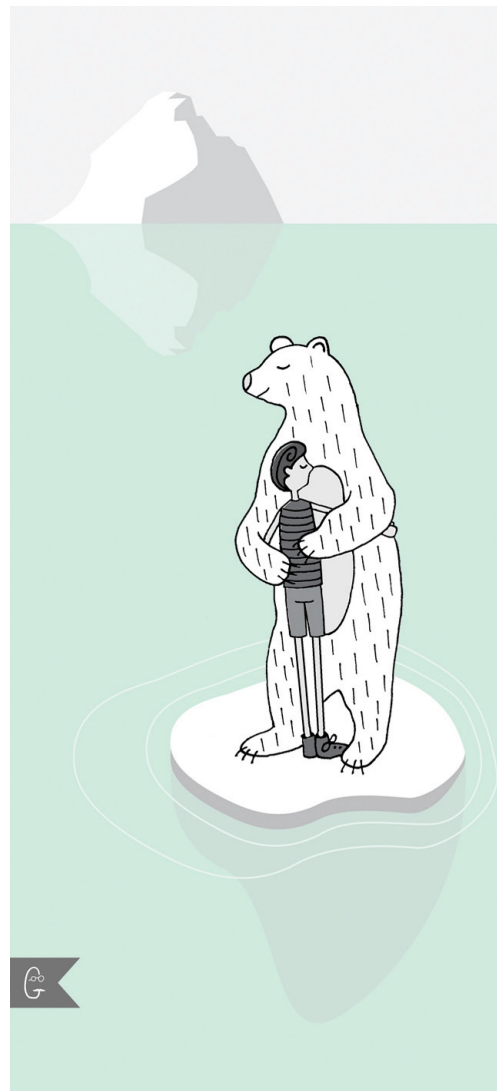
The game ended; the Gay Gatsby name stuck. A passion project was born. "I knew I wanted to create queer-centric art—since that's one aspect of who I am—as well as promote the community," she says. So when Melville, an art director at Cleveland-based agency Melamed Riley, had a free hour between work and spinning class, she began combining a simple line-drawing style with minimalist backgrounds to create various posters.

Melville brought what she loved most about her Gay Gatsby character—the bawdy yet benign attitude—to the resulting prints. Titles like "Bear," "Swings Both Ways" and "Flaming," phrases commonly heard within the LGBT community, juxtapose whimsical, G-rated imagery. Melville knew she was onto something when her initial print—sold to benefit a friend who'd been in an accident—took off. "I originally set out to do a series of three," she says. "However, after I was done, I realized I was having fun and wanted to keep going. So I did."

Area boutique Room Service soon invited Melville to participate in their Made in the 216 pop-up shop, which features new work from select artists who call Cleveland home. This notoriety pushed her to create the Gay Gatsby website and begin promoting the character on a greater scale—something she'd like to continue. "I'm at the point where I would like to expand the line," Melville says. "I would love to do greeting cards, as well as a coloring book. I would also really like to create a G. Gatsby haberdashery, which takes men's fashion but tailors it for women."

Whatever her next endeavor may include, Melville refuses to treat "busy" like a four-letter word. "It seems weird, but for me, the busier I am, the more creative and prolific I am with my work," she says. "It's also the reason why I fill my downtime by creating. Make something with your hands, play an instrument, write, draw. You never know what will come from it." [HOW](#)

Joseph Hughes is one-half of the Kent, OH-based husband-and-wife creative collaborative Northcoast Zeitgeist. www.northcoastzeitgeist.com



WEB EXTRA
Read a Q&A with Nicole Melville, aka Gay Gatsby.
HOWdesign.com/May-2014