



*e.g. Magazine* 2025

2025 SENIOR MEDALLION - Art  
Gia Faiola



2025 SENIOR MEDALLION - Photography  
Adnana Camacho



2025 DENISE REINKING AWARD &  
2025 SENIOR MEDALLION - Sculpture  
Emily Kleinfeldt



# e.g. Magazine

stage. 2. **eft** (eft), *archaic*. 1. again. 2. afterward. [OE *eft*; akin to *AFTER*]  
**eft-soon** (eft-sūn/), *adv.* *Archaic*. 1. soon afterward. 2. again forthwith. Also, **eft-soons**/. [ME *eftsone*, OE *eftson*. See **EFT**<sup>2</sup>, **SOON**]  
**Eg.**, 1. Egypt. 2. Egyptian.  
**e.g.**, for the sake of example; for example. [< L: *exempli grātia*]  
**e-gad** (i gad/, ē/gad/), *interj.* (used as an expletive or mild oath): *Egad, that's true!* [euphemistic alter. of *ah God!*]  
**E-ga-di** (eg/ə dē), *n.* a group of islands in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of W Sicily, 15 sq. mi. Also called **Aegadian Islands**, **Aegadean Islands**. Ancient, **Aegates**.

An annual magazine of the arts devoted to the publication of the best examples of art, essay, fiction, photography and poetry produced by the students of Elk Grove High School

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ALAN ZUNIGA  
*Digital Photography*



AMYA THOMAS  
*Digital Image*



KAYLEE RUETTIGER  
*Animation - Scan QR to watch*

## THE NEW ESCAPE

*Liana Ramirez*

Confusion overtakes me when I look around and see

How have we become so absent from life,

Our heads were created on top of our body to look around and see the trees and sky,

Now our heads hang low,

Our backs are bent,

Our eyes see the floor.

We look up to disconnect.

We no longer look down to disconnect,

But that is where we live,

We are not humans but machines,

Operating in a life for content.



STEPHANIE BRIONES

*Oil on Paper*

## CHAMPIONS

*Andres Razzak*

Champions,

Fighting their fate

Every battle directing them to the end,

Their end.

Yet, despite the danger,

They march onward

Towards the promise of tomorrow

With resolutions as strong as steel

And weapons of will.

Their paths may diverge,

But their light will never extinguish

That light...

Those words...

"See you tomorrow"

They ring clear as day

Even when there is no other but one.

One left to witness the end.

And the beginning.

## OAK TREE

*Rebecca Moreno*

Oh, how strong is the oak  
In her firm, sturdy presence  
How strong she is  
To sprout her fruits  
To keep them so tightly within her reach  
To vow her everlasting love for them

With her many branches and stems  
Her sticks, all broken with stones  
Nurture her harvest  
To the best that she can  
Yearning to leave them with a love  
Better than she ever knew

Oh, how strong is the oak  
Her locks of leaves  
Now a vibrant emerald  
Her flora bloomed to beauty  
But she is unaware  
That her love  
Will never match what greed  
Produces from this world

Her green remains  
But her sanctuary soon fades  
All come to bring to gaze  
To shower unto her produce  
And soon  
Wonder will turn into want

Oh, how strong is the oak  
To bear witness to this robbery  
To be held captive in the background  
Forced to feel the pain of greasy, dirty, cold hands  
Grabbing at her blossoms and bounty  
Forseeing the neglect that is to come

Now stripped of her young  
They will never again feel  
The care that she cuts from herself to shower  
For she tried so hard, day by day  
No one could ever blame her  
But the oak now ponders  
Was it ever enough?

Oh, how strong is the oak  
Green turned to gold  
Gold turned to gray

She must carry to her rot this guilt

Her children, yes, her children

Were too abundant of a beauty

For this ugly world to deserve

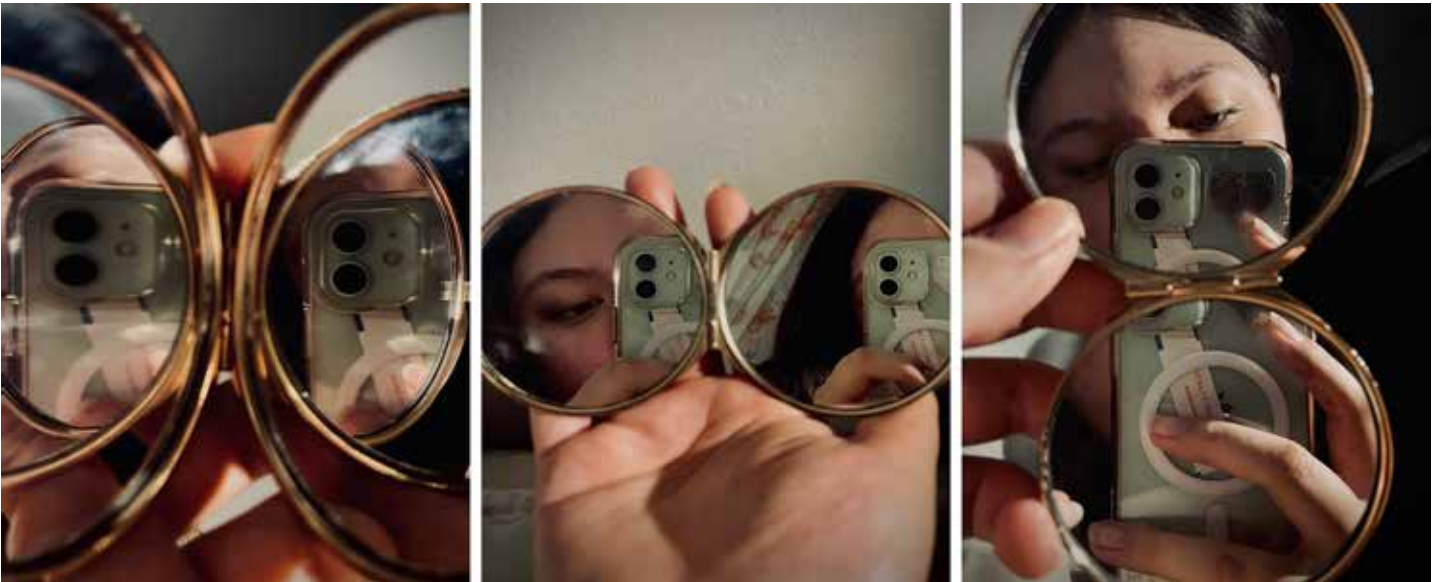
With her strength crumpled and beaten

Her life's loves damaged and bruised

It was of because of lust, of greed, of corruption, of apathy

That this mother's efforts were no match

For the cruelty that this world bears for all without exception



YASLYN JAIMES  
*Digital Photography*

*“This is an English class! We’ll only speak English in this classroom.”*

This was a common phrase that Mari was accustomed to hearing in her early elementary school years to ensure “equality” for all students. Yet, equality isn’t always fair. Everyday before walking into her school, she made sure to lock up the one thing that made her feel special and unique. She would keep it locked away until the dreadful school day ended. Then, she was back to her happy and unique self. At home, Spanish felt as comfortable as an old shoe. It felt familiar, and it gave Mari a sense of belonging. Her parents would always remind her that Spanish wasn’t just a language, but an identity and a timeline of history. Mari always felt filled with pride due to being bilingual, but because her school not only restricted the usage of different languages, but discouraged it, this would drastically change.

When Mari walked into her classroom, she saw her friend Millie and bolted towards her in the split second that she saw her.

“Terminaste la tarea? Did you finish the homework?” Mari said in Spanish.

“No. Did you?”

“No.” Mari softly said before giggling with Millie.

“Girls. What have I told you about speaking Spanish? Do I need to speak with your parents?” Mrs. Evans complained for the millionth time.

As the year progressed, Mari would gradually lessen her usage of Spanish in school. She would say Spanish words with an English-American accent instead of the traditional heavy Mexican accent, and she usually corrected people’s pronunciation when they would mispronounce words in Spanish. That patriotic accent is filled with pride and ambition. At home, conversations that once flowed effortlessly became short and simple, filled with the silence of a language she was taught to shun. She was no longer the proud Hispanic girl she once was.

By the time Mari began high school, the use of English only at school and in public settings had been ingrained and had become one with her. She would hear students in the halls speak that familiar language that she once loved, but Mari wouldn’t speak it. She mustn’t. She must speak English only at school. One sunny after-

noon in her gym class, Mari was walking the track, the sun's warm glow shining on her face, partially blocking her field of view.

"Hola! Hi!" Said a familiar voice. Mari turned to look in the direction the voice came from. A girl from her gym class, her name being...Ruby...Rebecca...she didn't quite remember.

"Hi.."

"Oh. Do you not speak Spanish? I thought you did." The girl said, confused.

"I do. Just not at school." Mari explained.

"Why?" She asked, patiently waiting for Mari to answer.

"Well I'll get in trouble," Mari mumbled.

"Says who?" The girl said. Mari stared at the strange girl and stopped to think.

"I'm Ramona, by the way! We're in the same math class!" Ramona said with a welcoming smile.

From this moment on, Mari started hanging around Ramona more often and opening herself up to speaking Spanish in school again. Something about Ramona's warmth and interest in talking to Mari broke her defenses. They spoke about everything. Whether it was a homework assignment they both were confused about, or just talking about each other's days, without the worries of getting punished for speaking Spanish. They were both in their math class, talking about random gossip they heard going around the grade, instead of doing their math assignment. They were giggling and conversing in Spanish without the need to hide it.

"Mari! Ramona!" The teacher warned. Mari was startled by the sudden yell from the teacher. She felt like she was back in her 5th-grade class with Mrs. Evans constantly complaining about Mari's use of Spanish. She prepared herself for the usual scolding of speaking Spanish at school and how English should be the only language spoken in class.

"Keep your voices down, please!" The teacher said. Mari felt a sense of relief and felt a weight off her shoulders, thinking that she was going to get scolded like she always did. Mari giggled with Ramona, and they continued talking about whatever chisme came to them because, as Mari likes to say, "Yo no sigo el chisme, el chisme me sigue a mi."

## IN BETWEEN: A MIXED IDENTITY STORY

*Teaghan Kohn*

I've never had a simple answer to the question,

“What are you?”

Some people ask out of curiosity,

others out of confusion.

My skin is a color that varies with the seasons,

lighter in winter,

darker in summer.

My hair,

a mix of curl patterns,

refuses to be pinned back.

My last name tells one story,

my face another.

And my family?

A blend of traditions,

languages,

and cultures

that will never fit into one box.

Being mixed

is sort of being in between worlds,

never fully belonging to both or either.

I grew up understanding

that being mixed

was to tiptoe

between two worlds

and be praised sometimes,

dissected other times,

and be forever uncertain

of whether I wasn't “enough”

to either.

Too much of anything,

not quite enough of another.

But as I matured,

I found myself wondering:

What if my in-between wasn't broken?

What if it was something to be proud of?

This is my journey of discovery,

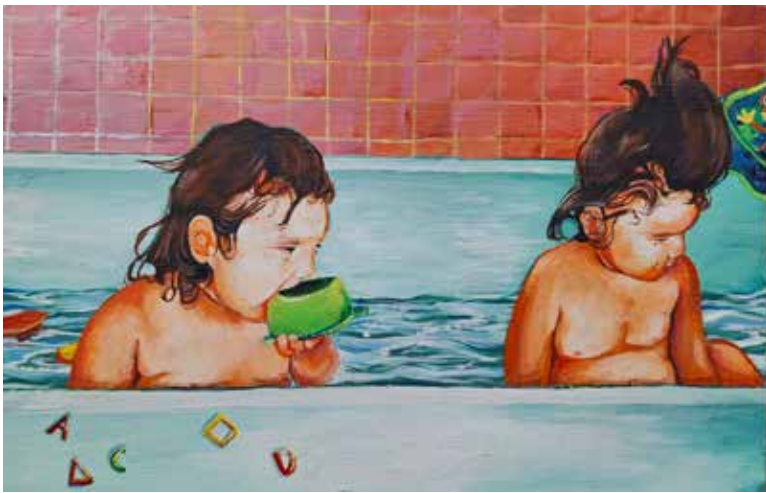
belonging,

and learning

that being mixed doesn't mean

choosing sides.

It means making my own.



EMMA TAUCHER  
*Acrylic on Panel*



JOSELYN GARAY  
*Tempera*



MAJA SIWIK  
*Mixed Media*



HIKARU TSUCHIYA  
*Oil on Paper*



TED MARTINEZ GOMEZ  
*Charcoal*



AJ COLON  
*Oil on Paper*

## MY HOPE

Maryam Syeda

People cherish many things in their lives: people, objects, words, numbers, or anything. Just like everyone else, I cherish someone too. *Someone* isn't always a love partner, it can also be a close friend or family member. People call that a "soulmate." The someone I revere and treasure is someone I met back in middle school. That just may sound like a really close friendship to most people, but what do they know about how it feels when I am with her? Do they know that any other friendships I ever had ever compared, even the slightest? Do they know that I am always laughing when I am around her? Do they know that I would regret it if I said something that she wouldn't like, and the guilt would eat me up? Even after I apologize and we get over it?

Well, obviously they wouldn't know because they aren't *us*. Many people have ups and downs in every relationship they have with another person, and that may ruin their connection. But for us, no matter what, our friendship with each other will always be an inseparable bond, no matter how many times torn.

Now let's talk about what gets people going. *Hope*. They all have hopes for something they wanna achieve. That's their fuel to drive their goal. But did you know that I also have a "Hope"? I am not talking about the feeling. I'm talking about a person. The one I have been talking about. She's the one who is my Hope. We could go 3 years without a word because of our busy lives, and reconnect one day, and guess what? We will talk again like we have been for those past 3 years.

I remember being particularly sad all the time a couple of years ago, and she was the hope. I never wanted to go to school back then, but I would because that meant I got to see her. When she missed a day, I automatically went silent for the rest of her day. Why? Because even if I could talk with others normally, it wasn't really that "normal" for me. Someone once said that I hadn't talked for the whole day because the "hope" wasn't there. In that school, we never really had opportunities to do things since it was an underfunded school. But the best part of the day was just hanging out in class and talking about everything, or looking at each other in class when someone does something really weird so we can laugh about it later. Or even when we hear something crazy, we would talk about it like it involved us heavily. It never did. We just loved to talk and laugh and do everything together.

I know this all sounds like any other close friends, but you wouldn't get it. I promise you. The depth of our friendship is truly special. So find someone who's the hope for you like I did. Cherish her in the way I cherish mine. And don't worry, I haven't lost my hope; we are still thriving.



NATALIE SHAFAR  
*Tempera*



ALAN ZUNIGA  
*Digital Photography*



GIA FAIOLA  
*Acrylic on Canvas*

## DERAILING

*Sophia Magenta*

the train is derailing  
no I AM DERAILING

Somebody please god help  
anybody  
I feel myself breaking apart  
bit by bit  
piece by piece

I want to fix this  
scratch along the rails, damage the cars  
so the other cars can keep going

everything is shattering crashing exploding  
how long before I crash  
how long before I make myself crash  
to stop it from happening

to stop all of it  
everything's piling up, and the carriages are hitting each other  
there's no more room, and yet luggage is still being piled on  
nothing's being taken off oh god, what is happening

make it crash  
MAKE IT CRASH I am begging you  
I can't keep on the tracks like this

what will happen after the train crash  
I'll just be more destroyed  
more shattered  
more exploded

nothing works  
nothing will work  
everything will just keep crashing and burning  
and I will still be broken



MILY PENA

*Cardboard Sculpture*



HANNAH KUGELBERG

*Pinhole Photography*



ELLABEL PHUNG

*Animation - Scan QR to watch*



MAITRI PATEL

*Metal Earrings*

## DEATH - THE ENDING OF A LIFE

*Inspired by Emily Dickinson*

*Amelia Pascal*

Death

The ending of a life

Death is what we fear

Not just for ourselves -

But for the world

In a world full of greed

Why do we suddenly care if another person dies?

To welcome it is psychotic

But to overwhelmingly fear it,

Causes psychosis

Death is feared for a reason

It decides to snatch someone for the sole reason of

"It was time."

Is it time for a child

Is it time just before graduation

It is time for someone just married

Is it time for a new mother

Is it time for a grandparent

Is it time for someone whose life is slowly being taken

When is it the right time,

Death is never right nor timely

There is always something going on in someone's life

Or their loved one's life

Death chooses

We don't choose death

We wish we could

But we also wish it would never come

It is feared for a reason

Death

The ending of a life



AVA BOBINSKI  
*Tempera*



EDIVAN DEL REAL  
*Oil on Paper*



AMY SANCHEZ  
*Photogram*

## FOCUS WILL BE VICTORIOUS

*Jake McLane*

I woke on October 2nd, 2024, ready. Prepared. I was ready for it. Excited for a chance to go to sectionals and maybe even further, to state. I got to the course early to practice and warm up for my tee time. The sun was shining out its rays. The grass was flowing and dancing with the wind, and the water was flickering with sparks. Today was the perfect day for golf. All the top schools were here, exhilarated by the competition and the chance of moving on. Without any hesitation from the tee box announcer, I was called to the tee. My body was heating up, getting loose, and hungry for that cut to sectionals. In honor of our school hosting regionals, I was chosen to hit first. Every single time when I'm about to hit my first shot, I get nervous, scared because this is the first shot of the day, in front of my group, my teammates, schools, coaches, and especially myself.

Despite this, I was able to pull it together and make an absolutely beautiful shot that was right down the fairway. After the first hole, everyone played remarkably, maybe even seriously. I was able to pull off a par, which was perfect in my own eyes. But this just made me more nervous knowing that making par would just get me closer to the gates of sectionals.

On the second hole, I started to feel confident. That maybe I had a chance at sectionals. I saw my group member pull out a hybrid while my hands were on the driver. Next thing I knew, I changed from my driver to my hybrid. Every time I play this hole, I usually go driver. I was focused on someone else's games rather than my own. When it was my turn to hit, I thought that this would just make things easier for me. Well, it didn't. It was much worse. I hit my ball. It was a decent shot until it started leaking to the right, heading dead straight right for the water. I saw the ball go scuba diving into the water, never to be seen again. That was a 1 stroke penalty for me, and I had to drop. My next shot was even worse. I used a 4 iron to reach the green and hit it right into a small stream. Another 1 stroke penalty. I made my last putt and finished with a measly double bogey. I would need to make some changes on the remaining holes if I even wanted to get a whiff of the glory of sectionals.

After 8 holes had passed, my score was at a very sad 7 over par. Reaching the end of the back 9, I was able to maintain that same number. I knew I didn't have a strong enough score to have some leverage against future mistakes. I have to make the holes different from the previous 9. Concentrating on my shot to fix my game

was successful enough to get me par for the first hole on the front 9. Walking onto the next hole, I felt better, I felt clearer by putting the bad shots in the past. However, that past slowly became the present. I just went for the shot. I topped it on the toe of the driver's head, causing it to just flop about 30 yards in front of the tee box. Leading up to the 4 hole, I was 10 over. The par for the course was 70. The cut for sectionals was 83. I felt like I was crawling closer and closer to the end of my game. My heart felt like it was pounding at 180 beats per minute. This hole was a Par 5, a great place for me to come back. I hit a 6-iron to get close enough to a stream where it split up the fairway. I had a chance to turn things around

I took a 3 wood out of my bag to get a nice shot to get myself close. I knew that if my shot was decent enough, I'd still be safe. I turned my hands just a little too much to the left and hit a horrendous hook into the forest for another penalty. At the next hole, I got a bogey again for 3 bogeys in a row, putting my score at 82. I only had one more life to make sectional. Hole 7, I was able to get myself a safe par. The next hole resulted in a nerve-wracking bogey. I watched my extra life flying away to the abyss above. Every single piece of effort had to be put towards the last hole. Par 4. 360 yards. A hole that I'd played numerous times and had been successful almost every time. I grabbed my driver, feeling the smooth, stippled grip, looking at the beauty of the carbon fiber pattern on the crown of the driver. I had an eye on the ball to line it up with the indicator on the crown to match up the sweet spot, and just absolutely ripped the ball into the sky, landing right on the fairway. My second shot landed on the green, but far from the hole. I knew that all I needed to do was just hit a small putt, enough to get close to the hole, and putt it again for par, ensuring a glorious victory. I relaxed, calming my head, arms, and hands, making sure that I could precisely put the ball close to the hole. I took aim, got the shot, and it rolled too far to the right. The undulation of the ground was too complicated for me to register to make it work.

I had one last shot to make the cut. I needed to put everything I had into this putt. I hit it, and immediately began seeing the balloons, the confetti, and the cheering in my eyes. Until the ball stopped. A millimeter from the edge of the hole. My vision was gone, everything I wanted to see is fading away, popping one by one with the torture of the feeling that I just couldn't do it. I couldn't make the cut. I missed my chance for sectionals.



OLEZIA OUSIIENKO  
*Acrylic on Canvas*



DIANA TOLEDO  
*Pen and Ink*



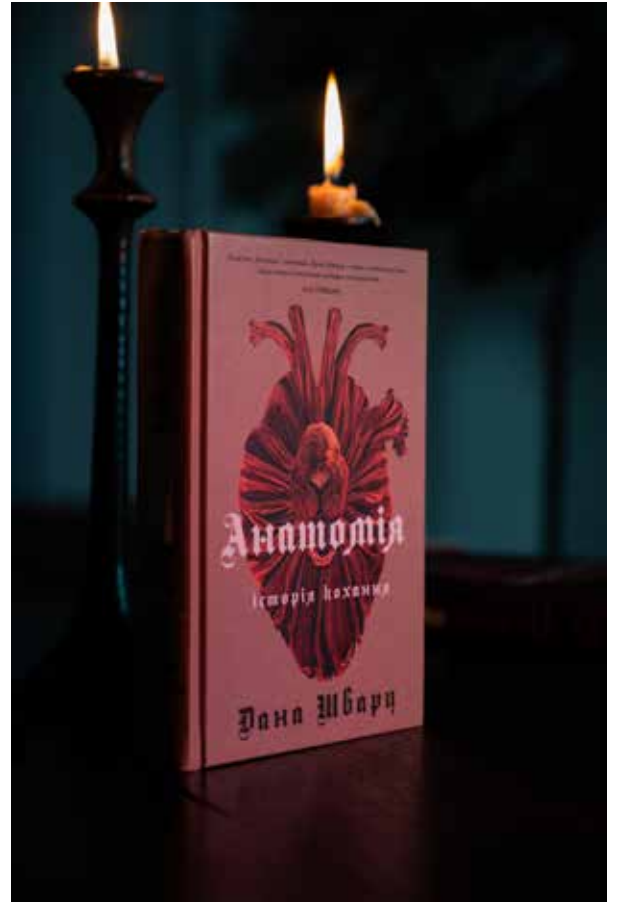
HIKARU TSUCHIYA  
*Ink*



ANTONETTE FIORITO  
*Darkroom Photography*



EMMA TAUCHER  
*Acrylic on Canvas*



SOFIYA GALKO  
*Digital Photography*

## SELF-LOVE

Zariela Myles

It's been twenty minutes. I have been staring at myself in the mirror for twenty minutes. My eyes searched my face, trying to admire what I was staring at, but the feeling wouldn't come. A singular warm tear rolled down my cheek when I finally brought myself to the conclusion that I was not and would never be a pretty girl. I'll never have a face as beautiful as the girls I see on Instagram, I'll never have the same body shape as Vogue models, and I will never find someone who falls in love with the way I look. I wipe my face, brush my long, dark hair, and put my waterproof mascara on. I know better now to keep it waterproof. I slip on my JanSport backpack and head out the door.

As I enter the school doors, my heart feels like it is ready to jump out of my chest and make a run for it. The soccer boys are against the lockers in the history hallway like they are every day. Which, of course, happens to be where my locker is. I dread this part of my day. I put my head down and my hair in front of my face as I approach my locker. If I avoid eye contact, maybe they won't notice the pimple above my lip, or the bags of skin below my eyes, due to my four hours of sleep last night. As I am putting my bag into the locker, I can feel them staring at me. I hold my breath to try and blank them out. I'd prefer to focus on the fact that I can't breathe rather than think about whatever jokes they're making up about me in their heads. "Hey!" one of them says to me. I hear his friends begin to snicker in the corner. I quickly rummage through my backpack and grab all the things I need. He shouts at me again, but his voice dies out as I raise the volume on my phone. The only thing my ears can process now is the melody of my music blasting through the headphones, and I leave the premises with no hesitation.

When I arrive for first period, I take my seat in the far left of the classroom. As the room starts piling in with more students, I look around and realize my teacher is not even there. Just as the thought crosses my mind, she walks in with another student. Someone I don't recognize. I put my head down and continue selecting a new song to queue. "Take your seats, please," Mrs. Donovan announces, "Today we have a new student. Her name is Audrey. I want you all to welcome her."

"Hi Audrey," the class mumbles in unison. I finally look up from my desk and make eye contact with her. The first thing I notice is that the eye on the left is slightly lower than the eye on the right. She has burn marks on the left side of her forehead, and she has several scars across her body. My stomach turns at the sight, but I feel guilty for getting that nauseous feeling. She takes the seat right next to me, and class begins. I notice the bright colors she is wearing. A pink shirt, black leggings, and pink shoes. It really is a nice outfit. She doesn't have any shame in standing out. I admire that. About fifteen minutes later, the teacher orders us to get into pairs with the person next to us to work on a partner assignment. As I start to turn over to her, she is already fully facing me.

“Hi,” she says. “Hey,” I say back. Her eyes widened. “Wow,” she exclaims, “Your eyes are really pretty!” “Thank you,” I chuckle, but in reality, I am embarrassed. I attempt to hide my face with my hair again. “You don’t need to do that,” she tells me, “If I looked like you, I would never want to hide my face.” She shows me a soft smile and then reaches into her bag to pull out a pencil, and she begins working on our partner assignment. I am still motionless in my seat, analyzing her comment through my mind over and over again. I wondered if she really meant it. However, my thoughts are disrupted when she asks me a question about the assignment. I scoot my desk closer to hers and bring my attention to what we are working on. As we work through the paper, we converse about many topics. It feels easy talking to her. She made a joke about the burns on her skin so I finally built up the courage to ask her what happened. She told me everything. She was in her house alone when the fire broke out. She described everything so well. The way her heart was pounding in her ears as she tried to find an exit. When she found the door, she grabbed onto the handle to leave, but it was far too hot. That was the last thing she remembered before she passed out. Audrey’s voice was flat and calm, as if the memory was too heavy to even feel anymore. Yet she kept her focus on the ground, refusing to make eye contact when speaking about the subject. “I’m so sorry,” I said with a shaky breath. I barely knew the girl, and my heart broke for her. “It’s okay,” she said, with her voice going back to normal. She smiled and said, “At least I have these sick scars now!” We both laughed and finished up our work.

Having made a new friend, I walked to my locker with a smile on my face. The soccer boy from this morning, Devin, I think was his name, approached me. I wasn’t as nervous anymore. I didn’t care what he had to say. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you away this morning,” he said. “I just wanted to let you know I think you’re really pretty and was wondering if you’d want to talk more?” A nervous silence hung between us. My mind was racing, but it kept coming up empty. This was the last thing I expected to come out of his mouth. Before I could even find the right words, he said, “Don’t stress about it right now, just get back to me when you can,” and walked away. I didn’t know how to feel about this interaction at all. I hardly get attention from anybody, let alone boys. I reached into my locker and grabbed my things, and headed home.

I found myself back in the bathroom. The memory of what Audrey said to me stuck in my head. If I looked like you, I would never want to hide my face. Suddenly, my eyes didn’t seem so boring. I liked them. Then I recalled what Devin had said to me just about an hour ago. You’re really pretty. I think he meant it, too. As I looked in the mirror, it wasn’t just my eyes I liked. I started liking everything. I saw my eyebrows from a different perspective, I realized my nose actually fit my face nicely, and surprisingly, I even became a fan of my eye bags. I felt upset for being so hard on myself. What I learned from Audrey is that if you wish you looked like someone else, there is always somebody wishing they looked like you. At the end of the day, you are your worst enemy. You are your biggest critic. If other people can see the good in you, then that means that there is good in you. You just need to be willing to see it. Love yourself the way others love you.



ARIANNA NAVA ROMAN  
*Photogram*

## DEFINE LOVE - DEFINE HATE

*Ashtin Sagerer*

### Define Love

Love; an intense feeling of deep affection.  
Affection, love. Same thing in different ways.  
How I love to love this affection of a Lover of mine.  
A heart that beats in the rhythm of mine.  
A heart part of a home I could call my own.  
How this love is part of me I wish to never leave.  
My own home.  
My own love.  
Love; a home.

### Define Hate

Hate; feel intense or passionate for dislike for someone.  
Someone to hate.  
Hate is like bait, a fish for the take.  
Hate can only lead to pain.  
Hate your suffering, the pain you cause.  
(Be)Cause you could not control a little hate.  
Hate the world yourself, but everyone hates something.  
Hate is short and sweet.  
Hate is something passionate and deep.



ASHTIN SAGERER

*Animation - Scan QR to watch*



JULIA "HAM" ANDERSON  
*Metal Earrings*

JUST AS I AM  
*Emily Lopez*

My home is not made of fancy things.  
My heart is not made of glass.  
My soul is not made of perfection.  
No, my home is a quiet refuge that no one can invade.  
I am there whenever I am calm.  
I am there whenever I am peaceful.  
I am there whenever I am strong.  
Yes, you can enter.  
But first, repeat after me:  
My heart is not made of glass.  
My soul is not made of perfection.

WHAT HAVE WE BECOME  
*Iliana Ramirez*

We are no longer the human race,  
But a division of pride and politics.  
Hate is not questioned,  
Nor does it wish it be erased.  
Those who love and embrace differences,  
Are told that it is written that they will burn in a fire of eternal hate,  
Yet those that make these claims are not to be blamed,  
It is the generations of what came, the ones who set their standards for this earthly place.  
This place was created for joy, love and connection,  
So let's stop the division.



PATRICK MLYNEK  
*Darkroom Photography*



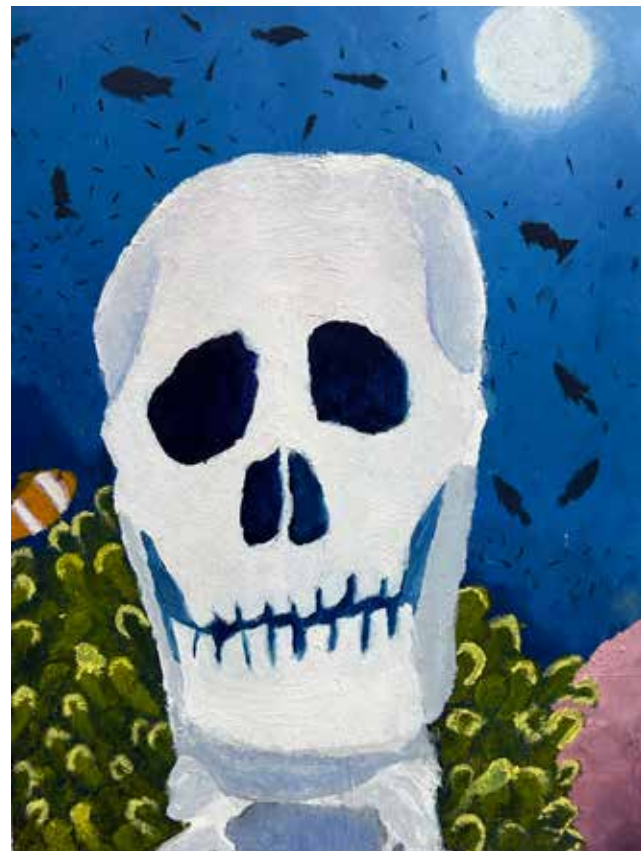
EMMA KIM  
*Digital Photography*



AMELIA HERNANDEZ  
*Oil on Paper*



AMYA THOMAS  
*Acrylic on Canvas*



RONALD RODRIGUEZ PEREZ  
*Oil on Paper*



JOSELYN GARAY  
*Graphite*

## NIGHTS OF THE ECLIPSE MARKET

Jenna Nowik

“What do we do, huh? What’s your solution?” I demanded, my voice breaking slightly. “How can we just sit here and wait? You said it yourself. If we’re stuck here too long, everything’s gone. Do you really think that we can just wait for someone else to solve this for us? I am *not* giving up,” I seethed.

Josh gave me a long, hard look, then shook his head. “I don’t want you to give up, Chris. But pushing yourself into the ground won’t help either... wait.” He suddenly stopped speaking, his gaze gleamed with sudden realization. “Perhaps pushing ourselves into the ground won’t work, but pulling ourselves up will prove otherwise...”

I blinked at him, still seething, but the determination in his expression made me pause. “*What?*”

Josh was already shrugging off his pack, ruffling through it until he pulled out a coiled length of rope. “We climb over.”

I hesitated. “Are you serious?” The idea wasn’t bad. In fact, it was probably the best plan we had. But a sinking feeling clawed at my gut.

Josh hadn’t noticed my hesitation. He was already scanning the wall for anchor points and worked fast, tying the rope off securely on a thick tree branch extending over the wall’s edge. “I’ll finish this thing off, climb first, and then you follow.”

I swallowed hard. I had never been good with upper-body strength. Josh, on the other hand, climbed like it was second nature. He always had.

“Yeah... okay,” I said reluctantly.

Josh, undoubtedly, scaled the wall effortlessly, hoisting himself up like it was nothing. He perched on top, grinning down. “See? Easy. Your turn.”

I grabbed the rope, steeling myself. My arms trembled as I tried to lift my weight, feet scraping against the brick. My grip faltered, my fingers burning, and I barely managed to hang on.

Josh peered down at me. “Uhh... Chris?”

“I got it,” I gritted out, trying again. My arms screamed. My body felt heavier than ever.

I didn’t got it.

My fingers slipped. I gasped as I lost hold, hitting the damp ground hard.

Josh gasped. “Are you okay?”

I sat up, seething again. “Do I *look* okay?”

“C’mon, man, try again.”

“I’m already trying hard.”

“Well... try harder?”

I shot him a glare. “Not everyone’s a damn monkey, Josh!”

His face fell, finally realizing the problem. Before he could respond, thunder rumbled.

A single raindrop hit my cheek. Then another.

And then the rope went slack.

I looked up to see Josh, frozen, his hands gripping empty air where the rope had once been. He hadn't meant to drop it, but he did.

I stared at it, lifeless in the mud. My throat tightened. "You—" My voice cracked.

Josh cursed under his breath. "Chris, I—"

But I wasn't listening anymore. The sky let loose. Rain poured down in sheets, soaking me instantly. My clothes clung to my skin. Hot tears welled in my eyes, mixing with the rain streaming down my face. The weight of it all crashed down at once.

The market. The opportunity. The feeling of being left behind. And the wall, unshaken by it all.

Josh shifted uneasily. "I'll find another way to get you over, okay?"

I didn't hear him, though. My thoughts were louder than my surroundings.

I'm not proud of it, but my eyes reacted much like the rain. I let all of my emotions bury me as I slid down the wall and sat in the muddy ground, the ground making a slushy noise under my pressure. How is it that every time Josh has a stroke of genius, I'm left wondering how? Why is it that I cannot come up with intricate ideas that somehow always manage to work out in the end?

I wiped my face with the back of my sleeve, though it didn't matter. The rain hid everything. As I looked down at the ground, I watched as water trickled down through the soil, merging with earth.

Then something moved.

A small, wriggling shape emerged from the soaked ground, twisting and turning before borrowing back down.

A worm.

For a moment, I just stared. Then I laughed. It was soft and almost disbelieving.

Josh had never understood why I liked them. "They don't even do anything," he had scoffed. But that wasn't true. They moved the earth itself. When something stood in their way, they didn't go over it, they went through.

I sat up straighter. My breath was still shaky, but my mind was clearer now.

I wasn't like Josh. I never had been.

But maybe I didn't need to be.

My hands pressed into the mud. The ground here was soft, soaked through from the rain.

My idea was insane, ridiculous, even.

But the alternative was sitting here, waiting for someone else to pull me up. And I was done waiting.

I instantly got to work. I ran back into the forest and gathered sturdy branches that weren't damp from the rain for the handle and a flat, thick piece of stone. I quickly patted around for flexible roots in the ground, then secured all my materials together. As I walked back to the wall, I sharpened the edge by grinding it against another rock. It wasn't my best work, but it would have to do. I picked up my pace and ran with haste to the base of the wall. I stabbed my creation into the ground and began digging. Clumps of mud splattered behind me, and the hole developing beneath me was full of water from the downpour. But as I continued to power my way through the mud, I felt as though the rain wasn't coming down as hard. The once sharp and steady pour turned more into a light, gentle pattern. Around me, the earthworms glided on top of the surface, wiggling and squirming around, almost rejoicing in my progress.

The moment I felt my hands break through the other side, fresh air hit my face like a warm summer breeze. My breath caught as I scrambled forward trying to drag myself out of the muddy tunnel. My arms ached, my clothes were drenched, and I could hear my heartbeat within my head.

"Chris!"

I barely had time to react. I coughed, spitting out dirt as I felt myself being pulled out of the ground and onto my feet,

Josh.

His face was paler than usual, his hair a mess, and his breathing just as uneven as mine. He looked like he had been pacing for hours.

“Gods, you scared the life out of me,” he muttered, his grip still tight on my shoulders. “You—are you okay?”

Despite everything, I laughed weakly. “You waited?”

Josh scoffed, but it was equally as weak. “Of course, I waited. What’d you think? That I’d just leave you?” He let out a breath, running a hand through his damp hair. He slung his other arm over my shoulder, guiding me towards the market. “Come on, you look like you just crawled through a swamp.”

If I’m being entirely honest, before this day, I never really took the time to really appreciate Josh as a true friend. Sure, he was always there, but I realize now how much I’d taken him for granted. My raging jealousy was always in the back of me for his seemingly stupid aloofness yet quick-thinking brain, but I understand now that I appreciate him for it.

The whole experience was so surreal, but a type of humorous nonetheless. Josh managed to get what he wanted and communicated with a whole culture of people at the stalls of the plaza. And as for me? Not only did I manage to get my hands on the enchanted wood, but Josh also managed to network up and secure a shot to kick-start my own woodwork practice. I couldn’t help but applaud Josh for his efforts.

I look back on these moments and smile. It truly is a wonder how the most difficult and lowest parts of our journeys turn into the most beautiful and empowering motivations of our lives.

“Obstacles don’t have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don’t turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it” -Michael Jordan

## SPRING HEART CYCLE

*Andres Razzak*

Oh Spring,  
Bringing light and life,  
Chitter and chatter,  
Tell me,  
Why am I still dormant?

Why do I remain in place?  
As if the Winter cold has kept me  
In a most pristine condition,  
A statue,  
Full of life yet held by ice.

Where is the first sun that heralds the future of Summer?  
Where is the laughter heard throughout every nook and cranny of this world?  
Why have we fallen silent?

Ah...

Separation...

The trees have withered away,  
The streets are empty,  
Autumn, you give us but a taste of the end,  
You show mercy when we enter a merciless time,  
In an attempt to preserve us,

But,

We are not whole,  
We have lost,  
This Winter has taken a toll on our souls  
We no longer know who we are

So tell us,

Oh Spring...  
Tell us who we are,  
Bring life back into this empty carcass,  
Reinvent us,  
Make us reborn,

With a spring heart,  
And let us begin the cycle again.



MIRYAM CARBAJAL  
*Digital Photography*



SOPHIA DEAN  
*Tempera*



JOCELYN SANCHEZ. LAYLA MAY. KAYLEE RUTTERGER. ALEJANDRO HERNANDEZ  
*Animation - Scan QR to watch*

## NESTLED DREAMS

*Ami Patel*

High on the branches of an oak tree filled with the vibrant and colorful leaves of the fall was the home of Ava and her family. Ava was a beautiful little blue-feathered bird with a snow-like chest and hints of black and white feathers on her delicate wings. Her beak, small and black, was perfectly curved at the tip. Though she hadn't found her voice fully yet, she quickly picked up her family's language: the chirps and calls of her family, and the melodic songs that would fill the air with joy at the first appearance of sunlight in the cool mornings. She was young but smart.

Ava was born into a cozy nest built by her parents inside a lively forest. As the sunlight pierced in golden lines through the towering trees, chasing away the darkness of the night, the robins would begin their symphonies, their sounds weaving through the trees, adding sweetness to the mornings. The forest was full of joy like this: birds chirping, squirrels scampering through and pecking at the acorns on the ground, robins searching for their next find hidden under the leaves, and butterflies hopping from flower to flower, enhancing the colorful nature of the forest. Gradually, the baby robins started to flap their wings out of their snug, flying in uncoordinated patterns with even more enthusiasm from their last flight, trying to navigate through forest maze with their parents. However, Ava was trapped in her comfort zone by her biggest fear: flying.

Her wise parents and encouraging older brothers would tell her, "The sky is your home, you're born to soar high in the sky."

"You're so strong, you'll definitely catch up Ava," her brothers would add, hoping to convince her.

Yet, Ava stayed put in the snug nest, refusing to leave her home while she watched other baby robins learn to fly and adapt to the lifestyle of their families. "But what if I fall? I don't think I can get my wings to catch me," she'd say, her voice stuttering.

She so badly wanted to be like the other babies, but the thought of flying made her heart race and sink. She was blocked by her fear of falling and hurting and embarrassing herself.

With an exchange of worried looks, her parents fed her with encouragement, "We know you can do this. And so what if you fall? That is how you learn, and you will never learn unless you try, Ava. You have us and your brothers by your side." But reassurance from her loved ones didn't push her because she clung to her fixed mind-set.

Fortunately, one evening, when the sun slowly descended, creating vibrant fiery hues in the sky, a gush of cold wind suddenly swept through the forest with ferocious strength. The long trees swayed left and right as the breeze hit their thin, delicate branches, knocking them off onto the ground. Ava was resting in her home alone while her family was out, unwarned by the upcoming storm. Hearing the rattling sounds of the trees, she woke up startled, her eyes wide open. She waddled around her nest with a worried look on her face looking for a sight of her family, but all she saw were leaves flying out from the ground and branches cracking. It got darker, and the wind got more intense. As she stood, she felt the air pressing against her from the left, but her small body was unable to resist. The wind forced her to the left, but she kept moving back, trying not to hit the edge of the nest.

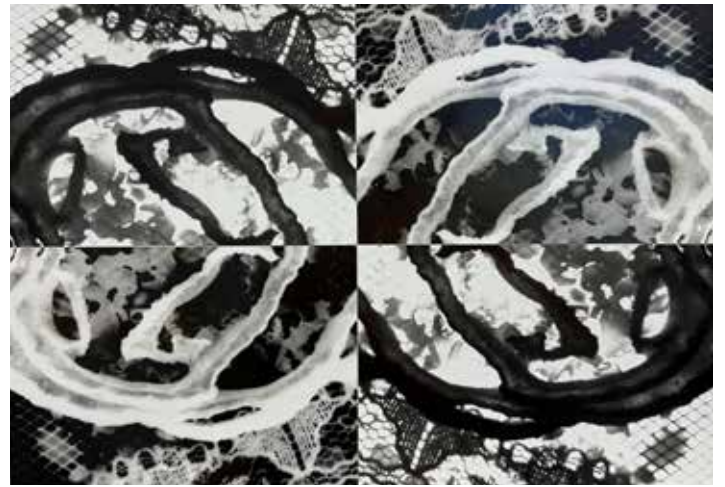
Suddenly, the stability of her home was disrupted by the instability of the branch on which it stood. The surface beneath her trembled as the once-reliable branch began to disconnect from the trunk of the oak tree. The twigs that weaved together her nest were being taken by the wind as well. Amongst the storm, there was thunder running inside Ava's chest. As she gazed left and right for her family, her heart pounded heavily, her heartbeat increasing like it had before. She saw other birds seeking shelter under stable bushes and shrubs while she was stuck in her nest, unsure of what to do.

The fracture on the branch grew wider, and it was just before a final crack that Ava's eyes caught sight of her family rushing to her. Before she got too happy to feel secure, a final crack gave way to the branch, and the ground started getting closer. Ava had no time to think, but amidst the storm, her surge of reflex took over, and her wings flapped fast, and her feet lifted off from the ground. Before she knew it, she was in the air for the first time, feeling each stroke in her muscles. She was unstable initially: her wings flapped fast, her body wobbled side to side. For a second, she thought she was going to strike the ground, but the gust of wind pushed her higher in the air. Her wings began to unfold slowly each time, and soon, she moved in a steady path, finding rhythm. Each flap gave her more confidence as she maneuvered through the air, and the thunder inside her began to calm down.

The sky that she once feared was now a place of freedom for her. There was never a day when she wasn't excited to fly in the sky. Her bubble was no longer her favorite place because she loved the sky more than she thought she could; it was her playground.



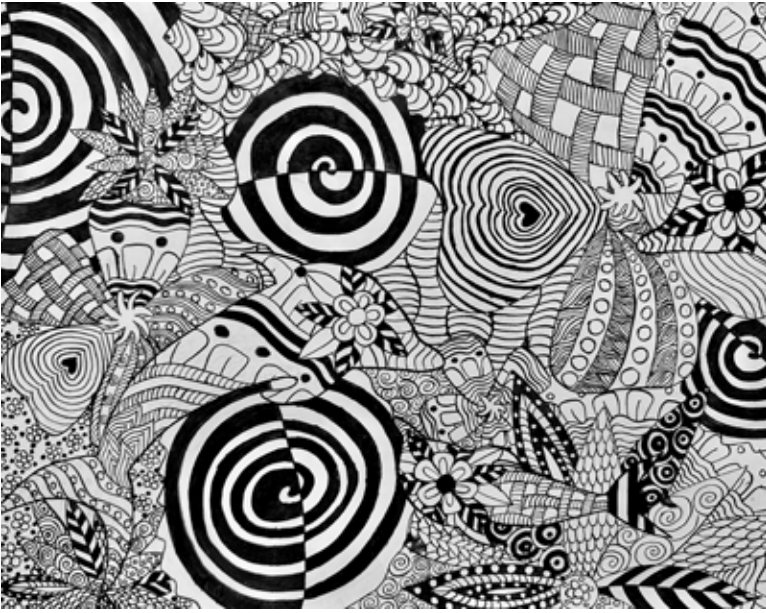
ESMERALDA MENDEZ  
*Acrylic on Canvas*



KUBA BLACHOWSKI  
*Photogram*



RANZEN REYES  
*Graphite*



ERIKA LIMA  
*Pen and Ink*



SANDRA OJEDA MONTALVO  
*Digital Photography*



MELISSA KARAVAS  
*Digital Photography*



LANA HORAN  
*Oil on Paper*



EMILY KLEINFELDT  
*Mixed Media Sculpture*



MARIANNA CASTRO  
*Pinhole Photography*



NATALIE FAULKNER  
*Pinhole Photography*



EMMA TAUCHER  
*Ink on Mylar*



LANA HORAN  
*Animation - Scan QR to watch*

*ON THE PATH TO LOVE - A Multilingual Collaborative Poem*

*Sophia Magenta, Andres Razzak, & Ashtin Sagerer*

Der Tod tanzt, wo Liebe schweigt  
Death dances where love is silent

Un corazón en el invierno  
A heart in winter

Cries out in the darkness

Mit nur einer flackernden flame  
With but a flickering flame

Una luz que pronto se extinguirá...  
A light soon to be extinguished...

Shadowy beasts crash through the trees,

Ein von Traurigkeit getrübt Wald,  
A Forest dimmed` with sadness,  
Sin esperanza de escapar,  
without hope of escape,

but hope slices through the night,

Das Feuer eines Anderen...  
The fire of another...

Sagrado y caliente, luchando contra la oscuridad dentro de mi,  
sacred and warm, fighting against the darkness in me,

They ignite a blaze, lighting the path to my eventual escape.

In einem Moment haben sie mein Schicksal verändert;  
In one moment they changed my fate;

En un momento cambiaron...mi vida  
in one moment they changed...my life

Bringing light to this once barren world and healing a heart once thought dead...

Jetzt mit der Verheißung der Liebe.  
Now holding the promise of love.



AMY SANCHEZ  
*Pinhole Photography*



RANZEN REYES  
*Tempera*



JOSHUA MAXWELL  
*Cardboard Sculpture*

## BRIE'S APPLE PIE

Julia Grin

A clock ticks softly on the thin, dull partition devoid of color. Next to it, three more identical partitions, covered with calendars, sticky notes, and photos, encompass a desk at which a man sits, scrolling through job listings on LinkedIn.

*There's an opening for an accounting position at a firm about 20 minutes away. The pay looks great, but what if my boss pulls out a non-compete clause when I try quitting? I have the money to wait it out, but what if my car breaks down or my house gets damaged by hail?*

*Should I switch careers? This is so boring that I'm practically falling asleep even though it's only the early afternoon. But that would be a huge change with lots of unknowns: so many things can go wrong. It's probably best if I just stick to my numbers and spreadsheets at this cursed job.*

The man is only in his late 30s, yet his hair is already turning the same shade of gray as the walls that trap him in this tiny cubicle. His eyes are bleary, with bags underneath that have grown to be a constant in his life. His back hurts from sitting all day, and he is sporting a beer belly. This is his life now. This is what he stressed about grades for, what he traded hours of sleep for, what he lost friends for. Was this really what he wanted?

The pictures that hang on these walls are full of famous artists and beautiful landscapes. Some of the landscapes defy the laws of physics, and upon closer inspection, tiny brushstrokes can be seen. One of the pictures is different from the rest: it's old and worn, and the people in it aren't famous. They're the man and his college friends, riding a roller coaster. The man doesn't remember when he stopped talking to them, just that it was long ago. He always found them to be rowdy and precarious, but he's thankful they almost never entertained his pessimism and his what-ifs. In fact, the only reason that picture exists is because they dragged him along on their crazy road trip, and he was too tired to complain. If it weren't for them, he'd have been sitting at home, stressing about a thousand different things. It's how he lives to this day: trying to find the safest route through the game of life. It's not his fault that he doesn't want to risk ending up with the worst-case scenario.

His job search on LinkedIn turns into mindlessly scrolling through his social media apps. There's a family member on Facebook who posted about their vacation to Hawaii. There's another whose snap story is full of their car mechanic friends having fun in their shop, working on an expensive-looking car. They all look at ease and content.

*I wish I could travel or have friends like that,* he muses, not knowing he's capable of the same feats. Although the man makes more than enough money to afford traveling to a new state or country for a week, he never does, always fretting about potential natural disasters or possible costly scenarios. The same goes for interacting with other coworkers: he always makes sure to be courteous to them, but he never tries to get to know them better, nor does he go out for drinks with them or share parts of himself with them. *I can't be hurt or emotionally manipulated if I keep them at arm's length, right?* is his thinking. With that conclusion, he goes about his life, slowly growing miserable and resentful.

Five o'clock finally hits, and he walks home like usual. As he passes by a small shop, the sweet smell of pastries and muffins draws his attention inside. A beaming woman with large, thin hoop earrings, glowing dark brown skin, and black, curly hair pulled back loosely into a bun is serving a customer a slice of still-steaming

apple pie.

*That looks SO good. One piece wouldn't hurt, would it?*

*I'm so happy I went to baking school, the woman thinks, reminiscing about the past. You see, she came from a large, poor family that wanted her to get a safe office job that paid well and didn't require huge sacrifices to attain. It's not that they didn't believe in her dreams or her skills; they just couldn't afford the fallout if she failed. This meant that she had to work extra hard to go to culinary school (which her parents thought was a waste of money). While there, she worked part-time at a local restaurant and learned as much as she could about running a business. She even took classes hosted by other colleges that taught her the basics of business and economics. There were many obstacles that she had to overcome, but it was all worth it in the end to see the looks on her family's faces when she bought them a brand new minivan on Christmas.*

The aroma of pumpkin spice and fresh coffee meets her nose. *Who am I kidding? It was worth it just to be in this room.* She is surrounded by all sorts of wonderful smells, many of which are her own creation. The display case in front of her is filled with muffins, cookies, cakes, pies, pastries, and sweet breads, looking like they were taken straight out of a baking magazine. In the room behind her, half a dozen ovens whirr with life, and the chatter and bustle of her fellow chefs kneading and stirring and working hard gives the small shop an excited energy. This job didn't make her a millionaire, nor was it easy, but it brought her joy and filled her life with purpose.

"Excuse me," says a deep, timid voice, jolting the woman from her thoughts. She didn't even notice the man in front of her. "Can I have whatever that last customer ordered?"

He sounds exhausted and unsure, and his demeanor shows that he feels out of place in this small, cozy shop. He is hunched over and pale. However, there is a small glimmer of curiosity in his tired eyes.

"You mean our homemade apple pie? Sure, it's 2 dollars per slice."

The man looks at her name tag: "Brie." *What a beautiful name.* He notices the store logo on one of the walls: "Brie's Bakery."

"Sorry, are you the owner?" He asks her. She responds, "Yes."

*This woman looks about my age, yet she's already a business owner, and it looks like she couldn't be happier: she isn't even stressed.*

"What about you, what do you do for a living?" she inquires back.

"I'm an accountant at the firm down the street."

"How do you like it?"

"It's boring and time-consuming. Honestly, I wish I were in your shoes right now: your shop looks amazing."

"Why don't you try starting your own business, then? There are lots of courses online that you can take that teach about marketing, and you clearly have the 'money' part down.

"What if something goes wrong?" I protest.

"What if it goes right? Bad things happen all the time: they're part of life." She says, handing me my still-steaming slice of apple pie.



NAZAZII HZYNIV  
*Digital Photography*



SOFIA FLONDRO  
*Tempera*



LANA HORAN  
*Oil on Paper*



NADIA DANIEL  
*Tempera*



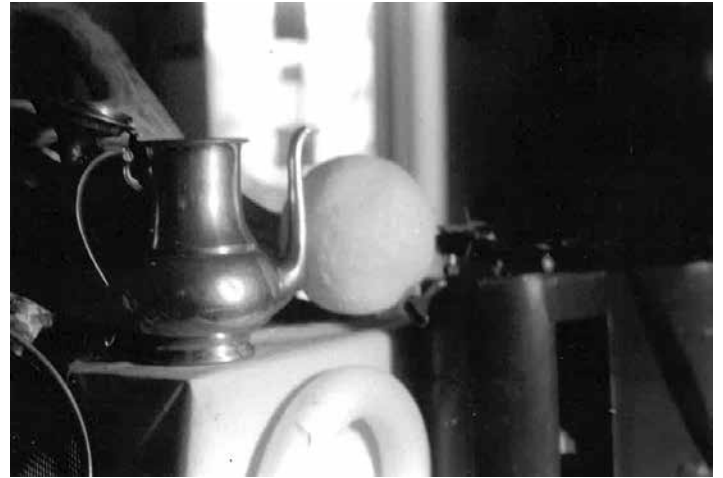
SAM GARDNER  
*Digital Photography*



MAJA SIWIK  
*Ink on Mylar*



HANNAH SPIZZIRI  
*Acrylic on Canvas*



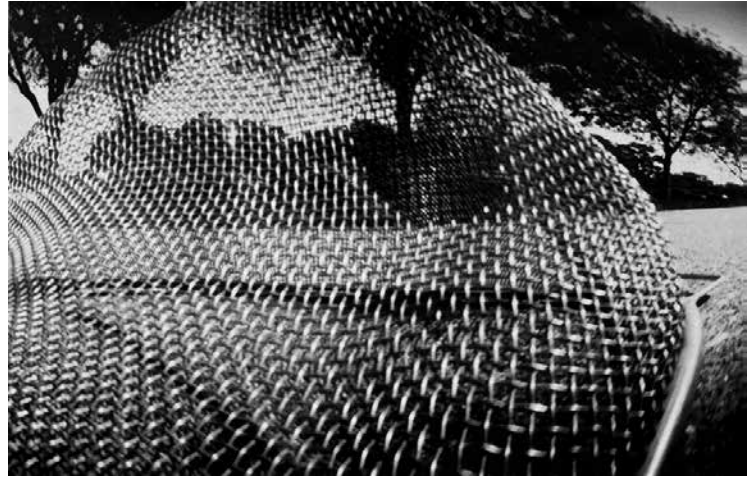
LORRAINE GARCIA SANCHEZ  
*Darkroom Photography*



STEPHANIE BRIONES  
*Oil on Paper*



HAJAR FARTAT  
*Tempera*



LUI LOBATO  
*Darkroom Photography*



KAYLIE MAJER HART  
*Pinhole Photography*

## ENCHANTED GARDEN

*Grace Titean*

In an enchanted garden, there were two rare flowers. This garden was one of a kind. The birds chirped melodiously, and the grass glistened with rain, but there was something that made this garden the most unique. Two flowers stood out from all the other flowers. The moonflower and the Sunrose. The moonflower has petals that shine in the night and cause a glistening in the night sky. The Sunrose has multitudes of colors, and it's as if the sun shines brighter with the flower in bloom. If these two flowers were together, it would be an indescribable beauty.

Unfortunately, these flowers can't bloom and thrive at the same time. The moonflower bloomed only under the light of the moon, while the sunrose flourished in the warmth of the sun. One day, the gardenkeeper spotted these flowers at the same time. The gardener kept thinking to himself how wonderful and gorgeous these flowers would be together. The next day he had done everything possible to make them bloom at the same time. He tried to make the sunrose stay alive in the night with a lamp, but the flower still wilted. He then tried to make some shade for the moonflower, but the flower closed up. At the end of all his trials to keep the flowers at the same time, the moonflower bloomed while the sunrose wilted. The gardenkeeper looked at his dirt-stained hands, pondering how to make this work. The man didn't give up. Relentlessly, he continued to try to change the outcome of the flowers. But as much as he tried, he could never get it quite right.

At the brink of dawn with a brand new sun, the sunrose began to thrive, and the moonflower started to rest. And beneath the starry night, the moonflower bloomed, and the sunrose began to wilt. After all the failed attempts to get the flowers to bloom in the same pattern, an older, wiser gardener came to the garden keeper. The wise gardener saw the struggle of the garden keeper and the efforts he had put into the magical flowers. He had turned to the garden keeper and told him to sit with him. He told him that to match the flowers together, it's not only the timing that matters. But it's how each of the flowers tends to itself and on its own time. The beauty of having each flower embrace its uniqueness and shine at different times. The garden keeper sat thinking of what the wise gardener had said. On that day, the gardenkeeper looked carefully at the flowers. He had finally seen with clarity and appreciated the beauty of the flowers individually, and how their uniqueness wasn't overshadowing each other. He saw how wonderful they flourish alone.

In some way, we are the flowers in the story. No matter our efforts to match with the person and make it work, not everything or everyone is going to make you become who you need to be. Just because a person makes you feel butterflies in your stomach and makes your body feel like you are in the clouds, sometimes you

do better on your own. Like the flowers, we could glow individually without relying on someone. Depending your happiness on how someone else treats you is a disservice to yourself. Having someone determine how your day goes and how you perceive life will always fall short of what you need. People change over time, whether we want them to or not.

The timing of a relationship is not the only determining factor of the failure or success of a relationship. The way you communicate with each other, the perspective of the person, shared goals, and, honestly, where the person is individually in life affect the relationship as a whole. One key component of a relationship is communication. If one person in the relationship doesn't communicate, the other starts to believe they had done something wrong and starts doubting themselves. The person who believes they did wrong starts to look at themselves differently and starts to become uncomfortable in their skin. In a strong relationship, you should feel secure and safe. When communication isn't effectively used, people start assuming how the other person feels rather than understanding their true emotions, leading to misunderstandings, which creates problems. And if you don't communicate, does the person truly care for you and want to keep you? If they did, they would fight for you. Not communicating leads to overthinking and believing the person doesn't trust you enough to speak about their problems. Having no trust in a relationship means that you build your relationship on lies. The deception is that you know the person and how they would treat you, while in actuality, you don't know the person at all, and they don't know you.

Putting energy into someone who won't give you the same energy back is a waste of time. Sometimes, life makes you move on from things, and you start to outgrow people. We can not blame the timing of how things end up, but we can understand that a person's point of view on things changes. We sometimes say it's the wrong time because we want to avoid the reality of deeper issues and face the problems that need to be resolved. We make excuses for the behavior of a person because we don't want to see the person for who they truly are. We say that they were our person, that we long for them, and that they were the only ones to make us bubbly and satisfied. But maybe that person isn't meant for us. However, that doesn't mean that the timing is wrong, but more like the person has changed. We need to realize that if a person is truly "the one" and cares for us, then they will stay with us no matter the circumstances. Through the good, the ugly, the sick, and the indescribable, they will remain there for you. And if they remain, their opinion of you doesn't falter. They love your imperfections and the scars you believe to have. Once you have come to that realization and embraced the idea that some people aren't meant for you, it allows you to truly explore deeper relationships with those who do value you and resonate with your aspirations.



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