Ella Dobson:
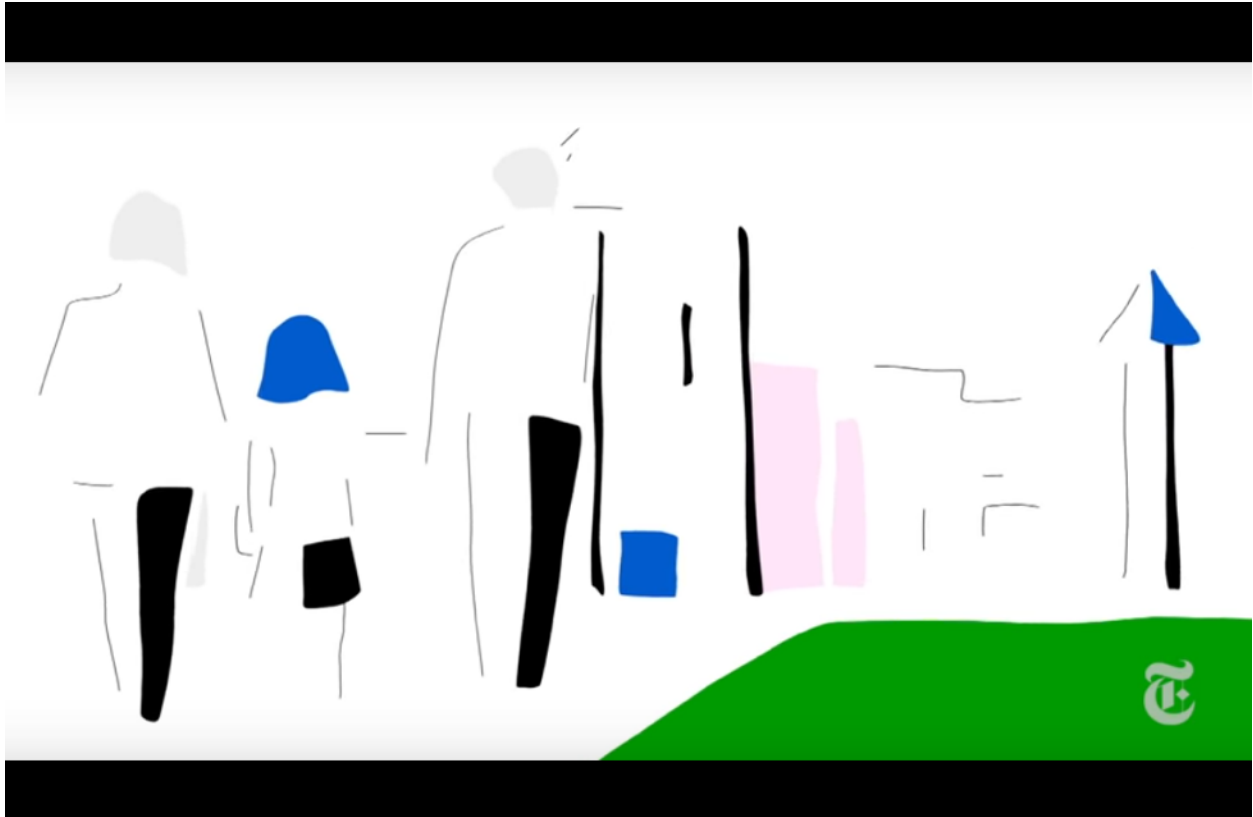**Understanding more with less / when words are not enough**

By Jennifer Vignone

Technology has opened the doors of communication not only wider, but frequently to the point of over-exposure. We can phone, email, text, tweet, and FaceTime. We have applications that can translate on-the-fly. We can still interact face-to-face (shudder) and snail mail (what?) However, in a world where communication should be so easy and accessible, we still have difficulty understanding one another.

Ella Dobson is a designer and animator. Her goal is to reach people beyond the spoken word. It is an art to be able to use this medium effectively. Where there might be a language or communication barrier of some kind, the imagery can be the key to understanding.
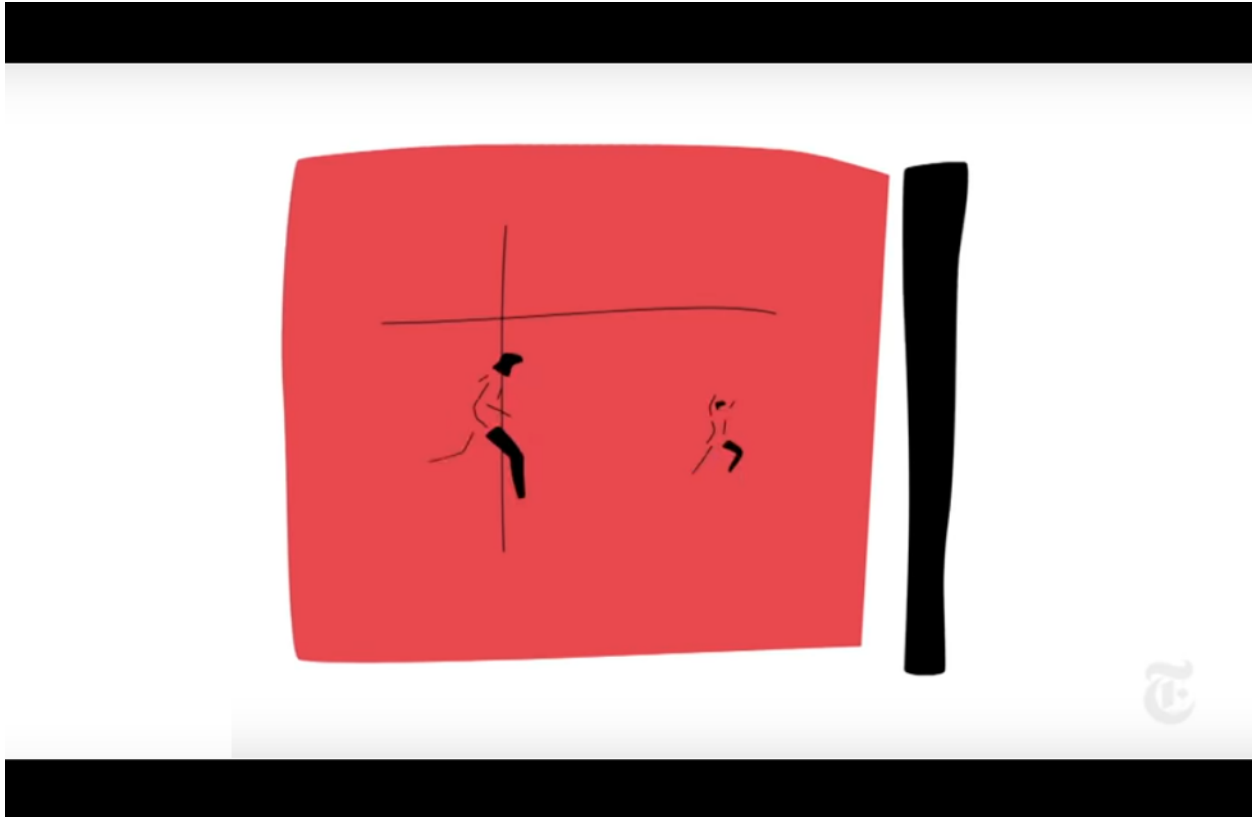
Ms. Dobson's work is deceptively simple. Her inspirations include Matisse, from the bold use of color and design design perspective and Saul Bass in how she combines design, typography and animation. The shapes are flexible so that their transitions are fluid, the animations transition seamlessly with intriguing flows and inventive shifts.They complement the narrative in away that engages but is not gimmicky, making it easier to follow along with the music and narration. Ms. Dobson understands that staying true to the story is the core. By not allowing the imagery to dominate or become its own showcase, the context is maintained and the message is complete.

Ms. Dobson's award-winning work for [“How the Parkland Shooting Changed My Son”](#) (The New York Times' second season of Conception -- 'When Your Child's Bogeyman Is Real') deals with the issues of being a parent in extreme circumstances. The narrator talks about her son's reaction to the [Parkland Shootings](#), as well as her own with the [Virginia Tech Massacre](#) (Producer: Margaret Cheatham Williams; Design & Animation: Ella Dobson).

When Your Child's Bogeyman Is Real (screenshot), from The New York Times series *Conception*.
Producer: Margaret Cheatham Williams. Design & Animation: Ella Dobson.

The narrator starts with her own childhood and quiet life growing up in Virginia. The simple lines of a family walking in a town with a patch of bright green grass conveys the mood of tranquility. She then speaks of her son who describes their current hometown as a place where nothing ever happens. However, this all changes with the Parkland Shootings (2018).
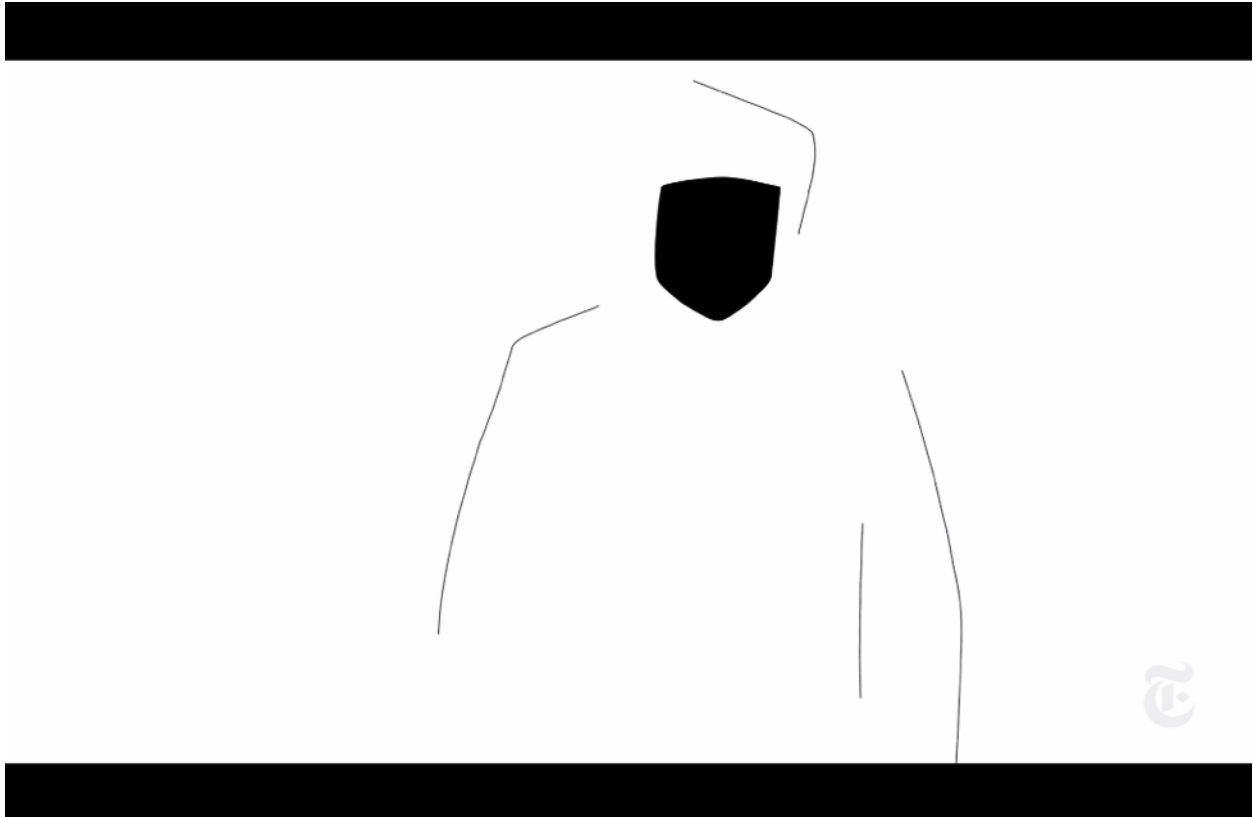
When Your Child's Bogeyman Is Real (screenshot), from The New York Times series *Conception*.
Producer: Margaret Cheatham Williams. Design & Animation: Ella Dobson.

The animation morphs into running figures and the overlay of red which tells us exactly what is happening. As the narrator's voice modulates, the animation's shimmying forms convey her emotion as she tells her story.

When Your Child's Bogeyman Is Real (screenshot), from The New York Times series *Conception*.
Producer: Margaret Cheatham Williams. Design & Animation: Ella Dobson.

She relates her own experience of the Virginia Tech Massacre years earlier (2007). As the mother and child figure sit together, the red veil of danger, fear, and death persists.

When Your Child's Bogeyman Is Real (screenshot), from The New York Times series *Conception*.
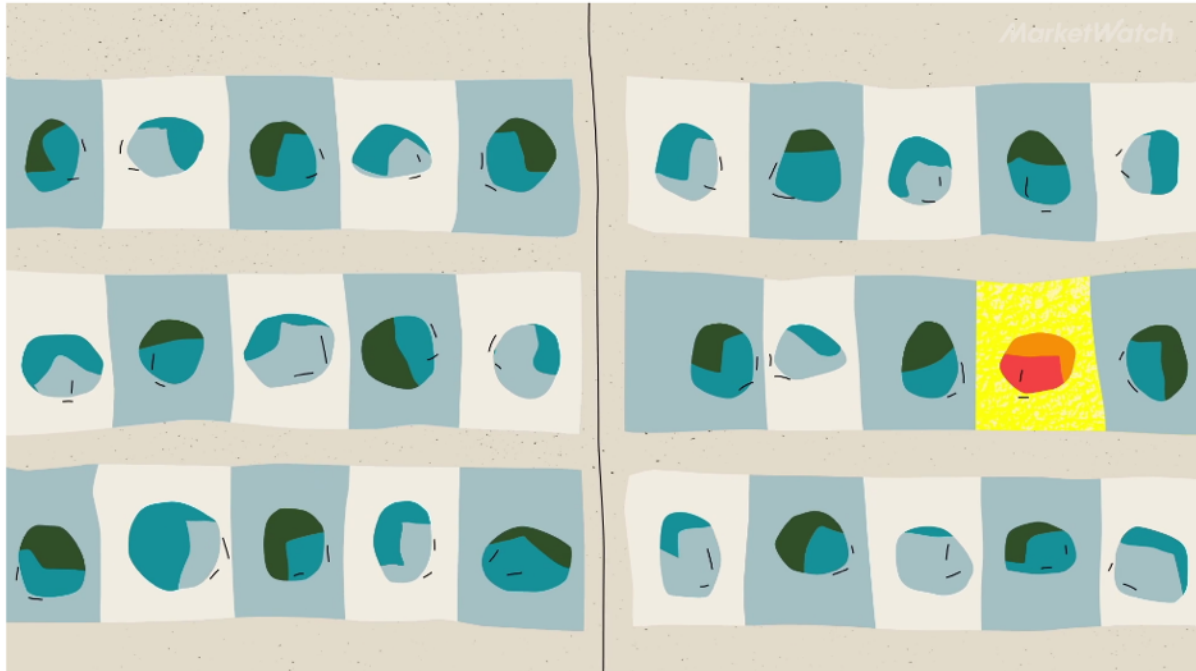Producer: Margaret Cheatham Williams. Design & Animation: Ella Dobson.

For the final sequence, the bare black and white treatment conveys the sense of alienation with elegant terror.

In contrast to such grim realities, Ms. Dobson has done work for MarketWatch in their story, 'Why Mailchimp CEO Ben Chestnut prefers sticky notes to PowerPoints,' and Spotify, animating their end of year campaign, 'Your 2018 Wrapped.'
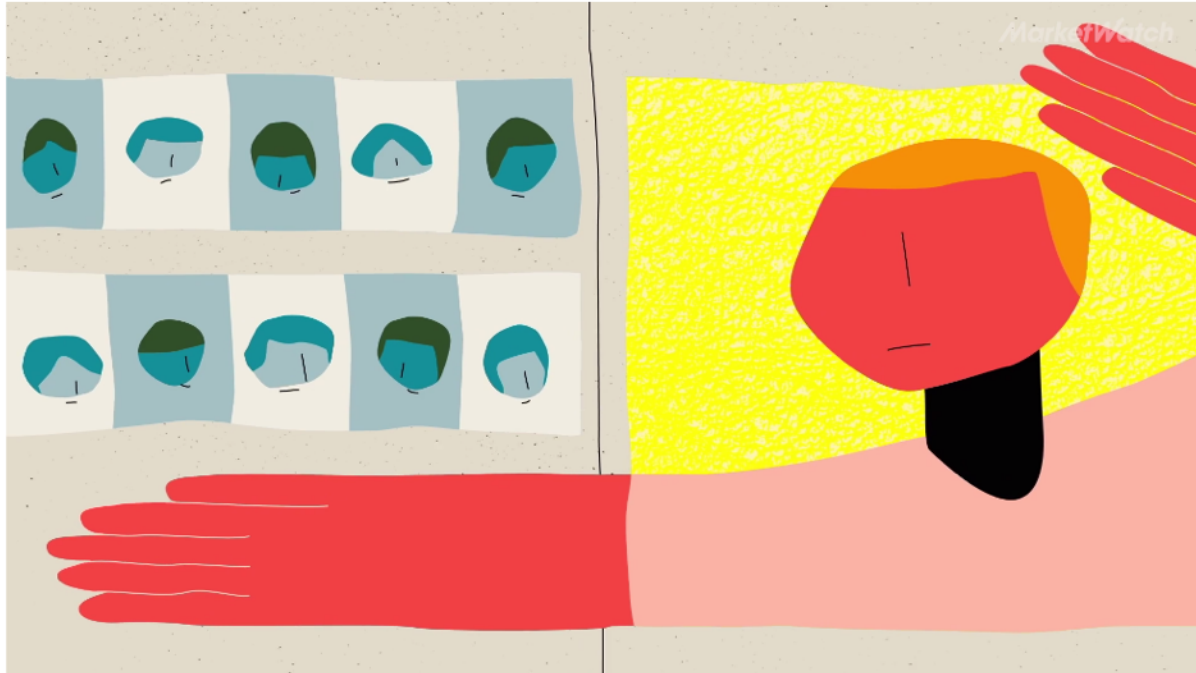
In the Mailchimp piece, she worked with the Barron's Group to tell the story of Mailchimp CEO and Co-founder, Ben Chestnut. The tone is decidedly upbeat, reflecting the informal charm of the CEO's narration.

When Mr. Chestnut's speaks about his feelings about Asian stereotypes, her imagery effectively interprets that experience, first by highlighting the visual difference:

Then, with wry humour, as Mr. Chestnut talks about "everyone thinking I knew Kung Fu", Ella's clean lines and bright palette make the animation pop, bringing focus and clarity to the story.

The colorful imagery and playful linear drawings take a story that deals with business development, sterotypes, and potential discrimination and make it accessible, as it seamlessly blends with Mr. Chestnut's open, non-confrontational account.

Ms. Dobson graduated from Auckland University of Technology in 2016 with a BA in Communication Design and has already garnered nominations and awards such as: Best Awards, Moving Image Finalist (2019); NYT Emmy nomination for the NYT 'Conception' series for category 'Outstanding New Approaches: Arts, Lifestyle and Culture' (2019); New Creators Showcase, Cannes Lions - Winner (2019); D&AD Next Animator - Winner (2019); and AI-AP's Int'l Motion Art Awards 7 - Winner (2019). She is currently working on an animated piece with 20th Century Fox for an upcoming Netflix series, "Girlboss". Ella Dobson's resume is impressive. It is easy to see why.

Though just 24, Ella Dobson has already accrued a following. With an insight into how animation can enrich experience and noting that people crave more authenticity and less fancy effects, she has carved out a niche for her work where the growth potential is limitless. You can learn more about Ella Dobson and see more of her work on her web locations: website, https://www.elladobson.com/; and LinkedIn, https://www.linkedin.com/in/ella-dobson-38b577124. Her interview on NY-ARTNews provides insight regarding her technique, influences, and approach.