

Garland Court Review 2026



2026

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Marina Johnson

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Yevgeniya Lapik

Lilliana Loye

Ella Markovic

Edgar Meza

Isis Meza

Amelia Motino

NILAM Taché Art

Daisy Ortiz

Ricardo Ortiz-Cisneros

Haby Palma

Brian Perniciaro

Corey Porter

Laura Restrepo

David Scheier

Margaretha Singleton

Jittaun Taylor

Jamila Valiyeva

Talia Veney

Sabrina Vives

Montrell Wells



Garland Court Review

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

2026

A curated assembly

of

Literature

& Art

Garland Court Review Est. 1962 by **Prof. Carolyn Rodgers**

The **Garland Court Review** is published in the Spring Semester of each year by the English and Art departments of Harold Washington College, 30 E. Lake St., Chicago, IL 60601.

Call for Submissions is announced in the Fall Semester.

Both literary and art works are accepted for consideration.

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Inner Front Cover: Brian Perniciaro **A king** (photo)

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<< **2019-2026**
GCR digital

<http://hwcartandarchitecture.org/garlandcourtreview/>

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All of the amazing artists and writers who submitted work for consideration in this issue!

Printed by **Sommers & Fahrenbach**, Orland Park, IL

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2026

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Yana Hlushchenko

Ivory Terrell

Luke Jones

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Letter from the Editors

The English and Art Departments joined forces in 2019 to better showcase the vast talents of Harold Washington College's creative communities.

This is the seventh issue of the Garland Court Review since that collaboration began, and we're proud to present yet another wide-ranging selection of visual and text delights.

This record of student expression, inquiry, and imagination comes at a time of great difficulty for many Chicagoans, and the fraught worries of these pieces give voice to those struggles with tremendous clarity and wonder. What emerges from this collection is a body of art that is tested but still strong in its principles; curiosity, caring, and cultural remembrance.

There are also timeless visions, here, and searches for meaning beyond our mortal realm. Metaphors become apparitions, inner battles are anthropomorphized and personified, and the huge power of nature shows up here and there to wash over everything. But there is no mistaking that this year's Review is, as ever, a product of Chicago: the imagery of the city and the sentiments of its resilient iconography and immigrant traditions sing too loudly to ignore. The Garland Court Review could not have come from anywhere else.

We're already excited about the 2027 issue, and continuing this wonderful tradition. Until then, please enjoy the 2026 GCR!

From us
to
YOU,

Galina Shevchenko
Jean-Laurent Deher-Lesaint
Megan Ritt Broenneke
John Wilmes
Daniel Cutter
Maria Fernandes
Yana Hlushchenko
Ivory Terrell
Luke Jones
Sarah Jamgotch.

CONTENTS

Letter from the Editors		ii
LITERARY WORKS		1
POETRY		
Nikhil Chandran	Chicago: An Ode in Letters	2
Amira Holliman	am I the monster	4
Amira Holliman	Lonely Nights	5
Talia Veney	Tribute to My Nana	6
Gabriella Carrizales	Thunder's Howl	9
Sabrina Vives	Grief	10
Haby Palma	Burying Problems	11
Sabrina Vives	THRESHOLD	12
Sabrina Vives	Yolk	15
Haby Palma	Ode To Chimalhuacán	16
Isis Meza	Children of the Sun	18
Isis Meza	Mestizo Fruit	20
Isis Meza	the drowned baby poem	22
Ashlyn Cross	Sunset Light	23
Vincent Cilento	Blue Hour	24
Daisy Gutierrez	A Necessary Death	26
NON-FICTION		
Corey Porter	Not My Worst Breakup	28
COMBINED or OTHER FORMS		
Isis Meza	This Year's Ofrenda	33
Isis Meza	to: The Eldest Daughter	36

FICTION

Nikhil Chandran	The Snake and I	38
Ashlynn Cross	Something Like a Star	43
Ashlynn Cross	An Unnatural Color	46
David Scheier	Love like a Darting Minnow under a Frozen Stream: Or Simply I	48

GALLERY: VISUAL ART

Semira Eason	Do You Wanna Smoke? (digital illustration)	56
Jamila Valiyeva	Jelly Fish (lithography)	57
Nikhil Chandran	Sunflower (digital photo)	58
Yevgeniya Lapik	Naturmort (digital painting)	59
Jittaun Taylor	Memorial Day (digital illustration)	60
Alex Brown	Successful Birthday (digital illustration)	60
AJ Johnson	Chi Exclusive (digital photo)	61
Montrell Wells	Lovely Bones (digital illustration)	62
Rosana Faieta	Sardine Can (soft sculpture)	62
Luke Jones	Pingu (ceramics)	63
Amelia Motino	Itch (collage)	64
Brandon Bacon	I Am A Gas In A Womb Of Light (ink on paper)	65
Margaretha Singleton	insect display case (ceramics)	66
Aniya Bush	EMBRACE (digital illustration)	67
Ulises Garcia-Ruiz	Battle (graphite on paper)	68
Ulises Garcia-Ruiz	Raccoon (cardboard)	69
Ella Markovic	My Dad Is A Mermaid (colored pencil on paper)	70
Nikhil Chandran	Red White and Blue (digital photo)	71

Janet Alvarez	Jess (film photo)	72
Brandon Bacon	Yamaiah (film photo)	73
Marina Johnson	Red (digital illustration)	73
Rosana Faieta	Happy Peacock (wire sculpture)	74
Rosana Faieta	Happy Peacock (wire sculpture)	74
Yevgeniya Lapik	Thinking Of Dave On A Windy Day (digital painting)	75
Aniya Bush	Tiny Lights (digital illustration)	76
NILAM Taché Art	The Love of God (mixed media)	77
Laura Restrepo	Cosmos (digital illustration)	78
Olivia Esquivel	Sun (concrete poem)	78
Brandon Bacon	Crybaby Capricorn (photography)	79
Ricardo Ortiz-Cisneros	Eclipse (digital pattern)	79
Keath Aisley Avenido	Convenience (ceramics)	80
Ella Markovic	Untitled (colored pencil on paper)	81
Guillermo Hernandez	Heaven or Hell (digital illustration)	82
Ricardo Ortiz-Cisneros	me & my shadow (digital pattern)	82
Alex Brown	We Stand (digital illustration)	83
Amelia Motino	Microscope (3D digital rendering Maya)	84
Luke Jones	Aladar – The Iguanodon (ceramics)	84
Jamila Valiyeva	Things I Learned before I Turned 21 (a page from a digital book)	85
Nikhil Chandran	Gateway Arch (digital photo)	86
Jittaun Taylor	K & D (digital illustration)	87
Terry Jones	My Kinda Town (digital photo)	88
Brian Perniciaro	Nia (photography)	89
Semira Eason	Wabash (digital illustration)	90
Lilliana Loye	Portal (digital illustration)	91
Rosana Faieta	Woman in Peace (stone sculpture)	92
Arianna Calderon	Dinner (3D digital rendering Maya)	92

Mia Espinoza	Spring (digital photo)	93
Brian Perniciaro	The Lion (photography)	94
Olivia Esquivel	Pup (colored pencils on paper)	94
Mia Espinoza	My Dream (charcoal on paper)	95
Carolize Baetancourt	Six Mythical Animals (digital illustration)	96
Guillermo Hernandez	Digital Escape (video)	97
Terry Jones	Lake Sunrise (digital photo)	98
Yana Hlushchenko	Vulnerability And Courage (digital illustration)	99
Laura Restrepo	COSMOSCARDS (digital illustration)	100
Amelia Motino	Battle of the Ages (3D Animation)	101
Jamila Valiyeva	Digital Self Portrait (digital illustration)	102
Kayla Kruczek	Life in Chicago (digital collage)	103
Jittaun Taylor	Jahi & Jittaun (digital illustration)	103
Ella Markovic	Lesbians (colored pencil on papler)	104
Guillermo Hernandez	Guillermo's Wacky World (digital illustration)	105
Daisy Ortiz	SEASIDE (animated GIF)	106
Arianna Calderon	Arctic Animals (digital illustration)	107
Edgar Meza	Diaspora (film photography)	108
Edgar Meza	Heaven's Symphony (film photography)	109
AJ Johnson	Cradle (digital photo)	110
Semira Eason	Prom (digital illustration)	111

Literary

Works

Nikhil Chandran

Chicago:

An Ode in Letters

Part I: The City

C - Chilly during winter

H - Hot dogs without ketchup

I - Interesting architecture; weather-tested

C - City by the lake; never bested

A - Alleys behind houses

G - Gardens with history

O - Outreach in every community

Part II: The Underdog

C - Cheers from the home crowd

U - Underdogs, making the city proud

B - Baseballs flying into the bleachers

S - Singing "Go, Cubs, Go" for the achievers

#

Part III: The Rebirth

A - A city made from grit and pain

R - Rising from the ashes

E - Enveloped in infamy

#

Part IV: The Movement

W - Willis Tower stands tall

O- Over the streets

R - River running

L - Like a snake through

D - Downtown and neighborhoods

#

Part V: The Celebration

C - Chicago is

H - Hardworking, humorous

A- Always changing

M- Music-making

P- Proud of its pizza

I- In the heart of the Midwest

O- Only for those who believe

N- Never settling for the

S- Shameless

Amira Holliman

am | the monster

am I the monster

the nightmare in your head

the creature under your bed

am I the monster

the one here by mistake

the one who aches and aches

am I the monster

the one who feels lost

the one who yearns the most

for things they haven't seen

for the things that might have been

Amira Holliman

Lonely Nights

I cry myself silently to sleep in the darkness of my room

Silently, so no one hears

Listening to music that encourages Depression.

Loneliness,

It appears with a vengeance.

One moment you're safe

Then you're me,

Crying yourself to sleep in the darkness of your room.

If you're lucky, you'll have someone

Unfortunate if you don't

Then you're me,

Crying yourself to sleep in the darkness of your room.

The next day everything's ok

Until you're not

Then you're me,

Crying yourself to sleep in the darkness of your room

Talia Veney

Tribute to My Nana

Legacy expands beyond last names and continues to become
defined by the reputation
personified through the human that breathes life
into their identity.

Flourishing into an individual that influences the community
around them.

My lips only kissed the dynamics of existence due to the legacy
that predates me and the heritage that raised me.

A culture that translated into soul food Sundays in the heart of
North Philly although the Black
diaspora birthed our bloodline across state lines originating in
the form of Southern hospitality.

Mr. C crafted his platters with care from his truck that
we would eat with a smile as a family
some nights and other nights we would share Chinese
take-out that came with a half gallon of
sweet tea in a Tupperware cup, but

Any meal enjoyed together always tasted homemade
because we would eat it in the house that
made my formative memories.
Yet, ceramic plates, cold drinks, warm hearts, and hot food
from her kitchen would taste the best
And each bite of her sweet potato pie would remind me
of how I have been blessed to indulge in
Long walks through the streets with her to reach the park
on the same block that Jill Scott would
Integrating our laughs into the sounds of the
neighborhood

Vinyls and heirlooms lining the walls of Nana's house
as we immersed ourselves in her stories
that turned the family and friends in her photo albums
into a tangible presence I could feel too
For her narratives would depict vivid stories like a rerun
of Happily Ever After that we would
watch together on HBO or a tale from the Highlights
magazines that she would order for me -
her Ladybug - and my sister - her Butterfly -
to read in-between games of Candy Land and
Monopoly

Her words transformed into a purple crayon like
what Harold used to create and she crafted our
history conveying the lineage we portray
I never met my great grandmother or great grandfather
Still, they touched me through her
Hugging me and loving me the way she would

Every accomplishment I ever reached
She lifted me up proudly so I could excel beyond any restraints
And she gifted to me, my aunts and my mommy who
shaped me into the person I am today
I want to pour into the next generation the way they did for me
and make sure they all
remember
my Nana's reign

How it aches to watch a soul who loved me dearly fly high
68 years young was still too soon
I want to hug my Nana again
And wish I could rewind
So I could tell her that I love her just one more time

Gabriella Carrizales

Thunder's Howl

It's too damn quiet
This chorus now hushed
A soundtrack gone silent
Once started it would always play

On and on it would play
Annoyed smiles on our faces
On and on it would play
The sharp tune would sound

This orchestra lost its conductor
It now plays out of tune and offkey

It's just too damn quiet
This chorus now hushed
That sharp tune gone silent
It all seems so rushed

An orchestra with no conductor
It's now an absent faded tune

by Sabrina Vives

Grief

This thing enters my body nonconsensually
and never learns the way out.

At night I feel it moving inside me,
a living monstrosity.

I've given it a body,

ready,
waiting,

to lay waste to my being.

The sheets gather around my body
as I feel the same slow crawl

climb into my throat.

It finds the tips of my toes,
gentle,

the way a lover learns
where to begin.

There is less space for me now.

When I see it,
we slow dance in the shadows.

I whisper to the beast
how I've fallen in love
with its visits.

I tell it things I don't say out loud.

I kiss its cheek.

I listen.

Haby Palma

Burying

Problems

I'm a bear going into hibernation

The wind seeps through my skin

Pushing me to hide away for the winter

To bury my priorities in the snow

Until spring comes to bring them to the

Surface, forcing me to face my indecisions

Sabrina Vives

THRESHOLD

I wait to feel my legs again.

Something keeps my feet anchored to the floor,
as though stillness has become
a condition of safety.

I try to speak, but my voice is lost
in unending radio electricity.

Signals pass through me, around me.

There is no pocket of quiet left to hide inside.

I want to go back.

Something in this world has shifted
its center of gravity.

In this after, the air itself feels occupied.

Thick with transmission.

I learn what it means to live inside

a system that never powers down.

The tether in my hand isn't a device but a condition.

A cord born of fear,

tightened by necessity,

pressed

into my skin

There is no outside anymore.

A technological bureaucracy

of air and signal.

The tether feels umbilical.

Not nourishing.

Governing.

It doesn't ask.

It persists.

From this, fear adapts.

What looks like caution becomes a way of living,

arriving slowly

as a way of staying intact.

.

The world no longer ends

at the edge of my body.

The clouds look different now.

The sky is heavy with something unfinished.

I am afraid to go outside.

I am afraid to live without interference.

No off switch.

Only transmission.

Still, I remain

where the doorway holds me,

caught

between the in-between

Yolk

Sabrina Vives

Have you ever been stolen by your anger?

Had it scold you in the middle of the night,

felt it spill from your belly,

cracked open,

yolk of self.

Do you let your shadow keep you there?

Have you watched its dance

joy,

misnamed,

turning your body into something

wholly unrecognizable.

Viscous jargon.

Yolk of self.

Alone on the floor.

Have you befriended it?

Have you made love to it?

Haby Palma

Ode To Chimalhuacán

Chimalhuacán, you restless town
Surrounded by graves that spill out of cemeteries
Reborn from the late Texcoco lake,
Where sirens stalked women washing clothes
By the shore, canoes lined by the dirt-filled ground
Where mules and horses trotted on your dusty crust
And olives sprung from the branches of your trees
Silence used to overtake the night only
The cricket's tune was heard while Nahuales
And spirits ravished on souls up to dawn
Chimalhuacán, Chimalhuacán
Your fresh water drained through the cracks
Of the earth, replaced by crooked bit apart roads
And unlevelled up and down sidewalks dipped in yellow.
Now it is crime that kills the shell of souls, sorrow filled village

Oh, Chimalhuacán

Scorned by neighboring towns, and spat on by those who
Live inside you, nothing expected from you. Neglected, left
To fend for yourself, fear claws unto homes, malice
Clings to the smoke lit by the cigarettes across the street
Surviving to live in you, generations grow and remain
Enslaved to you, sparks

Of joy found in the abarrotes on the corners, in the tazos
And trompos gliding on the ground, to love you is
To have a gun to my head, another person to be found

Oh Chimalhuacán, Chimalhuacán

The place I call home, I'm mad to love you, to feel peace in
Your broken streets, the place which holds my dad's
Cold body, one more grave in your overflowing cemeteries
That encase you, others scorn you, but I could never disown you

Isis Meza

Children of the Sun

Mothers and fathers
and sisters and brothers
and tías y tíos con sus abuelos
y sus maridos
go missing and disappearing
at the hands of nopales—
lost brothers and sisters
breaking their own as they
dangle by the neck at the whims
of el gringo.

These masked cobardes—
adorned in military gear
paid by our mothers' and
fathers' hard-earned tax dollars
shuttle them like cattle
across borders that might as well
been drawn with a stick.

Our mothers and fathers
and sisters and brothers
grow sick with worry
as they attend court hearings and

are greeted with open SUV doors,
our tías y tíos y primos y amigos
fall ill in crowded cages
drown in blinding lights
and vomit food infested with maggots.

Why are we foreigners in this land
when our roots blossom maíces?

Why are we aliens in this land
when our skin radiates the sun's kisses?

Why are we criminals in this land
when they lock our kids up in cages?

We are the Children of the Sun &
as children of this land,
our footprints are etched in the
fields with which we feed America—

Our blood runs through its veins
it's our blood that paints la bandera
with our Black & Indígenas
brothers and sisters—

It's our blood they want to run (out),
but as Children of the Sun
we are more American
than they will ever be.

Isis Meza

Mestizo Fruit

Tejano trees bear a mestizo fruit
of a stolen soil and peoples—
assimilation raped into their roots;
these Tejano trees, if they could speak their truth
they'd choke on the blood, soaked to the pulp,
of brown men, women, and children
hung high to the heavens, bodies swingin'
to the ballad of Manifested American freedom.

Lynching's a leisurely pleasure for the God-fearin'
man tying the noose, little boys in their Sunday best
climb sprawling oaks to get a better view;
scent of musky linen and freshly squeezed lemonade
is suddenly twinged by the pleas of a bandit to escape
then complemented by the scent of writhing, burning flesh—
a family-friendly pastime and money-making trinket
memorialized by a flicker and a flash.

Now it just ain't fittin' to hang
both black and brown bodies on same hanging tree
not for Goliad nor for the land of the free,
not for the values of white purity & biblical infidelity;
a land conquered and divided hoisting
black & brown men, women, and children
by the neck like the Flag sewn from the skin of their backs—
even in death, they couldn't stand us united.

Tejano trees bear a mestizo fruit
as do the California sycamores and Arizona junipers,
blood and salt of tears fused to rotten roots;
these stolen trees, if they could speak their truth
they'd count the rings and number of sunrises
that blazed the sky and shed light on the ghastly sight
of a father or son left high and dry by a mob sick and
wild-eyed; the weight of a life thrashed in their mind,
brown & black men, women, and children
limping, dropping like ripened fruit
resurrecting and blooming anew—
to the ballad of Manifested American freedom.

Isis Meza

the **drowned** **baby**
poem

the time he dropped my body down
down into the lake, my skin was still covered in your waxy film
like a buttery blanket you held me in safe,
until you could no more.

I tried to cry out for you, mama,
but my babbles turn to bubbles instead
I'm only 13 years apart, mama,
but they don't see us as the children we are
just flesh to use & forget.

the pearls adorned on my face have now returned to the sea
as drops of ice; I know the moonlight shining through is you,
mama, and as I've lived in the warmth of your belly
to term, now to the belly of mother earth I'll sleep.

Ashlyn Cross

Sunset Light

Reality revealed itself by the lines of the sun.

A dying awakened a sight unknown before.

Where red dyed the waiting trees in blood.

Clarity disappeared leaving shades in its absence.

Vincent Cilento

Blue Hour

I want the waves to swallow me,
While the Moon looks onto me,
Gazing lovingly.

But how can she love such a cruel being?

I sing in the choir of mankind,
The catalyst of destruction,
Bearer of despair to our Mother Earth.

Yet she still loves me,
Despite the hate of the choir,
Despite the pollution of the choir,
Despite the destruction of the choir,
The Moon still loves.

So I let the waves consume me,
I let Mother Earth claim me,
As the choir claimed her,
I let her swallow me whole.

I fall under the waves,
Sand closes me in,
I become one with the ocean floor,
I begin to sink.

I feel the moonlight shine down on me,
Smiling,
I smile back,
Feeling the warmth of her light,
I accept.

I sink lower and lower,
Silence accompanies the dark,
Surrounded by Mother Earth's love

I have become nothing and everything.

Daisy Gutierrez

A Necessary Death

Feel the ache from my left side

Constant playback from the moment

I crashed and spiraled

Eyes opened into gloom

From the deafening silence

Take another drag

Cats outside in the cold

Grieve the death

Of your former self

In vivid dreams

I'm parched

Reaching out for every fluid in your fridge
Next to my bed
A necessary death
Shapes everything you ever knew
Reconstructing through discomfort
A setback to perfection
An unattainable notion of individuality
I've been patient for adjustments
Waiting for progress to show
Like Daredevil, I am Born Again
Finish smelling flowers
And blow out your birthday candles.

Corey Porter

Not My Worst Breakup

Derek had 52 DVDs, 20 PlayStation games, and three 90's movie posters on his walls. My eyes flit about the living room of his apartment, noticing these details so I don't have to notice the disdain on his face.

How long has it been since we last spoke? Certainly, it's been multiple hours. Right? I sneak a glance at the time on my phone. Fuck, it's only been 3 minutes. That's still a really long time to have the only other person in this conversation simply say nothing to you.

The apartment is set up with a brutalist efficiency that says this person understands the components of a home, without knowing what makes it feel like a home. There's the dining table: two chairs pushed in, with the one closest to the kitchen left out, a stack of bills in the far corner. Nothing about it makes you want to enjoy a meal there, you just know you're supposed to. The dining table is positioned between the kitchen, and the living room, itself comprised of a mismatched sofa, armchair, and workout bench, all arranged to face the too-large TV against the wall. The LED light from the ceiling fixture, the tan carpet, and the off-white walls give the whole place a harsh, blanched, beige hue that makes us look slightly jaundiced. His apartment tells the story of his daily routine, and for the first time I feel unwelcome in it.

"Tell me a fun fact about yourself."

The words are said slightly below a normal speaking volume, but they

startle me. My punishment was over, he has decided to just move past it and ask for a fun fact. I can work with that. I mean, that's a fucking stupid question - well, it's not even a question, it's just a demand.

Whatever, I can work with that. I can fix this.

I take a sip of my drink to consider my answer, I run my hand through my hair, pushing it back in the universal gesture for 'I'm flirting with you, but in a totally cool and chill way.'

"Well, I am both the youngest and an only child." I cock my head to the side, satisfied with my fun fact, and ability to act like we had not sat through five minutes of painfully uncomfortable silence.

"What does that mean?" He sounds more annoyed than interested. I need to work harder to win him back to the right side of a good mood.

"Guess." I smirk. Charmingly brattish usually worked for me.

His eyes slowly move up and down, taking me in, what little warmth had remained in his face bled out. "Just tell me." he says flatly.

"I'm my dad's fourth kid, but my mom's only child. So I have older siblings, but I was raised alone." I explain, willing it to be the right thing to say.

He lets out a tiny breath that I choose to interpret as a laugh. His face softens. I begin to feel relief.

"This isn't going to work out."

What the fuck?

"What the fuck?"

"So in my psychology class we learned that only children and youngest children are the worst. And you're both. And I just can't handle that." The words come out like a sigh of relief. When I look at him, the tension in his body has dissipated. He seems at ease.

I don't know what to say. I don't know what to do. I'm more in shock than upset. Of all the reasons to want to dump me, something you learned in a Psych class is your reason? Surely breaking up with me is worth more than a Psych 101 factoid that I highly doubt contains much fact.

I look out the window at my bike chained to a lamppost in his parking lot. It was now the dead of night, and raining so heavily that the lampposts only illuminate a small area around their base, giving my bike its own spotlight. I close my eyes and imagine being free of this situation. I feel the wind and rain lashing against my face, I see the houselights glittering in the wet concrete, I hear my skull crack as my imaginary self falls against a curb. My balance is iffy at the best of times, after drinking whatever concoction he put in my cup? I'd surely die. I open my eyes and I'm back in the too-beige room I am stuck in for the night.

I hear him inhale, and begin his summation. "I don't think we should see each other anymore. I think you're cool, but..."

I decide that if I am stuck with this man, I am going to drink as much of his alcohol as I can. I march to the kitchen, and pour out my drink. The vodka breaks off a chunk of coagulated ketchup from one of yesterday's dishes.

"We have nothing in common, you're into..."

My lips curl. That's not the reason, we have plenty in common. We both work as baristas, we play video games, and we read the same fantasy books. It's why we started talking in the first place.

"...I'm just not interested in the things you're interested in, and you seem really interested in the things I'm interested in..."

Ah, there it is. The pieces start falling into place.

A month ago, Derek had introduced me to his favorite video game. I would play it with him when I'd come over, but tonight I was excited to share with him that I had bought it, and started playing it at home as well. I thought he'd be happy to have converted me into a fan, but instead he fell silent. Now, I see my transgression - I showed too much interest.

“...I just don't think I want anything high pressure right now...”

I force my face to remain expressionless, but I can feel the heat creeping up my neck into my cheeks. My hand starts to cramp from gripping my glass. I lean against the counter to hide the rising tension in my body.

I meet his eyes, I take a drink, I say nothing.

He gives more reasons why he doesn't like me, why he's not attracted to me, why he never wants to see me again.

I take a drink, I meet his eyes, I say nothing.

He's emptying his brain of every negative thought he's had of me since we met.

I take a drink, I take a drink, I say nothing.

He talks for three refills.

Finally, I push against the kitchen counter to stand up straight. My mask of apathy is finally replaced with disgust as my hands stick to god knows what on the counter. I recover, and meet his eyes for the last time. He's fallen silent by my movement.

With as much poise and stability as I can muster, I stride towards the bedroom. “I'm going to sleep.” These are the first words I've spoken in what feels like hours, and, though I don't know it in this moment

they're the last words I will speak to him.

I enter the bedroom, and struggle out of my clothes. When my head finally hits the pillow, the world starts to spin. I squeeze my eyes shut, willing it to stop. I will be damned if the last memory this guy has of me is me puking in his bathroom all night. I take slow, measured breaths, and the spinning begins to slow.

I don't know how much time passes, but I hear a soft clink on the nightstand next to my head. I hear him shuffling to the other side of the bed, and begin to undress. I open my eyes to see a glass of water. Something in my chest starts pushing to be released, my body grows tense fighting to keep it in.

I close my eyes again, and pretend to be asleep as he climbs under the covers. My back is to him, but I can feel him looking at me, trying to conjure up the words to make everything better.

No, that's just what I want him to be doing. Instead, I hear him begin to snore softly. I stare at the glass of water, the words he spoke all evening replay in my head, and my chest gets tighter and tighter. In his sleep, Derek rolls towards me, his arm falls across my body. Reflexively, he tightens his hold on me, snoring into the nape of my neck. His breath is the first warmth and softness he's given me tonight. The dam in my chest finally breaks.

When I wake his back is to me, the rain has stopped, and my pillow is dry. When he wakes, all evidence I had been there is gone.

Isis Meza

This
Year's
Ofrienda

I brush off the cobwebs from the old cardboard box in the attic, the one wrinkled and stained from years of holidays and tumbles down the stairs and has X-MAS sharpied in faded, silver ink.

There's a few ornaments inside—a styrofoam ball coated in glitter with glued on pipe cleaners I excitedly presented to you in kindergarten and the mini Christmas Story leg lamp you'd jokingly caress.

There's also the gold tinsel we'd shake like maracas and wrap around our waists to pretend we were belly dancing.

And of course the white Christmas lights that we'd keep on all night and swear we'd take down end of winter but realize we still had them up until next September. But I'm not setting up for Christmas; no, I'm not ready for that heartache.

I dusted off the chestnut radio cabinet and allowed the sarape to unfurl its warmth over the top, like we'd do when we'd prepare the

table to serve the tamales we've been up since 4 am busting our asses on.

I coil at the chalky texture of the clay bowls, then rub my thumbs over their crevice. It feels ritualistic, indulgently nostalgic. I placed them in the front row; two bowls of water to quench your thirst (one for you, abuela, bisabuelo, and our primo to share, and one for the dogs: Chico, Chilindrina, and tío Ricardo).

I burn the incense, with a charcoal strip as black as your hair. Inhaling the scent, it had to be you; its sandalwood aroma with notes of jasmine and vanilla, the smell of your neck when I would lean in to hug you, your hair as black as a raven's feather, if I rubbed my fingers across the sarape and closed my eyes, it had to be you. If I reached out and grasped the cloudy wisps of smoke and traced my hands along its silhouette, I could see your crinkled eyes and mischievous smile; I could wrap the tinsel around your waist and listen to the maracas shake.

It had to be you.

The last bowl I place in the middle.

Salt—to keep you safe.

Salt—to ward off bad spirits.

Salt—what I was out shopping for our pozole & tostadas.

While you were picked up from the bus stop and shoved in the back of a black Chevy Tahoe with tinted windows.

Only to find when I came home, salt, on the kitchen counter, behind

your mug with your lipstick still on it.

If only my salt could melt the bastards who took you.

I burn another stick; I can't leave you reduced to ashes.

I put up the photos of abuela, bisabuelo, primo, and tío.

I don't want to put yours up, because I need to know you're still out there.

But I want you to come home.

So I put your photo—cap, gown, & sarape stole—inside the radio cabinet.

Marigolds, marigolds, marigolds—I'd leave them at every corner of the world if I could—I should be mourning with you, not for you.

I kiss the marigolds in my palm, and caress the petals with fine hairs like the peach fuzz on your cheek.

Cempasúchil con bendiciones,

please—

bring my heaven home.

to:

Isis Meza

The Eldest Daughter

Please send my love to the eldest daughter
diaper-changing, peek-a-booing
bottle-feeding, baby cooing
pink-faced, nose-scrunched,
toddlers tightly tugging their tiny
arms around her calves clothed
in hole-patterned denim jeans
and their cleaned bums sitting
on her talking shoes.

Please send my love to the eldest daughter
when she should've been reading
Junie B. Jones, watching Scooby-Doo,
and multiplying 1 to 6 with 10 digits,
she bathed and powdered
the babes she didn't birth
and cooked arroz con pollo
with chicken breasts, long grain,
frijoles pintos y tortillas,
she bought with the Link card
on her trip after school to La Chapala.

Please send my love to the eldest daughter
as she was the strength
woven into each of our hearts;
she was the resilience
that stitched the soul of our family
together—
she was the flame
that set my spirit ablaze,
and she is the reason
I believe my gift for language
has a purpose.

Please send my love to her,
or she'll never know
how much I admire her,
in all of her beautiful and imperfect
facets of being—
like an emerald embellished in her grace
and how much of this life's beauty
I wish I could offer her
as she truly, wholeheartedly deserves.

Nikhil Chandran

The Snake and I

(Adapted from the short story “Sweat” by Zora Neale Hurston)

The snake was awake now, staring at me through its two gleaming yellow eyes. From its perch in the basket at the front of the bedroom door, I could see its two venomous fangs, sharp like daggers, ready to sink in at the slightest movement. Even in the dying light, its yellow eyes shone like the brightest streetlamps.

I know how it goes. Stand still, and the snake will leave you alone. Take one step, and it'll all be over. Just like with me and Sykes. I still can't believe he brought this snake in. After everything I ever did for him. After all the long nights. After going through so much with him. How can he do this to me? To his one true friend?

As I was pondering the answer to these questions, I suddenly came to the realization that this snake, this horrible, monstrous, beady-eyed creature stirring right in front of me, represented Syke's demanding and controlling presence over me. All the pain I've ever endured

because of him. All the hatred he spewed towards me. All the screaming, crying, begging, harassing, over the years. This was basically Sykes saying to me, in a tone full of disrespect and anger, “You’re not wanted here.”

After a while, the snake lifted itself out of the basket. I watched, horrified, as the snake slithered onto my bed. That was it. I grabbed the nearest lantern I could find and, not once looking back, ran to the kitchen as fast as my legs would allow. Unfortunately, I had left the kitchen door open, and so the wind blew the light in my lantern out. I had no time to light the lantern in my terror, so I carried the empty lamp with me as I ran outside into the Florida night and slammed the door behind me, not caring that it was pitch dark. Once outside, I sprinted to the safety of the hay barn on the side of the house, climbed up onto the roof, and lay there a hyperventilating wreck. I must have been there for over a full hour.

As I lay there, the sight of a million stars clouding my vision, I felt a cold, bloody rage coursing through my entire body. It seeped into every pore, hid behind the walls of my stomach. It told me that I’ve done the best I could. If Sykes doesn’t want to change, that’s on him, not me. It’s not my fault that Sykes is the way he is.

After another full hour of thinking this, about what I could’ve done, I finally fell into a deep sleep

I woke to a loud, thumping sound coming from the house. I looked down to see who it was. It was Sykes.

He was at the fire pile, dismantling the wire-covered box that once held the snake. I saw the black soot rise out of the flames.

He hurried to the kitchen door; looked around once, twice, thrice; stepped inside; looked around once, twice, thrice; and closed the door behind him.

Not feeling any fear now, I climbed down from the barn and crouched below my bedroom window. I couldn't see inside because of the drawn shade, but I could hear every sound in the house through the thin walls. I hoped with all my heart that the snake bites Sykes.

“That old devil is awake now!”, Sykes exclaimed when he heard the snake's rattle from nowhere. As anyone familiar with rattlesnakes knows, its rattle comes from different directions – to the right, to the left, straight ahead, behind, close underfoot – but sometimes it's not even there. It could be hiding under the bed, but you'll make the mistake of thinking it's not there. So you'd better be prepared to fight it well. But sometimes you have to watch extra carefully, as sometimes it'll strike without making a sound.

Sykes looked for the snake everywhere but couldn't seem to find it. He reached for the set of matches behind the pot on the stove and

That was the sound of the shade being violently torn from the window. A huge, blood-stained hand banged on the window. But before I could see, the snake pulled Sykes to the ground and out of sight. Then, the rattling stopped. The only sounds I could hear now were Sykes' pitiful cries of pain.

"D-d-d-Delia? Delia?" Sykes was asking on the other side of the wall, his voice dotted with fear. My legs turned into wet spaghetti noodles. I was too scared to respond.

I saw him stumble through the open window, saw him move towards the front door. I crawled on my hands and knees toward him.

His face was badly scratched and bruised, his neck had swollen to the size of an orange, his left eye had become a slit on his giant face. But I wasn't focused on that. It was Sykes' right eye. It was not the same eye that had accompanied his abuse of me. The eye had changed. It was now an eye of pity, of fear, of worry. I looked into his eye and saw the same fear reflected in mine. I knew, right then and there, that that eye was about to close soon, that he was about to suffer, that I would suffer no more.

Ashlynn Cross

Something Like a Star

Her wings protected her from the crushing weight, but they could only take so much for so long. Entrapped in the egg she had become, she disappeared into the nothingness around her. The nothingness she had given herself.

Coldness greeted her like she'd never known before in a strange bright darkness. Awareness left her enveloped until something important disappeared from inside her. A brutal assault that left her screaming, grasping desperately at her sternum. Curling into herself gave no relief, but neither did spreading herself wide.

Nothingness might exist outside of her, but emptiness existed inside of her, and nothing had ever hurt more.

The darkness disappeared, slowly, slowly, moving into her still cavernous chest like a whirlpool until she could see. A giant tunnel stretched in front of and behind her. The walls curved into a circle, so small she had to slouch, and slouch, and slouch. Curling into herself until her shoulder bones burst out of her skin, breaking the rocks.

She fell.

Fell hard onto the shard covered ground. They cut her arm, side,

and hands while she scrambled painfully onto her feet, where shards sliced her feet broken.

The whole of the world stretched below her, where she sat in the moon aching and dripping. The shards pierced her back through the absence of her wings. She couldn't leave. But that was okay when the view below her was so magnificent.

The mountain towered so tall she could almost touch the peak. Almost wanted to touch the peak. But she would not. The rest of the mountain spread out like a star, separating the sea, from the sky, from the desert, from the rocks, from the forest, from the nothingness.

The nothingness that wasn't her emptiness. It was supposed to be there unlike her.

She looked down from her place in the sky. The world was a broken mural where the shards of the sun and moon had fallen.

She tilted her head to try and comprehend it, but she couldn't. Tilted back until her mind twisted to envelop her body, finally letting out the emptiness, and only then did she understand that she was not supposed to see it. Was not supposed to comprehend it.

The loud clang shrieked through the world into her bones, and the view was gone from her.

No!

No!

No!

The scream could not escape her throat.

The clang continued, followed by the

ticking tocking,

ticking tocking,

ticking tocking.

Always there the

ticking tocking.

How could she forget?

She curled into herself to block the noise with her hands and knees.

The shards stabbed into her spine, her blood bled down into the ground. From the ground a light shined. A small little diamond like light.

She reached down and ate it, only to hear the

ticking tocking

inside of herself.

She stuck her hand down her throat but she couldn't throw up.

The light wasn't supposed to be inside her.

It wasn't

it wasn't

it wasn't.

The dirt piled on top of and around her, packing her down underneath the world.

Something poked out from her stomach. It stretched and moved and got bigger, and bigger, and bigger, until it burst out of her stomach and flew like a star above her.

Leaving her fallen open in a way she had never been before. Leaving her breathing like she never had been before.

Looking down she saw herself split open, viscera spread out in every direction, something like a star herself.

Ashlynn Cross

An Unnatural Color

Alice had spent the long, dark night hiding under her bed in hopes that whatever creature had been violently assaulting her window would not see her and go away. Fear had her hiding in the bed without thinking about how best to see, so she stared at her wall, flinching at every bang and scratch. She could not have run to her parents' safe yellow room, which seemed light even on the dimmest of nights because they were away on a trip. Her uncle made it clear that he did not tolerate being woken up, though he slept in the unlucky blue room. How the banging had not woken him up even though his room was next to hers, she did not know. Most likely, it had to do with his disgusting brown drink.

Morning light brought silence though no comfort. It wasn't until her room glowed gold, the lucky color, that Alice crawled quickly out from her bed. The pink curtains fluttered from the breeze of her ceiling fan, with the window revealing no cracks or smudges. It showed clear to the green forest outside her room.

Disbelief had her standing fast and uneven, only to fall because of her aching legs. She was immediately face to face with a strange puddle on her carpet. The liquid gleamed a color she'd never seen before nor could she really describe it. A headache throbbed behind her eyes and her hands

burned where the fluid had soaked into it. Beside her left hand was a bird she could not place either.

The bird was a tiny thing with metallic wings. Not gold, yet still almost gold. The body was more of a sphere than anything a bird should look like and it had cracked spilling that strange unnamable color onto her carpet. For how small its body was, its blood had soaked across half of her room. The wings were broken with feathers leaving a trail to her mirror. Her broken mirror.

More of the bird's blood leaked down from the mirror, trailing across her collection of rocks and geodes. The morning sun gave the blood an almost rainbow sheen but not quite. Alice picked up the broken bird. It was so cold, it burned her, so she had to grab it with her night gown. Standing up, she trailed the undeliverable color across her floor to her vanity which she dropped on top of the broken shards. The broken mirror reflected multiples of herself back, and right in the center, where the bird had undoubtedly come through, was a too black void.

Even as her skin burned and stung, uncomfortably but not unbearably, curiosity made her push her hand into the void of the mirror. It disappeared completely from her view as though she never had a left hand to begin with. Alice snatched it back. Cold pained her hand though she couldn't discern any physical problems aside from the rainbow-but-not-rainbow color that stained her skin.

Her own pale face was unusual in its seriousness, though her brows furrowed in determination. Curiosity had never engulfed her so thoroughly as it just had.

David Scheier

Love

like a

Darting Minnow

under a

Frozen Stream:

Or Simply



I met I at the regional I Am a Modest Leader Conference, a leadership workshop and retreat for enthusiastic but unaccomplished leaders. The sort of two-day team building camp where promising tour guides, hospitality coordinators, and event planners gather to learn how to stand differently and say the same sentence louder. We did ice breakers. My favorite were name games. My name is Adam, you might say, and I'm bringing an apple for a picnic. What's your name and what are you bringing?

"My name is I," she said, "and I'm bringing ice."

This felt important at the time.

We played hugging games. We circled a room to the song "Burn Baby Burn." When the music stopped, you were pressed into someone who had not been there a moment ago. We built bridges out of people.

We listened to lectures from people pushing books like *Fish! A Proven Way to Boost Morale and Improve Results* and its damn four-fish philosophies. “Play!” I heard someone shout through the walls of the men’s restroom against the clatter of sound from a group of wiry mustachioed men holding hands, eyes closed and chanting, “Make their day! Make their day! Make their day!” Later, a girl in a pink baseball cap yelled “Choose your attitude” to no one as she dropped a plate of scones onto the gleaming tile floor between folding tables and the lukewarm breakfast bar. “Be present!” followed me all afternoon, even into the quiet parts of my head.

I had already attended several lectures by experts on icebreakers. What kind of icebreakers are appropriate for centennials, for instance. Or what if someone refuses to participate in the icebreaker? Actually, no one answered that one. The conference changes location every year. Last year Dallas. This year Tucson, at a very posh hotel with windows circling the pool and hot tub, where swimmers darted back and forth like something small and alive beyond the foggy glass, the air smelling faintly of carpet cleaner and ambition.

I first saw her standing near the refreshment table pouring a packet of stevia into a Styrofoam cup of Pepsi, stirring it with her middle finger. Her nametag read: Hello my name is I. I had short whiskey-brown hair cut at the level of her chin. Purple eye shadow. Mascara applied like punctuation. Her eyes were brown and capable of looking in different directions at the same time, in a deliberate way. I noticed that when I focused, both eyes landed. When I lost focus, they explored.

I smiled at me with her attention divided as I approached like a cautious crab, hugging my plastic notepad to my chest. I could hear my

heart melting, bubbling, dripping into my gut. I imagined my stomach digesting it for fuel. Her smile carried a hush of recognition, like the one reserved for an old friend or a distant cousin who suddenly steps back into your life.

“Have we met before?” I asked.

“I doubt it,” I said, already convinced we had.

“Do you know which actor you look like?” she asked.

“A young Jack Nicholson,” I said.

She made a face as if I had suggested something sticky.

“You look like Adrien Brody,” I said, “but younger. And not as thin.”

“I’m twenty-two,” I said, lying in the direction of the truth. I was closer to twenty-seven. Possibly thirty-four. Time felt soft here.

She added more Stevia in the Raw to her carbonated beverage. Packet after packet. I watched carefully, as though she were performing a task that required supervision.

“Isn’t that enough sweetener?” I asked.

“Hardly,” I said, both of her eyes briefly checking the ceiling.

I laughed for some reason. I stuck out my hand. Her hand was cool and damp, as though recently rinsed.

“I’m I,” I said.

“What an interesting name,” I said, pointing at her tag. “That’s not your real name though, is it? It’s short for something.”

I listed names quickly. Ida. Ingrid. Isabel. Iris. Irene. Ivette. Irina. I nodded after each one, breathless.

“Just I,” I said.

I told me her entire life story in the time it takes a powerful toilet to flush. I was somewhere in my late twenties. I had a ten-year-old boy. I

was unmarried. I worked as an event coordinator at a hotel. I stopped abruptly, and I gestured at her face and said, “Are you okay?” Her eyes parted to check different corners of the room. Her hair was in a ponytail. This is not important, except that I liked it.

“What hotel do you work at?” I asked when she paused to breathe.

“I work at the Kiloannum Hotel outside Cloud Craft, New Mexico,” I said. “We have skiing, hiking, bird watching, events like this. Recently we hosted a cat psychic, Kaspar Spiegelschrift. Is your cat on the other side? He can reach her.” I moved her hands like she was casting a spell.

“Come water ski, fish, or relax on a dinghy in our private lake. No swimming. We are known for gourmet New Mexican-style Tex-Mex and casino gambling. The Kiloannum Hotel and Casino. It’s an adventure.”

“By the way, what’s your name?” she asked, one eye on me, the other watching a man drop a cup behind us.

I tapped my nametag. Before anything could stabilize, Claudia arrived.

I met Claudia during a hugging game earlier. She had an energy that made space rearrange itself. She hugged me tightly and for too long.

Maybe I am over thinking this experience as you may have guessed from the start of this biographical episode. I do not want you to think less of me, but this was not the first time I had fallen quickly, and madly, in love. And really, in retrospect, it’s only now in memory of this most recent event that I feel I was the one that got away. These spurts of love, as I was once told by a woman who shall remain nameless. Okay, her name was Ellis and she too was one of many who escaped the vortex of my open heart, after I fell for a girl at a mall Subway back when

five-dollar foot longs were a thing. She said that for me love comes and goes like darting minnows beneath a frozen stream. I don't know if minnows swim very fast in icy water, but I think she meant that my feelings move quickly, quietly, and just out of reach, flashing with life for a moment before disappearing again, leaving only ripples.

This may be true, but still when I think of her, I, now, and her two brown eyes semi-looking at me and not at me, I feel lightheaded and the ground beneath me feels as though it is made of glossy cotton. A feeling I had known only once, when meningitis from the Subway girl left my mind parched. I didn't want to be a minnow darting below ice. I could be lost to me and that might be ok, but I did not want it to be. I wanted—

“Sunshine!” she said, slapping my arm.

“This is I,” I said. “I, this is Claudia.”

“Did you meet hugging?” I asked. We laughed, though I was not sure why.

“Sunshine is such a nice boy,” Claudia said, repeating it as if it might become true through repetition. I smiled. I held her iPhone, unsure when it entered her hand.

“So what do you do?” I asked Claudia, already feeling the pull of her gravity.

“I'm a clerk,” she said proudly. “I'm here with my coworkers.”

She waved, and they arrived in matching pastel shirts, chanting phrases from the Fish philosophy. “Choose your attitude!” “Play!” “Be There!”

The pink-capped girl bounced closer, leading a small choir. I knew if I did not move now, I would dissolve.

“I’ll leave you with your friends,” I said, backing away.

“No,” I said silently, shaking my head.

“I’m going to the restroom,” I said, slipping past them. I moved through banners that read We Welcome Success Here! Flat shoes followed.

“Sunshine,” Claudia whispered and evaporated into the assemblage of other voices. I turned to stand in front of I again. Her eyes looked everywhere and then, finally, both landed on me at once. I wanted to tell her that I was presenting a seminar later on friendly crowd work.

That I was a Tour Guider. That I taught leaders to lead.

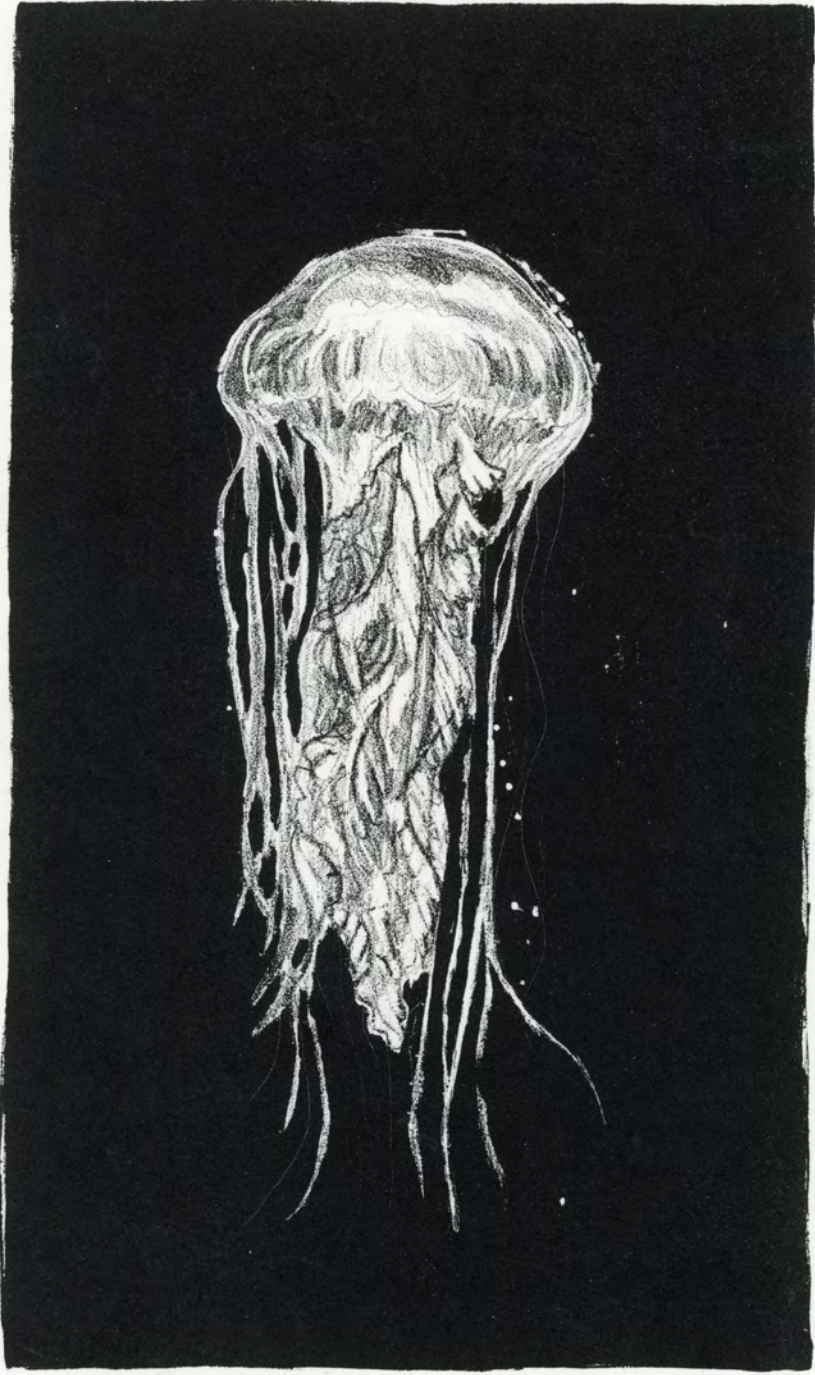
The bell rang before I could choose which version of myself to offer.

“Don’t be a stranger,” I said. I nodded. Hundreds of people in khaki shorts and pastel shirts moved toward lectures, discarding cups and Frito bags, their tote bags reading I Lead Leaders. I watched someone clear the snack table where I had just tried to seduce I. I could still feel her damp hand slipping away. The second bell rang, and I was gone.

Gallery



Semira Eason **Do You Wanna Smoke?** (digital illustration)



Jamila Valiyeva JellyFish (lithography)



Nikhil Chandran **Sunflower** (digital photo)



Yevgeniya Lapik **Naturmort** (digital painting)



Jittaun Taylor **Memorial Day** (digital illustration)



Alex Brown **Successful Birthday** (digital illustration)



AJ Johnson **Chi Exclusive** (digital photo)



Montrell Wells **Lovely Bones** (digital illustration)





Luke Jones **Pingu** (ceramics)

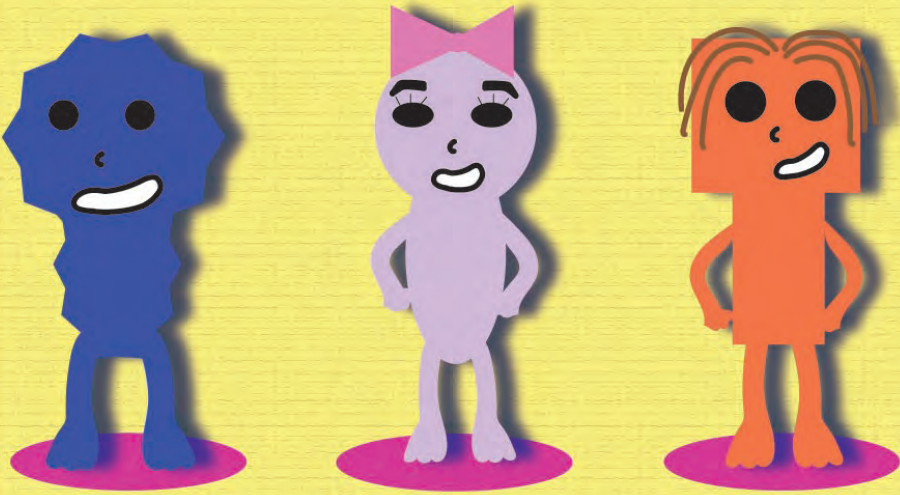


Amelia Motino **Itch** (collage)

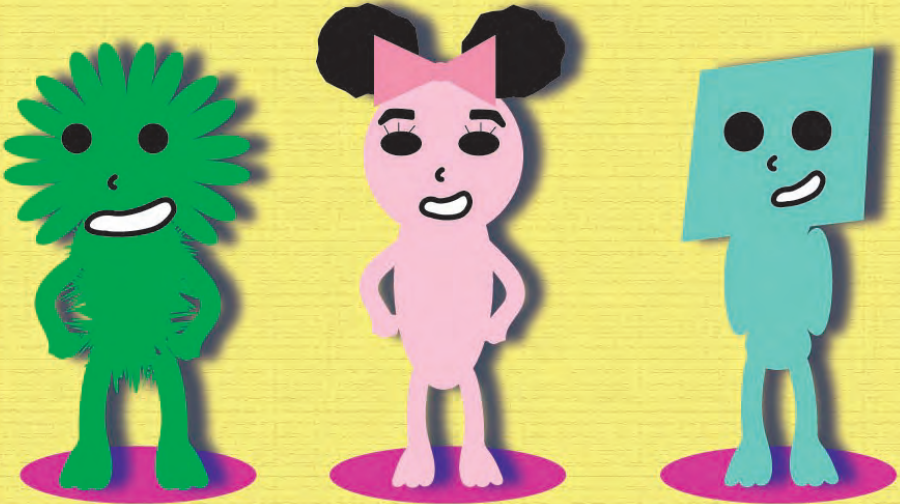


Brandon Bacon **I Am A Gas In A Womb Of Light** (ink on paper)

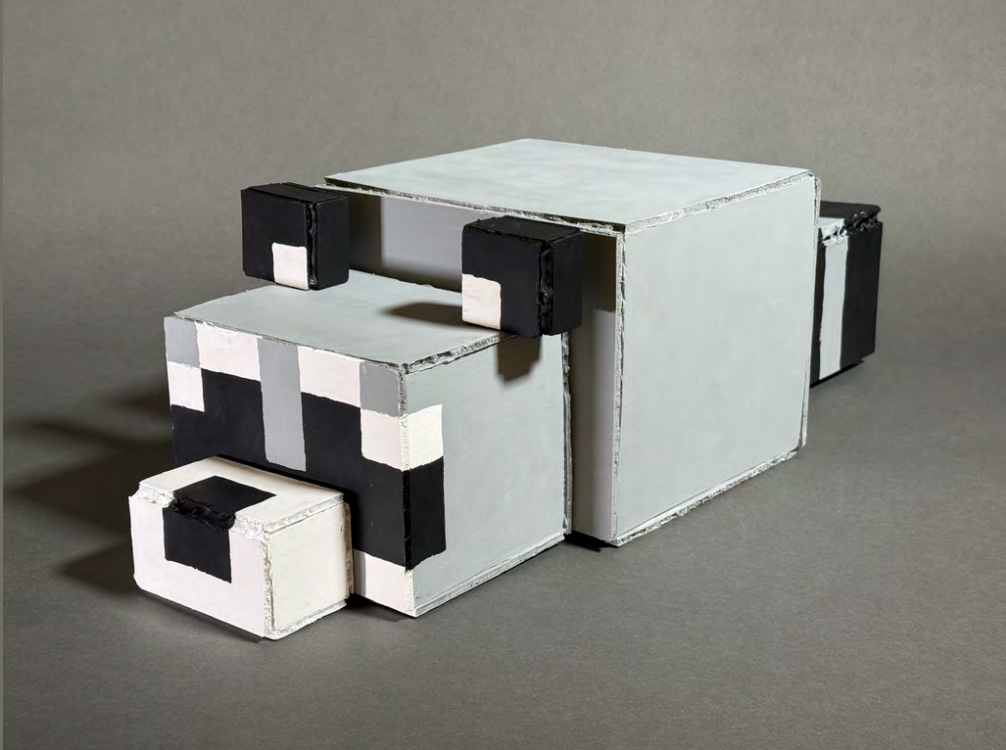




EMBRACE OUR DIFFERENCES!







Ulises Garcia-Ruiz **Raccoon** (cardboard)

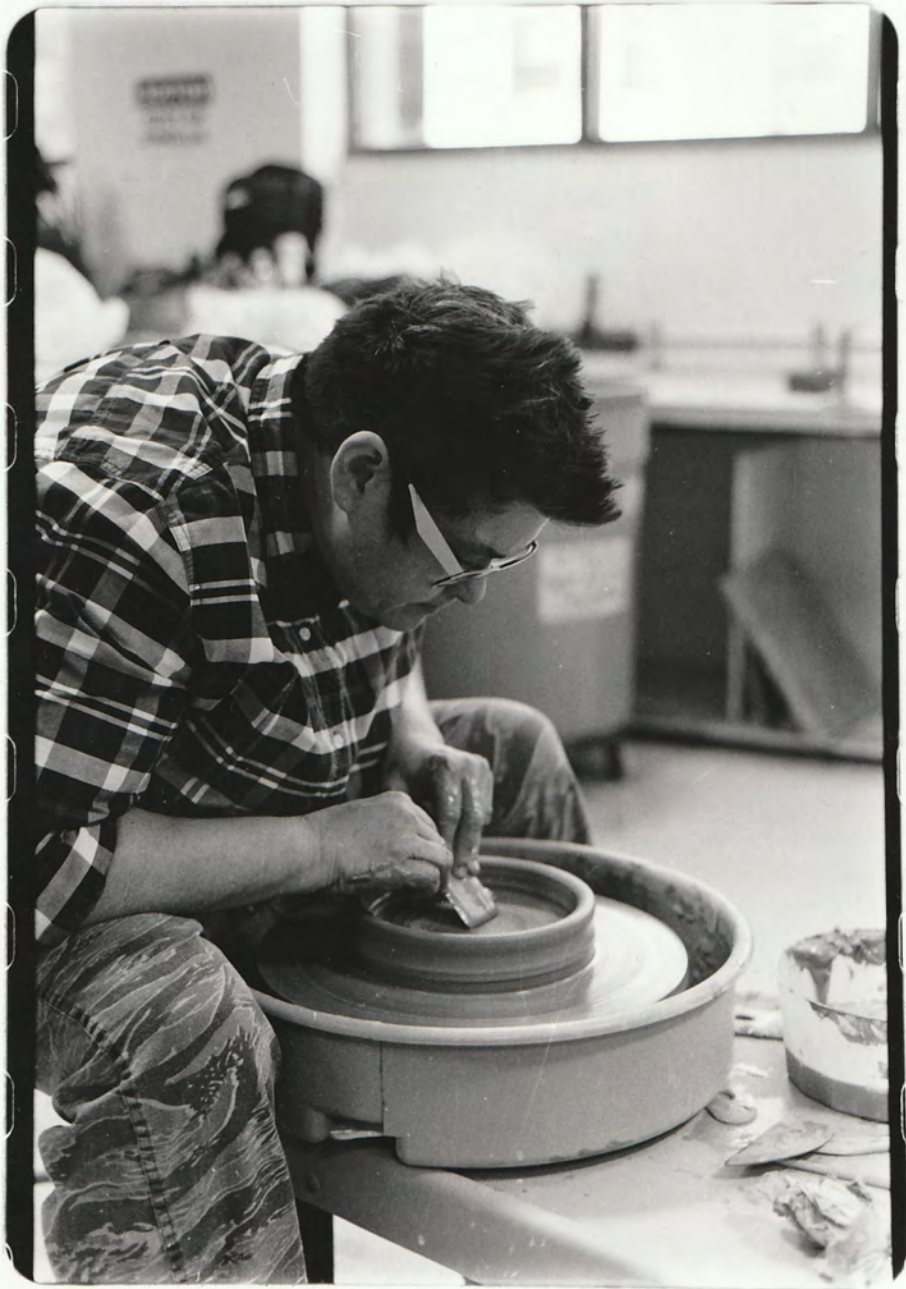


Ella Markovic **My Dad Is A Mermaid** (colored pencil on paper)



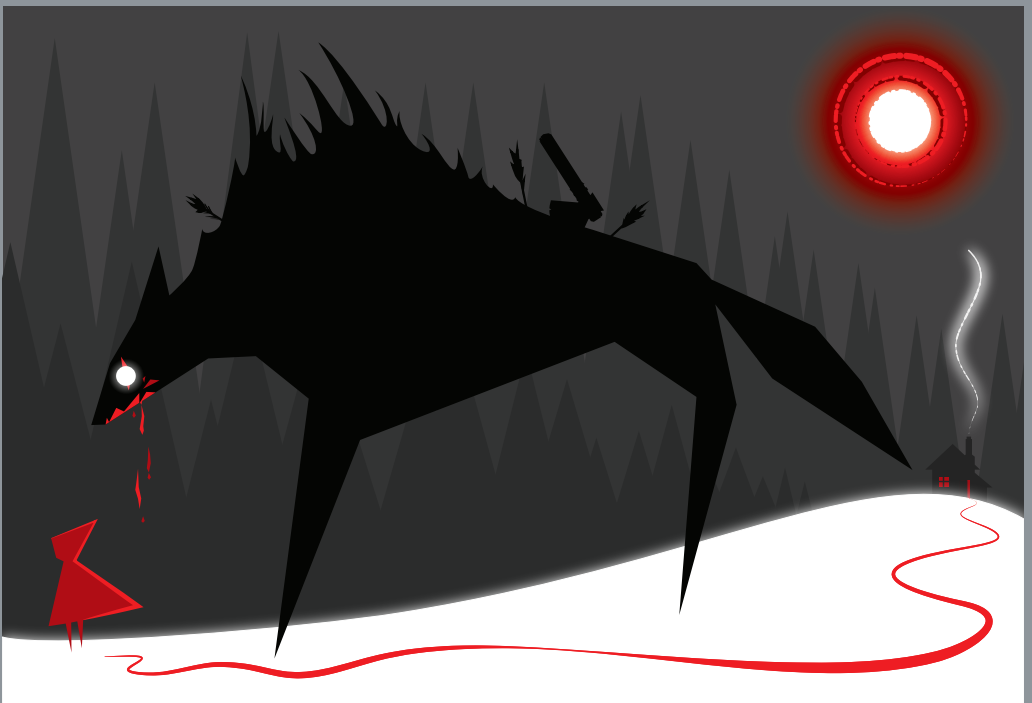
Nikhil Chandran **Red White and Blue** (digital photo)

Janet Alvarez **Jess** (film photo)





Brandon Bacon **Yamaiyah** (film photo)



Marina Johnson **Red** (digital illustration)



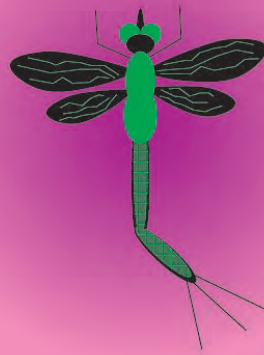
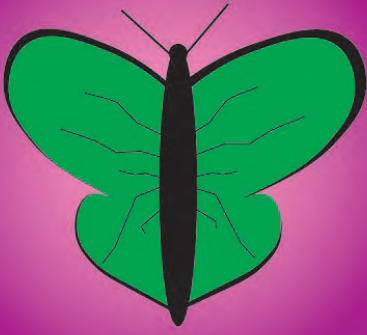
Rosana Faieta **Happy Peacock** (wire sculpture)

Rosana Faieta **Happy Peacock** (wire sculpture)



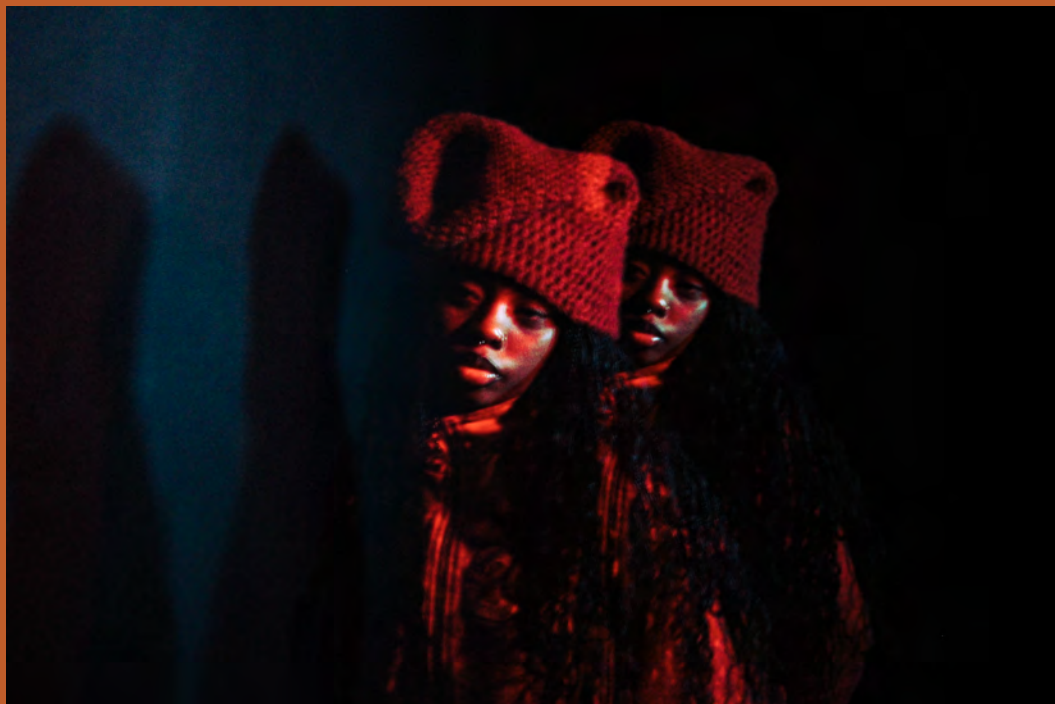


Yevgeniya Lapik **Thinking Of Dave On A Windy Day** (digital painting)





NILAM Taché Art **The Love of God** (mixed media)



Brandon Bacon **Crybaby Capricorn** (photography)



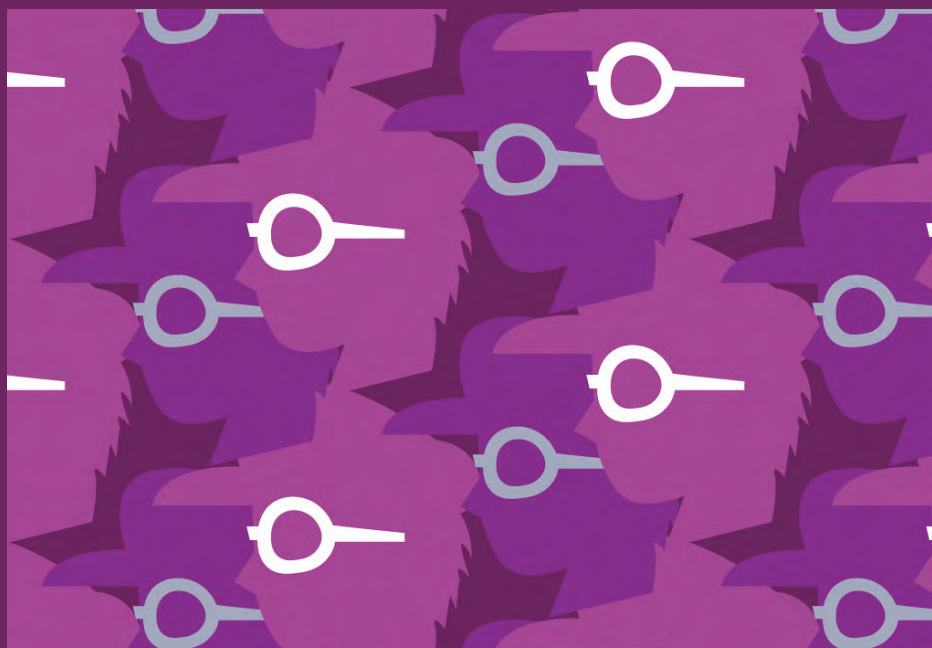
Ricardo Ortiz-Cisneros **Eclipse** (digital pattern)



Keath Aisley Avenido **Convenience** (ceramics)



Ella Markovic **Untitled** (colored pencil on paper)





Alex Brown **We Stand** (digital composition)

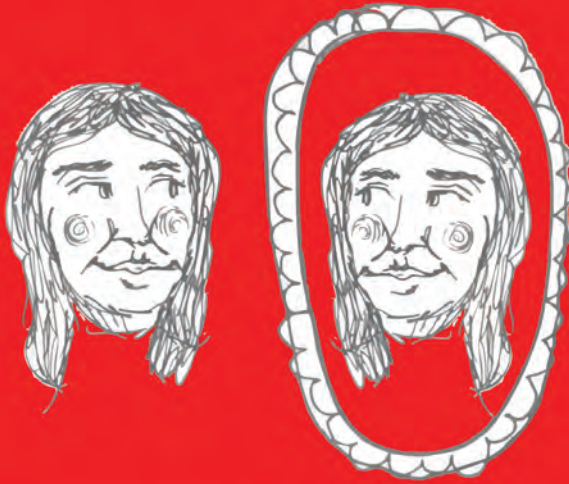


Amelia Motino **Microscope** (3D / Maya)



Luke Jones **Aladar – The Iguanodon** (ceramics)

UNTIL
i am happy with myself



can make me happy

NOTHING



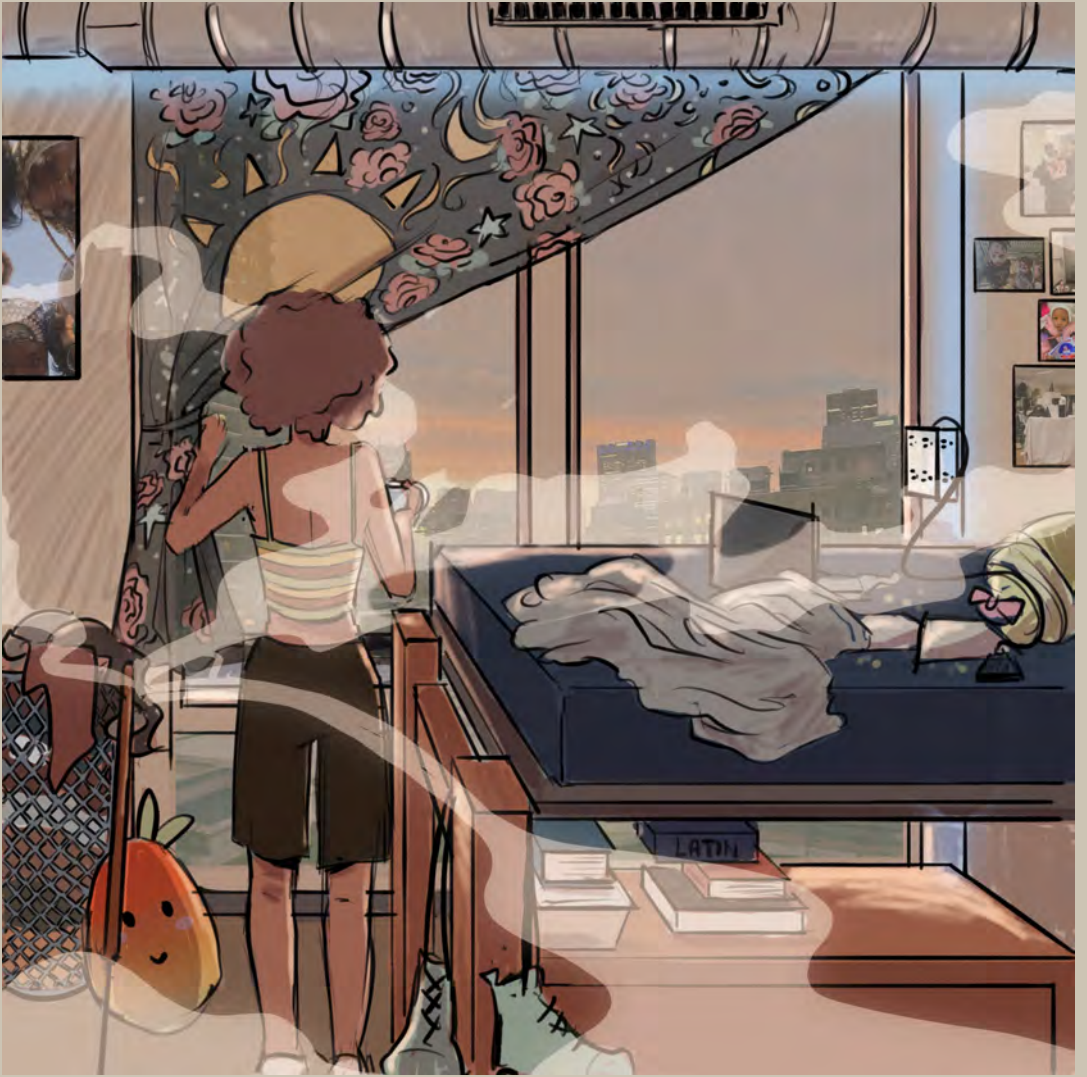
Nikhil Chandran **Gateway Arch** (Digital Photo)







Brian Perniciaro **Nia** (photography)



Semira Eason **Wabash** (Digital Illustration)



Lilliana Loye **Portal** (Digital Illustration)

Rosana Faieta **Woman in Peace** (stone sculpture)



Arianna Calderon **Dinner** (3D digital rendering Maya)



Mía Espinoza **Spring** (digital photo)



Brian Perniciaro **The Lion** (photography)

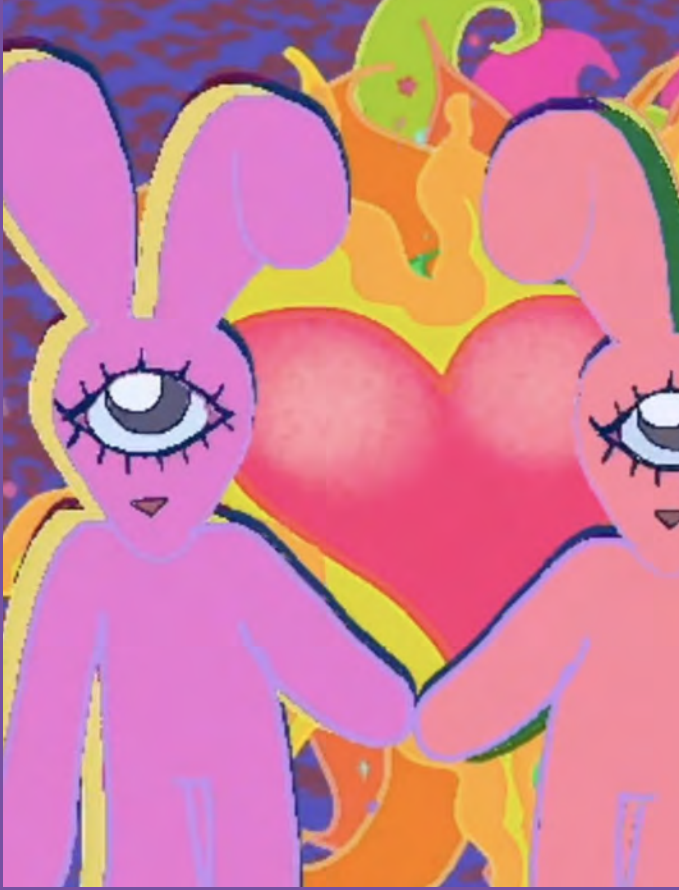
Olivia Esquivel **Pup** (colored pencils on paper)



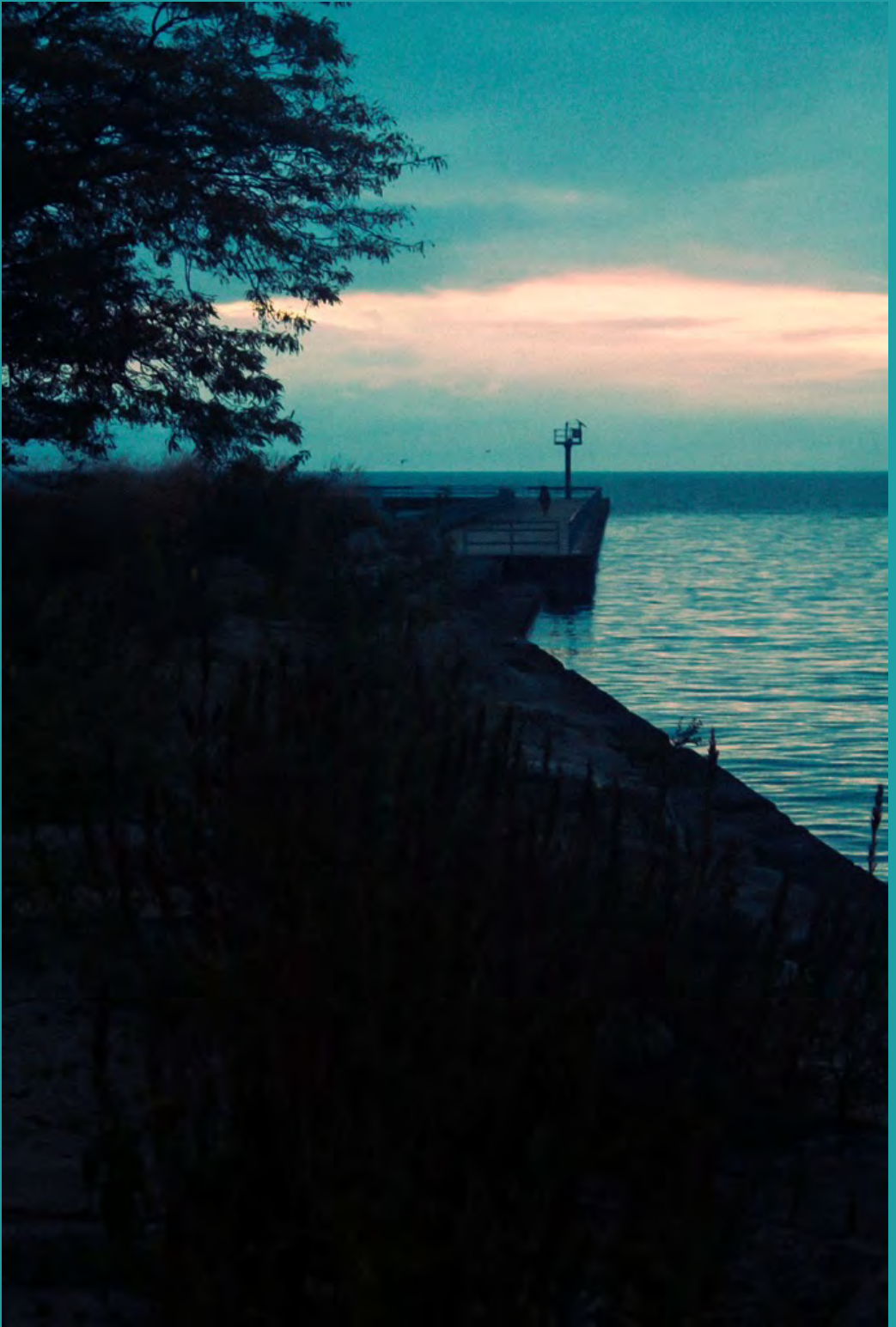


Mia Espinoza **My Dream** (charcoal on paper)





Guillermo Hernandez **Digital Escape** (video)



Terry Jones **Lake Sunrise** (digital photo)





Laura Restrepo **COSMOCARDS** (digital illustration)



Jamila Valiyeva **Digital Self Portrait** (digital illustration)





Kayla Kruczek **Life in Chicago** (digital collage)



Jittaun Taylor **Jah & Jittaun** (digital illustration)

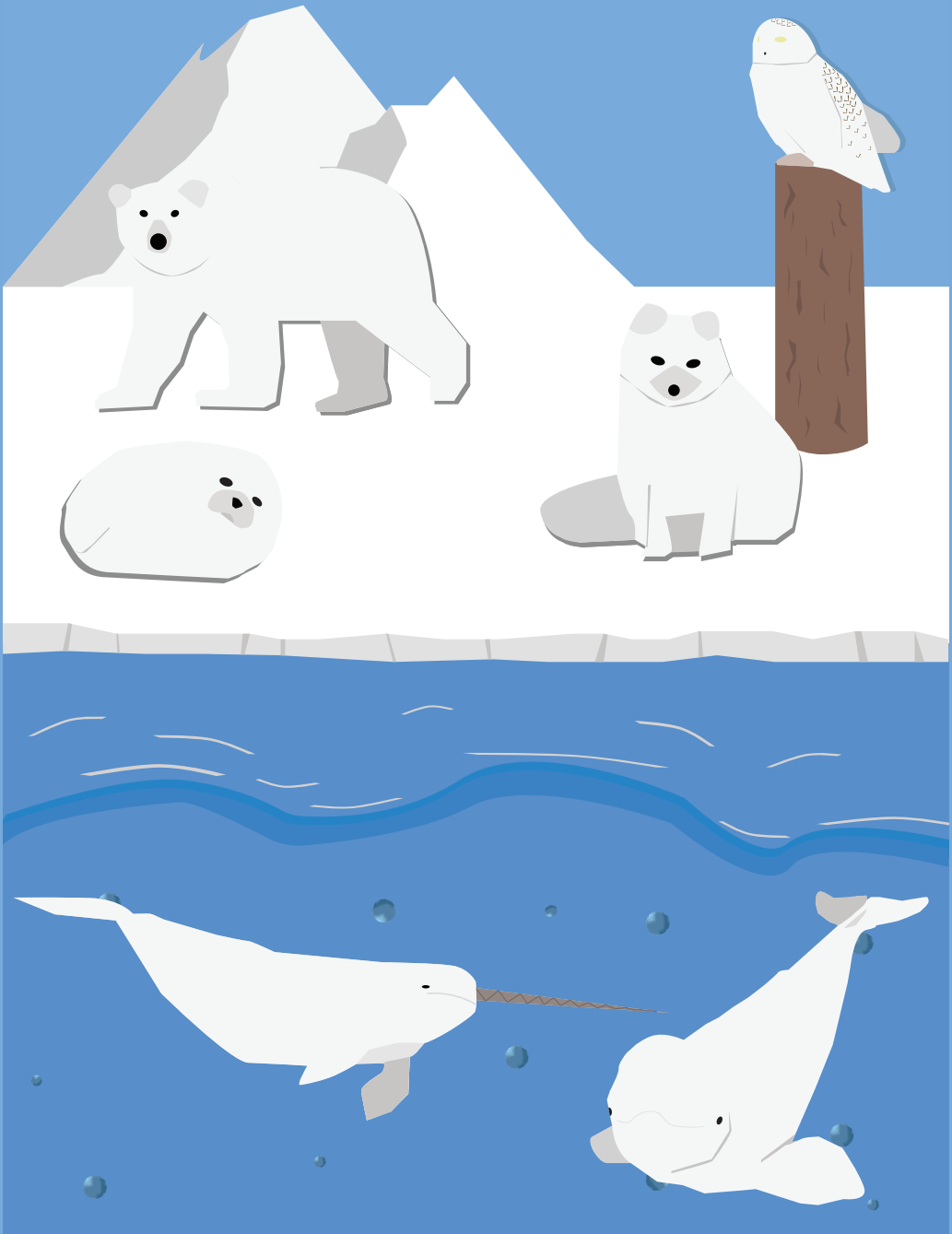


Ella Markovic **Lesbians** (colored pencil on paper)



Guillermo Hernandez **Guillermo's Wacky World** (digital illustration)





Arianna Calderon **Arctic Animals** (digital illustration)





Edgar Meza **Heaven's Symphony** (film photography)



AJ Johnson **Cradle** (digital photo)



Semira Eason **Prom** (digital illustration)