

TRANSFORMATION



SPRING
2025

ABOUT BODECKER'S SKILL BUILDING COHORTS

We believe that true growth unfolds over time. That's why, for the second year, we offered our **Skill Building Cohorts**—a space where students connected with mentors and peers throughout the school year, building skills and community along the way.

This year, we continued with three cohorts—small, dedicated groups of emerging student artists—who met twice a month to create, learn, and collaborate. Each cohort had a unique focus, allowing students to immerse themselves in a specific artistic discipline. Participants were part of one of the following:

WORDS

Exploring the craft of writing through daily practices, poetry, short stories, and the publishing process.

SOUNDS

Diving into music and audio engineering, mastering signal flow, equipment setup, essential tools, and studio etiquette.

VISUALS

Developing fine art skills with an emphasis on drawing techniques, color theory, and portfolio building.

As a culmination of this journey, students showcased their work in this annual **anthology**, a collection that celebrates their creative growth and artistic exploration. Now in its second year, this program was more than just a learning experience—it was a chance to experiment, evolve, and share their voices with the world.

BODECKER
FOUNDATION'S
MISSION

**TO SPARK YOUNG PEOPLE TO REALIZE THEIR
CREATIVE POWER THROUGH IMMERSIVE
LEARNING EXPERIENCES.**

INTRODUCTION BY TANYA CERDA

At Bodecker Foundation, we are dedicated to empowering young people to discover their creative potential through immersive learning experiences. Our goal is to nurture their artistic expression by providing a safe, supportive space where they can grow, connect, and find a sense of belonging within their community and themselves.

This year, we are thrilled to present our annual anthology, centered around the theme of **Transformation**. Transformation is about embracing change, evolving perspectives, and finding beauty in the process of becoming. It's about the moments that shift us—visually, emotionally, and audibly—and the ways in which art fuels our personal and collective growth. Let this theme inspire you to explore new creative paths, redefine your style, and seek out the stories, sounds, and visuals that move you.

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Tanya Cerda". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.



OUR TEAM

TANYA CERDA

**CO-FOUNDER,
TRUSTEE + PROGRAM DIRECTOR**



Tanya Cerda is the Co-founder and Trustee of the N M Bodecker Creative Foundation and Founder and Board Chair of Sandy Bodecker Project, Inc. An interdisciplinary BIPOC artist, she draws from her vibrant identity and cultural heritage to foster diverse, inclusive spaces. A graduate of Otis College of Art and Design, Tanya has over 15 years of experience in fashion, entertainment, and advertising, leveraging art and media to shape narratives and drive social change.

TONY OZIER

**STUDIO
ENGINEER + MANAGER**



Tony Ozier is a multi-instrumentalist, producer, recording engineer, and music educator. He is passionate about bringing music production and studio engineering education to underserved communities and co-founded Beats | Lyrics | Leaders, which has brought workshops throughout the West Coast for over 10 years. He is the co-founder of the Portland Black Music Expo and the bandleader of the Doo Doo Funk All-Stars. He holds a degree in Recording Arts from Full Sail University in Orlando, FL.

JORDAN SOUZA

**YOUTH PROGRAMS
COORDINATOR**



Jordan Souza is an educator, writer, and editor passionate about propelling young voices. Jordan earned her BA in Sociology and her MA in Teaching and taught high school English for ten years. Simultaneously, she co-founded and edited Lilun Magazine, which published the work of 15-21 year old writers. After ten years in the classroom, Jordan pivoted towards working with youth outside of school and pursuing her writing. When Jordan is not working with young people or writing, you'll most likely find her reading with a good cup of coffee in hand.

KYRA WATKINS

**VISUALS COHORT
INSTRUCTOR + MENTOR**



Kyra Watkins is an artist and muralist known for her work that combines portraiture with deep emotional narratives. Originally from Cincinnati, Ohio, Watkins has gained recognition for her community-centered art, often using portraiture to tell powerful stories. She has been involved in various public art projects. Her mural work often emphasizes connection, family, and remembrance, with a focus on human stories. Watkins also mentors youth in mural art and has collaborated with various community organizations.



SOUNDS COHORT

ABOUT THE SOUNDS COHORT

2024/25

In the SOUNDS cohort, led by Tony Ozier, a group of nine high school students—including musicians, audio engineers, DJs, and producers—immersed themselves in the fundamentals of recording, mixing, and music production. Through hands-on sessions, they explored the essential components of a professional studio environment, learning how sound travels through microphones, mixers, and digital audio workstations.

Throughout the program, students experimented with recording techniques, microphone placements, and layering sounds to craft original tracks. They gained practical experience in mixing and effects processing, applying EQ, compression, and reverb to enhance their recordings. Collaboration was at the heart of the cohort, as students worked together to create unique compositions, refine their creative processes, and push the boundaries of their musical abilities.

**SCAN THE QR
CODE TO HEAR
THEIR RECORDINGS**



MEET THE SOUNDS COHORT

Kalil Wolf

Bella Barnett, whose artist name is dr bjb, is a songwriter, producer, and multimedia artist who focuses on drum and bass, ambient, and indietronica throughout her works. In the past 4 years she has dropped 4 albums. She has experience with fl studio, and has been learning the bass guitar for 8 years. When not producing she is either writing material or working on developing an original video game with a homemade sound track.

Bogazzi (Massimo Bogazzi) is a pianist and music producer specializing in Hip-hop and jazz. Driven by a deep curiosity and love for listening to music, he draws inspiration from a wide range of sounds. Using Ableton as his main tool, Bogazzi crafts soundscapes that reflect his passion for experimentation and creativity.

Ultrasmith (Jaylen Smith) is an artist and video producer. He is inspired by Freddie Dredd, DtD, and Riovaz. You can find him hanging with friends and family, listening to music, and working out.

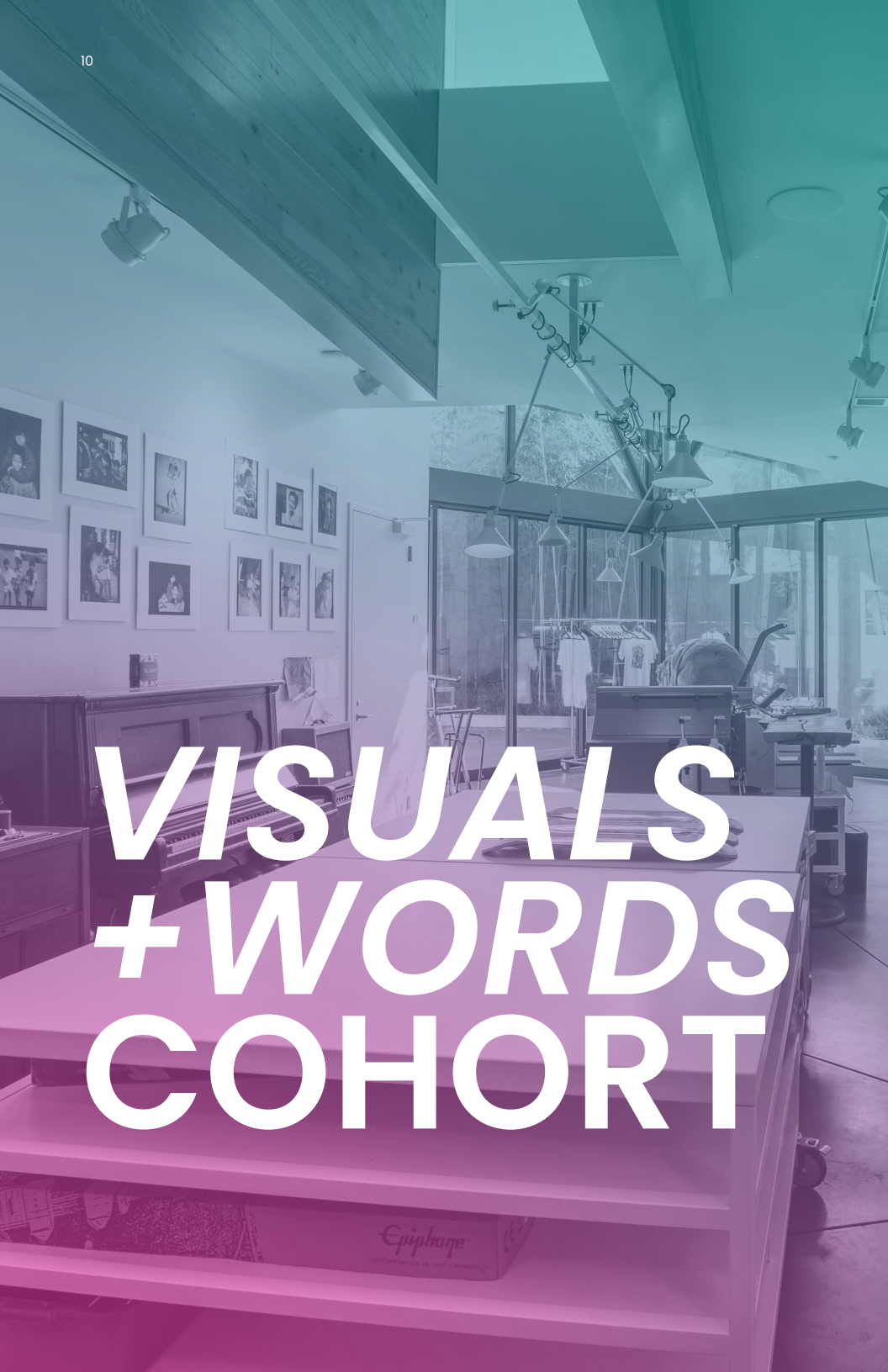
Faeza (Liv Hasek) is a dj and artist who loves electronic and experimental music. In general she is inspired by things with a heavy contrast. Whether it is heavy drum beats with soft vocals or light visuals contrasted by dark motifs, she loves to bring dichotomy into her music and creative outlets. Additionally recently she is inspired by artists such as Snow Strippers, Kunt Fetish, Cowgirl Clue, and Cortisa Star. When not mixing tracks together, Liv enjoys putting together cool outfits and curating her personal style as well as hanging out with friends and dancing to music.

n4no (aka Felix Souza) is an experimental creative artist who blends a mixture of deep, rumbly bass and synthy chords followed with trippy vocals. n4no grew up on futuristic sounds like Daft Punk and ODESZA and underground rap like Duwap Kaine, Bladee, and Nettspend. When he's not working with Tony at Bodecker, he's at home making the most of his home studio setup, always trying new things and creative new soundscapes.

Ruskii, born as Anaru Jackson on May 6, 2009, in Portland, Oregon, is a 15-year-old producer, DJ, and artist. Raised in the city, he started making music at just 5 years old, teaching himself how to sample, produce, and design his own album art. Inspired by artists like Tyler, the Creator, Ruskii built his creative world from scratch, focusing on authenticity and raw expression. As a teenager, he's DJed events across Portland, worked with local organizations, and launched his own radio show. His music blends emotion, samples, and energy, reflecting his personal journey and vision. Ruskii is currently working on his first album, set to release in Summer 2025.

Ryan Muir is an audio engineer who enjoys listening to music and seeing/hearing the process of songs come together. She likes trying to figure out her style and experimenting with new sound. Ryan enjoys learning more and more about beat making and being surrounded by talented people to help her in areas she might have less experience in.

Sydney is a guitar player and singer song-writer who specializes in slower indie/contemporary music and has recently started recording more indie-rock style songs as well. Inspired by artists like Jeff Buckley, The Sundays and Big Thief to Sonic Youth and Jets to Brazil, she hopes to expand her musical horizons constantly. Outside of the Bodecker studio, she enjoys adventuring outdoors, exploring new art, and jamming out with friends.



VISUALS + WORDS COHORT

AMEIA WERGELAND

A CRIMSON FOREST (森红)

Ameia Wergeland is a self taught artist in Portland, Oregon who specializes in portraiture and impressionism. He is inspired by his artistic heritage ranging from his Chinese Grandmother, a watercolor painter; maternal Grandfather, an oil painter; and fraternal Ojibwe Grandfather, a beadworker. Ameia has drawn for 13 years, more recently focusing on the portrayal of his multiracial identity. He's explored

human gesture and dynamic form as a student of the Bodecker Foundation 2024-2025 visual cohort. "A Crimson Forest (森红)" describes Ameia's personal growth and his natural transformation along his life by reaching his branches upward to blossom into the future. This painting visualizes Ameia's faith in change and a new approach to living.



ARI ROMERO

KINEMATICS

Ari Romero is a writer and storyteller who obsesses over language, and who drags his characters through whatever brutal events that might entail. He has written short stories that have been part of an anthology, and looks forward to getting more of his work out into the world. Outside of writing, he likes to stay up late playing board games with friends and daydreams about taking a GAP year road trip around the US.

Right before the rain comes, you sit by the campfire, and roast marshmallows.
The deep orange coals sending sparks curling
Into the night sky.

For it feels like that night will never see dawn.
But as the stories run dry, and the kindling becomes just
twigs and light-green moss.
You realize.

Life is too short to be kindled into embers.
It is too short to think, to linger, to be anywhere but here.
Time isn't changing pace.

So.
When the last piece of chocolate is plucked from the wrapper
And graham cracker crumbs collect in the dirt.
You need to move.

Because when the first droplets of rain begin to fall from the sky,
And the air smells like thunder.
The clouds ripe to soak into the ground.
You'll be moving too fast to care.

Our minds ear-splitting scream pierces the fog,
But wait...
If only I was older. I could do better.
If only I was smarter. I could do better.
If only I was inspired. Then I could be more.
You try to live years ahead, but
In ten
You're grasping at grains of sand
The shards of the hourglass slipping through your fingers.
The stench of a dream cast into the mud seeping through your fragile skin,
life dripping from the surface,
And pooling on the floor.

But reckoning with mortality is a far away mirage,
When life is a blur outside your car window
Worrying about being enough is barely even a speck caught in the grill.

Let your feet rip the morning rain from the pavement.
Strip away the wax of the candle and toss it into the hearth.
Let it's wiry hand curl up at the touch of onrushing smoke,
Better a flare
Then a quiet ember,
Slowly fading,
To ash.
You might not be able to outrun the soon-approaching downpour.
But you're moving too fast to care.

CORINA BEVANS

3-D **KNITTED VEST**

Corina Bevans is a designer based in Oregon with a passion for product design and sustainability. With experience in costume design, she has also developed skills in operating various 3D knitting machines. She is pursuing higher education in design, having been accepted into multiple colleges and awarded scholarships. Away from sewing machines, Corina enjoys experimenting in Adobe Illustrator or trying new bread recipes.

3D Knitted Vest represents Corina's personal transformation through 3D knitwear. The design reflects adaptability, shaped by the trial-and-error of her creative process and the use of available yarn colors. Through this piece, she explores the connection between design and personal growth.



BEATRICE LIEBRECHT

EVOLVING TOGETHER

Beatrice Liebrecht is a journalist and memoirist who enjoys exploring the human condition, and is originally from San Francisco. She has written articles about people and missions she believes in that have been published online and in local and school newspapers. Beatrice hopes to continue journalism and communication studies in higher education, and dreams of making at least one film in her career. When not writing, she enjoys watching films, listening to music, working out, and spending time in nature.



The Cow Palace, a Daly City staple that was originally intended for showcasing livestock and agricultural expertise, became a destination for our annual Christmas celebration as young ones. The Dickens fair was nearly a renaissance festival, instead, we were inside the town of A Christmas Carol, in 1800's Germany. We would traverse the maze of the palace, hay on the ground and braids and ribbons woven into our hair. San Francisco, really the whole Golden State, never had distinct seasons, so the Dickens fair would act as our white Christmas miracle. Every time we attended we found more things we wanted to try, experiences we would not be able to find again; fencing, face painting, dances in fancy, stunning dresses. Strangely, not too long ago we sat together through a rendition of A Christmas Carol, and I could not help but reminisce on the fair that aided Christmas in becoming my absolute favorite holiday, and the immense gratefulness I have for our friendship.

Lydia Melton and Beatrice Liebrecht, blonde and brunette, Bay Area natives, the best of friends, and even for a short while, neighbors. From 2009 to 2013, I lived with my papa in the apartment across the hallway from Lydia and her family, the Meltons, and we were the closest in proximity we've ever been in our nearly eighteen years of affinity. Those four years were not the easiest for my papa, and we ultimately lost the apartment, a rare rent-controlled two-bedroom in a wonderful neighborhood, but it never meant the end of our connection, and I still see that apartment regularly on my visits back home. Our most recent visit was for the new year; 2025. The year we would ultimately graduate high school, attend our freshman year of college, and start our years of young adulthood. While we were not able to keep our eyes open for the ball drop,

we started the year off right, together, on Oak St., a place I know we can both call home.

Although I was no longer across the hall, my mama's apartment on Masonic Avenue was close enough, and we always found a way to go on adventures. The Meltons had started to attend the Religious Society of Friends or Quakers and invited me to help with a food pantry for those struggling in the community. I of course happily obliged, excited to do something good and spend time with some of my favorite people. Soon enough I became more involved, accompanying the Meltons whenever our schedules would allow. We were too rowdy and young to sit in the silence of expectant waiting, so we would head to the nursery to help with the younger kids, and after we'd talk with various people who found themselves in the Meeting House. I don't quite remember why we stopped attending, but as I was raised with no religious affiliation, being a spectator to the Quakers instigated my interest in theology that's followed me throughout my education and creative endeavors, and I can only thank the Meltons for inviting me.

Before Lydia and I were even an idea to our parents, they met each other and became good friends, despite their inherent differences. My papa, Jeremiah, was working at a skate shop in the city, DLX, and started a conversation with a beautiful woman, Natasha, about the independent stage nine trucks she was picking up as a gift and she mentioned he might get along with her husband Josh. Just a week later Natasha paraded in the whole family, Josh, his brother Micah, and his wife Carrie. Soon enough they all met my mama, Carmen Sanches. Not too long after, Carmen and Carrie became pregnant in close proximity. I was first, on January 29th, 2007, and just six months later, Lydia was born on June 12th. Eventually, Josh and Natasha moved away, and then Josh could never come back to visit, and us girls unfortunately never had the pleasure of meeting him, but his memory carries on always.

There are hundreds of memories that Lydia and I cannot recall as we were too young, but our parents can, and that is another beauty of our abundant friendship. It is not only a gift to us, but to them as well. While our parents each only had one daughter, they have had the pleasure of seeing the two of us grow into our respective potentials as young adults, and there is still so much ahead of us. As the years on Oak were demanding, and the years following up until my papa's sobriety combined with my mama's hectic work schedule, the Meltons became my stability. As we began

middle school, papa had moved to Sacramento, and mama told me we were going to move to Portland, Oregon.

I was heartbroken, I had just started at a new school I adored, and I was making so many friends and great memories. It felt like my life was actually beginning, and hysterically I told papa the news. Soon enough paperwork was delivered to the apartment on Masonic Avenue, and a custody battle began. My mama won, and we packed up our beautiful three-bedroom flat in the heart of the city. I didn't want to leave, I was unsure if any of my friends would care enough to stay in contact, but merely six months after our arrival in Oregon, the pandemic began and we all turned to FaceTime to socialize. This was a strange time for the two of us, and I believe we fell into some petty argument that resulted in some time apart from speaking, but we both never stopped caring. These arguments I now look back on and ponder, as they seem so immature and unrealistic, but I also realize that we've always contended like sisters, we still do.

In August of 2024, I had the pleasure of bringing Lydia on a family trip to Oahu, Hawaii. There we learned much about each other and had one of the hardest but also best trips of our lives. As we live nearly 900 miles apart now, spending time with each other is very far and few between, although we do our best to stay connected online. I would never hesitate to call Lydia my sister, so when my grandparents told me I could invite any friend I wanted, I knew immediately who it would be. Two only children who treat each other as siblings I've now learned is a recipe for hard truths, heartache, but also laughter and joy. We did all of those things, explored Honolulu in Havaianas and bikinis, swam with sea turtles and rainbow fish, and had one of the most beautiful vacations of our lives right before our senior year.

Our relationship is complex, sometimes it is harsh and sometimes it is completely glowing and golden like the sun. We have both gone through so many different eras of our lives, it is very interesting to see how we grow in our differing environments, and there is even more change for both of us in the future. I'm unsure what will happen, where we might end up, and who we will be surrounded with. Change has always frightened me but knowing I have a sister, a best friend, who will always be there for me for the rest of my life makes it so much easier.

On June 13th, 2007, around 11 a.m., I was introduced to one of my favorite people, Lydia Melton who was just one day old.

EVELYN KIRTLEY FILIPO

PROZAC

Evelyn Kirtley Filipo is a multimedia artist based in Portland, Oregon. She enjoys using art as a way to capture memories and emotions. Recently, she received a regional honorable mention in painting from the 2025 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. Her colored pencil illustration, "Prozac," focuses on the uncomfortable nature of transformations and change, even good ones. When Evelyn isn't drawing, she loves learning, eating, and discussing books.



BRIXTON FAIRMAN

*POSSIBLE RESPONSES
TO "WHERE DO YOU SEE
YOURSELF IN TEN YEARS?"*

Brixton Fairman is a writer who tends to explore the topics of change, stress, and growing as people ourselves. They've written numerous collections of poetry all following the theme of growth. When not writing they enjoy dancing, watching movies, and reading.

I see myself as a 25 year old with everything worked out, as an educated person with a steady job, A person reading all those letters I wrote to my future self when I was 10, A person who didn't fulfill much on those bucket lists included inside of those letters written to my future self.

As a procrastinator with a clean house

As a person obsessed with keeping that house clean reminiscent of
My freshman year bedroom.

Constantly reminded of the saying "Your room is a reflection of your mind"
A Person with a steady routine and a favorite breakfast,
Bagels with cream cheese, a cup of greek yogurt, an entire water bottle of tea.

As a person that can easily answer questions such as:
WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN TEN YEARS?

I quite honestly don't see myself in ten years, I see the things I love, I see
The color of my apartment, the brand of coffee I will keep in the back of
My cabinet for when family comes over, because I would rather throw up
Than drink a shot of that espresso, I see the tattoo I will have on my arm
Matching with my middle school best friends

I see myself as a person I don't know.

INDIYA HUTASANGKAS

IN ANOTHER LIFE

Indiya Hutasangkas is a multidisciplinary artist who explores her identity and experiences through her art. Indiya has received two silver keys from the Scholastic Art Awards and is currently in the Bodecker Foundation's 2024-25 visual cohort. "In Another Life" symbolizes her transformation from childhood to her current understanding of herself. It signifies how people are constantly transforming and becoming new versions of themselves. She believes it's important to keep in touch with her roots while living in America.



EMMA YORK

RAINY SEASON

Emma York is a poet who specializes in confessional tone poems and is dabbling in performance. She tends to focus on theme, tone, and emotion, and is inspired by the strong emotions evoked by her everyday life. When she is not writing her own poetry, she performs others' at speech and debate tournaments around the Portland Metro area.

3/9/22: Daylight filters through my gauzy curtains as I pad up to the coffee machine and press the button to brew.

Warmth from the cup bleeds into the room.

Breathe. Blink back the dissociation.

Grab the cup with shaking fingers, and slide down to the living room. It burns into the top layer of my skin. The coffee burns down my throat.

It burns into my stomach, and I force down the bile. I'm healing.

I open my computer and log onto the software my job uses to monitor

My coding. The rain taps and taps and taps and taps onward against the roof 3/13/22: I'm healing.

I strap the rain boots onto my feet and contemplate a walk All of the websites say I it would fix me, but I stare out at the wall of water standing sentinel at the other end of my glass backdoor. I swallow.

Take three breaths in and out.

I take the boots off and retreat back into my shadowed living room.

It's dark and quiet, like a cave, and for a second, I am deeply, deeply afraid of slipping back into my lonely life.

3/15/22: The rain keeps pouring. I sit, in my casket, in my hollow, empty riverbed. My fingers are stiff and brittle on the keyboard, flashing my eyes, tired, with white light. I'm healing. I'm healing. I'm healing.

I tap tap tap against the keyboard. My breaths quicken and slow and quicken and slow as I ride the wave of my sadness.

The room is so, so, so dark.

THREE/HOURS/LATER: I jolt awake like a live wire. I can't see. My heated blanket gone cold, the cup of hot chocolate I couldn't bring myself to finish lukewarm, with a fly drowned and floating on the top. My heart won't stop beating. It punches the inside of my throat, my pulse, and rises sickness in my stomach. God no, I can't breathe. There are tears in my eyes and energy racing up and down and up and down and up and down my arms. I curl up under the covers-my weighted blanket pressing the energy somewhere deep and unreachable in me. I try desperately to fall asleep.

It doesn't work. I sit up and rub the sleep from my unseeing eyes. I stumble down to the light switch and flick it on and off a couple of times. The light still doesn't turn on. My heart beats faster when exposed to the open air, slamming against the outside like it's trying to escape. I stumble out of my tiny bedroom and to the backdoor that swings into the back garden. I press my hands against the glass, fogging it up. The caged animal in me writhes for the fresh air of the outside, and before my mind can stop me, I am

slipping out the door, and into the downpour. I sink to my knees in the dirt and feel the water needle holes into my shoulders through my sleep clothes. It is bliss.

--/--/--: The sickness descends like the moon. Omnipresent.

Somehow, I drag myself to the bed and curl up under my weighted blanket. The next day, I start coughing, and the fever floods me completely. The rain is falling and falling and falling. I can hear it from the window above my bed. I lay in the bed until I forgot how I got there. --/--/--: I blink my eyes open. There is nothing. It is dark, and it's raining, and I can't make what I'm experiencing fit into the stencil of my expectations. The window is open. I must have opened it, because everything littered around my fever-hot bed is the same. The wrappers still falling in their dizzying spiral pattern around me.

The rain pours in and fills my room like it's a submarine, capsizing.

--/--/--: You know,

I used to sit in the cold house while they withered away, and it rained, and the rain filled me. I didn't eat, I just sat until I could feel something fizzing in the corner of my mind. I thought it was exhaustion, but it was waiting for the rain. And the rain made it sing. I whisper into the empty dark, shivering under the covers, drenched. Thank You thankyou thankyou thankyou. I cough up more rainwater onto my bedroom carpet. The rain filled the gap between my ribs their leaving wrenched open. And now all I feel is cold.

4/2/22: They found me in my room. Red and blue lights eat the starlight. I am foisted onto a stretcher. Their hands are scorching, dry, deeply and intimately uncomfortable. The lights are hot on my skin and the smell of antiseptic burns my tongue when I try to breathe. It should be a dead impulse. There is nothing in my lungs but rainwater. I choke on the air and cough up more mud. One of the nurses, a skinny young thing, presses a needle into my neck.

For a single second, the rain inside of me swallows me into sleep,

until the nurse presses something sharp in my lungs, and

She's trying to take the water away, and adrenaline pulls my consciousness, drenched, out of the water.

I scratch at her fingers until she lets go of me and I surge up, stumbling away. Outside, the rain is as heavy as I have ever seen it, like the heavens have opened and the ocean is pouring down to fill up the world. The rain covers me and buries me under the dirt; Down, down, down. I become nothing, happily.

JANIYA THOMPSON

CRANIAL PANIC ROOM

Janiya Thompson was born in Phoenix, Arizona. Growing up she was always passionate about art, and exploring various mediums and techniques. From crayons and markers to graphite and charcoal, she continues to allow her Identity as a young, Black, bisexual woman to shape her work. This piece, "Cranial Panic Room," was inspired by the tainting and transformation of your childhood state of mind, and how our trauma affects our vision of the past. Janiya remains committed to sharing her unique perspective and passion through her creations.



JAKE LUBIN

A SUMMER TO REMEMBER

Jake Lubin is a journalist, essayist, and spoken word storyteller, whose work explores themes of relationships, loss, and community. He has been a lifelong writer, a passion he hopes to pursue through a career in journalism. When he's not writing, Jake is likely playing soccer or tennis.

"He was a beautiful boy," you say.

Avoidance glues my eyes to the road.

I'm speeding down I-84 towards no particular destination. Driving for the sole purpose to just keep moving. Drake's "Passionfruit" plays out of the scratchy car speakers. I can't look at you. Not right now. Not while tears slowly cascade down my cheeks.

"Was." His mom found him dead in his room. I can imagine her shriek of horror when she opened his door. I can practically hear her buckled knees hit the floor, both hands covering her slack jaw. I cry because I miss the boy. I cry because I cannot fathom the pain felt by his mother. I cry because I know so many people that loved him. And I cry because yet another man chose to take his life.

My relationship of 'almosts' and 'in-passings' with him only made this even more confusing. I knew my pain was justified, that my tears, which were trained to be so conservatively shed, fell for a reason, yet I don't feel like it. All that was inside me was the cold twang of guilt reverberating continuously in my body like an overreaction, like a theft of someone else's tragedy.

We end up lying in the park on a cool blanket of grass. I give you my hoodie and we talk about all that is happening and all that we have. Luck never seemed to be on your side, yet your gratitude warmed my heart and I began to appreciate my life just as much as I mourned the death of another. The evening passed, and we had spent hours swapping stories side by side on the bumpy lawn.

We cried and laughed that night, finding an unbreakable bond in each other's company. While our fingers traced patterns on each other's hands, the song from the car played an unfortunate message in my head. "Don't pick up the pieces, just leave it for now, they keep falling apart."

I'm at his memorial. I nervously round a corner and step into the church and see the cast of my life story reflected back at me. The boy down the street who I used to ride bikes with. The girl who I once stopped from drunkenly collapsing down a flight of steep stairs. An old carpool group. That guy who I ran into that one time at pickup soccer. A friend of a friend. Characters from my past and present filled the pews and enveloped my vision, and I saw who loved him and I felt so pointedly out of place. I managed to stagger into a crowded pew. 15 boys sat where there was only meant to be 12, hip to hip, shoulder to shoulder, physically testing our masculine doctrine of separation and concealment.

The boy's mother speaks first, choking out her best memories with her son through tears, often pausing for what seemed like hours to feebly

attempt to recompose herself. As she speaks, I can feel eyes making their way to the ceiling; each chin pointed towards the heavens in one last act of defiance. Every pew was crammed, and every young man looked towards the sky, and every young man—surrounded to the touch by friends and family—mourned alone. We all silently agreed to look away, as if to give each other space to hide.

When the service ended, I signed his skateboard, threw up into a bag I found in my car, and drove away without saying goodbye to anyone.

I end up at , and sit alone watching the sunset, mulling over everything that happened. As I sit and think, two twin boys no older than eight years old run by me, pulling each other's shirts, and laughing so hard they're out of breath. They're youthful innocence—a part of me which was lost forever to the day's events—is intoxicating and contagious, and I can't help but crack a smile. Suddenly the woman yells the name written on the programme in my back pocket, and I whip my head around and stare in awe. She yells it again, and the twins stop wrestling, cocking their heads at their mother's call.

The boy lived on that day, carrying his name and free spirit into two lively twins, wide smiles permanently plastered across their faces, flooding my thoughts with a climactic realization of truth: you were so damn right.

He was a "beautiful boy," but he was more than that. He was the embodiment of everything that is right and wrong—all his good was met with a world of bad. His celebration of life put our divisions—our choice of separation—as young men on full display. His death brought us first-hand awareness to men's mental health, yet former classmates and friends claim they would rather kill themselves than do another English assignment.

You were right about so many things, but I will never forget how you taught me that changes start on the inside, that the values that dictate us are primarily personal. It is there where the real choice lies: Who do we let in to help shape those values? I am lucky to have let the boy in, to have let you in, and to have let so many others in, to where I am able to stand here today, face tragedy, and be grateful for my 16 years on this earth, while praying for many more to come.

JOSH OGANEZOV

UNTITLED

Working with numerous mediums and art forms, Josh Oganezov strives to make works that influence our today's society through the ever changing landscape of his life. With meaningful storytelling, he seeks to create work that inspires his viewers. Since age six, Josh has been passionate about animations and film and has commissioned art for the Ida B. Wells High School newspaper. He is a part of the 2024–2025 Bodecker Foundation Visual Cohort, and won a silver key award for his work titled, "Take A Step Back" in 2025. For this piece, Josh was inspired to portray how greed and consumerism changes an individual.



JOAQUIN SWANSON

*DEAREST
CHEMICALS*

Joaquin Swanson is a carbon-based life form. They write things, sometimes. The writing might even turn out to be good.

September 17, 3:50 AM

The serum is almost complete.

I suppose I should be feeling excited, or joyful, or at least relieved. But it's never enough, is it? The culmination of my life's work, so close at hand, barely elicits a mere emotion out of my hardened heart. And for what?

But that is, after all, what the serum is for.

Just need to add the sodium solution and heat.

Will update after administration. See you on the other side.

The final beaker bubbles gleefully as the fire writhes around it, filling its contents with new life. The stench of the chemicals fills the room, a permeating feeling, clouding out the presence of all else. But the woman does not mind. She adores it, even. To her, the encompassing fumes signify something much greater than the sum of its parts. The burn makes her feel alive. The love, the passion... of science.

The most passion I will ever feel-

She brushes the thought aside. This is no time to be troubled with her thoughts. Not when victory is so tantalizingly close at hand. And besides, after this works, she'll have plenty of time to figure those things out. Plenty of time. If this works.

This has to work this has to work this has to work

Her mind is screaming as she grasps her tongs and lifts the beaker off the flame. Her hands shake uncontrollably, making the colorful mixture inside swirl and churn. It almost seems alive, like an untamed beast. Trapped inside a prison of glass.

The woman gingerly places the beaker in a vat of cool water, and steps back as the hiss of rapidly evaporating liquid fills the room. The elixir settles into a warm shade of green. It seems less wild now, its demeanor more liken to that of a predator lying in wait.

Set me free-

The woman, the scientist, the doctor, would much rather ravenously swallow this serum than to carefully inject it. She needs it inside her. The results may be painful, or they may be freeing, but they will be a change. A change from this suffocating world, where she is seen but not heard and destined to die unfulfilled and unremarkable. Where the only joys she finds are in this cage of a laboratory, distracting herself with compounds and vials and

measurements. *Where the only one who cares is...*

As she prepares the syringe, her mind drifts to the thought of Ms. Gabriella. Her business consultant, and professional colleague for many years. A quite pleasant person, really. They go out for dinner every other Friday or so. Not to talk about patenting or licenses or whatever, they do that enough already, but just to... Enjoy each other's company? Strange, really, but Gabriella's been her closest friend for a long while. Not that there's much competition. What would she say, in a time like this?

"Don't overwork yourself! Everyone needs time off every once in a while." "I wish we could spend more time together. Maybe I could help in the lab?" "I miss you."

"Hard work always pays off, in the end."

Yes. That's exactly what she'd say.

Goward

Shut up.

Her nails, unclipped for many months, dig into the palms of her hands. They threaten to scratch open the surface of her too-thin skin, her weak exterior. This treacherous prison of flesh holds her dearly to whatever it desires. Flesh and mind. The heat coiling around the outside and the maddening spirals on the inside. It's all too much

SET ME FREE-

Hate hate hate hate hate she hates this, hates these layers upon layers of terrible pain and meaningless restrictions, this nightmare of derealization

Who am I doing this for?

Myself

Gabriella

She needs it. Her hand grasps wildly for the beaker to load the syringe with the dearest, *dearest* chemicals to plunge it inside herself to become something

New, unique, dangerous, passionate

Always with her

My dearest Gabriella-

Forever-

Dr. Harriet Jekyll plunges the needle into her body,

and feels every

last

drop

September 17, 4:00 AM

A few slight changes

ROMAN MAXFIELD

GORDON'S FIREPLACE SHOP

Roman Maxfield is a student from Portland, Oregon. He is currently a Sophomore, taking art classes both at Grant High School and at the Bodecker Visual Cohorts of 2024-2025. He has illustrated for online animation jams, school art shows, and other personal work. Wanting to go into a career focused either on animation or comics, he has put most of his efforts into practicing these skills. In his anthology painting, he demonstrates transformation by splitting Gordon's Fireplace Shop in two: the left side reflecting how it looked before it closed, and the right side showing the worn down and vandalized state it is in now.



LANIYAH SPIVEY

CLASSROOMS

LaNiyah Spivey is a freshman in high school with a deep love for writing, especially about childhood memories and experiences. Her passion for telling a story through writing allows her to capture the essence of nostalgia and emotion in her pieces. Outside of writing, she enjoys spending time with friends, immersing herself in music, and finding inspiration in the world around her.

Nothing felt quite like the hum of an elementary school classroom, the days were measured in snack breaks and recess, and the air always seemed to carry the scent of pencil shavings and construction paper. The weeks before winter break were the sweetest—movies flickering on the whiteboard, paper snowflakes taped to the windows, the promise of two whole weeks without spelling tests or times tables. School was a world of simple rhythms, friends were as easy to find as the next game of tag, as simple as sitting next to someone at lunch.

Then, the desks got smaller, or maybe you just got taller. Middle school was different. The magic of winter break still lingered, but the movies before dismissal felt a little less special, the snowflakes a little less charming. Tests weren't just spelling words now—they had essays, numbers that didn't add up as easily, the kind of questions that followed you home. And suddenly, friendships weren't as effortless. The lines between groups had started to form, invisible but firm. Sitting next to someone at lunch didn't mean you were friends anymore, and sometimes, finding the right table felt harder than any test.

High school arrived without ceremony, just a slow fading of what came before. School stopped being a

place where days were counted by recess and holidays; instead, it became a ticking clock, a countdown to something bigger, something uncertain. The movies before winter break were no longer a guarantee—sometimes, there was still work to do, exams to take. The desks weren't in neat rows anymore; they were wherever you ended up sitting, next to people who had been there all along or ones you barely knew. The days weren't as light, but in some ways, they felt more real. Making friends was still weird too. People had settled into their circles, their patterns. It wasn't impossible, but it wasn't simple either.

Somewhere in between it all, the walls of the school changed, but so did the way you walked through them. The same hallways that once felt enormous in third grade seemed smaller by freshman year, just imagine senior year. And yet, for all that had shifted, for all that had been outgrown, there were still moments—tiny echoes of what once was. The whisper of laughter in a classroom. The feeling of a Friday afternoon. The way the air still seemed lighter before winter break, even if there wasn't a movie playing anymore.

SABRINA KAY FOTINAKIS JÁUREGUI

THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

Born in Portland OR, Sabrina has always been interested in the arts field. She is passionate about learning languages, playing cello and is constantly drawing in her sketchbooks. Currently, Sabrina is working on storyboarding and character design for a potential future in the animation industry. When thinking about the ways she has changed as a person,

it most often leads her to a point in her life where she has experienced grief. "The 5 Stages of Grief" are a time of self reflection, where we learn from the mistakes or misfortunes in our lives which can lead us to become new person. She chooses to portray this with the expressiveness of the eyes paired with the colors transitioning from one emotion to the next.



MIRI CARPENTER

POMPEII

Miri Carpenter is storyteller and fiction writer born and raised in Portland, Oregon who enjoys writing short stories and longer form fiction. She finds inspiration in the everyday things she experiences like plants, buildings, street art, and people she sees on the bus as well as music like The Portland Cello Project, The Lumineers, and Jason Isabel. When not writing you can find her playing basketball, running, binging something on Netflix or beating her family at Mario Karts.

The children of the mountain live and die in her shadow. The youngest play at her feet, running the streets of the stone city she built for them, while the more grown toil away in the hot sun, waiting until she plucks the sun from the sky and drags it down behind her pointed crown, freeing them from the harsh light.

Even after they take their final breath, the mountain cares for her children. She buries them beneath her breast, laying their delicate bones under a blanket of soft dirt. She cares for their wayward souls, letting their delicate bodies melt into her soft soil, sprouting into new trees and shrubs to feed their siblings.

She watches over them tirelessly. When drought runs the rivers dry, she cracks open her rocky surface to pour forth crystal cold ambrosia to satiate her precious children. When the game flees south to escape the mountain's constant rumbling, she feeds them olives grown from the fertile soul of her flesh. And when their houses of wood rot and crumble she lends them her body to build homes strong enough to weather any storm.

The children of the mountain take all that she gives them, striping her olive trees bare, splitting her skin to widen their icy streams, and building their homes into her very bones. But she gives it all willingly.

She is the mother, the mountain, and they are her children. But as all children, they are wooed by the promise of greater things and greener grasses than the rough yellow blades that prick through the patches of dirt scattered about the mountain's stony slopes.

Her children build out and away from her, finding more delight in the

soft waves of the sea and towering trees of the woods, nothing like the small streams and stout olive trees of the mountain. She tries desperately to keep them, shaking and rumbling as they pack their things, crying out for them with plumes of dark smoke as they leave from under her nurturing shadow. But her calls go unanswered, only serving to scare her children further away.

The rage burns beneath her thin crust, roiling within her as the children she worked so hard to protect, spread their wings. The anger begins to spew from her maw, tuning the sky a sickly grey. In her pain she bleeds blistering blood over the land, raining the hellfire of a mother's wrath down upon the children who dare to forget her blessings. She moves with the fury of a long dormant volcano, burying her precious children beneath her rage.

When the cloud of smoke and ash finally settles in a layer over the blackened earth and her blood cools into dark rivulets along her body there is nothing left. The olive trees burned and the city of stone returned to the rubble of its origin. All that remains is the mountain and her children.

She settles into the bed of ash she has laid over the land, comfortable in the knowledge that she has completed her motherly duty. She has protected her children. Her children of the mountain, born to live and die beneath her.

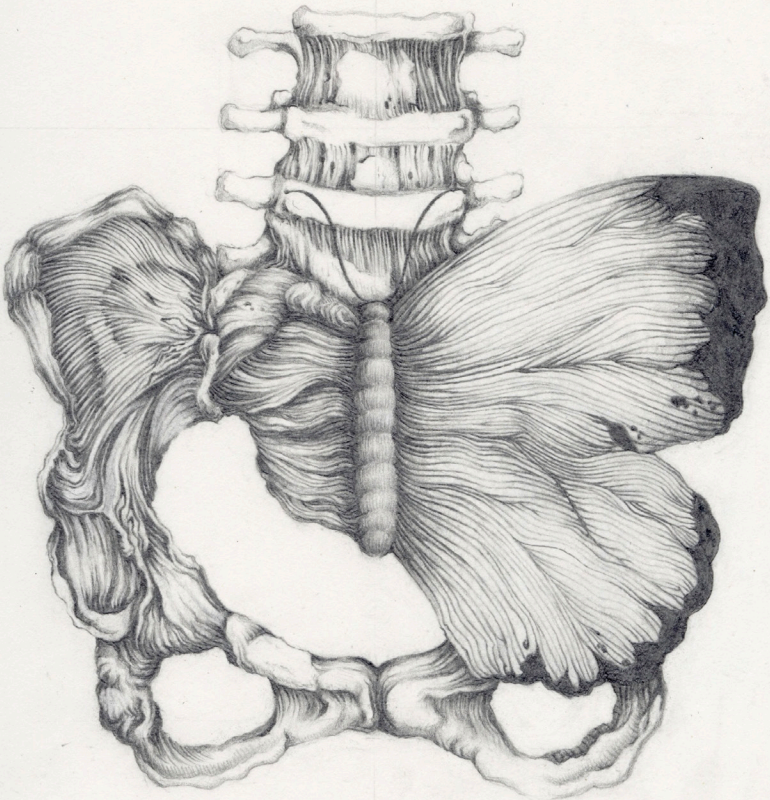
SONIA PARIKH

FRAGILE FRAME

Sonia Parikh is a multimedia artist centered in Portland, Oregon, who specializes in pencil and charcoal drawing. Her piece, *Fragile Frames*, was inspired by the ruins of ancient cities, buildings and bones crumbling to the touch. She loves experimenting with different values and textures, and one day hopes to open her own art gallery. When not drawing, Sonia enjoys reading and writing in nearby parks and coffee shops.

FRAGILE
FRAMES

SOMIA PARISH



PIPER WISE

FALLING IS SILENT

Piper Wise is a 17 year old writer based out of Portland, OR. She explores vast topics from religion, body and family issues, and nature. She has a background in slam poetry and has Competed the last three years as well as attending open mics whenever she can. In the brief moments she's not writing or attending poetry club, she's on track, works and enjoys hanging out outside.

Snow's fall is silent.
 The earth prepares herself silently,
 Only breaking the silence with storms of wrath.
 She's tired repeating the same 4 seasons of her.
 She is the sadness the winter feels.
 She is the birth in spring .
 She is the strain of summer.
 And she dips silently to fall.
 Now the leaves quiver and pluck themselves off
 the branch,
 Of a brittle and frail tree,
 Leaping with the hopes they can find something
 better than where they've been stuck.
 The nights are long.
 Clouds of her sadness leaves her to be isolated,
 Thick and dark swirls become deafening.
 She's all alone.
 At least that's what she tells herself,
 Not observing the company she habitates.
 The alone she feels turns to cold,
 Her empty feeling translates to a bone chill and breeze.
 Enough to make knuckles purple and ears and
 noses red.

Snow's fall is silent.
 She wakes,
 Blanketed with white,
 She observes the way that life continues.
 A young child,
 Not much older than 4.
 He rolls these small bits of ice turned to powder,
 Growing one crystal into a sphere larger than his torso.
 He rolls 2 more before carefully stacking one on top
 of the other,
 He impales this lump with 2 sticks,
 One on each side.
 He dresses this object,
 A hat and scarf to keep it warm.
 He draws a smile and eyes on the top one to
 signify a face.
 His hands cold and frost bitten wrap around this

man made of snow.
 but the man cannot reply,
 He stuck in place,
 Statuted with a smile.
 He's made of her sadness,
 He's made of her pain and her anguish,
 So he believes he can't be anything else.
 At least that's what he tells himself.
 The boy visits every day of winter.
 He sits talking to this man with no ears,
 In hopes to finally be heard.

Snow's fall is silent.
 The days collect from short,
 A mere 8 hours of being kissed by sun but bitten by
 the frozen breath she brings.
 To elongating 15 minutes each morning.
 His eyes have sunken in,
 His smile deeper ingrained into his face,
 His sides started the decomposing her sadness
 faces every 4th season .
 She watches ,
 Grieving the loss not yet made.

His fall is silent.
 His smile was the last to go ,
 The last to finally give into springs bittersweet bites.
 Devouring her sadness into nothingness.
 At least that's what he thought.
 His everything dissolved into nothingness,
 Cause what could come after.
 He puddles where he could once stand tall, despite
 his pessimistic outlook.
 Hes absorbed into her.
 Until every last drop is stolen from the ground into
 the soil.
 She is the birth in the spring,
 His rise is silent.
 blooming into a marigold flower.
 Bursting through the dirt,
 The start of something new.

SEBASTIAN ORDONEZ

PXL

Sebastian Ordonez is a self-taught artist based in Portland, Oregon, specializing in portraits. His artistic journey was sparked by the influence of his grandparents who are both seasoned painters. His primary medium is acrylic paint and is currently studying the fundamentals at the Bodecker Foundation Visuals cohort.



SUPPATRA NAMNOM

BE STILL, MY RACING HEART

Supattra Namnon is a writer, a listener, and a thinker. Born in Bangkok and raised in Portland as a transracial adoptee, her experience caught between two worlds of identity shapes her writing and perspective on life itself. In her free time, Supattra enjoys reading, listening to music, and eating carbs. She is an avid dragon boater and plans to continue writing and paddling for the rest of her life.

The most exhilarating feeling happens at a dragon boat race. Don't believe me? Well, let me show you.

You're standing on a floating dock in the late spring, early summer. The weather is mildly sunny, with a lot of clouds and a soft breeze. In front of you, parallel to the dock, bobs a dragon boat. It's painted intricately with bright colors, red and gold and green. Chinese characters run up the side of the large structure, and sculpted onto the front is the head of a fierce dragon.

You clamber inside the boat, both hands gripping the gunwale, then stretch your legs in one at a time. When you sit down on the boat's first bench, paddle in your lap, you take a deep breath. Your heart seems to clench, as if it has become submerged in water. There is shouting and cheering all around you, but you try to ignore it.

Your caller yells out, "Paddlers sit ready!" and you jerk to attention. You slide your paddle into the correct spot, then wait for the next call. "Paddles up!" Your body rotates as you position your paddle's blade just above the water, ready to strike into the depths.

And then. "Take it away!"

You're not racing yet. This is just the warmup as you paddle towards the start line. But the other boats, some in front of you and some behind you, maintain an intense pressure that almost suffocates you the entire way. You cannot let your guard down.

Once your boat reaches the start line, you desperately keep your eyes focused on your boat's caller. If you look at the people in the surrounding boats, you're done. You've given in to the temptation, and you'll be distracted by your own thoughts. So you continue staring at your own caller, the drum they rest their hands on which will beat out the timing during the race. You look behind you, to the tiller and the rest of your team. You can't do anything without them. As a lead paddler, you have a duty to set the rate of the boat, but you aren't where the real strength lies. It's in the 19 other benches behind you, who propel the boat across the finish line. It's in the tiller, who steers you to victory.

Someone in the back of the boat shouts, "We got this!" You don't know who said it, but you roar in response. "Heck yeah we got this!"

Just as your boat erupts with cheers, a tinny announcement from the signal boat crackles through a megaphone. "Paddlers, prepare to start."

It's time. You plunge your paddle into the deep water, staring now at the finish, which is marked by a line of orange buoys some 500 meters away. You're not just staring at the finish, though. You're staring at the win. It looks far away now, but with every push of the boat, those orange buoys will grow bigger and bigger until they're close enough to touch.

The next signal. "Attention!"

"Attention" is the phrase that always gets you feeling anxious. Questions like What if I mess up the start? or What if my paddle slips out of my hand?

But you can't think like that. You shake your head and mentally slap yourself on the face. You stare down at your paddle, to your hand which is slightly submerged in the cool water. Your strength, your energy, your determination, your love... these things will take you far.

And then, before you know it, the air horn sounds, signaling the start. Crap! Your body reacts before your mind can. You pull the water back, back, back, three long and strong strokes, then ten ultra-fast ones, before settling into race pace. Soon, you're flying on top of the water, mist spraying your face. Is it mist or tears? You can't tell. But who cares? All that matters is that you keep going.

Your body rocks back and forth as you pull water behind, behind, behind, focusing only on the beat of the drum. Somehow, you are already halfway through. Crunch time. You feel yourself growing tired, but you know you have to keep going, despite the tightness in your abdomen and your gasping breaths.

"Go! Go! Go!" Shouts, screams, desperate cries surround you. You shout too, as loud as you can, letting the strength of your resolve pull you and your team forward.

Those orange buoys are so close. Just a bit more strength, a few more yells...

And then. "Let it run!"

It's over. Just like that. You stab your paddle into the water to help brake the boat. The tiller turns the dragon around and you paddle slowly back to the dock. You're completely drained as you pull yourself out of the boat, but you are the happiest you've ever been. You don't know if you've won, since the finish boat hasn't uploaded the results yet, but that doesn't matter. Your team converges into a tight huddle, and you all jump around and cheer. Some of your friends immediately start heading back up to land, but you stay behind for a moment, watching the water ripple in the breeze. Your eyes pass over the dragon boats lined up against the dock, their painted eyes filled with determination.

This is where you belong. You're sure of it. In fact, you've never been so sure of anything in your whole life. It all happens in a flash, but every race you come out a different person. Each time, you're slightly better. More confident. More determined. Always ready for the next hurdle.

And so.

The most exhilarating feeling happens at a dragon boat race. Don't believe me? Then try it for yourself.

SOPHIE ADELE BAKER

OMNIPRESENT

Sophie Adele is a mixed media artist whose artwork focuses on symbolism and composition. She is inspired by surrealism and her own perception of the world through a religious lense. Omnipresent (pen and ink on paper) explores themes found in the natural world such as, the passage of time, and cycles of decay/ rebirth. When not drawing or painting Sophie Adele expresses her creativity through dance.



VINCE PASCUAL

MUTUALS

Vince Pascual is a writer who primarily indulges in writing about the music he enjoys, but also branches out to forms of poetry and short stories. From Tyler, the Creator to Erykah Badu, he likes to analyze songs on a lyrical level, as he finds it intriguing to figure out the hidden meanings within his favorite songs. Though he's only expressed this love through music reviews posted online and personal dissections, he's sure to explore this passion in the future with the hope that it'll become his job.

Packed inside the car, the laughter
and the bass of Rocky, Keef, and B are
deafening Moshing with three people in a
CR-V screaming lyrics we don't relate to.

Amongst the chaos

I check Snapchat

**Message from Maya* that I can
barely see, better yet understand
"I'm...with...friend..."*

She thinks you're cute...

cool if I give...your snap?"

In haste,

spur of the moment,

adrenaline,

a decision was made

in altruism...

..."Yeah, that's cool" ...

was it all it took. The night raged on,
going in and out of the conversation.
Never really committed.

The days went by and the
conversations were always enticing
Learning more and more about each
other with

Every

Hour

That

Ticked

By.

The weeks went slow, but with her, it
felt worth it, her face was a screen that
I could only savor. Eventually, we met
up and every single one felt like an
eternity

An eternity of sweetened flirting

"You're such a fucking nerd..."

I love nerds"

*"I think the idea's perfect,
especially with you"*

hopeful planning

*"We should do pottery painting
with the playlist we made, that'll be
perfect"*

and stupid questions

*"Me and my brother always
wondered this...what do blind
people see?" "If you had*

*to fight a Walrus for 40k would
you do it?"*

*"Do you think you genuinely could be
Spider-Man?"*

always ending the same way, a shared
laugh that made me sink a little
deeper into the waters of infatuation
with her

beneath the saturated lights of
winter, everything felt like a dream
transmitted through VHS

*"OOOOH THAT WREATH IS BEAUTIFUL
WHAT?!"*

*"We should take a picture together
for the spam"*

*"God pollution is so stupid,
I NEED to see the stars"*

entirely enveloped by her gaze, touch,
and voice, which were as silky and
meaningful as violin harmonics.

So when she said that this wasn't
going to workout, I knew she meant
every syllable

She was perfect

She brought me peace

She was a reflection of myself

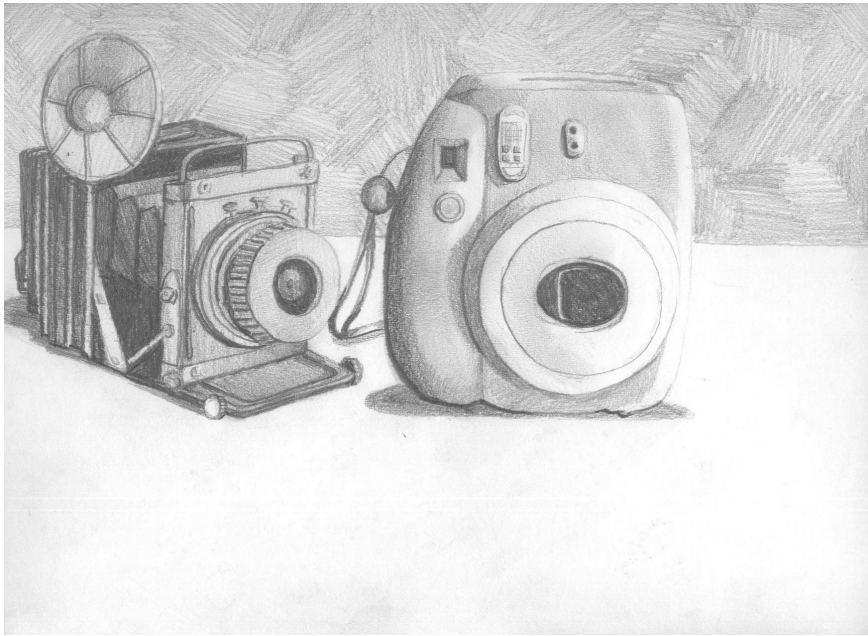
I wish I had dated her.

FRANCES HEALY

TRANSFORMATION

Frances Healy is a multiple multimedia visual artist based in Portland, Oregon who specializes in graphite, charcoal, and acrylics. She has been practicing art all her life, taking art classes since elementary school. Frances' creative process is inspired by people in society and what they create. *Currently she is pursuing her art learning through the Boedecker Foundation Visual Cohorts.*

Time changes everything, including the way we capture memories. In this drawing, I show the transformation of photography through two cameras, one old and one new. The camera on the left is detailed and complex, representing a time when taking a photo required more time and patience. Next to it is a modern camera that is simple and fast, displaying that today's technology makes capturing moments easy. Through my art piece, transformation shows how society has changed, moving from a slow and intentional way of preserving memories to an instant process. Just like technology advancing, humans have adapted to valuing speed and convenience, yet still trying to capture moments in time.



ZOELIE WILLIAMS

THE VILEST AND MOST DESPICABLE CREATURE

Zoelie Williams has been writing since she was six, which is a shock when you see how many grammar mistakes she makes! When she's not staring at a blank document, you can find her reading, scrolling through Pinterest "for work", or participating in her school's musical theatre productions.

Long ago, there was a girl and a boy; long ago, there were Gods, and long ago, there was Love. Love is a well-known feeling. Most of us have fallen in love before or felt a glimpse of the emotion. Love, as most of us know, is a feeling that changes the course of your life. People will die for Love. People have died for love, and such stories will continue. Another thing about Love that people know, some all too well, is that Love can rip you apart. It can burn you from the inside. It is fatal and dangerous, a lurking, twisting, crying feeling. Love is a weapon and a reason. Love is dangerous. And no one knows that better than the Woman of the Sea, Daughter of the Sky, and Lover of War, Lady Aphrodite. Lady Aphrodite held war in the palm of her hands. Her eyes were sharp, and her lips were red from blood and wine. Beside her stood the Son of Love and War: Cupid, better known as Eros. His arrows were sharp, able to pierce through flesh, their tips red from slipping between bones and reaching the heart. He himself was a weapon of war, able to bloom love and hate into hearts with each pull at his bowstring. Devoted to each word of Queen Aphrodite, his mother. A God. A son of War.

Far from the throne of Aphrodite in a Kingdom of a Queen, a King, and three daughters. Three princesses. But the important one was the youngest. Princess Psyche, a sweet girl with narrow eyes and a rough laugh. A blessing, her parents said, and a curse. A dangerous curse. A curse that could end them all, they said. As Psyche had a quality, a fatal truth that drew the eyes of everyone. Because Psyche, the poets say, was beautiful. As beautiful... as Aphrodite herself. No one can be more than a Goddess. At some point, mortals wither and die, but a God is everlasting. And so is humiliation.

Angered by the mortals claiming Psyche was the reincarnation of Aphrodite, the Goddess wailed to her son: "Eros, my son, I have been disgraced! The mortals speak of a woman more beautiful than I. Have I not been a caring mother, my child? Avenge me, and I will award you. She may be beautiful, but she too will feel the sting of humiliation! Let your arrow fly, fair child, and use your powers to make this little shameless girl fall in love with the vilest and the most despicable creature who has ever walked this earth!"

And so Eros did, sheathing his arrows and flew to Psyche's Kingdom, where a wedding was being held between Psyche and a rich merchant who bought her hand from her parents. He clung to her shoulders as the priest of Aphrodite spoke, his wrinkled hand digging into her flesh. High on the balcony of the castle, Eros positioned his arrow, aiming for Psyche's chest as a single droplet of

blood raced down the Princess's shoulders as the merchant's nails dug into her dark skin, anchoring her next to him. The enchanted arrow, invisible to the naked eye, flew through the air with deadly poise and sank into her flesh, through the gap between her ribs, and pierced her heart. And so, unknown to the miserable, pained princess, her heart pleaded not only to escape this awful, old man who claimed her as his wife but for another soul. Another soul who, too, felt the burning feeling that was love and shoved his way through the crowd. The crowd parted as a man in armor, his face hidden by a War helmet, shoved them all aside and strode straight towards the princess, ripping her from the bleeding fingers of the Merchant.

"Swine, how dare you pull my wife away!" The merchant yelled as the mysterious figure dragged the slower princess behind, towards the cliffs. The guards took a step away from him, the odd, pulsing feeling of fear and disgust sweeping over them.

"Who do you think you are?"

The figure reached the top of the hill, and with a single push, shoved the shrieking princess over the edge before turning, a watery red eyes peering from out of his helmet. "Who am I? Well, the oracles and fates had told me I am the vilest and the most despicable creature who has ever walked this earth."

The next morning, Princess Psyche found herself on a field of grass, and a spirit of wind hovered above her. She did not know it yet, but this spirit was Zephyr, god of the west wind, and least fortunate in the area of love.

"Hello, Princess. I am the Wind, the oracle told me to wait upon a cliff for a creature to throw a treasure so rare from its top. This hideous creature told me to bring you here, to his island where he awaits you."

Psyche twisted, examining the field of grass she awoke in. A while away gleamed a castle, shining gold and jewel wells reflected the sun, bouncing colors upon the flowers around.

"Which god awaits me, Lord of the Wind?" Psyche cried. "For no mortal could own such a place!"

"Your husband," The Wind told her, "May be the vilest man alive, but for what he misses in beauty, he makes up for in wealth." The Wind guided her into the Palace. "Your husband wishes that you do not see him," Zephyr said. "For he fears you will run away in horror. I have helped him, you will find he is now only a gust of Wind. Invisible, yet he will still talk in your ear, whistling." And with those words, Zephyr disappeared, as the wind often does.

Psyche walked through the large, rich halls alone

when she heard the wind talk as the Gods had told her it would.

"Hello," A voice said. "I apologize if I have scared you, dear maiden. The moment I laid eyes on you, the great Eros struck me with his arrow, and I needed you for a wife."

Psyche was weary at first. "Why do you hide your face from me?" She demanded. "Reveal yourself!" "I cannot," Her husband said. "For if I do, you will fear me, and you will run. My soul will shatter if you do, my dear." "Why do you hide me here, far from the world?" The princess wept. "How I miss my sisters and my parents so!"

"You cannot leave, fair maiden." Her husband warned. "The Gods have told me that Lady Aphrodite, Queen of the Heart, despises you and yearns for your death. I cannot let you die, my love, for I will die too."

Psyche remained in that castle, speaking to her invisible and nameless husband. He would disappear often, leaving her to wander the halls, but at night, he would return, and they would sit together for dinner. Days passed, and with every laugh and every tear, Psyche found herself falling for her husband. One day, she threw herself at his knees.

"Loving husband, I too have been struck by the arrows of Eros," She cried. "I wish for us to marry!" Despite her pleas for him to join her in bed, he refused. "At night, I sleep in my mortal form," He said. "You must not see my face, for you shall run scared." Despite her objections, her husband refused. Finally, Psyche responded:

"If you will not join me in my bed, Husband, I ask one thing of you. I am lonely in these tall walls, and I miss my sisters so much. Bring them to me so I may be in their arms once more!"

Her husband denied her at first, but every night, Psyche would beg until one day, he said:

"Lover, I hate seeing you so miserable. I will bring your sisters to you for one day, one day only, once the sun rises. Please know I hide you in these walls of riches to keep you from the bloodlust of Lady Aphrodite."

Psyche wept tears of joy, and the next day her sisters would appear in the fields as she once had. She would run out to greet them, falling into each other's arms and sobbing, whispering sweet nothings into each other's ear. Once they ran out of salt, they sat down inside the palace as Psyche told them what had happened. They were impressed, but jealousy twisted around their hearts.

One thought: *She always got everything from her beauty, always taking. I am married to a man thrice my age who I love not, yet she gets swept*

away by a man of wealth who loves her so?

The other thought: I work days upon days to buy a dress she would consider the price of her loose change! My husband is lazy and slow, yet she gets piles of gold? Her husband must be a god.

But they spoke none of it allowed. Instead, they planted a seed and wept.

"Sisters, why do you cry so?" Psyche fretted.

"I am happy and safe, yet you still sob in anguish!"

"My dear sister," the eldest wept, "Can you not see? Your husband is no kind soul but a warlock!"

"A warlock? Why do you speak such nonsense, sister?"

"He hides his face from you, he must be a monster feared by the gods themselves! Why else would they hide him from you? He feeds you to get you fat and ripe, and one day, he will sink his teeth into your flesh and eat you whole! Stupid child, do you not see? If you do not slay him, he will drink your blood and send you to Hades!"

Poor, poor Psyche lived a sheltered, private life with only her sisters as her friends. She knew not how to spot a liar, as she didn't know she needed to. Her soft heart swelled with each word, and she too sobbed. "Sisters, what shall I do?" She cried. "You are right. How will I escape such a creature?"

That night, her husband returned to a full meal and a smiling Psyche, unaware of a gold-handled dagger hidden inside an urn. She gestured for him to sit beside her. "Come, dear husband, join me! You must ache so after a long day of work, I hope to relieve your pain." Her husband sat next to her, asking about her day with her sisters, pleased to hear that she had enjoyed herself and that she loved them so, unaware of what her sisters had told her to do in the dead of night. Sneak into his room, they had told her. If what you say is true, he will be visible in his true form. Take Father's dagger and pierce his rotted heart. Her husband soon slipped away to his bedroom, and Psyche waited for the moon before lighting a candleholder and slowly, clutching the gold saucer in one hand and a dagger in the other, snuck into her husband's bedroom, slipping the curtains apart and staring at his sleeping form... and she shrieked softly. Sleeping peacefully, bathed in the moonlight, was the most beautiful man in the world. Lord of Lust, Son of War, and the greatest archer, was her husband, Lord Eros.

The candle holder slipped from her fingers, and the burning wax sprayed across Eros's feathered wings and back, causing him to cry out in pain as the wax sizzled and burnt into his immortal flesh. He looked up at the shocked Psyche, who still clutched the knife raised above her head. It clattered to the ground.

"Wife, my lover," Eros cried. "What is this feeling?

I love you so more than the world itself, but I cannot look at your face!"

In pain, Eros flung himself out the window, flying up and up till he reached Olympus. Psyche ran after him, crying his name as he flew away. In despair, she flung herself onto the ground. "I love him, Goddess Aphrodite!" She sobbed. "I will walk to the end of the world for you!"

And so Psyche did, and on her walk to the Temple of Aphrodite, she passed by an abandoned temple: a temple of the Goddess of Marriage, Hera. As the sweet soul she was, Psyche paused to rip the growing vines off the marble walls and statues before continuing and reaching Aphrodite's temple at last. There waited the goddess. "Mortal princess," Aphrodite cried. "You have hurt my son, torn his heart out of his chest, and thrown it to the ground. Why should I spare you?"

Psyche fell to her knees before the goddess and wept. "My lady, I love your son. I have made the mistake of trusting people I should have not, and I have hurt him. I will do anything to win him back, anything!" She sobbed.

Aphrodite only scoffed. "You would do anything for my son? Then prove it. You will complete three of my trials, and if you do, I will pardon you. And you may see my son."

Psyche agreed instantly, and Aphrodite brought her to a dark cell, locking her in it. Inside was a large pile of mixed beans. "Sort these out into separate piles by beans," The goddess demanded. "If you can do that by sunrise, then you may see my son." And she left without another word. Psyche crumbled to the ground and sobbed at the impossible task when she heard a small voice from the ground. In front of her was an ant.

"Little girl, I am Hera, Queen of the Gods." The ant said. "I can tell you love him so. Worry not about the beans, they will be sorted by tomorrow." Psyche watched as ants poured from the cracks, grabbing beans in their jaws and pulling them from the pile. Psyche soon fell into a deep sleep, only to be awoken by the angry cries of Aphrodite. The goddess grabbed her arm, and in the blink of an eye, they stood in a field where sheep grazed, coats made of gold.

"Collect their wool and bring it to me," Aphrodite smirked. "But be careful, these sheep are creatures of legend; they feast upon the flesh of all those who walk." And the goddess disappeared once more. Psyche spotted a river surrounded by rose bushes, and she threw herself into the water in an attempt to drown herself until she heard the voice of her beloved. Unknown to Psyche, Eros had fled to his mother's where he remained. The God of Love, dying

of heartbreak, rejected his purpose and began to slowly lose his immortality, and with it, his life. In an attempt to protect him, Aphrodite locked him away in her house. But he was still a God, and he was still in love. He reached out his weakening abilities and whispered through the reeds of the river.

"My love," He whispered. Psyche turned to the reeds, hopeful. "Fear not, for these sheep are well-trained by none other than Hermes. Whistle from behind a bush by the water, and they will come to drink. The thorns of the bushes will catch their wool, once they leave collect it and give it to my mother." And so Psyche did, whistling softly and waiting for the carnivore sheep to drink and go back to the field. She cut her arms on the thorns as she scooped the fur, and Aphrodite returned to find a pile of wool waiting for her. Aphrodite shrieked in rage.

"Girl, I sent my son to kill you, and die you shall! Go to the Underworld and fill this cup with the dark waters of the Styx, River of the Dead! Then, go to Queen Persephone and ask for a box of her beauty." A crystal chalice and bejeweled box appeared, and the Goddess vanished. And with that, Psyche walked and walked until she reached the underworld. The Styx was surrounded by sharp rocks, and Psyche once again wept. A mortal could not climb the rocks without falling into the Styx and dying. The sound of wing beats caught her attention, and an eagle landed in front of her. "Psyche," the voice of King Zeus said from the beak of the bird. "Worry not about the Styx Water; go to Queen Persephone." And so she did, walking along the bank until she reached the throne of King Hades and his Queen, Persephone.

"Queen Persephone, I beg of you, listen to my tale." Psyche told the Queen everything, weeping until she finished. Hades opened his mouth to answer, but Persephone cut him off.

"I, too, have experienced love like yours. I will fill your box, dear." And so she did without another word, and Psyche left, clutching the box tightly. Her heart fluttered at the thought of being closer to Eros. The filled cup was waiting for her on a rock, and she brought the last of the items out of the Underworld, where Aphrodite was waiting. But the box felt heavy in her hand, containing the immortal beauty of a Goddess. A queen. Once more, curiosity pushed her over, a Psyche opened the box. A bright light flashed, and Psyche once more was trapped in a place of wealth: the Underworld. As she was dead. She cried out one more time about her husband's name.

Far up in the kingdom of the Gods, Eros was close to death. He cried out in despair as Psyche called out

her name. "Mother!" He called. "All I have ever done was your work, always building and destroying love, for what? If this is the pain of a broken heart, I want it not! Release my wife, the woman I love, or never will anyone fall in love ever again!"

Aphrodite heard her son's anger as she stood at the top of Olympus, a gold apple in her hand. She too as seen the horror that love brings. And she too once loved someone she lost. And for the first time, Aphrodite realized: Love was the vilest and the most despicable creature who has ever walked this earth. She let out a soft sigh and turned to the clouds.

"Father, bring the spirit of Psyche to Eros. Although I may not trust her, she is the heart and soul of his being. And I'm tired of watching hearts and souls being broken by something as ridiculous as death." And so Zeus listened, taking Psyche's spirit to Olympus. However, she was dead, nothing more than a shade. After all, she was only mortal. So, to save her, that would have to change. Zeus tipped nectar, the drink of other gods, between Psyche's lips. She gasped and sat up as the blood of the Immortals pulsed through her veins.

"Psyche, I am Zeus, King of the Gods. You have deemed your love for Eros immortal. Welcome to godhood, Psyche, Goddess of the Human Spirit. Go to your husband's side and hold him at last, as you fought so hard to do."

Without another word, she ran to Eros's side and held him tight, pouring her love into her touch. You know what happens next. According to the story, they got married and lived together happily. For the rest of eternity. And so is the story of Spirit, the beauty, and Love, the beast. A tale as old as time, as they say.

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