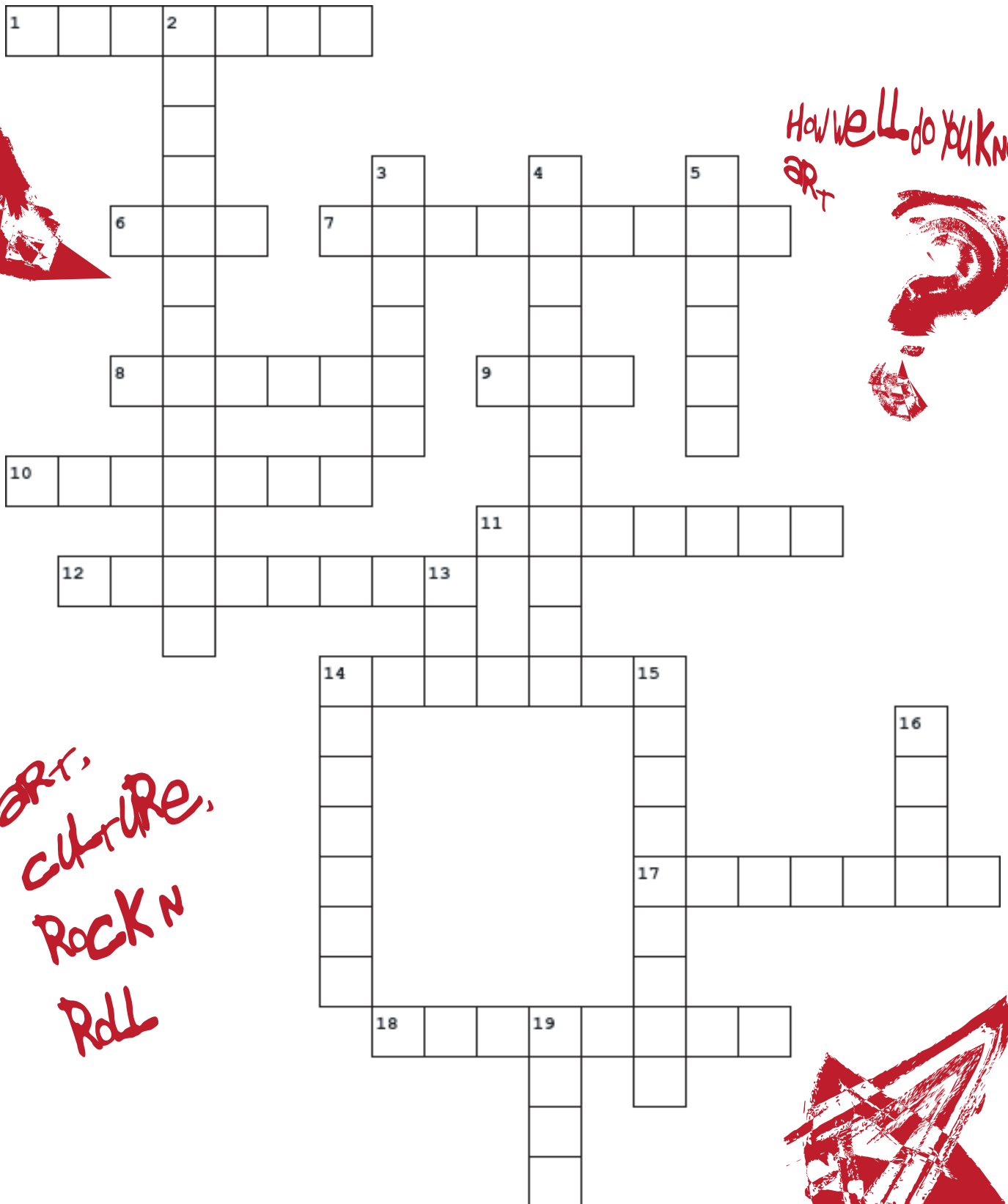


RATROCK



ISSUE 2

RATROCK CROSSWORD



How well do you know
ART

ART,
CULTURE,
ROCK N
ROLL



across

1. Renaissance artist who painted a very famous meal
6. This museum's steps famously appear in *Gossip Girl*
7. Low Steps' very own musical festival
8. Colloquially known as "a rat with wings"
9. Best Picture nominee starring Cate Blanchett
10. Columbia sculpture located in front of the Philosophy building
11. Artist known for his drip and splatter technique
12. Famous neo-expressionist artist who graffitied under the name "SAMO"
14. NYC neighborhood where you can go gallery hopping
17. The scientific name of the family to which rats belong
18. Famous Barnard alum's directorial debut set in Sacramento

CROSSWORD

down

2. 19th-century art movement seen in the works of Matisse, Degas, Renoir
3. What phase the moon was on the 2023 spring equinox?
4. Apocalyptic video game AND TV show about a fungus outbreak
5. This year's award season's smallest red carpet guest, who was voiced by alum Jenny Slate in the titular film
13. Beloved NYC bridge is turning 140 years old in May
14. Art form that involves assembling various materials on a piece of paper or digitally.
15. Performance artist best known for her work where participants sit silently at a table with her
16. The Venezuelan musician whose most recent albums are part of her "Kick" series
19. Star of a 2022 film that includes "talking" rocks

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Aries

(March 21st - April 19th)

Finding yourself bearing the brunt of something obscene, it is harder to write the love letters you used to bleed out before but, ironically, it is easier to send them. You affirm to yourself that soon you will kiss the edges of the page again, anxious as if you keep ending up with the Queen of Spades in a game of Hearts. You forget that love never dies, it just ages.

Gemini

(May 21st - June 20th)

Peace collapses into you after a particularly hardy battle. The stench of your armor feels more like an olfactory medallion than a memory of physical suffering. No one will fault you for riding high on your horse, but remember to clean the blood off your sword before presenting yourself to the king.

Leo

(July 23rd - August 22nd)

You keep waiting for affection branded with lucky number 3, but your magnetism wanes with desperation. Nightly seances to cosmic soulmates lose their ritual magic when you become the specter flickering your own candles. Ghosts cannot hold you without the stench of ectoplasm. Try kissing someone with telekinesis for a change.

Taurus

(April 20 - May 20)

You will be disoriented by a typical delusion that rapidly becomes too honest. It is important to ponder the arcane, but splashing around in shallow water can also bring brilliant reflections of the sun. A true philosopher king would know when to sink their feet in the sand instead of their head. Do not forget to wear sunscreen!

Cancer

(June 21st - July 22nd)

All of your favorite songs have been out of tune lately. The bass is too loud, the rhythm is hard to follow, and you can't quite make out the lyrics that used to twirl inside your skull during a rest in conversation. The dissonance is destabilizing, but you hate the itchiness of radio silence. Consider slipping your headphones off and listening to the static.

Virgo

(August 23rd - September 22nd)

You will grow tired of poetics. In response to the warm weather, you will jettison the carefully manufactured shawl of complexity, disavowing the padding of circuitous verses and syntactic stitching. You will seek and discover ultimate, personal truth in a tank top and a pair of denim shorts.

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Scorpio

(October 23rd - November 21st)

In a moment of pure anarchical sentiment, you became a constitutional criminal. You regret nothing but the circumstances of your capture, but now you fear the ramifications on the loved ones who remain free. This anxiety has been weighing heavily on your usually liberating hand, debilitating your wily charm. Begin plotting your escape.

Capricorn

(December 22nd - January 19th)

Do not panic! You will experience a quiet, necessary calamity the same way a caterpillar does when it curls into its chrysalis. It is easy to feel fearful and unsure as you build your caged nest, but do not forget to relish in the paradoxical beauty of tender emotion, a byproduct of the solitary nature of your being.

Pisces

(February 19th - March 20th)

Whimsical, willowy walker, you wander across campus wistfully without reason. You want a winding way, a path to worship, but will Broadway and Amsterdam ever be worthy enough? Whisper why you wish for immaterial wealth, wield it as your weapon until it withers.

Libra

(September 23rd - October 22nd)

Arbitrary borders are increasingly sacrosanct to you. Who are you if not an immovable, geographical landmark? You relish the feeling of cartographical significance, collecting travel brochures to gift your favorite tourists. Ask yourself about the status of physical maps in the age of GPS.

Sagittarius

(November 22nd - December 21st)

Grappling with the diverse nature of existence, you will begin to reject specificity. Eight million different stories feels entirely too much for one library, much less one bookshelf. Generalization, although easier to understand, is the enemy of true community, and you learn to dilly-dally in nuance.

Aquarius

(January 20th - February 18th)

There are many words to describe the unexpected way warmth has been settling in between your bones recently, but none of them can truly encapsulate the perturbing sensation. You are beyond comprehension right now, speak in tongues in more ways than one while you try to decipher the gibberish lining your tendons. Make translation errors.

2023

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ratrock

"Don't judge, rat, but I had a particularly late night study sesh with a guy from Tinder and one thing led to another and we ended up making out in the stacks. Bad decision already, I know. It gets worse though- a girl from my Lit Hum class walked in on us, gasped, and ran out. I can already feel the tension that is going to be hanging in the air in class on Monday... What should I do?"

"My son won't stop listening to Ed Sheeran (and his new stuff, not even his old stuff). I try to tell him to stop but he won't. I've taken his phone away and he got a record player and vinyls. I took those away and he got a walkman (where do you even get a walkman these days??). I took that away and he hired an entire band to come play Ed Sheeran live in our house. I sent them away and he is now relentlessly singing Ed Sheeran at full volume 24/7. I am losing my mind daily, every minute, every second. I even tried googling "Anti-Ed Sheeran Conversion Camp" (It doesn't exist). Help."

Try introducing him to Charli XCX. He'll never look back, and then everyone in the household can be operating at maximum slay every day. You'll never have to worry about Ed again unless you enter an indoor mall or the Hewitt cafeteria.

This one's so easy I could answer it with my eyes closed. You pull her aside after class and invite her to join you both next time. Then everyone is happy and the tension is diffused between three people instead of two- and according to math, that's less tension per person.

"Has anybody seen my phone?"
Sent from my iphone

I think the real phones are the ones we made along the way.

ratvice

"I'm talking to this girl and I really wanted to impress her, so I told her I'm part of a secret society here at Columbia. When she wanted to know more about it I panicked and started a fake one with some friends. I wanted to make it seem legit so I got some more people in on it, wrote a little manifesto, and even got some knockoff Rolexes to throw into the river. Problem is, it's been a few weeks and now I'm the leader of a full blown cult that honors a made up celestial overlord and does blood rituals at 3 a.m. in Riverside Park every Sunday. I'm in too deep and I don't know what to do.

This one's simple. Tell them you received a prophecy from your celestial overlord—maybe even stage a fake vision live during a meeting for good measure—telling you that if the members abandon the society right now, they'll all get summer internships at massive companies that pay more than minimum wage. As for the girl, move on—hot take, but being into cults is lowkey a red flag.

"There's a Barnard Baddie who I always see in class with the prettiest face, but she has the worst drip ever. I'm talking egregious fits. Do I ask her out? Can I fix her?"

Depends. If the drip is highschool boy from Ohio wearing neon gym shorts in the winter-bad, it's a no-go. If it's a bad attempt at high concept fashion in an editorial, Björk-gone-wrong kind of way, I think there's hope. In that case, just make sure you're wearing at least one chain and vintage pants that are at least a size too large when you ask her out.



Dear
rat...



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

CARLOS SÁNCHEZ-TATÁ

Feature by Iker Veiga
Photos by Sungyoon Lim

is a junior studying Art History and Visual Arts at Columbia College. His work oscillates between abstraction and portraiture, and explores the tensions between queerness and his Venezuelan heritage. Through his musical, vibrant style, Carlos enchants the viewer, inviting them to take part in a moment of absolute ecstasy. We met via Zoom to discuss healing, passion, and being an artist in New York City.

Can you talk about your first memories making art?

I have always drawn and been interested in the arts. However, the first time I put thought into what I wanted to draw, I was in high school. Most of those pieces actually give me the ick today, though. My high school work was super dramatic. Back then, I used painting to explore my past trauma, so I included many references to Catholicism, which made my art very dark, and even bloody.

Did you heal through art?

It depends on what you define as healing. I try to empower myself through painting. It's more about healing after seeing the result, rather than creating just so that I can move on. Art is one of the things that I know how to do well, therefore, in order to heal, I try to make something that I'm proud of. The process of creating is healing in itself, so I don't often explicitly depict scenes that overwhelm me. Nevertheless, many of the topics I touch upon in my pieces do come from my own insecurities. I usually draw inspiration from themes that I'm obsessed with, that have saturated my thoughts and drained me emotionally. The charged energy of the paintings comes from my own self-awareness and restlessness. Sometimes my pieces are really sexual, sometimes they're very busy, but there is always a tinge of anxiety to them. In order to fully capture and exploit the solitude I feel, I don't tend to represent multiple people in one piece.

How do you explore such personal topics through portraits of other people?

At first I used to draw myself because I was the only model I had access to. I committed to self-portraiture for the longest time during high school, and my best pieces of that time are without a doubt self-portraits, but you cannot draw yourself in every work because it gets boring. As my work matured, I began to depict other people, and I soon gravitated towards queer people. It became more interesting to make these people a reflection of my consciousness. Through my models' physicalities I am able to express narratives similar to mine in other subjects.

I believe that most of my paintings are about fifty different things, so it's hard for me to narrow down what each of them is doing on its own. My portraits are not just representations of one person, because there are many factors in the background that complicate the situation depicted. In my work I am also trying to world-build, mainly through abstractions that seize the energy of my subjects.



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

Can you elaborate on the relationship between queerness and your art?

When I was in high school, I struggled to represent my identity in my art. I tried to capture what I obsessed over, but my desires always conflicted with my Catholic surroundings. Nonetheless, when I got to college, I realized that I could create art that not only represented queerness, but also celebrated it, and that is what makes my newer work more joyful. Being queer is super difficult, especially in New York City. It is super lonely and intense, but it is also colorful. The passion you feel is so rich when you are queer, especially coming from a family who are just assholes about it.

There is a particular painting, one with a drip (like my professor calls it) that my friends call a “sex painting.” As sexual as “Wild Anticipation” is, it carries a bigger meaning than that. That painting was a huge breakthrough for me at the moment because it made me confront my sexuality. It had a lot of personal narrative to it, and it represented an absolute climax. It is about passion, it is about love.

You can see my queerness evolve through my art. A year later, I made “The Greatest Fox Hunt,” a painting of my boyfriend, and this one was not as sexual: it was about capturing passion in a different way. Even though in my work, people usually take up the roles I want them to take, it was different in this one. In this piece, the character was not someone that I could fulfill. Since he’s someone I have a relationship with, this painting is not about me: it’s about us.

How can we see your background clashing with your queer identity in your art?

I lived in Venezuela until I was 6 years old, which inherently made my upbringing a lot more colorful. Venezuelan people are a lot more artistic than they think; they are also funnier than what they think, which has really helped me. Even if someone looks at my work and thinks that they are all serious pieces, humor is the only thing that has helped me besides art itself. My surroundings were also extremely Catholic while growing up, which conflicted with my identity and with the stories I want to tell through my art.

In spite of this, I cannot ignore the influence that Catholicism has on my art. Even if my portraits don’t display it directly, there is a big religious inspiration that I drew from the images of Saints I was exposed to while growing up. In fact, one of the reasons why I am also studying art history is because of my passion for Medieval Christian art. I took a class with Gregory Bryda that I loved, where I learned about symbolism, which characterizes my work now. At first, the inspiration I drew from religion came from a place of pain, because Christianity was not the place where I wanted to be. But now that I have clawed myself out of it, even if my influences come from elsewhere, religious motifs still make it into my work.

One of my favorite artists is Naudline Cluvie Pierre. Her work is mythological, but it looks religious, and she often presents the viewers with moments of climax, which is something I do as well. I want you to witness a moment of greatness. And that is so religious! I am still trying to reconcile myself with Catholicism, because I can’t just be like “I hate Jesus,” and move on. I look at, for example, Ethel Cain, and I realize that she’s not only satirizing religion, but also dealing with her own religious trauma, and that is something I must do, as much as it scares me, because it underlies most of my paintings.



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

CADENCE GONZALES

Feature by Raunak Lally
Photos by Anais Mittelberg

is a first-year at Barnard who primarily paints both using paint and digital media to create. She has been creating art since her school days and has playfully indexed her creative journey by who she has used as references for her colorful and intricate works.

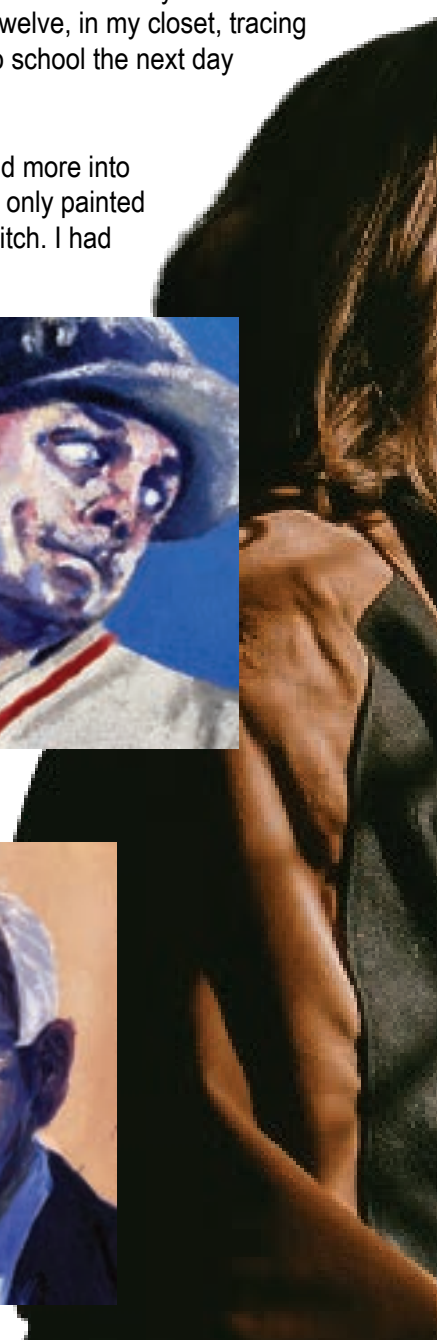
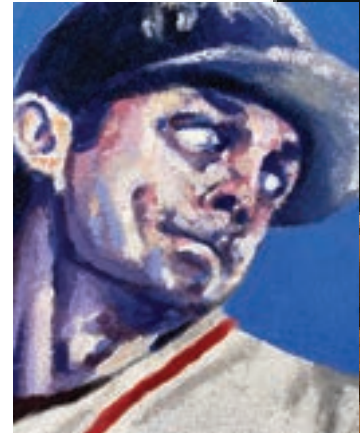
Where would you say that your creative journey began? What drew you to creating portraiture and art in general?

I've been drawing since I was a little kid and it was all terrible. Absolutely terrible. There was no trace of talent anywhere. In seventh grade, it's really embarrassing – my art journey starts off with anime – so get ready for that. I was twelve, in my closet, tracing on my computer because I thought that it was a horrific thing to do, that I was tracing. I would go to school the next day and say "look at this! Look what I just did!"

Fast forward, over the course of four years, I was drawing little cartoons and I was getting more and more into comic style. I was using markers and pens, that's my bread and butter. I hadn't painted – I think I'd only painted one time, and that was a very poorly done Stitch from *Lilo & Stitch*, an aggressively poorly done Stitch. I had taken AP Art, and the first time I did comic style, it was political commentary. I did well on the test, felt good about it. Then I took AP Drawing, so I just got to take the class again and still get the AP credit! I visited Washington D.C. with my family and went to the National Portrait Museum, where they have all the presidential portraits, and I was thinking about what my theme was going to be, so I said I would just try that, and, lo and behold, I did and it has literally changed my artistic journey forever - by just picking up a paintbrush and just seeing whatever the heck happens next. I absolutely loved the fact that it's been on my own terms and it's amazing for little kid Cadence, who struggled. I can take pride in that feeling of 'oh we can create things now,' and not just because other people like them but because it makes my brain feel good to see things coming together. It's been really awesome to start a new challenge and develop new skills along the way since I'm not formally trained.

Across your distinct works, when you decide on a subject for a painting, what might inspire you to choose that certain subject?

When I was in my AP Art era, my concentration was on my political role models, as politics are very intertwined into who I am, what I believe in, and what I want to do. That led to Stacey Abrams portraits, Ruth Bader Ginsberg portraits, John Lewis portraits, and I felt like I put more emotional coinage in those. Now, I am choosing things that I find challenging. I love a really good challenge, and love to 'struggle bus' through it, in the words of Trixie Mattel. I don't have any typical process, my stuff is all over the place, but it's good fun!



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

Do your color palette or texture choices ever align with the subject within the piece, or is it a spontaneous decision? What might your planning process and the development of your inspiration look like?

I'll use my first ever painting as an example, which is my Joe Biden painting. I feel complicated about that being my first painting, and also my favorite painting; I'm not a Joe Biden hater but, I don't know about it, man. Anyways, the way I started that one was a process of trying to match colors as closely as possible, and matching that form to get to some sort of a traditional realist painting. Then there's a real process of giving up at some point or changing trajectories – that's a better term for it– where I just go crazy with it. Something that is not necessarily unique to me, but is a very core aspect of myself as an academic and an artist, is that I'm a major procrastinator. I have the weakest attention span ever in the world, so my paintings are done in sittings. My Joe Biden painting took four to six hours, and all my other paintings have to be done in one sitting too, otherwise I can't go back to them. When I have that sort of process, it's more of a battle with my mind and trying to figure out what makes sense, and figure out if I'm convincing myself that it makes sense or if it doesn't. There's just this balance between my foundations and understandings of realism and what things should look like, but also how my brain interprets it, and what I have on hand, and also what it is that I want to do. There's no distinct process. Sometimes I really crave and wish to have one, because I have portraiture, but then I also have more personal projects like the comics, because my foundations for art are in comics. Sometimes it can be a little frustrating when my art style is based on the sentiment 'let's go in and see what we can find out' and then four hours later, I'll have something. However, when you're doing something that's tight-knit like comics, I would prefer to have a sketch, then an inking, and then a color, but I can't get those done as easily, so it's an interesting journey.

It's so interesting how your interest in politics is integral to your work, and that your first painting was of Joe Biden and you mentioned that there could be an intersection for you between art and politics. What do you think that combination looks like? Is that something you're already incorporating into your art?

The easy answer is making political cartoons, and I did do that for a little bit. This is not going to be joint with politics at all, but fitting with the nature of me being a selfish painter, a lot of what I'm starting to get into with my painting – that is more than just a painting of Joe Biden – is an exploration of my feelings about him and his work, more of painting being an outlet. This sounds very basic, but straight-up expressing myself and also processing things, so I want to try understanding my feelings or my past through painting.



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

MAX PATEL

Feature by Claire Killian
Photos by Grace Li

aka "Jayani", is a senior at Columbia College studying business and music. Jayani is an independent singer-songwriter born in Hong Kong living in NYC. Blending soulful vocals with sensory imagery and minimalistic production, Jayani's sound can be likened to artists such as Bruno Major, Mac Ayres, and Jeremy Passion among others. With the mission to tap into authentic emotions, Jayani has released 14 songs on Spotify with a debut album "Songs of the Storm" coming soon!

Let's start at the beginning, and talk a little bit about your personal history of music, how you came to it and when you started. Did you grow up in a particularly musical household?

My household wasn't particularly musical. I started by doing chorus, though I didn't do it for a while because I thought it was nerdy. I started listening to different kinds of music. My friends and I were singing songs on the school bus. I heard T-Pain one time and I thought, 'this is absolutely insane. I have to do this.' I didn't realize he was using autotune, but I wanted to sound like him. I would go to talent shows, just at the school and then sing his little riffs. I would practice and then people would say, 'oh man, you're really good.'

And I'd think, 'oh, I'm really good!' like, 'I should do this.' I just started doing more, when I got the affirmations, I started doing chorus because I felt good enough to join. Then, I started playing with little bands, my friends would do an a capella band, and I would join in. Then my friend played drums and guitar, so we'd do different covers and just sing songs around campus. My last year of middle school I had this passion, project opportunity and I thought, 'I'm gonna start writing a song, and we'll see how this goes.' At the time, I was moving away from Hong Kong - where I grew up - just to come to boarding school in America. So, I was leaving home, really moving away from everything I knew. I wanted to write a song about that. The song Moondrops came from that. At the beginning I was kind of skeptical of myself, but the more and more I performed it, and sang it, it became so real to me. I performed it at the graduation from middle school, and then everyone was waving their hands, it was just so beautiful. I wanted to do more of that. Actually, I released that song Moondrops in my recent album. There's a version on YouTube, which is me, a capella, in some random studio in Hong Kong. I was just doing beatboxing, a few 'oos' here and there, and then I remastered it, put some instrumentation in.

When you're singing or writing a song, is that a highly emotional experience for you? Is it very removed? What's going through your head? What are you feeling?

It depends on the song. Especially in writing it's an usually vulnerable situation - especially if it's a sad song. I don't like to write songs around people that much. I mean, I like to collaborate, but that's different. A lot of my songs are happy. I try to imbue my songs with a spirit of 'live in the moment.' To make it clear that things are going to be okay. A lot of the time I'm just trying to have a good time writing songs. If they're sad, then they get vulnerable.



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

Is songwriting for you a catharsis, or an outlet? Or is it more of a practice, like a technical exploration?

I know for a lot of people it's both, but for me it's definitely mostly been a catharsis. The second half of my music journey is when I got to Choate, the boarding school. One of my friends passed away, and I started really writing songs about that. Just coping with it. I hadn't really had a personal project, it was just like that one song in Hong Kong. Then I wrote these personal songs in this church, like in this chapel, by this piano. I didn't even know how to play it. I was just playing these keys, and I just needed to sing, I needed to get it out. Then I performed the songs at this random coffee shop. People thought my set was really meaningful. I wanted to do more of that. So, it definitely started with catharsis and still whenever I'm sad, I'll just go to a dark room and play with my guitar, or play with the piano, and just sing. Honestly, even when I'm not sad, sometimes I'm just mad or overwhelmed or I'm excited.

What's most challenging for you when you're creating any piece of music?

Probably self-doubt, and I think like a lot of artists might feel this way too. Whenever you're making something like, 'is this good? Are people going to like this?' That only comes in after I've finished the initial song, and then I'm trying to make it better. That's probably the hardest thing for me. I'm trying to make it good, but what is good? Because everyone has a different taste. You can't appease every taste, or appeal to everybody.

You're very well ensconced in an art community on campus. Other singer-songwriters, C.U. Records, MIC - what's that like for you?

Working with other creatives, other young artists?

It's really nice. A lot of my friends are doing their own stuff, like Rommel with his video and Jane with her photography. All these people are pursuing music and creativity in their own facets. I think it's really refreshing and inspiring, whenever someone has a win, it feels like a win in my book too. We're all in this together. Eva Westphal is a good friend of mine, and she's blowing up, playing these amazing venues, playing The Mercury Lounge and it's inspiring. When I see friends who are not at a public level, I tell them 'You can be.'

I'll help them, and that will take the form of getting them a gig, or finding them a band, something like that. I feel like we're all part of the same community and we wanna help each other.



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

WATSON FRANK

Feature by Sadie Hornung-Scherr
Photos by Kendall Bartel

uses themes of nature, animals, and the hidden world of the Earth in their art. Watson doesn't constrain themselves to just one medium. They use charcoal, animation, watercolor, printmaking, and collage in their practice.

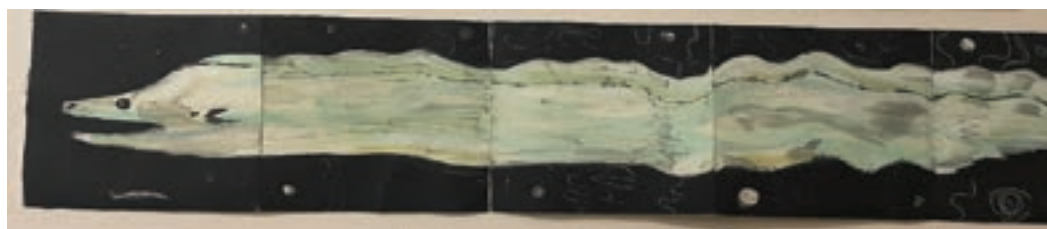
Watson believes that certain concepts and ideas are executed best in a specific medium. For Watson experimenting with different mediums is an intrinsic part of the complexity in their work and it's part of what makes their work distinct.

"The choice of mediums should serve the concept, rather than the concept being filtered through the medium."

I think Watson was right when they said art can always be new. Watson did a piece called "To the Worm That First Gnawed at My Corpse". This work is new and is fundamentally Watson. It is a mishmash of medium-charcoal and animation. The piece quotes a dedication from Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis' Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas: "To the worm who first gnawed on the cold flesh of my corpse, I dedicate with fond remembrance these Posthumous Memoirs." Inspired by Bras Cubas, Watson explores the regenerative nature of death. The piece asks what a life cycle is, exploring with medium the questions raised. Watson commented on the piece:

"I wrote a short story called "An Addendum to the Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas." I fell in love with this idea of a conscious worm. I was really interested in this idea of worms being agents of death, but also creators of life cycles. So I had this story and I decided I wanted to draw something connected to worms for my art class. I decided to make an animation instead. It started as this idea of showing how a worm consumes a dead body. As I was making it, it grew on its own. The piece told me what it needed. I found my best work comes when I let the art live and grow on its own. So then it became more of a self reflection through this character of the worm. In this case, using animation allowed this piece to grow in ways I never would've thought of myself."

In this, we see Watson's dedication to a meaningful medium. The work needed to be communicated in charcoal animation so the artist did exactly that. To Watson, inspiration is everywhere. This inspiration necessitates artistic investigation of one's work and oneself:



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

Their ideas are sometimes best served by charcoal, sometimes by watercolor. But whatever the medium is, Watson is intentional. While their lack of access during quarantine turned out to be a blessing in disguise, this constraint of access also pushed them to explore certain themes and ideas.

“If I'm in an art class, say a printmaking class, I have to use the print to make whatever I'm going to do. So then I only conceptualize ideas that I think are served best by printmaking. Since prints are easily mass produced and they have connections to children's stories, I would try to make something that challenges the medium of printmaking.”

To Watson, inspiration is everywhere. This inspiration necessitates artistic investigation of one's work and oneself:

“It [inspiration] comes and goes and it depends. Since I've been in New York City, I've become a lot more aware of my connection to nature and how much I care about nature and how much I miss it. I took a creative writing class called Animal Tales my freshman year with Annalise Chen. The whole class is thinking about how humans use animals as symbols and how we see so much of ourselves in animals.”

That really informed my writing. Because I spent so much time doing that in my writing, it trickled into my visual art. I became obsessed with what plants and animals have to offer to art. Animals show up a lot in fables and children's stories but, why is that? What is it about animals and that style and that connection to our basic minds? What is it about that that's so appealing? I think there's something so fascinating there. Also, I think in so many different mythologies animals are the foundation of the natural world. Why is it that? I almost see it appear in all of my classes. Why is it that we always go back there and what can we learn from that? What can I learn from that? What can I learn about myself from that?”



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

SOPHIE JOHNSON

Feature by Julia Tolda
Photos by Frances Cohen

works with mixed media, combining collage, drawing, and digital techniques. She makes art hoping to forge an identity out of the pieces of herself that she puts forward; realities and possibilities are virtually indistinguishable and there's always an undercurrent of anxiety. She aims to familiarize herself with her own slightly tilted, distorted way of seeing the physical world and to translate it into art.

How do you think growing up in Switzerland has impacted your art?

The Swiss high school academic curriculum is very different from the American one. As part of it, we had to choose our own major, quote unquote. There's a lot of options, like math and physics, econ, biochem, Spanish or Italian... And of course there's art, which is what I took. The program was two-thirds studio art, and one third art history. And as much as I hated the studio art class (so much!), it has impacted me a lot in terms of the mediums that I use. There was a lot of emphasis put on multimedia art, which forced me to get out of my comfort zone constantly. At first, I was kind of a purist (and still am)... But now I either go full in and mix everything, or I stick to one very specific medium.

What kind of mediums are you interested in? What kinds of mediums would you like to explore?

I mostly work with color pencils. But recently, I've been playing around with digital art, touching up a lot of the things that I do digitally. I'm trying to play around with the effects that that can give. I also make collages using random trinkets that I find. I recently did one with leaves. But I also use any scrap pieces of paper that I find... This is probably not the best thing to say, but I do draw all the time, including during lectures... I would be thrilled to work with textiles, maybe incorporating it in collages. I'd also love to work with ceramics and to make sculptures, because I want to touch my own art all the time. While touching it is currently a bad idea, because I work with colored pencils, which can smudge, I feel like sculptures would be perfect for that! I additionally want to get more comfortable with digital art, because I think it allows for so many possibilities. But one thing I don't like about digital art is how polished it looks; it lacks the sketchiness, the messiness, the weird finger-shaped stains that I enjoy.



NOVEMBER

Featured Artists

Many of your art pieces contain writing. Can you tell me more about it?

A lot of the writing that I include on my pieces isn't what I would consider my "good writing." It is not the kind of writing I would feel comfortable submitting on its own. They're not diary entries, but they have more of that feel to them. I can be more honest in them. Are they telling the full story? No. But they convey a certain sense, a certain specific perspective. I label everything all the time. I love having silly little labels on everything. A lot of my writing can be just very long labels—an over explanation. You can interpret it however you want, but I'm still going to try and direct your focus towards what I want.

Walk me through your creative process. How do you start a piece? When do you know it's done?

The latter is a much easier question because the answer is usually never! I never know when a piece is finished. I add as many details as I possibly can, only to look at it and think "It's too crowded, I should've stopped while I was ahead!" My art is never really finished, I'm eternally trying to make it look different, or better, or just more crowded. My creative process varies on a piece by piece basis. Sometimes I start with an idea, which I will sketch out. And sometimes that little sketch, which I thought was an idea for another piece, becomes the final piece.



Where do you draw your inspiration from?

Louise Bourgeois, especially her spiders, her shapes, inspire me. I first saw her art when I was a sophomore in high school, and I remember thinking "this is gonna change my life, I just don't know how yet."

Recently, I've been looking at textile art, because of the interesting way it allows for representing the body. For example, I saw a knit version of human internal organs which really inspired me. And body horror. Most of my writing is body horror inspired, which I also attempt to capture in my drawings. To me, my art looks like something I could eat. Objectively, it looks weird and kind of gross. But the colors are so appealing that it doesn't feel disturbing.

What about body horror draws you in?

It allows for an exploration of the physical self in a way that is cathartic. You can project any meaning onto these brutal transformations. It's an externalization of internal feelings and experiences. I find strange beauty in what has been dubbed "weird."

"I think its essence is the transformation of a body, an altering from its previous state, through a very intense, very visual process.

I like to think that every time I go out, I get dressed, I present myself to the world, or I create art, I'm transforming into a version of myself that I appreciate more. A version of me that feels more representative of what I want to show the world.





Featured Artists

PRANAVI KHAITAN

Feature by Mara Toma
Photos by Wynona Barua

is a sophomore at Barnard College studying Urban Studies and Economics. Originally from New Delhi, India, her photographs explore the distinct and complex relationship between people and their surroundings. Photography is a way in which she defines and redefines spaces while also exercising gratitude and awareness towards the intrinsic characteristics of each lived experience. Her photography is a powerful reminder of how we each experience and process ordinary encounters in distinct ways.

What got you into photography?

I started off with photography at quite a young age. I got a DSLR camera as a birthday gift and it turned into a passion of mine. It began by photographing national parks in India: mainly birds and wildlife. My father loves the environment of national parks, so my family would go on a trip every New Year. I would take out my dusty camera and take a few pictures. When I was looking through the camera, I processed the world differently. It gave me a sense of wonder to look at the world around me and see what's going on— sometimes it could be as simple as seeing fishermen through nets in a coastal town in India.

You described photography in relation to your own shifting sense of self. Do you think you are trying to immortalize moments or bits of a changing personal and collective landscape?

I am not trying to immortalize anything. My work highlights that places change, people change, things are moving, and things are happening around me. I aim to embrace change and understand the environment around me. It's about highlighting my perspective which changes as time passes. One moment I could be focusing on monuments in Delhi: to highlight the role that this part of history played in shaping my city and the art in all its beauty. Another moment could be trying to understand my peers. I had a point where I was just taking pictures of things that were happening in my school. I think that my practice developed a lot as I grew and saw how I could use photography to display my perspective. I don't think I'm trying to highlight anything specifically— but that's also the beauty of it.





Featured Artists

In the beginning, my priority was that my pictures needed to be extremely aesthetic— perfect picture, perfect structure, capturing this impressive moment. And then I realized there was more to it than that. I had to be just as embedded in it as the viewer, and that's when the world gained more meaning. Highlighting my high school experience, history, or just trying to capture the moments that I felt were important to my narrative. Today, when I'm trying to capture moments in New York, it's more about moments that seem so exciting, but that also don't need to be perfect. Embracing imperfections or flaws has become a very important part of it for me. I don't tell my subject to pose in a particular way or do something, it's more about the fact that I will crack a joke in the middle or goof around. Being able to capture moments that reflect something candid and genuine makes me feel excited as an artist.

How do you materialize the relationship between yourself and the subjects you capture?

The pictures that I take reflect a relationship between me and the subject which changes based on our closeness and familiarity to one another. In one picture, I captured a friend of mine. We were experiencing a moment of solitude and a feeling of aloneness. We were forming different parts of our identity but weren't quite sure how to express that. We collaborated on this concept of turning aloneness into something physical. I did a photoshoot about body positivity—that series depended a lot on what I spoke about with my subject. I ended up having an interview process with the subjects, discussing their opinions, their feelings, their insecurities. But I also have pictures where I don't even know the person— photographing someone with whom I have no relationship whatsoever. When I look at my pictures, I get a sense of when I am connected to my subjects and when I am not. In fact, when engaging with any sort of photography, it is very interesting to reflect on whether there is a sense of familiarity or personalization. As far as my identity influencing the picture, when I am photographing, it is very much coming from my perspective and what I want from that moment. I am in control of that, there is a lot of decision-making that goes into that—the framing of the picture, the structure of it, how I like to filter it. All those decisions reflect my perspective of them.



How does the experience of being a resident of New Delhi influence how your identity gets communicated in your photographs?

I have a big attachment to the city that I'm from. Towards my later high school years, I got attached to the idea of displaying everyday people in Delhi. Especially cities in India— it's easy to take for granted the people and services around you. Being a developing country, the informality of it all inhibits you from appreciating certain parts of daily life. I got very attached to the stories that created Delhi—and back then it came from a need for political activism. Hindu nationalism is a current issue in India. When I was photographing, there were major controversies surrounding the government renaming monuments or highlighting monuments that were made by Hindu People. This meant letting go of a major part of history or framing it as the work of "invaders". My work was very much in response to that rhetoric. The idea of colonialism is very different to the Mughal rulers—they settled here, colonizers did not. For me, it was very important to highlight that in a way that I could. My photography takes on various approaches, so I don't have one singular ideology behind it. It evolves as it goes and I enjoy that as well—I don't want it to be a specific thing, I want it to be fluid.



Featured Artists

FOREST WONG Feature by Susana Ruge Photos by Emily Lord

is a Junior at Columbia College studying Visual Arts, who works mostly with charcoal, graphite, oils, and chalk pastels. She has been creating art since she was a child. Forest is her given name, chosen before her mother knew the baby's gender. Forest thinks that is pretty cool. In her interview, she discussed her approach to art, her malleability as an artist, her family, and AI generated art. At the end of the interview, we realized we had forgotten to order coffee.

Tell me a bit about yourself as an artist.

Growing up, I've mostly drawn with charcoal, graphite, and chalk pastel. I stuck to those chalky substances because I really liked how they moved, and how I could really mess with and play around with them. Now, I've been working with oil, since I also like how it moves on the canvas. I am interested in manipulating, exploring it. Also, I have always admired people who used oil. Growing up, I would watch my grandpa and my mom paint, which encouraged me to make art. Transitioning into oil has been an extension of that.

How has your relationship to your family affected you as an artist?

I come from a very artistic household, so it always felt natural to start doing art. I saw so many artistic creations I wanted to emulate, made by people I look up to, so I began exploring, and now here I am. The same happened with music. My mom and brother play the piano; I would see them and think, "I'll click around on the keys, too."

Could you tell me about your affinity to making textured, unblended, and visible strokes?

The act of painting and drawing is so magical, right? Because when you look at a finished painting, you're just wowed by it, like, "Huh, wow, someone was able to produce this." There's something about showing the process in the physical marks themselves that is interesting to me. A painting is just a collection of marks on a surface. That's what I'm interested in. Chalk and oil give me that plasticity and malleability, they're so versatile. The marks depend on the thickness of the stroke, the speed of it—each mark conveys a lot, they capture the gesture of the hand, too. You get to see the process of it.

I like to be very careful not to let the strokes get lost in what I'm doing, because my goal is to show the audience the process I went through. I like guiding their eyes and having the painting be a visible creation, not just an end goal. I hate feeling like I overworked a painting, and I've done it so many times. If you overwork the painting it's the most tragic thing, because the process of making it is so beautiful and so fun. Sometimes after a few hours or days I look back at it and think, "Oh god, I killed it." Showing the raw process is the most satisfying relationship with your past because you get to see what you did and how it was done.

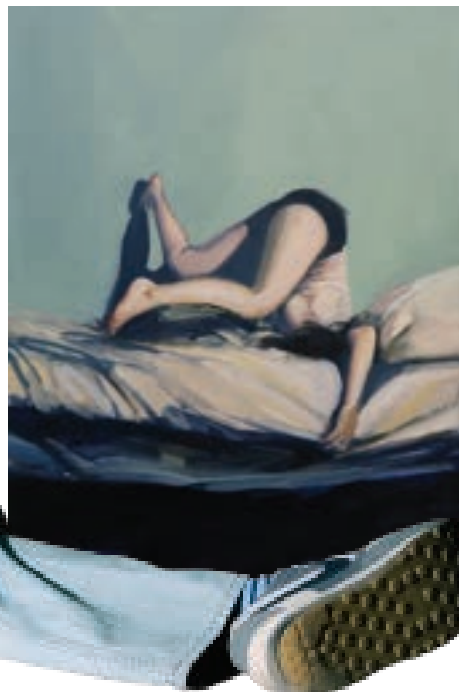


In your piece, "Because I see you as a body sees itself within a mirror," you have a really cool division of reality and non-reality, it makes you look again. What was the process of making it?

I got the title from a movie, Ghosts in the Shell, a 1995 anime that deals with this dystopian, futuristic world where people and machines are intertwined in a really dark way; so the movie deals with humanity and what it means— my human-ness, like my human ghost. So I started thinking about what the value of human art even is, if there is a difference from AI generated stuff, so that was the question that I was asking with that painting. And I even used digital stuff to make the reference for the project, so that was cool. I was trying to convey the physicality of being human through the tension of the figure. In the clothes you could see her stretching it and the hands are clenched, the feet are clenched, I'm trying to convey that anxiety. When you see the figure you see how tense she is and you can feel it in your own body too. I want to mimic that feeling, right? Anyway, that's what I was trying to accomplish with that pose. And with the mirror itself, I'm bringing it back to ghosts in the shell, like the ghost of a person, like the humanity of the person, what value it has. I know, it's really depressing.

How have you changed your approach to art?

When you're first learning and trying to pick up as much as you can, you just draw what you see. Initially, I would only work with references. And I still do, in some ways, but now I'm paying attention to the design, the message, to the parts that are important to me. If I'm looking at my portraits as just portraits, they don't have another meaning to them. But in the portraits I make now, I'm paying a lot more attention to where I want to lead people's eyes based on contrast, value, and color. Before, I was purely into representation. I just wanted to get it to look like the thing I was looking at— transferring this to this, like in photo realism, or just photography. I just wanted it to look accurate, but now I'm trying to be more loose with it, trying to direct it. I don't just copy, I get inspired by what I see.



How do you see yourself continuing your work?

Mixing digital with traditional. I'm actually going way more into digital. I got into Photoshop last summer and I thought, oh my gosh, wow, look at this new medium, I have to explore it. It refreshed something in my way of thinking about art and gave me so much freedom to make mistakes and focus on other details when creating.

How do you think that art exists as digital vs. physical?

You can't really bring the digital into the physical world completely. That's why I haven't completely abandoned it. But being able to experiment with digital stuff, not having any boundaries, it just opened the doors towards so many different possibilities. This eternal anxiety and fear ended up doing me good.



Featured Artists

GRACE LI

Feature by Yam Pothikamjorn
Photos by Will Park

is a junior at Barnard College, studying English Literature and Computer Science. She's dabbled in multiple art forms, including ceramics and textiles, but her principal focus is her photography. We discussed her current projects, why they are so important to her, and what it means to forget.

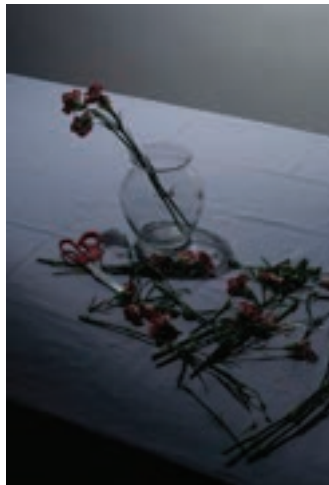
Grace's biggest project right now is her AAPI Tattoo Artists in NYC Photo Series, which she started 6 months ago. She interviews Asian tattoo artists in New York City and photographs them at work, intending to highlight different generations of tattoo artists and how their processes vary between cultures.

“In post-pandemic New York City, there are a lot of Chinese American artists who have turned to tattooing as a way to reclaim their bodies from the conservative households they grew up in, to say ‘This is my body and I can decorate it however I want.’

Grace interviewed a young artist who emphasizes creating a space for Filipino people where they can heal and allow themselves to be fully present in their body during the tattooing experience.

“She was saying that tattooing can bring up a lot of unprocessed emotions, especially when they're tattooing something that's deeply personal.”

In her private studio, this artist uses tools such as aromatherapy, soft lighting, and awareness of the client's background. She incorporates her knowledge of the human body and its energy which she learned from working towards her yoga instructor license, and offers a space for them to talk about the memories the tattoo brings up - whatever the client wants.





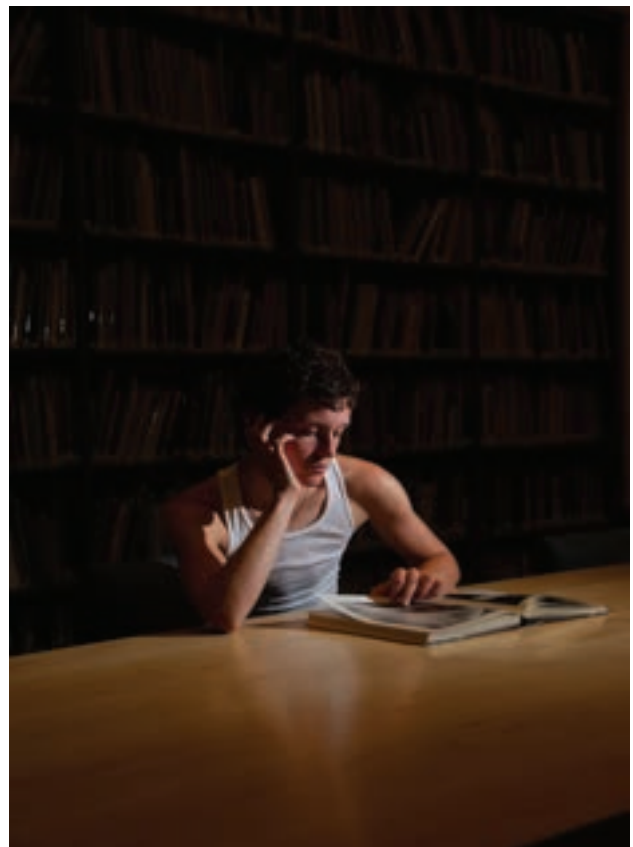
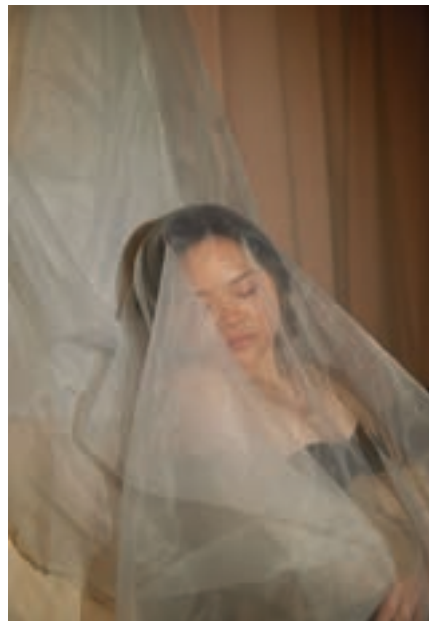
Featured Artists

For many, facing and accepting the unprocessed emotions brought up by tattooing helps them to embrace the things they've gone through. Grace's childhood home series is her own form of tattooing, a way to process her past. She started the project to learn how to put feelings into photographs, trying to capture how she felt growing up in suburban New Hampshire.

“There were a lot of complex feelings surrounding that, especially being one of the only Chinese families in the neighborhood at the time. There’s also the feeling of isolation, even when you’re not experiencing loneliness all the time. I went to boarding school for high school, so that feeling of leaving home quite early and returning back there, especially since the pandemic, was a really interesting feeling that I wanted to document and capture.”

But what does forgetting mean to Grace? It's one of the questions I'm most curious to hear her answer.

“I really like to have control – forgetting has been a very scary process because I really want to hold onto things. However, I’ve realized growing up and especially over the pandemic, that it’s important to accept that forgetting is just a natural part of life and to learn to appreciate the beauty of forgetting, perhaps.”





Featured Artists

LUCA BENZIMRA

Feature by Brontë Grimmer
Photos by Jade Li and Caroline Cavalier

is a junior studying Philosophy and Business at Columbia, where he is currently completing a dual degree with Sciences Po. Born and raised in Paris, Benzimra experiments with bleach and dye to create large swaths of color that bleed into the canvases. Marking a departure from his previous figurative pieces with acrylic and oils, his new series explores themes of philosophy, emotion, and the true-self.

Your most recent dye series has a very distinct style characterized by large blocks of color fading into one another. What did your early experiences with the arts look like?

Before this series, I experimented with various mediums; oil pastels, oil paints, acrylics, spray paints, and so on. My work was a mix of figurative stuff, but I found I was never satisfied with purely figurative depictions, I was always sort of distorting them. After I got bored with oil paints, I added in acrylics and spray paint. While they were much less figurative, they were still very precise.

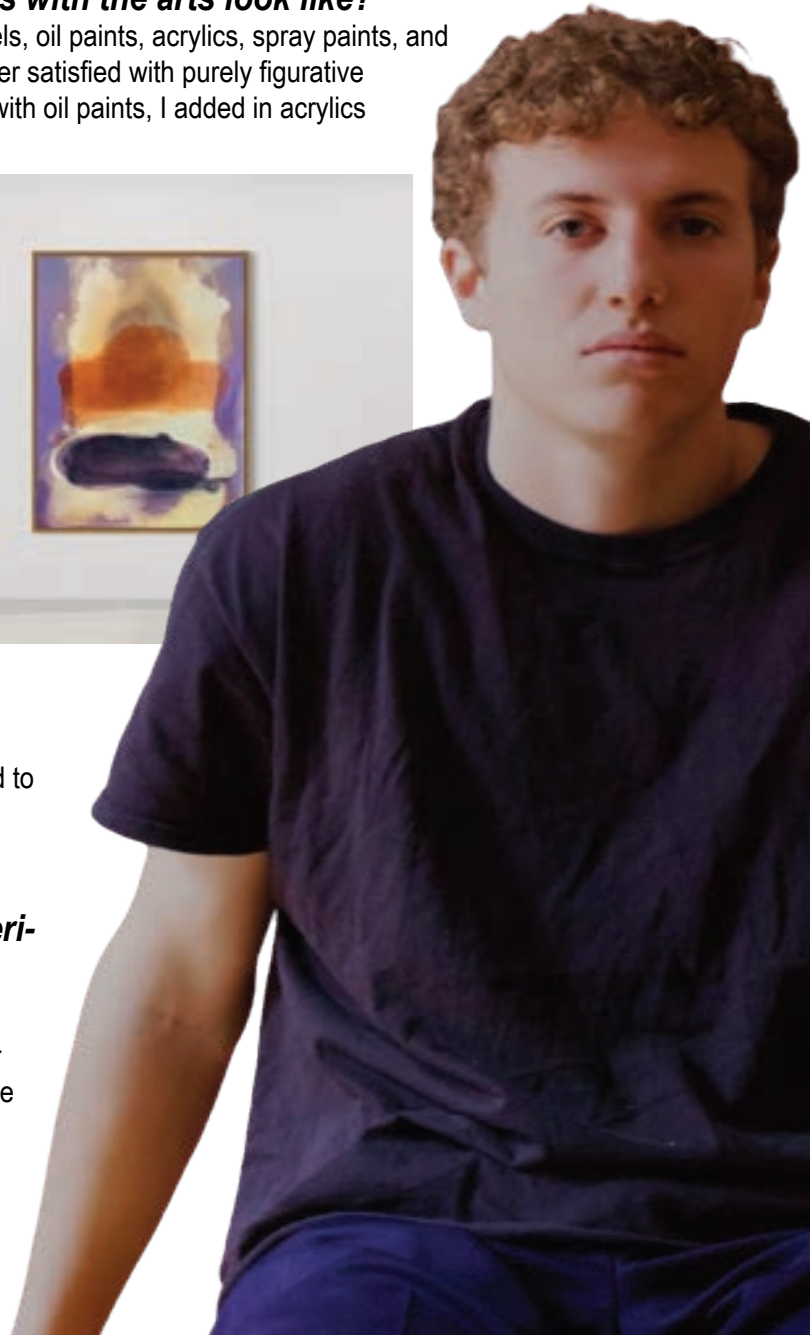
What do you believe caused this shift from figurative art to a more abstract style?

With figurative pieces, I always thought there were imperfections in my work. With dyes in my new series, there are no imperfections. I think that's one of the reasons why I like this medium. I get to finish a painting when I think it's right, and it doesn't need to be precise or look a certain way. That's not to say I never feel frustrated with dyes. Sometimes I'll think a work is finished because it looks balanced, until I look back on it. But there's something that excites me about this dilemma.

I had a piece in the beginning which I didn't like and never wanted to post online, but I continued working on it. I added more and more layers on top of the original piece, and now I'm satisfied with it.

Were there reasons other than the desire to experiment and represent forms differently that drove you to start using dye?

After moving to New York in the autumn of 2022, I was looking for cheaper alternatives in terms of medium, so it was mainly because of financial reasons. In Paris, I could buy materials for way less and had a studio where I could work and stretch my canvases, but I don't have that here.





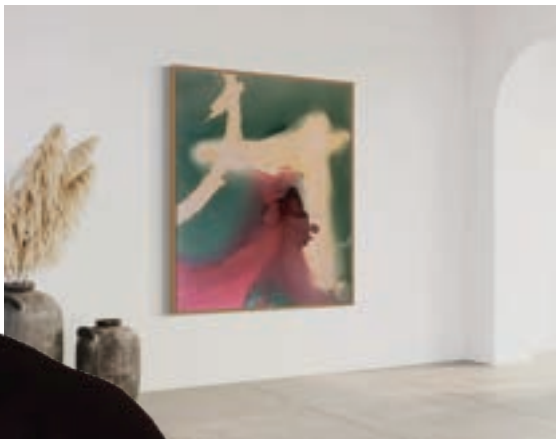
Featured Artists

I went to the Blick store one day and bought some dyes and a pack of small canvases. I didn't know how to use them, but I experimented anyway. The first time I tried using dyes, it was so awful, all except for one. It was a process of trial and error.

As a student, do you feel that there is a connection between your studies and your art?

I'd say I've become more invested in my art since I started studying philosophy. My favorite area right now is self-knowledge; the pursuit of understanding what the true self means. I believe we're never really going to have an answer to what the true self is by trying to explain our ideas through writing.

The only way I can express myself in the truest possible way, which has no constraints imposed by language or representation, is through my art. In a way, the unconstrained self is what I'm trying to access. To me, it's being able to completely pour my subconscious out on a canvas. Once I'm done working, there's a point where I think to myself, "Okay, now this is finished," and everything I did was completely unconscious.



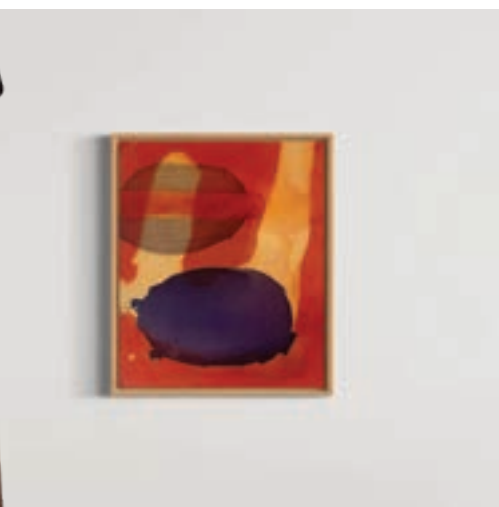
Do you have any hopes for how other people perceive your art?

I think the cool thing about art is everybody has a different experience with it. If an artist has a clear thing to say about their piece, I think it's always nice to have the context of what they were thinking. However, by no means is my art supposed to have a strict meaning. My series right now is extremely selfish, it's a portrait of me.

As long as the person feels something, I think it's cool. Paintings resonate with you because of who you are, your experiences, what you've been through, or your trauma. Our understanding of the arts and representation is an active thing within us that is always reacting to our environments.

How do you hope to foster your love for the arts in the future? Do you see your artistic practice as a career or as more of a hobby?

The reason why I decided not to go to art school is that art is not the only thing I'm interested in. Art for me is necessary, it's an extension of who I am. I think it is very important to nurture this aspect of myself.



I'm always going to make room for art. I want to be a full-time artist, it's a dream, but I also don't think I would be satisfied with having art as my only pursuit. Only pursuing art also means forgetting another part of myself, which I want to continue to possess.



Featured Artists

KATHRYN WHITTEN

Feature by Susana Ruge
Photos by Anaïs Mittelberg

is a Junior at Columbia College majoring in Visual Arts. She creates calm, colorful, realistic pieces using different mediums, although she prefers oil painting. She has grown up surrounded by art, and likes to express love, devotion and appreciation for her subjects and a moment's details in her work. Today we met via Zoom, so our conversation progressed dynamically, as we moved around trying to find the best connection possible.. We spoke about the process of growing up, the clash between realism and abstraction, and what it means to be away from home.

Tell me a little about your relationship with art.

My dad is a painter, so I grew up with art all around me. I've never not been surrounded by it. However, a deciding moment in consolidating myself as an artist was in third grade. I had a drawing assignment and I really wanted to draw Harry Potter to the T. I remember my dad sat down with me and taught me how to draw, how to really look at things in order to represent proportions accurately. After that, I was hooked. I started out by drawing celebrities or cartoons, but eventually I progressed into landscape, my family, my friends, and my boyfriend.

Why do you make art?

It's a personal thing for myself, something for me to show love and devotion. I do art because it slowly allows me to capture everything, to represent reality as I process it. Then, when I show the work, I want it to have an effect on other people, to share everyday scenes as beautiful, as appreciated and loved. My TA said to me in class the other day, "You see beauty in everyday life?" and when I nodded she said "Oh, that must be nice". I want to encourage others to look for that beauty in their own lives. I think part of what I want to share is the way that I get to see the world as an artist, because I feel so blessed for being able to find deep beauty in the mundane - I want others to experience that too.

How did you venture into different kinds of mediums?

I was really interested in oil because of my father. He gave me my first set of oils when I was 11 and promptly took them away after a month because I kept on getting it all on the walls. After this, I figured I'd try acrylics out. I stuck to this technique for a while since I had more exposure to acrylics than oils. Since I live close to the National Seashore, I've always been inspired by the landscape. We would go and visit mostly Yosemite and the National Seashore, so I relate these landscapes to such dear moments in my life. When, eventually, I got my oils back, I specialized in landscape art. I love to use oils for this because it is limitless when it comes to colors and textures, it paints so beautifully.



How has your inspiration changed as you've grown up?

As a kid I'd draw what I was interested in: celebrities, crushes, cartoons... whatever I liked. My mom would always look over my shoulder and tease me because I was drawing my new crush. Nevertheless, my interests changed as I got older. I soon shifted to focusing on landscape, family, and my boyfriend. But I guess I still paint what I like. Coming to New York solidified my interest in two main topics: California and my boyfriend. Probably because I'm away from them and miss them so much. I paint about them to feel them closer to me. But lately, I've grown interested in painting people around me too. I love that art can be a way to build community—to bring people closer together. With portrait painting specifically, I have been trying to figure out how to implement more portraits in New York, but there's a lot of practical challenges having to do with that.



What are some of those practical challenges?

I only draw when I'm truly, deeply, inspired - not only by the subject, but by the lighting and the overall composition in a precise moment. Here, since my community isn't as strong, and life goes a lot faster than when I'm at home, I have to start worrying about staging perfect moments to paint, getting someone to model, setting up the lighting... And I hate feeling that the moment I am trying to paint is staged or inauthentic, but it is unavoidable, because when I find moments I want to capture, announcing that I'm about to take a picture damages the ephemerality of the moment.

What are your favorite pieces in your catalog?

My favorite piece at the moment is a painting of my boyfriend that I titled *Blonde on Blue*. I was super proud of myself for that title because I'm a huge Bob Dylan fan, and he's got that album *Blonde on Blonde*, so I was like, 'this is genius.' Aside from that, I love that painting because it's a tender memory of just being with my boyfriend. He always sleeps in, and I love waking up early in the morning. This particular morning I was drinking coffee and reading, and the light was coming in so perfectly—the way it reflected on his blue sheets and his skin was beautiful. People always ask me why I have so much blue in my paintings, they think it's a profound thing, but actually it's just that my boyfriend's sheets are blue.



On the other hand, some of the recent paintings I've been making in my painting class have been difficult for me because I must work exclusively from photos. It's becoming repetitive, and I don't like when things get too easy, or mechanical. There's no struggle. The creative process of making mistakes and changing your mind diminishes, which I really dislike. I have lost part of my engagement with the paintings lately, just because of that technical limitation. You can tell when a piece has been automated: you can see if the artist is not engaged or actively making decisions or figuring things out. When it comes too easy, the painting doesn't turn out as well.

VICTORIA RESHETNIKOV

Feature by Sahai John
Photos by Sungyoon Lim

is a junior at Columbia College studying art history and visual arts. They are a multimedia artist born and raised in Queens, NY. Through their creative use of architectural sculptures, isometric prints and imaginative sketches, Victoria explores ideas of home and trauma.

When did you first start creating art?

In kindergarten I got my first sketchbook. It's been a mainstay ever since. I really can't imagine my life without it. Growing up I was sort of the village babysitter. I made comic books and exquisite corpses with the kids.

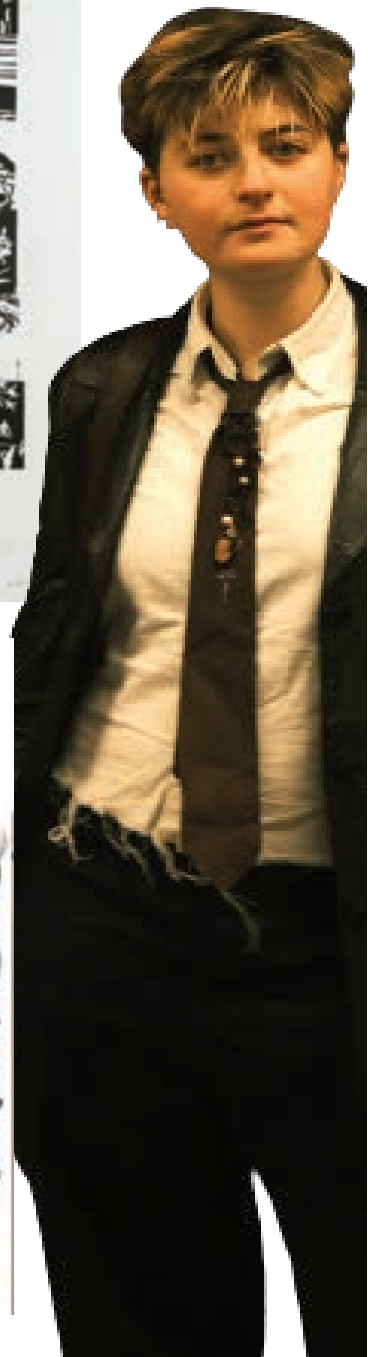
I was always drawing in middle school, but in high school I started getting more into my studies and became more anxious which meant I had less time to do art. I came into this school wanting to pursue academics more, and now I've bounced back into visual arts, and I'm trying to embrace it. I'll see where it takes me.

Where do you draw the majority of your inspiration from?

I am trying to exist in spaces with a lot of clarity now by being more aware of my surroundings. My work has been very architectural recently and the inspiration, because of that, is all around us.

How does living in New York City influence your work?

Becoming an adult in New York has been really stressful recently. I've always been financially independent, but as I'm facing graduating and losing the structure of school to frame my life, the housing crisis in New York is becoming much closer to me and feels more absurd. I've been very aware of it in the last few years, but I think there's always been this sense of change in my life. The neighborhoods and places I occupy have been morphing and actively changing. I've embraced this change in my work recently.





Featured Artists

I've been thinking about Flushing and Long Island City where they now have these circles of glass around the areas. It angers me so much. There's a lot of nostalgia tied to these places for me. But it's so much more than that because gentrification is upending entire lives and homes. I critique it in my work by thinking about the language of urban displacement through architectural plans and isometric drawings.

In a recent project, I used a lot of isometric perspective because those are the plans that we see on the sides of development projects where you have this image of the future home being presented in a super graphic, linear form. I was also thinking about gentrification in that project as something that occurs over time. And I was trying to equate it with the growth of mold and other organic growth, something that is also an agent of time. The project is juxtaposing the way that buildings and the city change to natural growth processes.

You incorporate many images of houses and articles of domesticity in your work. How is your relationship to your home and the concept of home expressed in your current portfolio?

We moved from one neighborhood to another neighborhood in Queens when I was around eight years old. So we've only been in my house for about ten years, and my parents came to the United States from the Soviet Union in the 90s, so there's no intergenerational home space for me in the way that a lot of my friends have. My parents are also planning to leave New York next year when my sister goes to college. I've been thinking about that anxiety as well, trying to rationalize this space that has been my home for a decade and is now going to be obsolete to me. But it's also a space that never really meant that much to me because it's not a generational space.



That idea has informed my work recently. In a recent project of mine, I used a wood panel to paint a brownstone apartment on the front and an interior space on the underside with furniture and people. I've been thinking about detaching myself from the home, and thinking about it as a separate structure that I use, and not so much an interior that I occupy. I'm interested in what that connection between the home and the house means, and how we construct what the spaces we're in mean to us.

How do these exterior presentations of structures juxtapose this concept of the power of the interior?

I've been thinking about exteriors as the overall city projects, and the interior as more specific to myself. But that's definitely a next step for me, conjoining. I'm thinking about these very hyper specific, individual pieces like the dentist office and different parts of Queens that I've grown up in, and then incorporating the interior. I'm planning to include architectural drawings juxtaposed with rooms and other interior spaces.

I feel like the city itself is an interior. I feel like I'm in a bubble here, and maybe that's because New York City is such a liberal and unique place in the United States. I've been reading about the anti-trans bills that have been passed within the last few weeks. There's always been this sense of relief from the idea that it's not going to affect me or anyone I know; that separation is very dangerous. It also characterizes the city as an interior that's not affected by a lot of the things that are happening in the rest of the country. It's very troubling.

DANIELLE SUNG

Feature by Sayuri Govender
Photos by Will Park

is a freshman at Columbia College. In her work, she illuminates the voices of marginalized groups who have been impacted by current day events. She hopes that the radical figures and techniques she uses in her work can be catalysts for social change. Sung is currently focused on installation work, and has created numerous astounding pieces with charged political meaning. Today, I talked with her about her exploration of new mediums, balancing the personal and the political, and finding the best burrata in NYC.

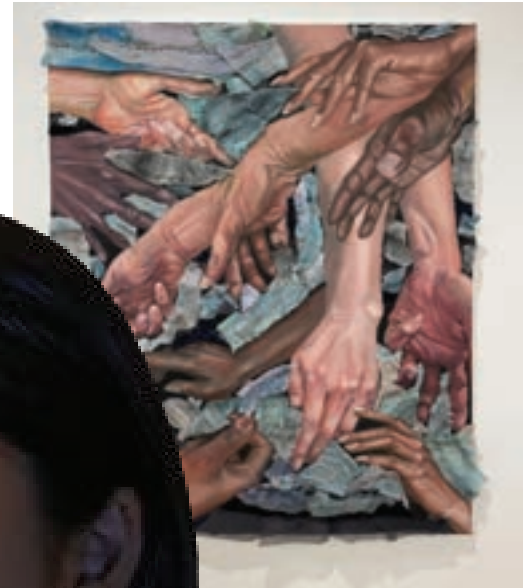
What is your creative process like?

It's kind of complicated for me, because I feel like I have grown and changed so much as an artist over the years. I started off with still life painting, which is pretty natural, just painting what I see. And then I shifted to portraits, which are also pretty simple, because I didn't have any real artistic inspiration. Then, I was introduced to other mediums besides oil paint in my junior year of high school. The discovery of these materials allowed me to start exploring beyond still-life or portraits. I was able to discern what I think is valuable and what I think should be portrayed in a painting.

When I started making my college portfolio in my senior year of high school, my teacher showed me this quote by James Baldwin, which has stuck with me deeply. Baldwin says the precise role of an artist is to "illuminate darkness, blaze roads through that vast forest, so that we will not, in all our doing, lost sight of its purpose, which is, after all, to make the world a more human dwelling place". After hearing that, I suddenly felt that my art could be a catalyst for change.

How did switching from a personal to a global and political lens in your art impact you as an artist?

I still have a lot of trouble when finding the boundary between the personal and the public aspects of art. Art itself is very performative, since it's meant to be consumed by an audience, but I also want to create art for myself without focusing on who the audience will be. I feel like that's what I really leaned towards throughout my entire life.





Featured Artists

All throughout my life, until high school, I created a lot of art about me, my identity, my interests, all while exploring the medium that I liked the most. However, ever since the pandemic, I realized I needed to be more aware of my surroundings and less concerned with solely my life. I started realizing how little knowledge I had about political and societal aspects of our world. I became really focused on those aspects of our world through talking about it with other people, asking people questions about their own thoughts and what, objectively, was going on, and reading the headlines on my phone. These headlines would always be about deaths, Black Lives Matter, and other global riots going on. I felt that these shouldn't be suppressed to just one headline, and that they could be much bigger. That's why I chose to create these types of activist artworks in a grandiose way. I had never done installations before, but I felt that a single canvas wouldn't suffice for all of it. I was able to develop my own thoughts and then express those in my own paintings. But it was a very gradual process. And I feel like I'm still working on that.

Do you ever see yourself reflected in your exploration of others?

In most of my most recent artworks, I tried to take an objective lens on the world. I tell people that I try to paint my pieces concerning societal topics and worldly events in an objective lens, but honestly, that's something that I've been working on finding the



balance for. For a while, I just felt so overwhelmed with emotions when I was making art to the point where I just couldn't really create anything I felt satisfied with. So I just put down my ink brush and I just gave myself a few weeks to take deep breaths and reflect on my main reason for creating art. I ultimately tried approaching my art in an "objective" lens, in hope that I could possibly refrain from being the main character of these larger societal problems that I am not the biggest victim of. Like for my COVID installation piece, I was aiming to capture the loss of millions due to the pandemic. Although I am second handedly affected due to the larger scope of the effects COVID-19 has had on us, I am not the one that should be the central character: the victims are those who have passed away whilst fighting for their lives. Likewise, when depicting those riots dealing with Black and/or queer lives, as an individual who does not identify as those racial or sexual identities, the most I can do is express my deepest and genuine sympathy. I cannot

try portraying these events in my artworks by putting myself in their shoes cause I'm just not them. That's what I mean by trying to refrain from self-opinion or the subjective in my pieces. My sympathy still exists and hopefully it is expressed through my artworks. After all, that's the essence of my pieces: I just want to follow Baldwin's words and "illuminate" the "darkness" and make the world "a more human dwelling place." I just feel like there is a difference between creating a piece that is poignant and sympathetic versus creating art by trying to relate to the individuals and those immediately affected by these incidents.





Featured Artists

WARREN MCCOMBS

Feature by Stuart Beal
Photos by Adela Schwartz

is a senior visual-arts major from Greenland, Arkansas. It's a town defined by proximity, just outside of Fayetteville. I feel a sense of kinship with him, being from a small town in Texas myself, and when I ask him what the South means to him, how he relates to it, if he relates to it at all, he answers simply:

"I like where I'm from a whole hell of a lot better than I like here."

To the extent that these words sound negative, they aren't. Or, maybe they are, but not in the way that they seem. McCombs doesn't hate things for the sport of it. When I try to relate to him by bringing up the cattiness that sometimes seeks to define creative writing workshops, and that I thought would be similarly present in visual arts workshops, he doesn't take the bait.

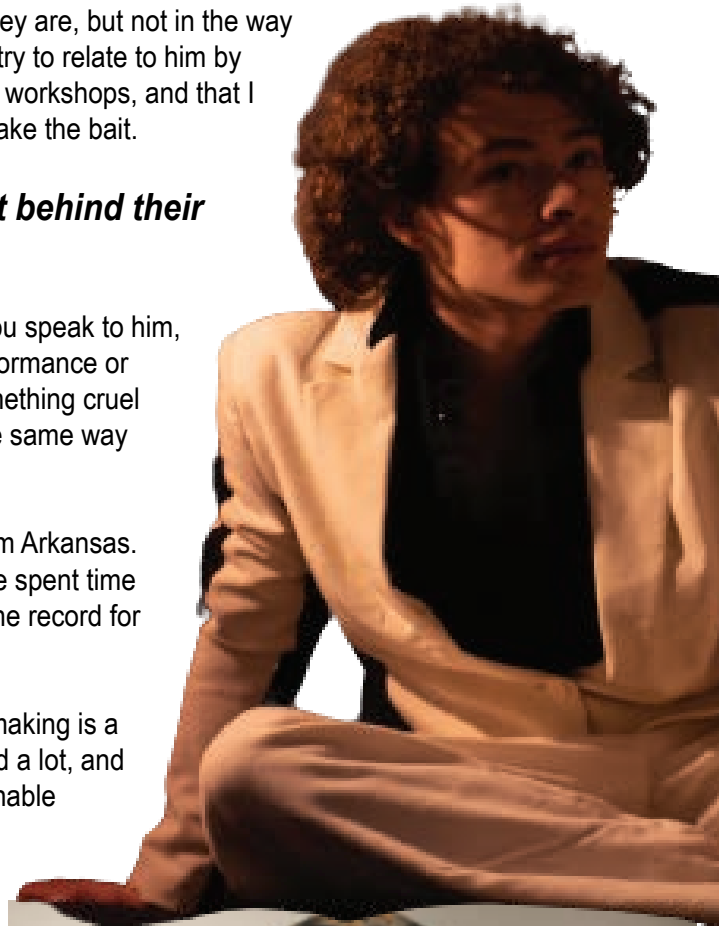
I don't think I've ever talked shit about somebody's art behind their back."

This type of honesty defines the conversations I have with him. When you speak to him, he pays attention. And when he speaks to you, there is no sheen of performance or presentation. I'm sure many artists have claimed to have never said something cruel about another person's art. I'm also sure many of them were lying, in the same way I'm sure that McCombs isn't.

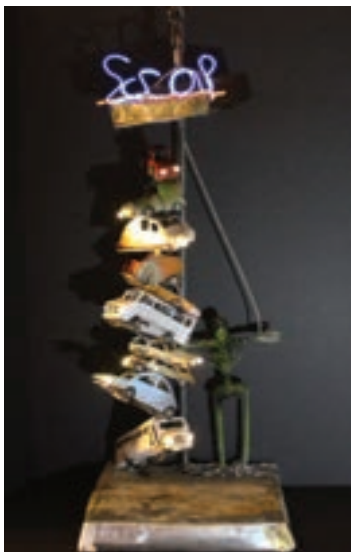
During our conversations, the brightest details he gives are the ones from Arkansas. He grows watermelons in his backyard every summer, massive ones. He spent time as a kid trying to break obscure world records and claims he did break the record for the highest unsupported stack of pennies, but never got it certified.

His main reason for preferring Arkansas over New York City: space. Artmaking is a very physical experience for him, requiring him to pace and move around a lot, and he feels like he can't do that here. For McCombs, this intrinsic, unexplainable desire to make art operates differently in Arkansas than it does in New York City. In New York, he finds himself being slightly more avoidant, turning away from certain emotions or fears.

"I feel so much more free to make anything in Arkansas for some reason and I don't know why."



Despite this constraint, being in New York City has influenced his work. The most formative piece of art he's made during his time at Columbia is "Oh my goodness, my brother, are you gonna be alright?", a performance piece in which McCombs recorded a time-lapse of himself walking the entire length of Broadway barefoot, taking 5 hours to cover the 14 miles. The project, which started as a test of his endurance, ended with a focus on how others reacted to him. The only person on the street that said a word to him was Cornel West, who happened to be walking by.



"He gestures to my feet, and he says, 'Oh, my goodness, my brother. Are you going to be alright?' And he puts his hand on my shoulder and I'm like, 'Yeah, I'll be fine. I'll be fine. Thank you so much.'"

Another piece he made while at Columbia is entitled "Wunderkammer," which translates from German to "cabinet of curiosities." Besides the plywood receptacle, the sculpture is made entirely of objects McCombs found on the street during a single walk through Harlem: a brass handle, food scraps, an old metal washer.

Still, if I was tasked with making a list of things that might be occupying his mind during his late-night jaunts around campus buildings, New York would make the list, along with the prospect

of him leaving it.

He's looking forward to graduation. He has a slight Arkansas accent, and he's afraid of losing it. I was nervous going into the interview. Within minutes, I wasn't anymore. If he saw someone else walking barefoot down Broadway, I have complete confidence that he would stop. He spoke carefully throughout our conversations, letting the silence hang, which I quickly got used to. He was especially well-spoken when it came to New York City, communicating a sentiment I know I've felt being here, and that I suspect many others have felt too.

"When it's cold, it feels hot here, and even when it's quiet here, it still feels loud. It's like the people are just making it feel like a way that it isn't. I don't know. I don't know how to describe it. I feel like I've never been cold here."



CAT LUO

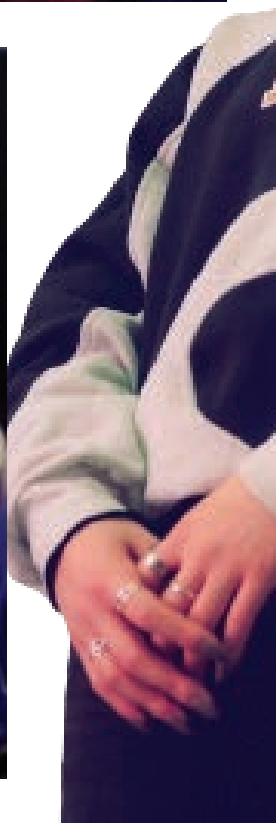
Feature by Korrin Lee
Photos by August Cao

is a senior in Columbia College majoring in Visual Arts and Creative Writing. Cat's work traverses several mediums such as traditional painting, ceramic sculpture, and print-making. Their work explores alienation and isolation as it relates to the femme queer body in uncanny yet uncomfortably familiar domestic spaces. Home is a concept for her, a psychological space, and their work aims to capture and recreate psychological spaces of distortion and absurdity. Shit gets weird as a second generation queer Asian American in the US and Cat hopes to find solace in being an alien, a foreigner, in environments that are meant to be familiar or comforting.

How does your vision affect your work? Does it affect how you see color and conceptualize contrast and composition?

I remember being in these art classes and my teachers asked, "Why do you make these stylistic choices? Why do you have such high contrast? Why do you choose such bright colors? And why do you have fingers with super smooth skin?" and at the time I didn't know why. Thinking more about it, I do have a history of visual impairment; I was born with congenital cataracts and so my vision is 20/30 or 20/40 with contacts—but without them I am legally blind. Which is pretty cute. Very blurry. Because of that, the few things that end up catching the attention of my very overstimulated eyes are really shiny or hard-to-miss.

I really love architecture, and a professor once said that my paintings are very sculptural. The way that this manifests in my art is with the sharp transitions, sharp edges, contrast, really stark colors that catch your attention. The way this translates to my ceramic work makes a lot of sense—I've always imagined painting as touching the edge of something. It's a very flowy kind of movement. And I found myself thinking, why don't I just go to clay? Clay is literally making it and it's really satisfying. It's ASMR for my eyes that work too hard during the day.



When I was looking at your art, I felt like there was a sense of entanglement in some of your work—more like self-entanglement, like the body is running into itself. Would you say that's a theme in your work? Does it translate in any way to your recent ceramic work?

Entanglement isn't a term I've thought about but it makes a lot of sense. Ironically, as an artist a lot of people in my family see me as this hyper-individualistic person, but how am I supposed to understand other people without understanding myself? I've always tried to understand what the hell is going on in my brain and how I fit into the meatbag avatar that is my body. I think that forever self questioning or self entanglement is something that I am working through in my art but I don't think there's an answer or end to it. It is forever fun to stare in the mirror and be like Who am I? To always question your identity.

I think it's a lot easier in my current body of work to express this sentiment because a lot of it is these distorted figures—a leg going into a torso, the torso turning into an arm and this sense of being lost and confused with yourself. All of these paintings and ceramic pieces are posed very intentionally by me; there's almost an acceptance or meditation of this self-entanglement and being forever twisted up within myself, this messy ball of limbs that is kind of pretty and that's how it's gonna be forever until I smash it or something

How does that idea of malleability apply to your depictions of the body across all your mediums? Is the body something that you see as a playground?

This painting I had a lot of fun with, it's very different from some of my other work that is very close to the human body. At the time I was obsessed with ribs and I wanted to make their waist so skinny that it's insect-like. There's something playful about it, but oftentimes, I feel like I'm wrestling with a piece because I just take so much care to make these perfect curves.

On the theme of alienation, I think the term 'alien' itself is crazy, like how in legal documents anyone who is not a US citizen is an alien. I'm not from outer space! I'm not going to eat you I promise!

I grew up in a very white area and a lot of that experience was characterized by me wondering, you know, why are people looking at me weird? Growing up I thought something was wrong or different about me and just felt like a big sore thumb— sticking out in a way I can't quite explain. My work is an exaggeration of these feelings, of being both scrutinized and not seeing why, which are encapsulated in alienation, which then talks to isolation. It seems like everyone is scared of being lonely, which I find funny because my paintings are almost exclu-

sively one figure. Because these are posed and because I enjoy painting these figures so much, there has to be a sort of joy in sitting in all of these complicated feelings by yourself.





Featured Artists

AUGUST CAO *Feature by Nora Cazenave
Photos by Frances Cohen*

Catch the full article on <https://www.ratrockmagazine.com/> (coming soon)!





Featured Artists

SEIJI MURAKAMI

Feature by Julia Tolda
Photos by Amelia Fay

Catch the full article on <https://www.ratrockmagazine.com/> (coming soon)!





Featured Artists

ROMMEL NUÑEZ

Feature by Iker Veiga
Photos by Kendall Bartel

Catch the full article on <https://www.ratrockmagazine.com/> (coming soon)!

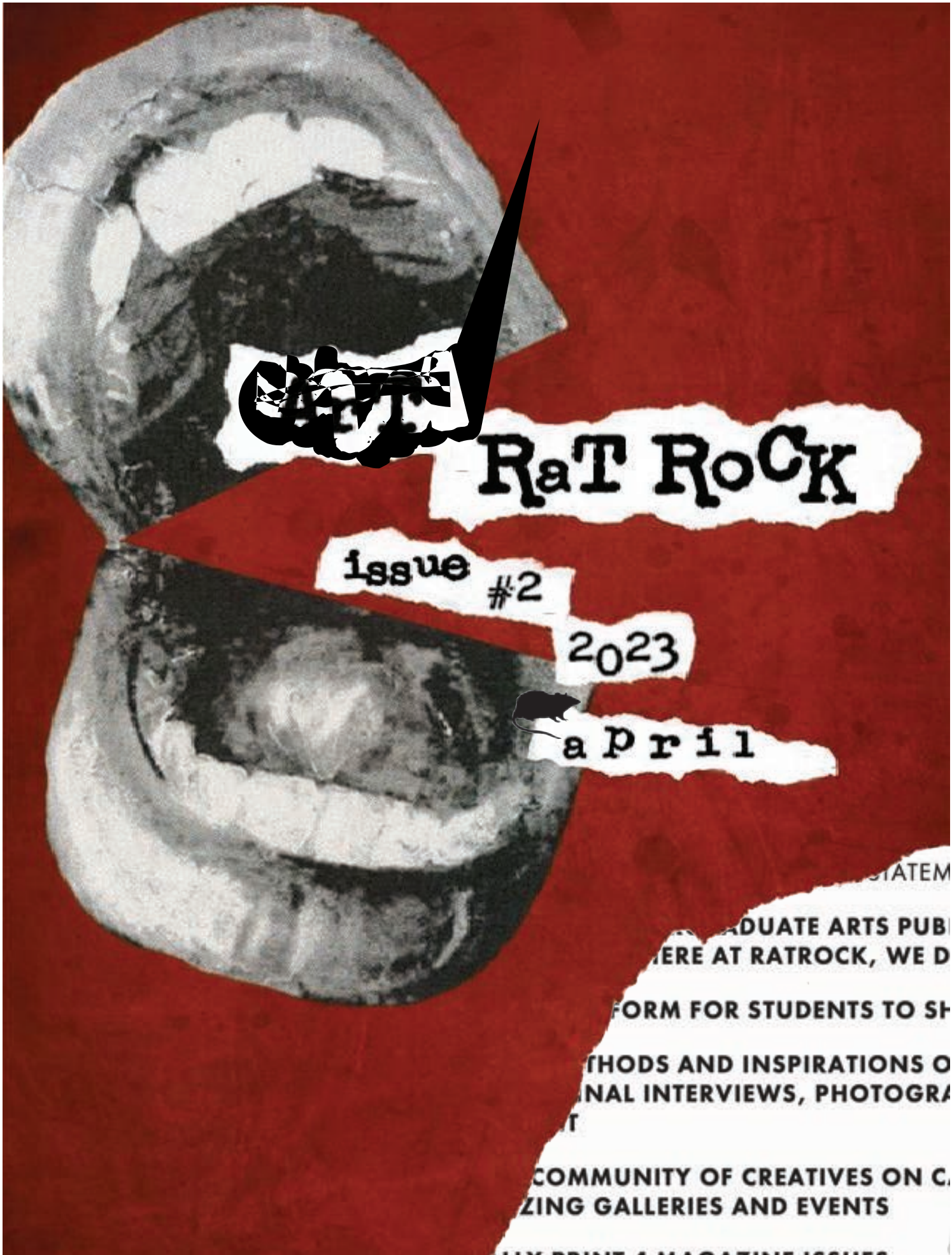


RATROCK CROSSWORD ANSWERS

1. **Davinci** — Renaissance artist who painted a very famous meal
2. **Impressionism** — 19th-century art movement seen in the works of Matisse, Degas, Remoir
3. **Waning (Crescent)** — What phase the moon was on the 2023 spring equinox?
4. **TheLastOfUs** — Apocalyptic video game AND TV show about a fungus outbreak
5. **Marcel** — This year's award season's smallest red carpet guest, who was voiced by alum Jenny Slate in the titular film
6. **MET** — This museum's steps famously appear in Gossip Girl
7. **Bacchanal** — Low Steps' very own musical festival
8. **Pigeon** — Colloquially known as "a rat with wings"
9. **Tar** - Best Picture nominee starring Cate Blanchett
10. **Thinker** - Columbia sculpture located in front of the Philosophy building



11. **Pollock** — Artist known for his drip and splatter technique
12. **Basquiat** — Famous neo-expressionist artist who graffitied under the name "SAMO"
13. **The Brooklyn Bridge** — Beloved NYC bridge is turning 140 years old in May
- 14 (across). **Chelsea** — NYC neighborhood where you can go gallery hopping
- 14 (down). **Collage** — Art form that involves assembling various materials on a piece of paper or digitally
15. **Abramovic** — Performance artist best known for her work where participants sit silently at a table with her
16. **Arca** — The Venezuelan musician whose most recent albums are part of her "Kick" series
17. **Muridae** — The scientific name of the family to which rats belong
18. **LadyBird** — Famous Barnard alum's directorial debut set in Sacramento
19. **Yeoh** — Star of a 2022 film that includes "talking" rocks



RATROCK

RaT RoCK

issue #2

2023

a p r i l

STATEM
GRADUATE ARTS PUB
HERE AT RATROCK, WE D
FORM FOR STUDENTS TO SH
METHODS AND INSPIRATIONS O
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IZING GALLERIES AND EVENTS
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