

IMAGES



THIRTY-EIGHT

20

A Literary
& Fine Arts
Magazine

24



All photos: Therese O'Halloran

IMAGES 2024

A LITERARY AND FINE ARTS MAGAZINE

by the Students and Staff of
Monroe County Community College



MONROE COUNTY
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

enriching lives

Front Cover:

Malaia Merillat, Purple Pot, Ceramic, Fall 2023

Back Cover:

Angela Mocniak, 2-D design, Paper Cutout, Fall 2023

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Note: This publication may contain mature subject matter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is the thirty-eighth year the compiled creative efforts of our community of students is being published. For Therese and I, this is our fifth issue as editors together. The publication of the literary magazine is the highlight of our academic year.

As with past issues, not surprisingly, our students' talent is on full display within this issue. Our hope is for you to see what our students have accomplished devoting their time and effort to producing these works of art. We hope our students' visions and voices are resounding.

We would like to thank everyone involved in making this volume a reality. To the contributors: thank you for your courage and willingness to submit work for everyone to view, consider, and remember. To those who work behind the scenes— Beverly Tomek, Alia Pilcher, Doug Richter, Joe Verkennes, and Elisabeth Brockman-- we appreciate you, and we hope you know there would be no Images without your help.

We are already gathering material for our next issue. From now through next February, we will be accepting submissions from MCCC students to feature in the thirty-seventh volume. We collect these submissions through our magazine's email address: images@monroeccc.edu.

Jenna Bazzell

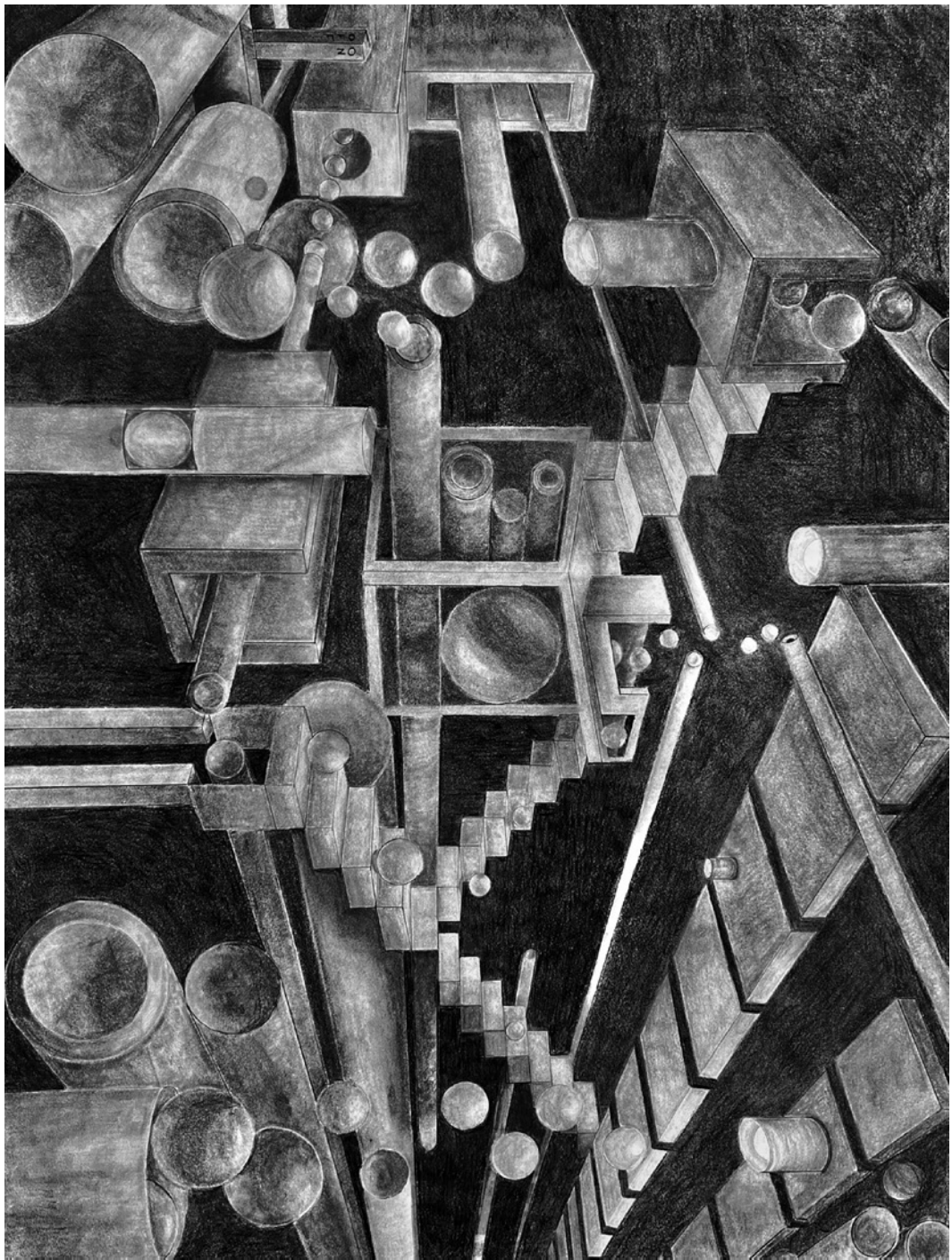
Assistant Professor of English

Therese O'Halloran

Assistant Professor of Art



Benjamin Fry,
Art Fundamentals,
Acrylic, Fall 2023



Malaia Merillat,
Art Fundamentals,
Two-Point Perspective pencil,
Fall 2023



Jessica Janus,
Pot, Ceramics, Winter 2024

The Withered Rose

Deep within the human soul
Lies a rose, so withered but still whole
The pedals so frail and thorns filled with sorrow
Its stem so weakened for a bleak tomorrow
With its once vibrant color faded, and dear smell nearly gone,
Its shriveled roots barely hold on
As time goes past, the withered rose would cry for something
Anything to help it get by
Through the chamber of despair holding the rose in its place,
Reached a flicker of hope, to answer the trembling roses' case
The flicker grew and began to spark
Reigniting the fire that had faded from the heart
As the light began to shine brighter,
The once withered roses' spirit became lighter
A stem, once so near to being broken
Now stood tall, with no fear, outspoken
The beautiful red returned to the petals,
Though some black remained, a testament to its mettle,
With roots growing ever stronger and a smell so sweet,
The once withered rose was back on its feet
In the garden of life where darkness often glooms,
Two hearts instead of one can make it through
Two souls joined in unity to face the dismay
Together they'll light the way
In the garden of life where many find it hopeless with no help in site
Reach out your hand and lend your might
For it takes two to heal a soul so worn and so weak
But together we'll find the strength we so dearly seek.

• Aidan Gerlica



Kylie Jacobs, Art Fundamentals, Black and white abstract, Fall 2023

Crack in the looking glass

I opened my eyes to look myself in the mirror and here's what I found out. I'm brainwashed into thinking the relationship is beautiful when really it's the thing that makes you feel like you're anything less than perfect.

The mirror trembles.

You gave me rose gold glasses that trap my heart in the misconception that you actually care for my well-being.

The first crack.

A crushed heart is the realization that you long left me in your past but replaced me with the shadow of myself that you created in your mind. Hoping the me today fits the image you created for tomorrow.

And then the second.

I felt the feelings build inside me like a volcano being shoved deeper and deeper until I implode.

I can hardly see my face anymore.

We act in the play I long wrote in my mind but the end was different from my expectations. The social norms say it's totally normal. So I guess I'll just become more like the character written for me.

I can hear the pieces hit the floor.

I'm holding on to the balloon as it escapes my grasp. I'm watching it as it flies. Now left wondering, does love ever last?

My reflection, now fragmented and scattered across the floor....

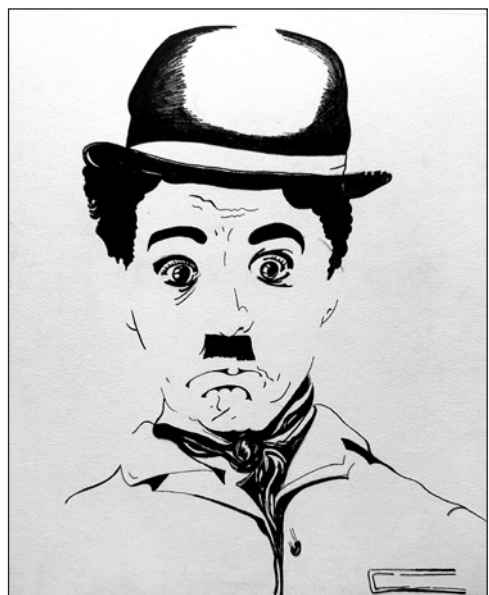
You covered me in false security. You gave me love laced with hatred. You hurt me first. So don't blame me. I know you don't like my changes but I won't be bitter. Lines have been drawn so I can have hope and love. I will be happy in spite of you.

Now to gather the shards... I am not broken; I am becoming

• Tyonne Jones



Cortney DeCarlo,
Illustration Techniques, Line drawing, Fall 2023



JoAnn Mills,
Illustration Techniques, Line drawing, Fall 2023



Cortney DeCarlo,
Illustration Techniques,
Reflective Paint, Fall 2023



Audrey Kecskes,
Art Fundamentals,
color abstract, Fall 2023



Untilted

I quickly scan the room to find a seat without staying in front of the room too long. I pick out a seat in the corner far left away from the nucleus of students. I set my bag down on the space beneath the desk, and lowered myself in my seat. Professor Bagheri puts coal in the steam engine as he explains our first day icebreaker activity. I can taste my breath, I'm cold. I reach for my seatbelt on my left and tug it over my lap and clasp it into place. The lap bar lowers from above my head and a misty figure walks past for a security check, trying to lock it into place. It wouldn't budge until we heard a click after it put some of its body weight onto the contraption. Gave a thumbs up to a shadowy specimen stationed in the booth. As the lips of my subconscious pursed to pronounce a letter, the car slowly rolled backwards. Why do we have to do ice breakers? The car slid down the spiral track, further and further into the abyss. I don't

think that I'm really that interesting
of a person for this activity. The more I
try to remember what I did over the summer
besides feel sorry for myself. I
don't deserve to be here.

I zoomed down the track

forced to look forward,

only seeing the top of the ride grow

more distant with every thought.

Of course, we're going in order of seating—

letting my anxiety flood over like a waterpark bucket

knowing I'm going last. I have to live up to everyone's answers.

.... Wait.. who said that? Breaks
screech. No really, who said I had to? Whatever I might say is good enough. The cart slowed
down gradually to a complete stop. I unbuckled my seatbelt and popped the lock with a balled
fist. I lifted the lap bar back over my seat with the tops of my fingertips. Bagheri looks over:
"Andrew? Would you like to go next?"

• Andrew Friar



Malaia Merillat,
Ceramics,
Fall 2022

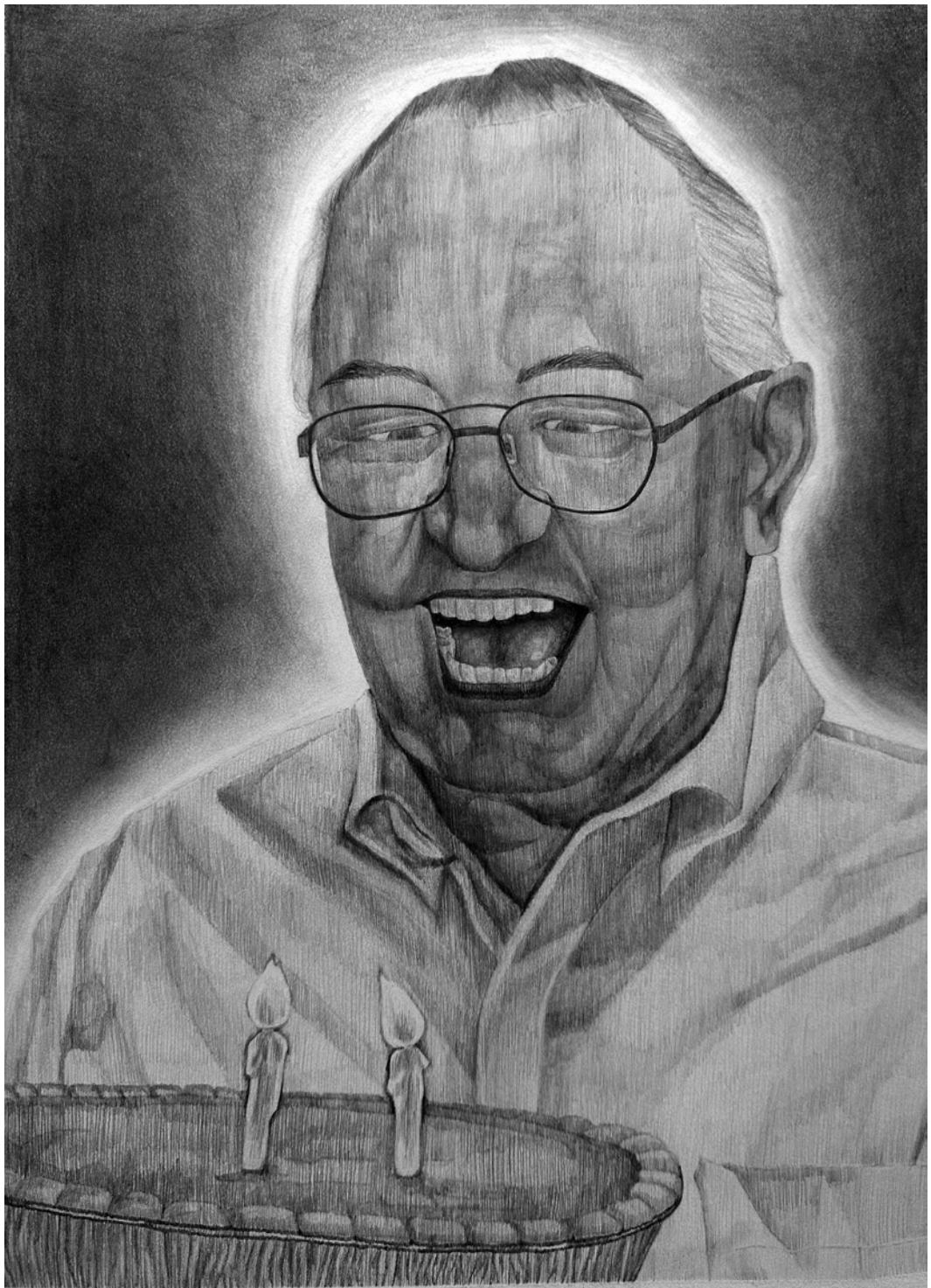


Malaia Merillat,
Ceramics (detail),
Winter 2024



**There is three
There is three people inside of me
The person I was, the person I am
The person I am striving to be
The person I was, I no longer wish to be
Because that person was not really me
I lived in a world where everyone told me
Everything I needed to be
That when I looked at my reflection it taunted me
Because I was living a life that wasn't for me
I woke up one day and determined as could be
I would live my life only for me
Those of my past became angry with me because
I refused to be what they wanted me to be
There is no looking back what is there to see
But a shadow of a person that wasn't me
I look at my reflection and examine what I see
Today I have grown into the person that is me
Yet I am not finished because you see
I have yet to become the person I strive to be
So, there will always be three with me
The person I was
The person I am
The person I strive to be**

• Ashley Atkins



Cortney DeCarlo,
Illustration Techniques,
Pencil drawing, Fall 2022

Toast

I crave
My mom's burnt
Toast.
Pathetic.

There is so much
She doesn't
Know about me.
I do not
Care
To tell her.

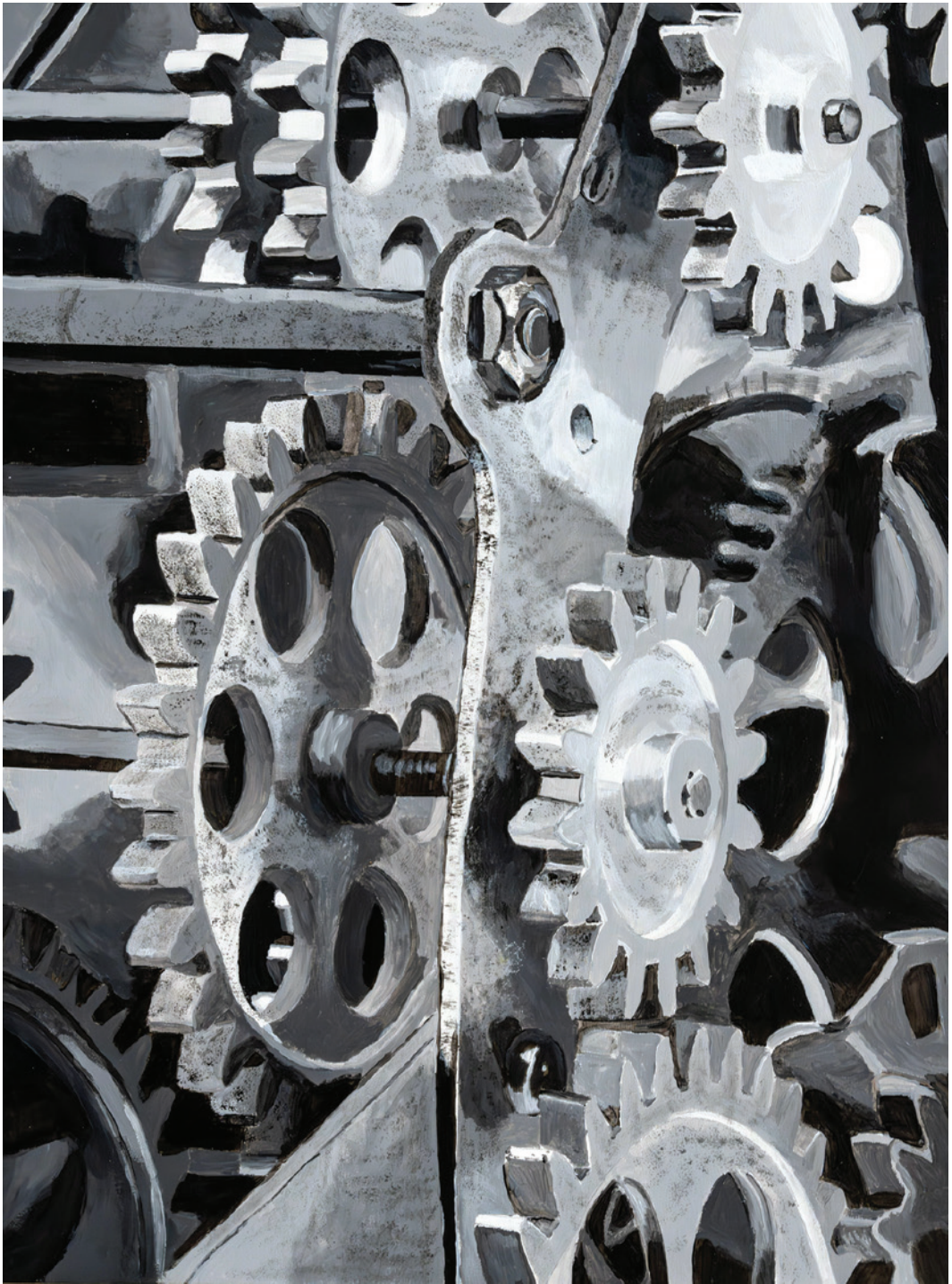
To expect her
To listen
Results in
Disappointment. Guilt. Failed
daughterhood.
So I remain quiet.

The toast tasted
Bitter. Like
Failure. Like
Imperfection.
Perfection is not needed
In toast
But it is needed
In daughters.

I crave
My mom's burnt
Toast.

I like the idea that
My mother
Can create
Something imperfect
And then
Forget
Once breakfast is over.

• Samantha Francis



Angela Mocniak,
2-D design,
Mechanical black and white paint,
Fall 2023



Robert Johnson,
Ceramics, brown,
Fall 2023

Enchanted

An unexpected approach
Something foreign upon my heart begins to encroach
My eyes fail to connect in that sacred kiss
Is this mere anxiety contracted from a lifetime of misery?
Or do I know deep down that I fear falling into that chocolate abyss?
I believed myself to be buried beneath a mountain of unmovable sand
Though how easily that mountain crumbles at the slightest touch of your hand
A heartbroken vagabond, believing himself unable to trust again
How easily this heart's armor shattered
Another crack piled on by your smile, every now and then.
You whisper to me after dark
Your tongue, a lover's hot-tipped knife, has left an irreversible mark
My face grows ever hotter with your gentle words
Perhaps I shouldn't have written off love as a luxury for the birds
By your advances I find myself hopelessly tongue-tied
A brighter red I've found my cheeks dyed
When your eyes connect with mine
A strange rush of bliss and nervousness courses down my spine.
Your calming presence at night
Is it wrong to call you my guiding light?
A sudden torrent of affection
I've witnessed your smile in my reflection.
A midnight waterfall cascades from your head
I fail to see these "imperfections," not even a shred
Boundless horizons await in your cinnamon eyes
Should they swallow my soul when I glance at them, it wouldn't be a surprise
Radiant smile glowing like the sun
Everything beautiful, by your charm has been hopelessly outdone
An enchanting laugh that leaves me reeling
Never before has my heart experienced such intense feeling.
The unprecedented death of my pride
Though, I realize I've become less teary-eyed
That cold night under October's caramel exterior
When comparing you to the stars, they seem far inferior
Your body pressed against mine,
I begin to wonder if you've thrown out a line.

I feel your fingers brush against my own
Though your intentions are, to me, yet unknown
Doubt's frozen fingers grip my neck,
Rejection's looming threat leaves me an awkward wreck.
I'm sorry if you wanted to light a spark,
But the precious journey of love is one upon which I've yet to embark.
I wanted nothing more than to hold your hand in my own,
Though it proved that my hesitation and uncertainty in love had grown.
What do you think about me?
That's what crossed my mind.
If I was wrong about your signals, certainly you'd be unsettled by our fingers intertwined
And so my hand stayed by my side, chained to the cold grave of the love-blind.
The perfect girl walks beside me,
So I began to find myself inadequate to stand beside you.
Though, you didn't give up on me then
You continued to speak with me from afar, time and again
Something odd began to develop in the way we interacted
My intentions were of love, but my actions counteracted
Further away I push you
Displays of my affection I've yet to debut.
Please understand that I'm simply not good at love yet,
But I'm certain that I love you.
If I ever ignore you, please understand that I want nothing more than to speak,
But your angelic presence leaves me hopelessly weak.
As the days fly by, your responses have become heartless.
I find myself a navigator in unmapped territory, confused and chartless.
I'm unsure of what to say to you,
But I know I want to feel your warmth in my arms.
What could I possibly say to hear your voice even once more at night?
This painful question is why I've begun to write.
I know that your sudden loss of interest is my fault,
And that my incompetence has slowed the ticking of my heart to a halt.
Perhaps you never felt the way I feel,
Or perhaps you did, but my emotions were far too well concealed. Santa
HOOOO! HOOO! HO! HOOOOO! HOOO! HO! HOOOOOOOO! HOOOO! HO!...

• Josh Sell

The Day You Went Away

I remember, the day you went away
Counting coins at your kitchen table.
You left without delay, they say.
Memories fled your mind, left you with a silvery nickel
The phone call came and broke the news.
Leaving us all in silent dismay
For you had gone and left us to sing the blues
The day you went away.

Your face was still the same as always.
Through seasons and through the rain
I faintly could imagine you dreaming of railways
As you laid there in the living room. waiting for the black train

My mother came and woke you.
You startled as your world came into view
She calmed you and explained who she was is true
Then she turned with a somber smile, and reintroduced me to you
You stared through me without clue
Your eyes a hollowed blue
And through the deafening silence I knew
That you went away, and I missed you
The day you went away
The family picked you clean
There were vultures on a roadway.
Leaving your frail body lean

The smell of death buggered the tomb
I still remember your lingering cologne
The family robbing you in the other room
As you laid there with me all alone

In the end I sit and wonder
If we will ever meet again
In the end I hope it will be like your last summer
In the flower garden you maintain

I wonder if you will remember me, since it has been a long while
For I am grown up now and no longer a child
I hope you greet me with your warm smile
As we embrace, you will remember me as your grandchild.

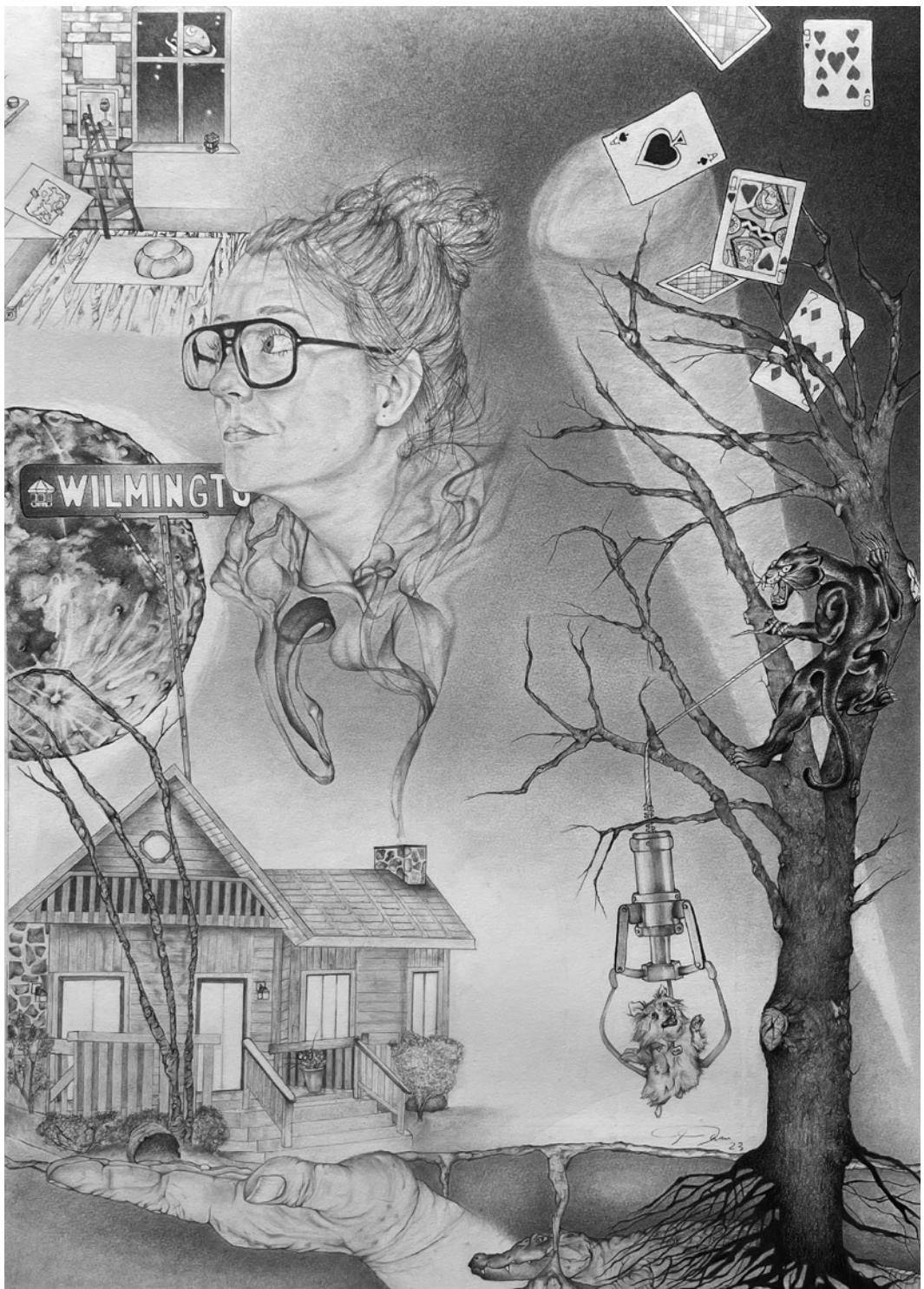
Until then I sit with teary eyes
Remembering you for a while
My gaze turning attention to the summer skies
And imagine you on the ivory isle.

Counting coins at your kitchen table
You left without delay
The silvery shine of pristine nickel
For it rings out to you in relay
The distant ring that broke the news
That caused you to go astray
And through the gloom and faded views
I remember the day you went away.

• Sierra Seidelman



JoAnn Mills,
Illustration Techniques,
Self Caricature, Fall 2023



Jessica Janus,
Drawing 2,
self reflection, Fall 2023

The Vegetable Stand

Chapter One.

In Which a Boy Called RJ Runs Away from Home and a Man Nicknamed Remi Doesn't Sell Him His Vegetables.

Robert had packed his bag. He just had to figure out how to get out. Once that wretched woman laid Diesel down to rest and his father and she went to bed, it would be the optimal time. Robert tucked his bag under his bed and lay there waiting. It's dark out and Robert had never walked alone in the dark before. But there's not much else to do. His left leg was sore but he couldn't move over to his right without pushing against the water heater. His eyes were watery as he stared at the boards and pipes in the ceiling and he realised he's never been so scared in his entire life.

And so when the world has gone dark and quiet, Robert got to his feet, slung his bag over his shoulder and crept up the stairs. Emerging from the basement, the rest of the house was still but his heart beat violently through his chest. The doorknob felt weird in his hand. He opened the door, it creaked, and he waited with his back to the rest of the house waiting for a moment. After a second more of silence, he opened the door the rest of the way and stepped out onto the patio. He breathed in the fresh air. The door closed behind him. There was silence. There was peace. He exhaled and not a moment later, he was running like a bat out of hell down the sidewalk and out into the road. His feet skipped across the street, barely taking time to touch the ground before kicking off again. His bag bounced against his back and he ran. And he ran. And he never stopped.

At 5 in the morning, Remington thought about getting up. Raspberry stirred next to him in the bed and stretched his back. The morning air came in through the window screen and the sun shone down into his eyes. Remington turned his face to the window and grunted. Pulled the sheets over his head and went back to sleep. And Raspberry followed suit, coiling his tail around his side and tucking his face into his arms. They both had put a little snooze on the morning and laid there waiting for an hour. 6 seemed like a much more reasonable time to get up. And anyway, they're both old.

Remington removed his night clothes and pulled out a pair of overalls and a black button-up. Raspberry licked his fur and grunted at Remington. He didn't like the black button-up, so Remington put it back and pulled out a striped blue button-down. The cat stood up and turned around, plopping back down and waving his tail at Remington. He probably didn't like the overalls but Remington didn't care. He got dressed and walked into the kitchen, leaving Raspberry purring on the bed. Then, he made breakfast.

He prepped the coffee and as it brewed, he made his eggs. Sunny-side up, as always. And he salted and peppered them and drank his coffee black. Every morning. And then he got his keys and put on his boots and got into his truck. He didn't do this every morning, but it was nearing the end of summer and people think community is important and all that other touchy-feely crap that Remington didn't care about. But he goes anyway. To sell his extra crops and get some pocket money. And so he stacked crates full of vegetables in the back of his old Ford truck and got into the driver's seat. Took a few minutes to get it running and pulled out onto the dirt road. Raspberry watched him drive off while lying in a ray of sun. The side of the road was littered with loose bags and other beer cans that people apparently couldn't keep in their car and a strange figure. Remington saw the figure lying on the side of the road asleep with a bag tucked under their head. Remington shook his head and reflected on the broken world around him. Chumps couldn't even get a job these days. Remington scoffed and continued past him. It was a real shame, the place where the world had gotten. It was a real shame.

Remington had a 20-minute drive to Fayetteville. He only came here when he was low on bread or soap, but he's dragged himself out once more for something he didn't want to go to. It was for the pocket money and nothing else. He could buy more bread with it once he's done. There were banners strung up between the old stores and flowers set out around the street lights. And city people pawning off resourceful people. Because they couldn't do nothing themselves. But they gave him pocket money and that was good.

He pulled into downtown, which was now bustling with people of all kinds, and weaved his way around until he found signs pointing to Fayetteville's Farmer's Market. He arrived at an even more

continued on next page

crammed sight of people and shopping bags and bright lights and tables and big, colourful signs, and unneeded excess. There were food trucks parked outside the big pavilion and it made Remington's stomach turn inward on itself. How much overly processed food could one person shove down their throat? Men in bright, neon yellow vests pointed him excessively in the direction of the parking lot and Remington waved them off, finding his way to a clearing on the grass. He swung open the door as one of them yelled that he was in the wrong spot and made his way down into the crowd. Voices came in waves. There wasn't a single coherent conversation in the world. Remington hated it. But a voice came booming over the rest and shook his head to its core. He froze.

"Remi! Remi! You're late!" She screamed.

Remington searched around, probably looking for an escape, maybe looking for who's yelling. The voice came ringing through the pavilion again and a woman started charging towards Remington at full speed. Remington hung his head. Embarrassing. She waved him down frantically and people's heads turned quickly to him. He shrugged as if he had no clue who this woman was.

"Remi!" She yelled in his face once she was toe-to-toe with him.

He jumped back. "Rita, I heard you the first five times.

"I told you to be here early. We have to set up. You aren't early."

"No." He said. "But I'm perfectly on time as-"

"I said early!"

"As the schedule said." He continued.

Rita shook her head and tapped viciously at her watch. "And I said to be here early and you said you would be. The schedule is for the visitors, not the vendors."

"They said seven on the dot. On the dot!" Remington argued.

"I don't care what the schedule says, Remi! We agreed that you would be here early."

Remi stood silently with Rita's finger pointed right at his face. Slowly, he muttered: "I overslept."

Rita shook her head and stuck her hands into her patchwork dress's pockets. "Well, you're here now and that's all that matters. You didn't forget anything, did you?"

"Nope, I've got it all in the truck." He sighed.

"Well, what's it doing still in there!" She exclaimed. More glances. "Get it out, already! You're still late." She swatted at him and pushed him back to the parking lot.

Remington shook his head and sauntered back to his truck. "Right on time." He mumbled under his breath. After a few trips back and forth, followed by Rita barking orders, all the crates had been moved to a little, plastic table with a sign that Rita had painted with some old acrylics she probably dug out of Remington's workshop. It said Fresh Produce over the front of it in bright, colourful letters with greenery around it. Remington rolled his eyes. A little overboard, perhaps. But as long as it all sells, right?

"That's all of it," Remington said, setting down the last crate.

"Where're the extra tables?" Rita placed her hands on her hips.

Remington looked behind himself, and back to Rita. He clamped his jaw and prepared himself for another scolding. "I must've forgotten 'em."

"You..." She began, shaking her head. She turned quickly to the vendor next to them, a small old man with orangish freckles covering every visible part of his unnaturally pale face and body. "Roof!" She barked.

He jumped up and looked over, fiddling his fingers. "Yes, Rita?"

"You got any extras?" She asked, pointing to the single table at her stand.

The man whose name was really Roosevelt looked back and called out to someone moving about the truck parked behind him. Remington shook his head. No one allowed him to park beside the pavilion.

“Benny! We’ve got any extras of them folding tables?”

A little boy jumped forward with a bottle in his hand. He was poorly attempting to open it. “Huh? How should I know? I didn’t pack any tables.”

“What? Then look in the truck. How many have we got in there? I know we packed some extras. It’s rather funny really, we had to borrow some from Chandler, too. Have you seen him recently? He’s been rather helpful with Benny in town-” Roosevelt droned on excessively, running his conversation into a rabbit hole, and Rita listened closely.

Remington tapped his foot on the ground and scoffed. This was already taking more time than he had initially hoped. The boy shuffled about in the back of the man’s old mini-van and peaked his head out grunting and tugging at a folding table. Roosevelt slowly pushed himself out of his chair and hobbled over to the chubby boy, making many grunting noises as if to prove that this was very difficult for him. Rita nudged Remington forward as if she expected him to help but he shrugged her off as Roosevelt and the small boy pulled out the folding table.

“Well,” Roosevelt sighed, rubbing his forehead of sweat, “this is the last one. Hope it’ll do enough.”

Fiercely, Rita ripped it from Roosevelt’s arms and dragged it over. “Well, that’ll have to do, I suppose.”

“It’ll do just fine, Rita,” Remington murmured as he watched Roosevelt shuffle nervously back over to his seat, watching Rita out of the corner of his eye.

Rita didn’t need his help to set up the table of course, as she tossed and pulled it about into place and Remington made sure to stay out of the way, lest her elbow go swinging into his eye. She groaned and muttered what Remington assumed were swear words under her breath as she lifted the crates of produce onto the tables and then directed Remington to sit in a folding chair and pointed shortly to a metal box where the money would be stored before rushing off quickly, saying “She’d be back.” Of course, as Remington obviously knew, she would be mingling for hours. And so she did. And Remington saw nothing of her, except for the few times she appeared in flashes with someone linked in her arms and she showed them to the produce and talked them into buying one or two things. Then off she went again. At one point she brought Remington a sandwich from a food truck, which he pushed, disgusted, to the side. And so the day began to pass and other vendors began to close and the metal box filled slowly with pocket change. Remington watched Roosevelt and Benny pack up, wave goodbye, and drive off slowly around the crowd of people but Remington waited for Rita to come back and tell him it was time to go.

Robert had woken up hours ago with his bag under his head and sand in his socks. And he got up and ran some more. He just ran and ran and ran till he found signs pointing him to Fayetteville and he followed them to the smell of food. His stomach grumbled. And by the time he was slowly weaved into the crowd at the farmer’s market, most of the vendors were closing down and the food trucks were shuffling out. Except for one.

Remington hadn’t taken his eyes off of the produce or metal box with his pocket change but for a moment when he heard Rita’s voice far off the crowd saying goodbye to someone. He hoped it meant it was time to go. He stared down at his shoes and thought of Raspberry lying down in a ray of soft fading sunlight and frowned. Oh, to be a cat.

Robert saw the old man staring at his feet and felt his chest rise and fall as he prayed the man was asleep. Waiting a few moments and cowering his head at the bustling people who slowly made their way out of the market, he moved his feet toward the vegetable stand. His weary eyes scanned over the ripe, fresh vegetables and his stomach began to groan and his mouth watered. He cleared his throat and the old man looked up at him. He reached into his pockets for the little spare change he had and held it out to the man.

“What will this get me?” He croaked, refusing to make eye contact with the old man.

Remington leaned forward and shrugged, “What do you want?”

Robert stared at his feet and shuffled slowly. Didn’t the old man hear him, he told the man to tell him what it would get him. “I’m not sure. What could this get me?”

continued on next page

Remington intertwined his fingers over his stomach. "Nothing." Remington wasn't actually sure of that, he wasn't even sure how much there was in the crumpled piles of ones and various coins, but he wondered if there was any more pocket change that could be exchanged.

Robert shook his head. "I know it's not much. Is there anything for this much?"

Is he trying to bargain? Remington frowned and shook his head. "Look, just shove off, kid. I'm not here to bargain."

The old man leaned back and returned to reclining in his chair. Slowly, Robert shoved the money back into his pocket. He stepped away and stood in the middle of the moving crowd. In between the people, he could still see the man in the chair with his head down and his eyes closed. In a quick craze, Robert lurched forth and reached for the first thing he saw and took no more notice of the old man.

Remington lifted his head as he heard Rita's voice echoing through the pavilion and his eyes met with the little, scraggly boy with a fresh tomato in his hand. There was a moment of silence shared between them both and the boy's mouth hung ajar. Remington lifted a finger to him and the boy's feet hit the ground but in a sudden and rather embarrassing mess, he tripped over his own ankle and Remington quickly reached forth and gripped the boy's wrist. Not without giving Remington his earned pocket change, Remington thought. Not just gonna take someone else's hard work without giving them what they rightfully deserve, Remington thought. Not on my watch, and not today, Remington thought.

Robert did the only thing he could think of. He screamed, a terrifying, pitchy shriek escaping from his chest. And the pavilion fell completely silent to his surprise. Both in shock, Robert and the old man with the fresh vegetables looked at each other with wide eyes. The old man's hand retracted as people gaped and gasped at him and once more, Robert ran. It was all he could do. He ran like he did in the darkness the night before, he ran like he had in the dusty hours of the morning, and he ran like he had always wanted to his whole life. His side felt like a knife was being stabbed into it repeatedly, but his feet kept rhythm. His knees were weak, but he didn't look back. And his eyes were blurry and weary, and he planted his feet and came to a screeching halt at the sound of a woman's voice. Not a fierce, nor judging voice, nor all the things he had been afraid of but a soft and low voice.

"Excuse me." She said.

His heart beat faster in his chest and his head continued to spin. He kept his face forward and closed his eyes tight, holding the tomato close to his chest.

"Excuse me, sir," She said and her footsteps crunched forward. The crowd had returned to the hustle it had been before and Robert swallowed down the lump in his throat. He turned his heels slowly and craned his neck in shame. Robert held out the tomato.

"Take it," He croaked silently.

The woman chuckled and knelt before him, "I think you need it more than I do, love," She closed his hand around it and pushed it back to him.

The first thing Robert noticed was her patchwork dress. He cleared his throat: "I like your dress."

"Thank you," She smiled, "What's your name?"

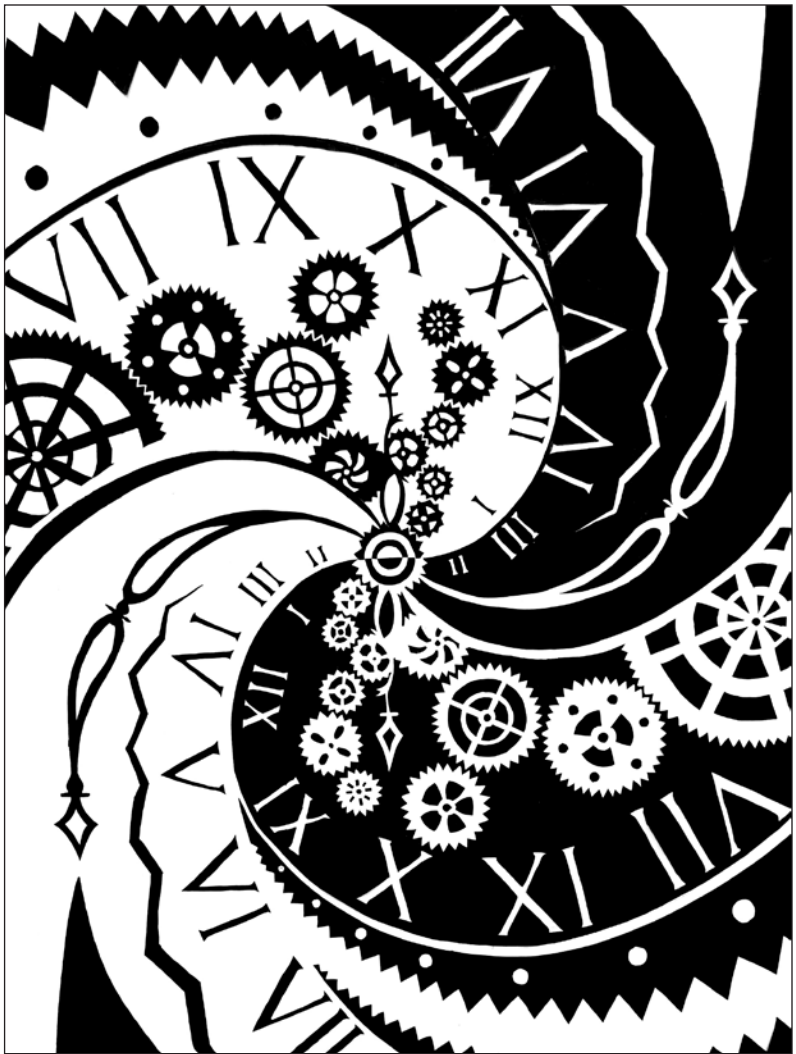
Robert looked around nervously and bit his bottom lip.

"You're not about to run away again, are you? Everything is alright. I promise I don't bite. Why don't you just tell me your name?" She chuckled, "How about I start? I'm Rita."

"My name is RJ."

Rita nodded and turned to the old man from the vegetable stand, whom Robert had not seen behind her until this moment. It was natural, Remington went unnoticed easily. "RJ, this is Remi and he has something he'd like to tell you."

• Renee Baker



Brooklyn Kayson 2-D design, Paper Cut out, Fall 2023



Emma Blanchard, 2-D design, Paper Cut out, Fall 2023



Cortney DeCarlo,
2-D design,
Paper Cut Out, Fall 2023



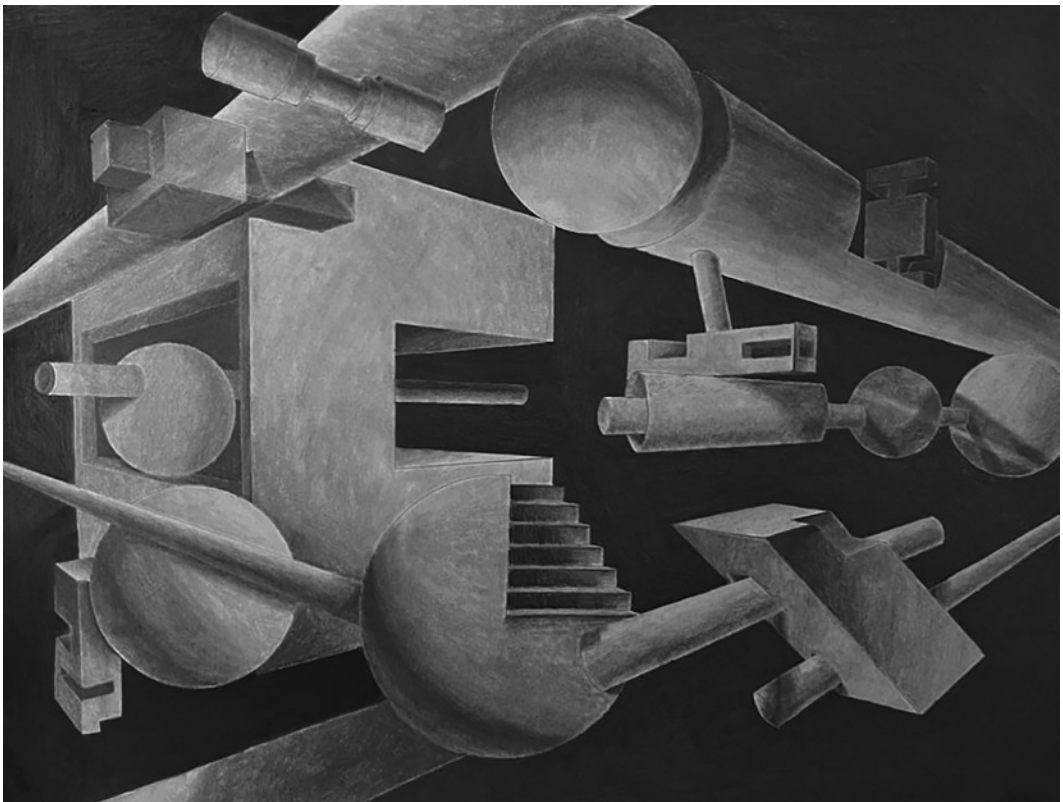
Katie Cooper,
2-D design,
Paper cutout, Fall 2023

The Crown

I tensed in the tan dental chair, the blinding white light above being slightly obscured by the figure above me. I focused on the yellowed tiles above my head; eyes occasionally dancing towards the dentists' hands. My mouth open, silvery tools pulling my numb cheek to the side; the drill buzzing across the tooth.

My hands clenched and fiddled with the faded blue denim of my jeans. The smell of burning powdered teeth wafting up in transparent wisps like dust. The taste of iron and bone created a gelatinous icky film over my mouth; my eyes creased in distaste. I winced slightly at the pressure on my jaw, the dentist's blue latex gloved hands pressing my mouth closed around a piece of thin gauze. A tan napkin pressed into my shaking hands; the napkin dabbed with diluted scarlet and brownish gunk. A silvery molar resting crudely in place.

• Sierra Seidelman



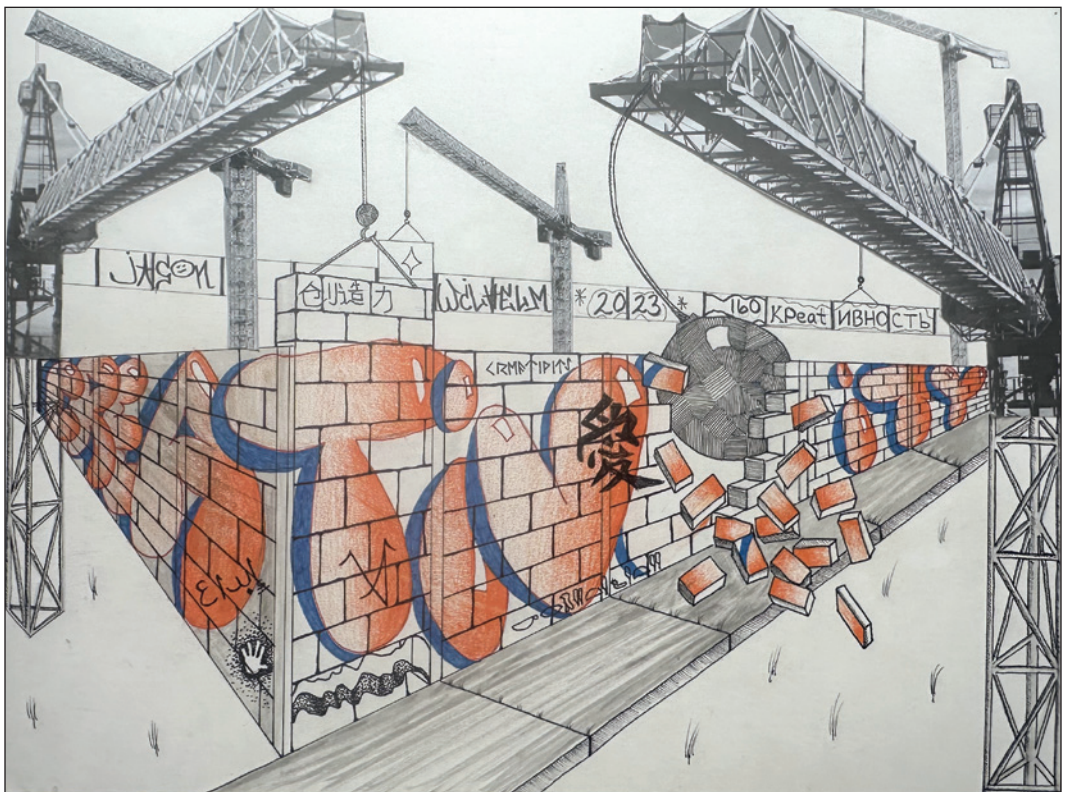
Benjamin Fry,
Art Fundamentals,
perspective, Fall 2023



Rob Johnson,
Ceramics, Fall 2023



Jaden Smith, 2-D design, Creativity Multimedia, Fall 2023



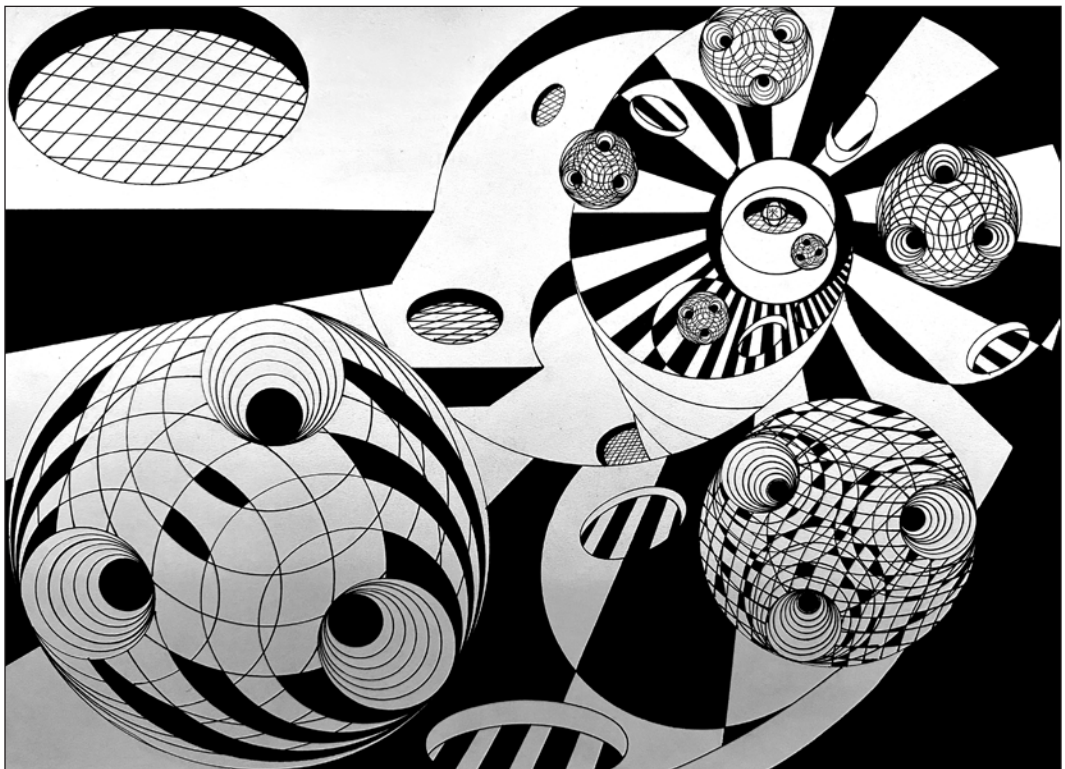
Jason Wilhem, 2-D design, creativity multimedia, Fall 2022



Katie Cooper, 2-D design, Mechanical Black and white paint, Fall 2023



Jaden Smith, 2-D design, Paper Cut out, Fall 2023



Jason Wilhelm, 2-D design, Black and white Ink, Fall 2023

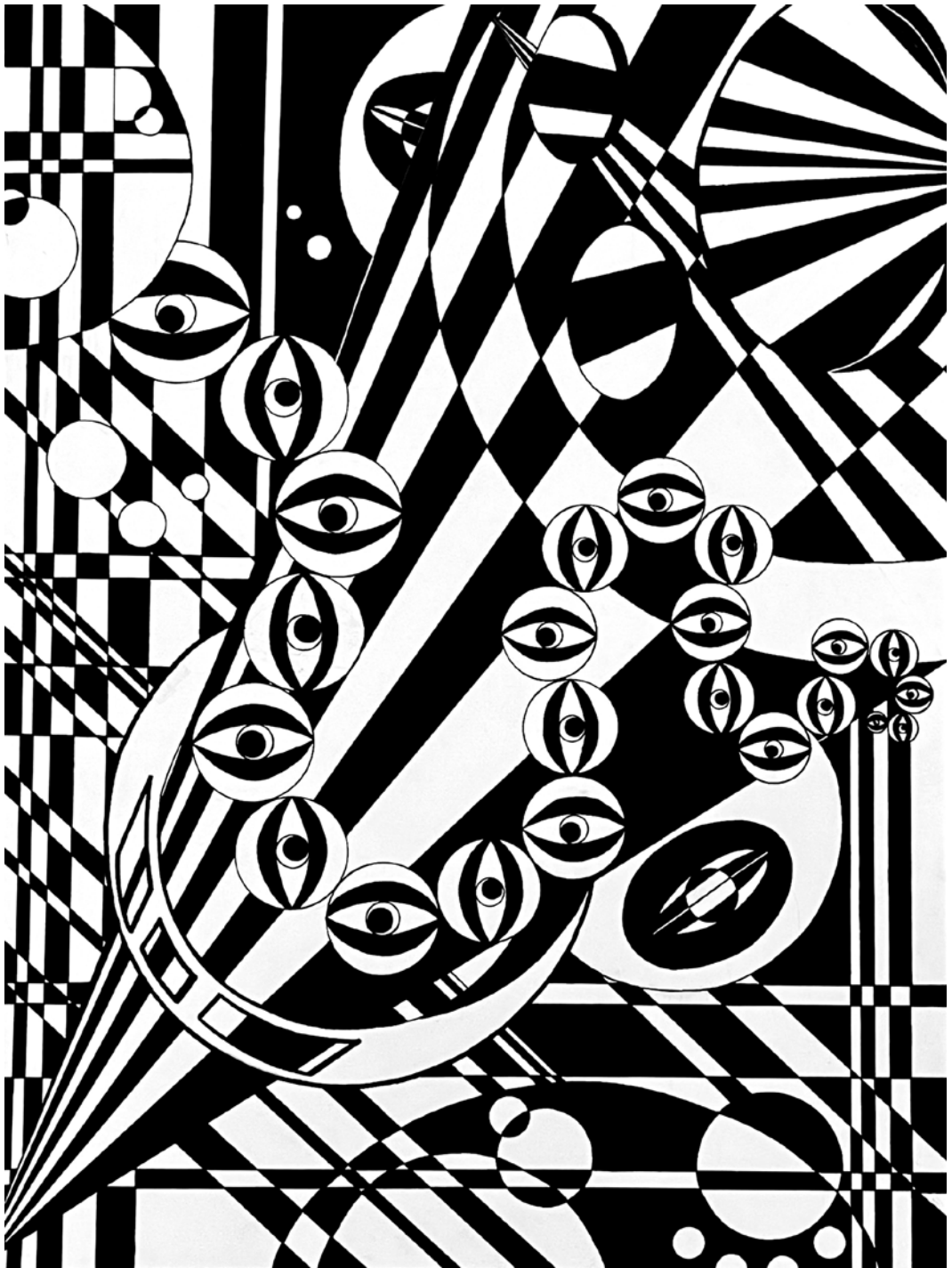


JoAnn Mills,
2-D design,
Black and white Ink, Fall 2023

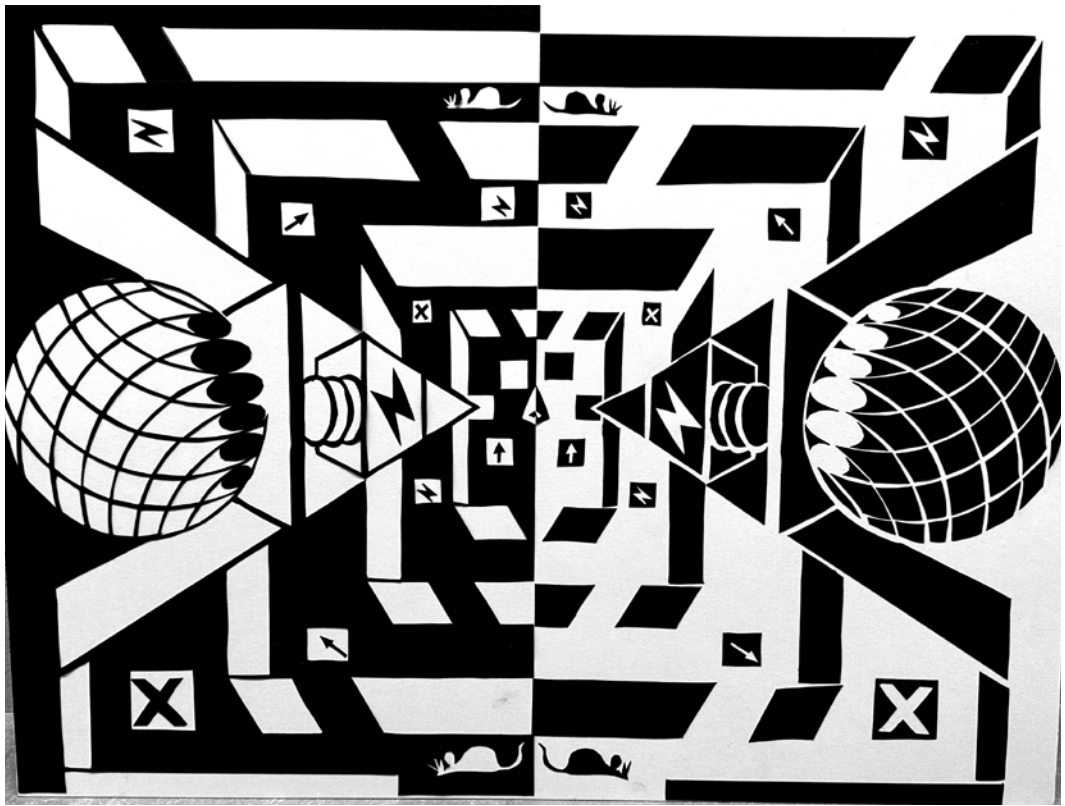


Malaia Merillat,
Ceramics,
Fall 2022





Emma Blanchard,
2-D design,
Black and white ink,
Fall 2023



Jason Wilhelm, 2-D design, Paper cutout, Fall 2023



JoAnn Mills, 2-D design, creativity multimedia, Fall 2023

We, the Ill and Misconstrued.

I reach my hand out to ring the bell on the desk. I look around and all I see is red. Red carpet, red candles, hung on the red walls, melting. I'm not sure how I got here. I look behind me to see big gold doors. The windows are pitch black, as if to keep something hidden behind them.

I turn back around to see a girl. She appears to have a similar build as me, but her face is blurred out. I can feel the terror radiating off of her. She's wearing a hotel uniform and stands behind the desk that separates us.

"Hello." I get no response in return. She doesn't even blink. "I think I'm supposed to check-in, are you able to help?"

Again, no response. But this time she looks to her right as if she sees something in the darkness by the grand staircase with red velvet stairs and gold railings. I look over my shoulder to where she's looking, and a chill runs down my spine. I meet a pair of black eyes contrasting against a pale white face, with black hair slicked away from it. The man is standing there with the shadows surrounding him and his tall, thin figure. He's staring at me with this huge, inhuman smile with perfectly white teeth and sharp canines poking out. He backs away into the darkness and disappears.

I slowly turn my head back to face the terrified girl, now matching her energy. Without saying a word or even blinking, she hands me a key for a room. I reach out to take it from her, slightly flinching as I feel the cold metal touch my skin. "Oh, thank you," I say, forcing a small smile. I take a step away from the front desk to head for the stairs, but a hand firmly grabs my wrist, yanking me back to the desk, nearly running into it. I use my other hand to stop myself from hitting the dark wood.

I look up at the girl with scrunched eyebrows that immediately fly up my face. The girl is staring at me with her mouth wide open as if she's trying to scream, but no sound comes out. I pull my arm back and stumble away from her as two tall men come out of a door wearing all black with black sunglasses on. They grab onto her arms and drag her through the door, slamming it shut.

I flinch from the noise, and when I open my eyes again, I find myself in a hotel room. I look around and see dark black carpet with black walls. Gold accents are sprinkled around the room on the small chandelier, doorway, doorknobs, balcony, and bathroom. The bed looks like a queen size with dark wooden posts, white sheets and pillows, and dark red bedding.

I walk to the glass doors and open them to the balcony that looks over the backyard. Leaning on the gold railings, I see a big yard mostly filled by a big pond in the middle. It almost looks like people are walking through the yard as someone dives under the surface of the water, followed by ripples, but when I try to peer through the heavy fog that's rolling along the dark water, I can't see anything.

A loud scream breaks the silence, and my hands shoot up to my ears to block the noise. I walk back into my room and shut the door. A loud thud sounds out from the hallway, causing me to jump and spin around. My breathing quickens and I feel goosebumps rise along my body. I run to the door and place my ear against the cold wooden door.

Nothing. I hear nothing.

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The door creaks loudly as I open it, making me cringe. I peer my head around the corner and look down the hallway, also seeing nothing, but when I look the other way, I stop. I feel the same chill down my spine as I spot the man from before. He's standing at the end of the hall, wearing the same smile on his face. A smile that never reaches his eyes.

Once I meet his eyes, he turns and walks out of sight. Without control, my body decides to walk towards him. The hallway seems to stretch as I walk along it. A door on my left is fully open, letting me look inside. But what's inside stops me in my tracks. I see a dark room with a dim light in the center, falling onto a girl around my age in some sort of dentistry chair. She's strapped down and seems to be unconscious while the doctor removes something from her mouth. It's dripping blood and he tosses it into a metal tin next to him. He catches my gaze and runs toward me. I yell at my feet to move, but nothing happens. Once he's inches from my face, he slams the door shut.

A shaky breath slips out of my mouth and I continue walking down the hall. As I near the end, another door is open on my right. I see a room similar to mine, almost identical. The only difference is that the red comforter is pulled aside and the white sheets are covered in bright red blood. My hand shoots up to my mouth when I see the girl lying lifeless on the bed. The two guys who took the girl from earlier are inside as well. One holds a bloody knife, and the other comes to the door and slams it shut.

I try not to continue, but my feet don't agree with me. I force myself to make my way to the end of the hallway. When I turn to my right, I see an old elevator shaft. Unwillingly, I step into the already open elevator. The floor is already selected and the doors squeak shut. The light overhead flickers and I take a deep, shaky breath as the box rattles upwards.

As soon as the doors open, the unsteady box is filled with the sound of music and whispers. I take a step out of the death box into a large ballroom full of more faceless people whispering and staring at me. I feel the eyes of all these faceless people on me, and hear the clicking sound of heels. Looking down, I see I'm not just wearing black heels, but a red silky gown, with a huge slit along my left leg. I feel my neck and touch a large diamond necklace.

A pair of long legs walks over to me and lifts my chin with his long finger. My eyes drift up his body seeing the all black suit, opposite of his pale white skin. The creepy smile is gone, and is now replaced by a gentle one, a smile that reaches his gentle black eyes. I no longer feel the chill from him, instead my heart feels warm and full.

His hand falls from my face and awaits my hand to fall into his. "Dance with me." His voice is deep and drowns out everything else. I reach out my hand to his and my stomach flips when our skin touches. I no longer feel the others staring at me as he leads me to the dance floor where a group of people are dancing. I've never danced before, and yet I find myself performing a perfect waltz. I feel happy, the happiest I've ever felt in my life.

We spin around and around for what feels like days, but I don't mind one bit. He lets go of my hand and I stumble away from him. Without his touch I start to panic. The people feel as if they blur together and block him from me. I get a glimpse of him, but he disappears again.

My breathing quickens and my head gets super light. I turn around and come face to face with a wall of mirrors. I finally see myself, but I don't recognize what I see. The girl in the reflection is indeed my body, my strawberry blonde hair, hazel eyes, light skin, but the look in my eyes isn't me. I no longer hear the music and I don't see anyone dancing. All that appears in the mirror is a girl who looks like me, and him.

He stands far behind me just as I first saw him. He has the inhuman smile back on his face, and his eyes strap me in place. He walks closer and closer, and as he does so, the room gets darker and darker.

I turn around and see the people dancing again, but when I look into the glassy reflection it's just him and me. I look around to find some way out and I land on a door in the shadowy corner, as if it's trying to hide.

Looking back one more time, he's at arm's reach from behind. I bolt towards my escape route. At least I hope it's an escape. I push through the blurs of people, hearing the music quicken. Glancing in the mirror, I see he hasn't moved from his spot, but is staring deep into my soul. I turn my head back to the door determined to get there, shoving through gossiping groups.

"Seraphina." I stop. My breaths are quick and my heart is racing. The chill slowly crawls all over my body. How does he know? I turn to look at him in the mirror. He's still standing where I left him, but sounds as if he's all around the room, his voice booming in my ear. "Stay. Stay with me." He reaches his hand out to me through the mirror. Part of me truly wants to, but I clench my fist and force myself back to the door.

I push right through it and find myself in a stairwell. My leggings, sweater, and sneakers are back. I sigh and run down the stairs in the dim, flickering light. My feet almost trip multiple times and I grip onto the metal railing as my life depends on it. My body falls through the floor as one of the steps gives out and crumbles beneath me. I feel the bruises form and the cuts sting.

I pull myself up and stumble towards the door. As I fall through, I enter the backyard that's covered in fog and shadows. I look around and trip on my feet as I turn in circles. There are shadowy figures by the bordering brick wall with glowing white eyes staring at me. I decide to not go near them and head towards the far wall, going around the dark, steamy pond. I get about halfway there when the ground starts to shake. I have to find my balance and catch myself by placing my hand on the ground. Bad idea, because then a hand comes out of the ground and grabs my wrist. A scream leaves my throat and I pull my hand back, causing me to fall to the ground. I slide backwards and bodies start to emerge from the ground and crawl their way towards me. I get up and run around to the other side of the pond, but there's more walking over to me from that end.

Having no other choice, I run to the pond and jump in. I kick my feet and swing my arms around to swim as fast as I can. Something brushes against my calf and I freeze. I try to look down into the dark water, but I can't see anything. Before I can swim again, a hand wraps around my ankle and digs sharp claws into my skin to drag me down under the green water.

A ghostly girl with razor-sharp teeth and all black eyes pulls me down to her face. She opens her mouth wide and lets out an ear-piercing scream. My hands slam against my ears, but they don't help much. Using my free leg, I kick the girl in her stomach area and then her face as I rise up. Once she lets go, I turn around and swim up to the surface, inhaling deeply the fresh oxygen. I swim towards the edge of the pond faster than I've ever swam before.

I climb out of the mucky water and turn around to see the girl slowly rise out of the water, her long stringy hair falling over her face and blending into her eyes. When her mouth comes over the surface, she's wearing a similar smile to the mysterious man from earlier causing me to look away.

continued on next page

I turn around and dodge the zombie-like bodies before jumping and climbing to the top of the mossy brick wall. I throw my legs over the edge and fall down. I feel as if I keep falling, never coming to an end before jerking up in my comfy bed at home.

Home.

My home.

I'm home.

It was just a dream.

I breathe a sigh of relief as I clench my blue sheets. I throw the blankets off and place my feet gently onto the light wooden floorboards. I stand up and put my arms up in the air to stretch, but instead I wince in pain.

Panic floods my brain and my heart beats at a dangerous speed. I stumble over the clothes on my floor and over to my door. I look in the floor-length mirror and see myself in my pajamas I went to bed in last night, along with all the scrapes and bruises on my body. I see the handprint on my wrist and I reach down to feel the handprint on my ankle from the girl in the pond.

Chills.

I stand up, scared to look in the mirror as I already feel the chills down my spine. My eyes drift up and see the man once again in the reflection with me. His smile is long gone, and his face now shows a scowl.

He walks closer to me in long fast strides. "I told you to stay!"

I scream and squeeze my eyes shut.

My eyes blink open, and I find myself back in the hotel, but this time I'm behind the desk staring at a girl. But wait. Not just a girl, I'm staring at me.

"Hello? I think I'm supposed to check-in. Are you able to help?"

No!

I try to open my mouth to talk but nothing comes out.

No!

My breathing picks up and I look over to my right, towards the darkness by the stairs.

He's there, once again, with the smile, staring at me.

No!

His view shifts over to the other me. When she looks back at me, my arm moves on its own and I hand her the room key. She takes it hesitantly, slightly flinching. "Oh, thank you." She gives a small smile and my heart breaks.

Before she leaves me, I grab her wrist to warn her. "Leave!" But nothing comes out.

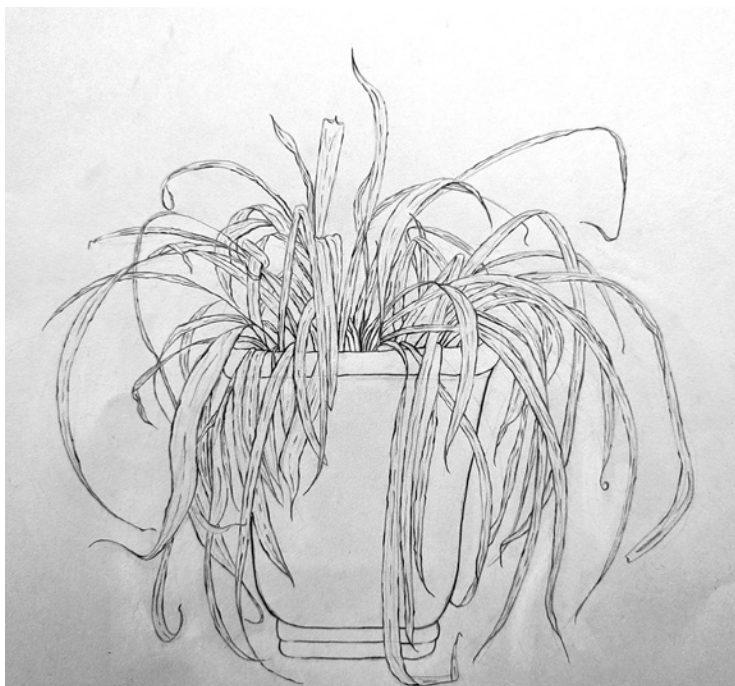
No!

I try to scream one last time for someone to hear me before the door next to me opens up.

NO!.



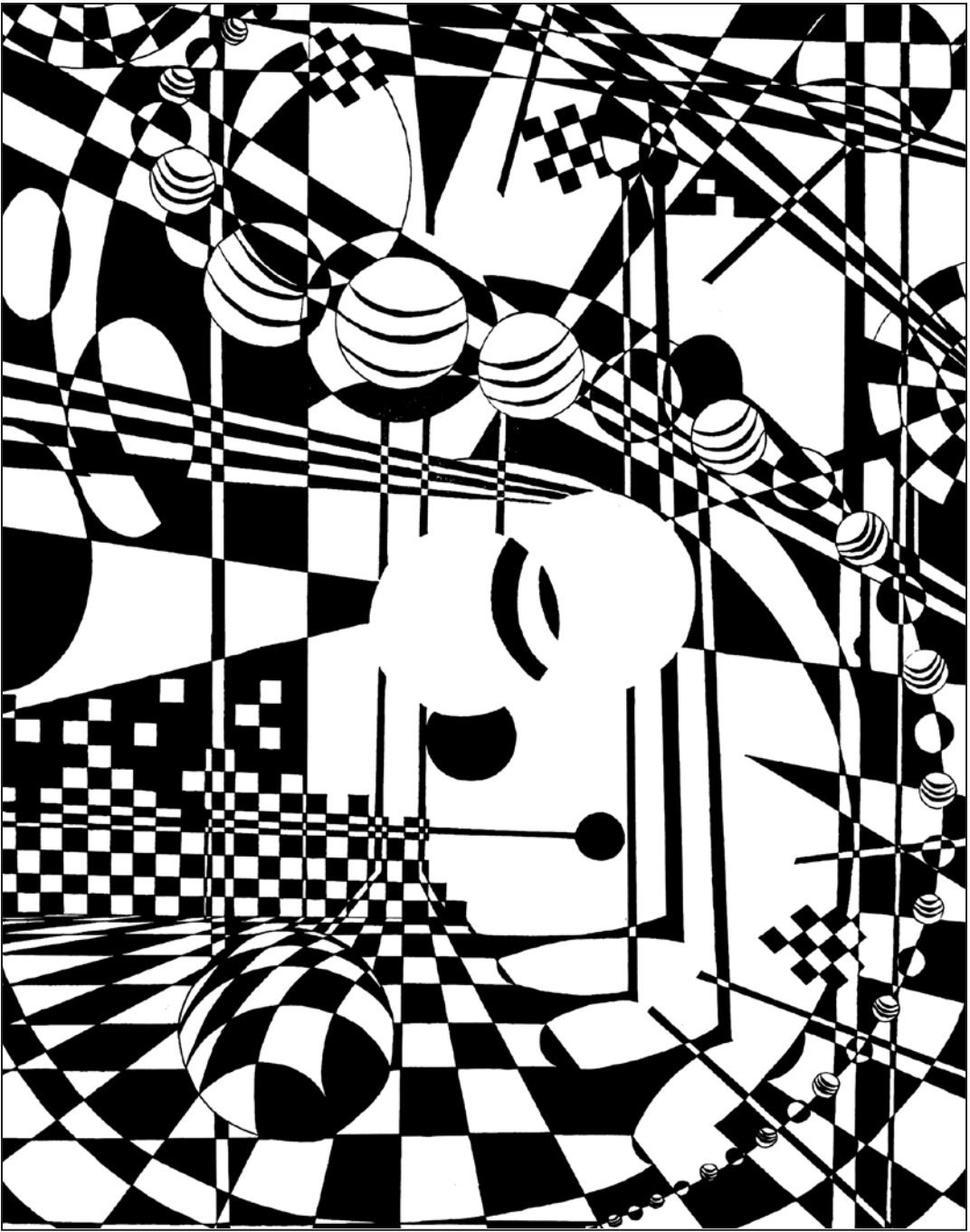
Benjamin Fry,
Art Fundamentals,
Pencil Sketch Plant,
Fall 2023



Layah Ortiz,
Art Fundamentals,
Pencil Sketch plant,
Fall 2023



Khamrii Wilson,
2-D design,
Paper Cut out, Fall 2023



Katie Cooper,
2-D design,
Black and White Ink, Fall 2023

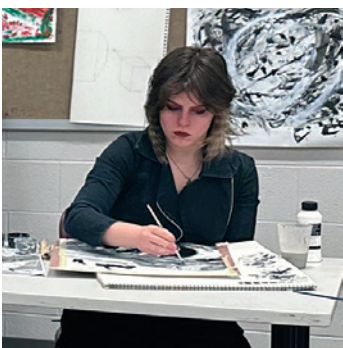
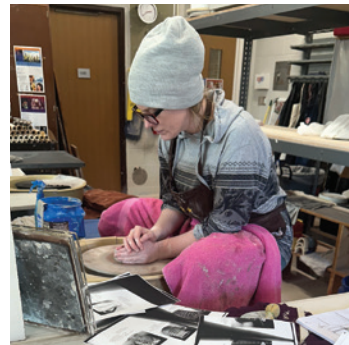
CONTRIBUTORS

Writers

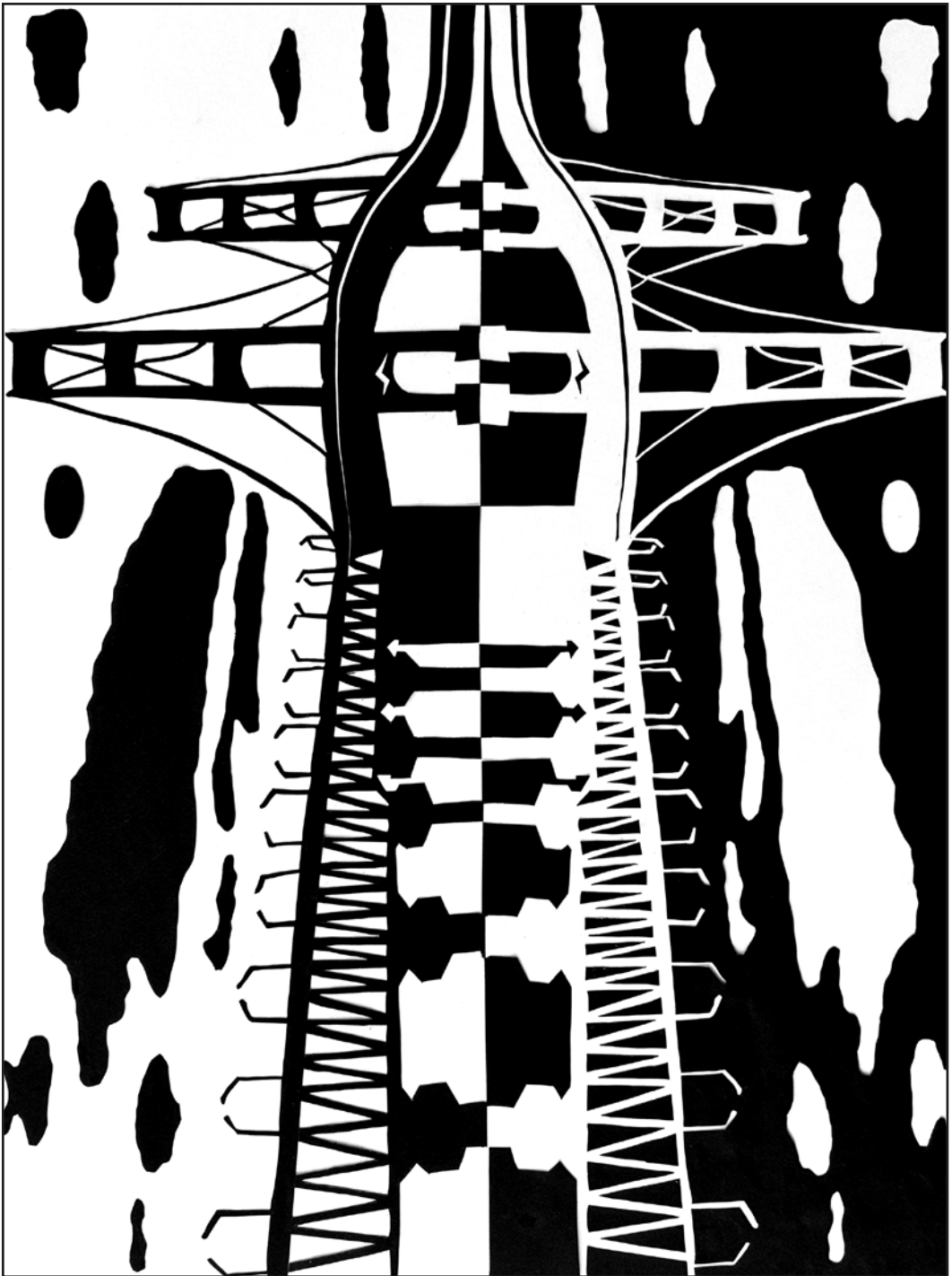
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