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# FOREWORD

Dearest readers,

We've been boiling, grilling, and harvesting ingredients from all over the world for the past three months and it's finally started to smell good. So buckle up for a scrumptious summer feast!

Since releasing the last issue in December 2022, we went on a tumultuous journey questioning our identity as Napkins [and maybe we'll always be questioning 🍓(that's [camp](#))]. For some #context, we organized a really delicious interactive art exhibition called Fractal in Taipei last November. That put us through a phase where we felt Napkins would be better off focusing on events.

In retrospect, our decision, which we were dead convinced was not a phase, was probably a result of the stress (trauma) cumulated from organizing Fractal and having to push out a magazine immediately after the back-breaking work.

But as you can deduce/induce/abduct by now, we missed having the magazine. They were right when they said your first would be unforgettable. The magazine was our first, serious baby.

Except that we thought it was an adult at first, and put all the pressures of an adult on that issue. We even expected it to be financially independent. Seeing it for what it was—a tender, curious, and confused as hell child—has helped us realize that we need to walk at its pace and listen to it. And same went for our approach to working with our contributors.

Everything you read in this issue is, as always, a dance between the editors and the contributors. What set it apart from previous issues was that we now have a much more diverse team of editors—different niches, different backgrounds, different editorial styles to accompany the diverse different talent of our contributors.

It is always difficult to foresee how each issue would end up looking. We agreed on setting a theme that was general enough to encourage running imagination but narrow enough for the galloping to not go astray. What you will see from this summer spread then is a collage of different people's summer experiences and musings made under the summer weather.

There are warm memories from childhood seasoned with fresh sea salt, wild strawberries on controversial plates, sandwiches crumpled in pockets, empanadas from hot bus rides, and much, much more...

Welcome to the Napkins Summer of 2023. Enjoy your meal and leave space for dessert!

Смачного and 趁热吃,

Dasha & Zhi Zhi x

P.S. Find the Dessert on the website.

# hot things drive us crazy by DONATELLO

romances, heat waves, the sun  
beating on bare backs, kick pushin down hills  
the oil popping out the pan  
the tip of the blunt when it shortens  
& shortens  
& shortens

like being 14 &  
finding a lover  
badder than the others  
to enter a new year with

like being 16 &  
curious of life  
& love beyond  
an era of "sweethearts"

like being 6 again  
running on concrete not splashed  
by Tia Silvia's pool  
scurrying to the deep end  
pretending to be grown

like being 24  
burning your fingertips on the comal  
while making your 5th struggle snack of the day  
while the fridge keeps the air inside it cool  
like being 28  
living in the product of global warming  
California fire season won't allow the ac to run  
unless... I invite the smoke  
like being 25  
& adoring the baddie, who consistently  
is inconsistent  
with her affection & attention  
but you hold on, hoping  
that whatever she's coping with will pass  
& she'll see that you're here to last  
until 29 finally teaches you

to let go of the fire

like my '92 corolla, box, bucket  
with a broken ac, and 92 degree  
dry heat, in traffic, for 3 hours  
& Santana can't soothe you...

like being 10 again  
basketball & wheels  
secret skateparks  
wondering what's ready at home

good memories are rays of sun massaging skin  
while sugar from popsicles or sodas  
do something to the mind

sometimes  
even the bad memories, that burn  
like these hellish summers  
full of work & worry & love games lost  
can feel like sunshine...

summers didn't use to feel like that

What I did in an art gallery this summer:

## Appreciation of the Tradition - JAGAE by SHAWN LEE (M25)

[@duson\\_gallery](https://www.instagram.com/duson_gallery)



\*NEW WORD\*

JAGAE: Jagae, also known as mother-of-pearl, is a pure Korean word that refers to the shell of clams, abalones, and mollusks.

In a world of ever-changing trends and modernity, certain things hold a significance that transcends their practicality. For me, that special item is a beautiful, useless box I took from my grandfather's room when I was just six years old. The black box, adorned with glowing rainbow curves, looked enchanting as it displayed different shades of color when I moved it around under various lights. It transported me to the beach, making me feel like I was discovering clam shells of different colors and shapes.

Despite sitting empty and covered in a layer of dust for the past fifteen years, I cannot bring myself to throw it away.

This box represents the reality of tradition, crafted from a material known as Jaegae. This material has now become a beautiful relic of the past. It has lost its original purpose and is no longer in use. The debate between tradition and modernity has been an interesting issue for me. And my summer internship helped me to seriously think about how we can create harmony between the past and present so that we can preserve a tradition that is out of use.

Over the past two months, I have been actively engaged in a project called the "Mother of Pearl (Jaegae) Project". The project's mission is to preserve traditional material while infusing it with modern designs, ultimately making it relevant on a global scale. Jaegae, derived from the shell of clams, undergoes a long and intricate production process, which in the past made it a material of great value accessible only to the royals in the past.

Since the 16th century, Jaegae has been known for its trickiness, with only trained masters being able to craft it. Jaegae is cut into a specific shape so that it can be attached onto the wooden frames that are already coated with lacquer. The surface is repeatedly coated with lacquer until it is firmly secured. Even for the project I participated in, the process of applying Jaegae to the table itself took at least two

weeks for one table. The whole process of designing the tables, creating wooden frames, putting Jagae onto the frame, and shipping took more than six months.

However, the pride associated with Jagae has dwindled in the 21st century. Once cherished for its warm connection to grandparents and traditional heritage, Jagae now feels out of place in modern interior designs. The Jagae closets and tables are tossed aside like forgotten relics. Furthermore, the market is flooded with cheap imitations of Jagae, further diminishing its authenticity. Thus, our primary objective was to elevate awareness surrounding Jagae and restore its rightful place of pride.

Collaborating with six modern designers from Italy and Korea, our gallery set out to interpret and design Jagae tables in their unique styles. These designs were eventually exhibited at the prestigious Trinale Museum in Milano, Italy, drawing visitors from all walks of life to witness the beauty and creativity inherent in these tables.

Among the six pieces, my favorite piece is a rounded oval-shaped table with a flower design made of Jagae. It has a low height but works perfectly as a tea table, and I can imagine it fitting seamlessly into various modern designs, alongside black and silver folding chairs. The Jagae flowers bloom with colors that create a rainbow reflection on the floor from the sunlight. I was always excited at the thought of placing this piece in different locations, such as the lobby of a 5-star hotel, traditional Korean houses, a minimalistic black and white apartment living room, or even in the garden. I truly enjoyed participating in this project to brainstorm on how this outdated material can be beautifully presented in so many locations in various formats in the modern world.

Before doing this project, I had never thought of why Jagae products like the box from my grandfather were devalued in society. But I guess, it was too easy to obtain in the present times, which diminished the legacy from the past. The abundance of Jagae led to a decline in its perceived worth. Currently, Korea preserves tradition as it is by showcasing it in museums and explaining its value through textbook



photographs. However, if we let this situation persist, Jagae would fade away as a fame of the past.

Of course, the origin should be preserved, but we need a revolutionary way of keeping the tradition alive. For this, we have to preserve tradition through culture and revive it with new life. Our gallery has chosen the latter, planning a follow-up project that designs and sells new, practical products catered to the needs of young people. Jagae is no longer an old, traditional, and outdated material. Jagae is a fancy, modern, and trendy material.

The Mother of Pearl (Jagae) Project is not just about preserving the original; it's about honoring our heritage, finding new ways to appreciate the past, and integrating it into the fabric of our contemporary lives. Through art, we aim to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. By combining the beauty of tradition with the ingenuity of modern design, we strive to keep the flame of Jagae burning brightly for generations to come.

The journey of the Mother of Pearl (Jagae) Project has been a testament to the power of art in preserving tradition and breathing new life into the past. With passion and creativity, we seek to forge a path where tradition and modernity can coexist harmoniously, bridging the gap between what was and what is yet to be. As we continue to navigate the ever-changing landscape of the 21st century, let us remember that the legacy of our ancestors is a treasure worth cherishing, and through art, we can keep it alive for a brighter future.

# Tastes Like Wild Strawberries by ПОЛИНА ЗЕНЬ (POLINA ZEN) (M25)

*Visual collage*

Found [here](#); numbered by pages.

# ALMIRA HALKINA (M27)

“parades march down”

parades march down

the street the lawsuit the death rally

who will not make it out alive this time?

in pockets *they* have the adjudications  
of folded away surnames and orders

the pockets smell like sandwiches originated in *their* wives' kitchen

yes, *they* also have wives  
and kitchens  
and gastrointestinal tracts  
and used up vitamin D storage like all of us mortals

we all originated from dirt and hints of love

nevertheless some turn back to dirt despite the amount of love they carry

or take away

## criminal / “should i feel like a criminal in this car”

should i feel like a criminal in this car  
with this sunlight trapped in my hair

i didn't deserve to be given a chance for happiness, not in the present times  
biting down these concerns and chewing them into molecules,  
yet they still proceed to overpopulate my body instead of disintegrating in it

i am not a foreigner in my house,  
in my hometown,  
i'm more than a foreigner but less than a part  
of the setting where i was planted and nurtured  
seeking to lose the smack in the air and the language i consume,  
but it's produced autonomously in my unconscious territories  
put together into the labeled bottles with unreadable instructions,  
vibrantly flaming side effects and 'regretfully undiscovered reverse agent'

carts of them are exported into my  
vision  
sight  
emotional palette  
sharpness spectrum of my vocabulary

old passwords aren't compatible,  
density of the pixels in the 3D model we call life is exponentiating like a  
cancer tumor  
hate culture  
political ideology —  
no collaborative efforts are enough in their hypocrisy

i'm not a hypocrite but am a criminal  
for locking my eyelashes  
for not sacrificing a sacrifice not worth it  
for running down the field and neither falling underground nor being blown up  
for the mismatched probabilities

8:03

8:03 - the eyes' first peak into the day  
more like into the ceiling and the limbs of rays of waking sun  
they dance over that ceiling more like sway gently but does it matter

down-up-down-up cuts the knife  
bread pieces fall with thuds  
they miss the plate but does it matter

round-and-round move fingers holding stainless steel tea spoon  
mixing lactose-free milk into the coffee  
it smells like morning even for those still sleeping but does it matter

28\$ was the grocery shopping  
the cart almost made train sounds  
shoes got stepped on  
and the coins jingled some even fell down over the tiles but does it matter

in-and-up was the key turned in ignition  
the steering wheel was way too warm all windows were rolled down  
the dialogues annoyed passers-by but does it matter

13 strawberries were squished along the ride  
1 t-shirt got a stain  
it wasn't old or not a favorite  
but peace was made so does it really matter

4 pairs of legs ran down the path and out of shadow  
1 lagged behind and no one waited  
as clothes and heat got lost in sand and quiet surface of the water body trembled  
it shivered and got mad at someone agitating sleep but does it matter

plink-plink the lake drops tore their hands  
tried holding on as they roll down into the abyss of soil  
departing the squeezed out towel in the hands of a soaking wet swimmer  
whose skin now carries a bit of cheap cloth dye but does it matter

side-to-side swayed the rusty boat  
engulfed in blue and green so firmly it barely felt it  
yet it felt the jealousy of those who move the water and themselves in it  
the youth was painfully dazzling and it doesn't matter  
    when everything is lost in laughs and talks and questions  
    and pats on the shoulders and accidentally touching glances  
    in the backseat of another passing week

# **(Un)comfort Zone by 김다인 (DAIN KIM) (M26)**

*Illustration*

Found [here](#).

*Description:*

During this summer break, I encountered numerous challenges that pushed me beyond my comfort zone. This illustration depicts one of these experiences: traveling abroad with my friend without the assistance of our parents. Surprisingly, our trip to Vietnam was far more enjoyable than I had expected!

# MEGAN CHRISTENSEN (Staff)

## Riding Along

There's nothing quite like  
riding a bus where  
Spanish licks from tongues

First, there's the seat  
fully reclined  
stuck in this position  
inviting...  
(*forcing?*)  
me to sit back  
and melt into the ride

Second, there's the window  
three-quarters open  
frozen in position  
afternoon air whipping playfully on  
freckles,  
soaking in the sweetness of movement

Third, there's the vendor with  
shouldered boxes  
selling dulces, empanadas  
water, umbrellas  
with a baritone call  
his salesman's song swimming laps on his lips

Fourth, there's the sudden break to a halt  
confused, a pause (*¿why?*)  
a stop in an empty field  
unto which half the bus  
descends  
or a prolonged pause because of:  
a protest.  
highway construction.  
toll booth takeover.  
sheep crossing.  
flat tire?

Before any answers arrive we're  
off again.  
and the afternoon light's flirtation  
warms my questions  
away.

Fifth, there's the music, sometimes  
Bachata

In Santo Domingo  
Mariachi  
In Monterrey  
Jackie Chan film, maxed volume  
In Bogotá.

Otherwise, music still, but just –  
The sound  
Of rubber meeting road  
Mixed with  
A buzzing of intimacies

Whispers between colleagues just off their shift  
Mom and son nesting, cooing  
Two teenagers newly in love  
Blurry hands feeling skin, skin, skin  
The bus ablaze  
Abuzz  
With so many intimacies

Every time  
I board that bus  
I'm reminded  
Of what a deep gift it is  
To be riding  
*Along.*



belong (*verb*): to form part of

how did we forget  
that we  
belong?

belong to the howls  
and whirls, and chirps. To the wailing  
orchestra

orchestral drips and paddlings  
of the puddles; of the downpour  
even thunder. especially thunder.

thundering, destroying, shaking, unmaking  
we belong to that too  
and it to us

us - an us that has lost our way  
an us ripped from  
the fabric to which we belong

belong (*verb*)

how did we forget  
that we  
belong?

# Sights and Sounds of the City by RAVEN HC GRAY (M25)

*Poem.*

Aristocratic skyscrapers extend across the urban landscape,  
Its murky steel precisely ordered against the street's dingy stone.  
Our predictability rendered life almost perfect in its simplicity,  
And I couldn't imagine anything different until that first pop of colour.

The sirens squeal for everyone, but are you near enough to hear?  
And how near is near enough to note that you were there  
Yet removed enough so that you remain to share?  
Can unbloodied and unbroken be unfair?

Its brilliance was overwhelming, which left it so much more intriguing that  
That single tinge revealed an entire world ever present yet unnoticed.  
Suddenly, everything I saw radiated stripes, spots, and checkers;  
And I quickly found evidence of the wicked patterns between them.

My own misery musters my immediate motivation,  
As I canvas my cadaver for cuts, carves, and legions.  
I find my friend and their friend, eventually eyeing the press's presence.  
As we await the assistance of an ambulance drawing from the distance.

We might all bleed vermillion, but that neglects  
Whether we were pricked, stabbed, or shot.  
It ignores the skin that swells, the heart that stops,  
And the community that suffers that loss.

Hours away, another rescue readies its wagon.  
Cruising crowdless, they skip a person unheard and unnoticed,  
Helping not who needs it most but who howls the loudest.  
And I, with my wounds, am thankful to be thunderous.

Existence was easier before I envisioned

The endless opportunities that I've been afforded  
By proxy of my privilege, my power and position.  
Before I discerned the darkness that dominates  
And the unrelenting glow of the rainbow it erases.

The screams become overwhelming, exhausting and quite numbing;  
Must we tune in and turn towards the tons of torment still spreading?  
Or can I simply lament my own, looking for safety within my home?

Perhaps you plug your ears, close your eyes,  
Trying not to comprehend it.  
Life's easier expecting that our world is normally right,  
That we are normally right.  
But that neglects the truth set in front of you.

***Poem is Accompanied by by Audio***

Linked [here](#).

***Raven's design***

Linked [here](#).

*Intentions behind the design:*

- The goal of the b&w is to highlight the irrationality of binary/dichotomous thinking in a complex world, especially as it pertains to good/bad, in-group/out-group, privilege/oppression, etc. (that's why the binary gradually shifts from b&w to gray as the poem progresses)
  - The final line utilizes a colored background to highlight that even imagining phenomenon along a continuum is limited.
- The poem is made with accessibility in mind. The different fonts and colors of font emphasize the meaning of words & increase readability; the audio allows the audience to experience it in a non-visual medium.

# Imagined Music by JAIME MUSSO (M25)

*Photo collage*

Found [here](#).

# The Continuity of Summer by ARI PEREZ (M26)

*Animation*

Found [here](#). Audio will be linked here.

# Button by ANELLE AZHIBAYEVA (M26)

#0

The sun shone brightly on the small button-shaped face of the newborn. “Sun is good for them in their first 40 days,” they said. Her eyes wrinkle under the loving strokes of the sun. She squirms, tossing her arms around, either showing displeasure or deep comfort. “She truly is the Daughter of the Sun, is she not?” The woman smiled. “Eliana. My daughter, my light, Eliana.”

*Dear reader,  
The Sun may be the  
Only one  
Who doth not know  
Me.*

#1

Eliana is learning to walk. She falls, she gets up, she falls again, pressing the repeat button. And yet, her smile remains. It seems that she will never give up. The past few weeks, she has been embraced by her family—all of her cousins and aunts and uncles came to visit her down South. She has never experienced this much human exposure. Nonetheless, she enjoys the interactions, it is thought. She even mumbles emoted, yet vaguely understood, words in her fierce and loving nature. The corner of Mom’s lips raise into a smile at the attempt.

*Dear reader,  
Let us not forget,  
Mom  
Carries the weight of the world  
On her shoulders  
Because of me?*

#2

“It’s crazy to think she’s talking now!” Mom tells her friends, as Eliana walks circles around their dining room table. *Clap, slap, clap, slap, boom.* An onomatopoeia of a child’s happiness. “I’m two!” she gleefully yells, as if terrible twos are nothing but a slight inconvenience to her, akin an extra button undoing itself on Dad’s shirt.

*Dear reader,  
My first encounter  
With you will*

*Undeniably  
Be brief.*

## #6

“Let’s celebrate her last summer of complete childhood.” Wine happily poured, Eliana looks at the adults and wonders, “What awaits me in the adult life?”

She has heard her Dad speak of the seriousness of school, yet she does not know whether she should expect to like it, hate it—maybe both. New emotions, her body freezes, fear trickling down her arm.

Escapism is limited to her favorite dolls in the dollhouse, she knows not yet of hurt other than those few friendly quarrels with the girl next door.

*Dear reader,  
It saddens me to know,  
I am not awaited, nor am I welcome.*

## #7

“Kid, are you happy at all?” Dad laughs after picking Eliana up on May 31st, the last day of school and the beginning of the break. “NO!” she wails. “Let’s push your happiness button,” he says as he giddily tickles at her sides. She musters a smile. “I’m Dad’s favorite button!”

*Dear reader,  
We shall meet soon.*

## #12

This is the first summer Eliana spends in contemplation of her adulthood. With new changes in her physiology, pools become a questionable choice—so do her favorite white clothes (though she always finds a way to make them off-white, if she has the slightest chance). “Ugh, is there no cure to being a woman?” she asks once, on a low from the painkillers, hands clutched over her stomach as the cramps fight a battle within her. *I wish there were a button to stop this.*

*Dear reader,  
You may know me,  
Lurking in the corner of your room  
Watching -  
Patiently -  
Painfully -  
Watching.*

## #14

Eliana: the one with locks of pure gold weaving her shoulders, the one with skin akin to the cleanest sand upon a royal beach, whose hours melt into days melt into weeks. Doom

scrolling. Brevity of interaction. Locked in a room with the key in the wrong hands, her control switched off.

*Dear reader,  
My hands, indeed, feign comfort  
And drain your life away from you.*

## #15

It hurts, oh, how it hurts, when for the first time, you realize you have left your heart for the taking. Left it to be used, left it to be broken.

“Eliana, sweetheart, do you need anything?” Mom comes by to ask.

“Eliana, darling, are you doing alright?”

Eliana ignores the comment. Dad sits by the bed.

“Should I press the button... for your giggly-pies?” He lovingly snickers, but trails off into the silence when he receives nothing in reply. He stands, slowly leaving the room, looking back a final time, and closing the door softly behind him.

*Dear reader,  
Oh, how I know you wish —  
Perhaps, so do I —  
That I can come and go,  
Like a Button.*

## #18

*Dear reader,  
I'm afraid –  
Age doth not make  
Me  
Younger or older.*

*You may call me  
A murderer  
Of hearts and deepest passions  
A useless button  
A kill switch.  
But really  
Who am I if not  
The one who comes from the past?*

*I am not more  
A ghost  
A memory  
A wish*



*A dream —*

*As I am a nightmare.*

“A human experiences an average of 72 summers in their lifetime. So why do I feel like my summers are over?”

# JERRY ZHAO (M27)

## Rose

Glimpse upon the emerald spire;  
The thorny road of thy desire.  
What is the toll? The soul  
That yearns ever so?

There lies the budding heart,  
Her silent walls slightly part.  
Pray not peer nor peel behind  
the layers which hide the mind.

Do the scarlet scales not rot  
with the gaze of those who sought  
the dream that has long snared  
their desires to be paired?

## Your Farewell

I had not realized that you had died.  
Because your voice still rings out  
and I still see your lovely pout,  
something that I've since been denied.

I wonder how your journey was,  
past the River Styx<sup>1</sup> filled with dreams  
and all those cracks in the seams.  
Did you find, amidst the chaos, a cause?

I cannot bear the thought  
that your soul, adrift upon our requiem,  
would be anywhere but in Elysium<sup>2</sup>,  
the Paradiso<sup>3</sup> that I long sought.

I hope you have not yet

---

<sup>1</sup> The first of the five rivers of the Greek Underworld, one that all souls must cross.

<sup>2</sup> The resting place of heroes and the virtuous in Greek mythology.

<sup>3</sup> Paradise according to Dante's Divine Comedy.

drank from the River Lethe<sup>4</sup>.  
And, I ask, would you pritheee  
not forsake the life we had?

I know I will soon join you,  
for your passing was a half-death,  
a state so torturous, every breath  
scattered like the morning dew.

This, I beg of you, my dove.  
Please await my eternal slumber.  
I shall set the world asunder,  
a final elegy to end our love.

## Abandoned

Yet once again you left me there,  
in a world I couldn't hear  
any signs of true regrets.  
I was just buried secrets,  
a text you don't expect.  
Try to name one aspect  
with which I would be so missed.  
Even those I had kissed  
so tenderly and truly,  
has replaced cruelly  
my role in their turning lives.  
Do I blame their dives  
into a new sea of thought?  
I can't, though I have sought  
and thought this the last time  
I would leave on a dime.  
Fate's Wheel repeats itself.  
I too, start to lose myself.  
For my want to be alone.  
For my need to so own  
a place where I can just be.  
Still they constantly tell me,

---

<sup>4</sup> The second river of the Greek Underworld, where anyone who touches it loses their memory of their mortal life.

always tender: "There are more  
the future has in store."  
How could I ever think so?  
When no matter how slow  
I try to hold back the time  
of all those things sublime,  
I have lost and I will lose  
all that wilts like a rose?

## You and Her

To say that I don't love her,  
would be a lie so blatant,  
that the heavens would tremble with fury.  
Yet I cannot forget you.

To say that I didn't love you,  
would be a sin so great,  
that the depths of hell would rise in rage.  
Yet I cannot leave her.

To say that I won't love her,  
would be a thought so wrong,  
that the poets would roll over in their graves.  
Yet I cannot dismiss you.

To say that I couldn't love you,  
would be a life so blank,  
that the spirits would leave in disgust.  
Yet I cannot hate her.

## Wolf

That thing is not the girl I loved  
My love has long since left  
A shapeshifter, a skinwalker  
Your skin, worn like a pelt  
Stinks of blood, and pain, and death

It laughs in your voice; it smiles with your face

But the eyes were obsidian slates  
Like a film, left on far too long  
Its features distorted and warped  
still playing those movies starring us

"Let me in", you whispered and begged  
"Out here is cold, and inside is home.  
Trust me, love, oh trust me now"  
Your words snuck beneath my hands  
and crept and rooted in my mind.

It is not the girl I loved  
It is no longer the girl I loved  
But your face, your laugh, your body  
Are you not the girl I loved?  
I opened the door, for the girl I loved.

# Everyday Goodbyes by SEO KIM (M25)

Whoever I kiss,  
Whenever I bleed,  
Teach me that comfort is not my answer.

Wherever I go,  
However I breathe,  
Show me that liberty lies in expansion.

As I slip  
Through the cities,  
Through the chaos,  
Through the trains,

I ease  
Into the unknown,  
Into the nothing,  
That follows a dream.

The days repeat,  
And nights come quickly.  
I focus on the present,  
And I reminisce the past.

For more lessons to be taught,  
For less of my pain to be left —

I plead for today to stay,  
Letting go of my yesterday.

*Illustration for Seo's piece; by Kamilla Serikbay.*  
Linked [here](#).

# Hidden Hues by JASON SHI DY (M27)

## *Photography*

Found [here](#). Artist has no preference for layout.

There are three more photos in [this folder](#) which can be used for bg/design elements for Jason's piece.

## *Description:*

This collection of pictures illuminates a sense of hidden beauty and hues that is unexpected. Conventionally, daytime is when colors and vitality blossom; however, another world of vibrance awaits to be discovered as the night befalls.

In a similar manner, traversing beyond conventionalism has always been the cardinal force behind every societal and technological advancement.

As an imminent student of Minerva University, I believe certain resembling motifs exist between the two. A stimulating and cerebral education does not have to exist in a traditional institution. We Minervans are able to see beyond the social expectations of following a linear path for education, and pioneer into a new realm of opportunities, excitement, and exuberance.

# EMMA ZHANG (M27)

class of 2023

Rugged sweaters—gray and blue—chipping logos, stray papers, smudged charcoal clashing with red ink; linoleum floors and fluorescent lights, the strong, sweet smell of stress and expectation and competition, strong in the hallways, but stronger still in classrooms, behind wooden desks and doors blacked out with shades. Sweet like envy, sweet like poison, overwhelming but addicting all the same; it drives the machines in circles, promises of fulfillment leading them up stairwells and into closed-stall bathrooms, parking lots and laboratories.

Hands meant for play molded to thumbing through textbooks, cramped around a mechanical pencil; red-rimmed eyes bloodied by expectation, brains hard-wired to chase grades, not dreams, promised later happiness in exchange for present boredom. Intellectual minds dulled by repetition after repetition, structure after structure—killer of creativity. But in a world where success is measured by conformity, there is no room for individuality.

Every ninety minutes the machines come to life, pouring into the halls, floors paved by those who came before them—generations after generations framed on the second-floor walls, smiling faces, successful products worthy of praise. Soon, they will be just that: a memory, a faint ghost hovering, spirits lingering, tied by the unfulfilling weight of regret.

*4 years* and it's not enough but too much all at once, *1,600 souls* machines in the pursuit of happiness; forever searching for the right thing in all the wrong places.



class of 2027

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
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[REDACTED] Sweet [REDACTED]  
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[REDACTED] promises of fulfillment lead [REDACTED] them [REDACTED] to  
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chase [REDACTED] dreams, [REDACTED]  
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[REDACTED] smiling faces, successful [REDACTED] worthy of praise. [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] a memory, a faint ghost hovering, spirits lingering, tied by the  
[REDACTED] fulfilling weight [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] of happiness [REDACTED]

# Sustainability by HANA PASKOVA (M25)

“You know that whales sing to their loved ones?”

“No, they just make noises because they want to f\*ck.”

“Really? And how is that different from human love serenades?”

Why do we give the privilege of feelings only to the human race?

Why do we think we are the only ones entitled to love?

Is it because we would have to accept  
the fact

that we kill sensible beings for the market?

Is it because we would have to accept  
the burden

of the consciousness of the villain?

“Hmm, yes, but humans were made to eat meat.”

“Yes, we were, we need it.

It's people's livelihood, it's people's culture,  
but we are acting like a dominant vulture.

We're waiting so we can take more.”

Actually no,  
vultures wait until an animal dies,  
humans kill for leisure,  
or maybe for pleasure,  
and we schedule our kills.  
We are nothing alike.  
We wish we could be.

So we villainize animals  
that we kill for free.

But wait, veganism is not the road to take,  
it doesn't see the obvious.  
It doesn't see how the access inequality  
defines the availability  
of choice in diet.  
Some don't choose what they eat,  
whether it's tofu or meat.

We cannot choose for others,  
as diet is culture

and culture is scarce  
in this globalized world;  
so let's not steal it  
from those who preserve  
what they've been taught  
even if it includes  
some meat.

Veganism acts as if meat was just a substance,  
but it isn't, it's more than that  
for many on this planet.

Yet I agree,  
the problem is how we consume,  
How we live and interact with nature,  
Eating meat doesn't have to mean  
Torturing stock without a blink  
Of an eye.  
We can show humanity  
In killing  
When it's for necessity  
and not profit.

Still, praising vegans as saviors,  
is one of many flaws of the West,  
the rhetorics are almost religious,  
dismissing the rest,  
That has never been a solution  
to any problem,  
it only creates a division  
among us:  
humans.

I wish I would know,  
what would be the solution,  
rather than criticizing the present  
but I don't.  
It seems to be a cycle.

I just know that  
systemic changes happen slowly,  
and time is a currency

we don't own much of  
and that has no exchange rate for money.

So I guess we are just broke(n).

# Being and Becoming by STÊNIO ALVES de ASSIS (M25)

The conflict between the being and the non-being of things, of the eternal change and permanence of beings. Of the complementary duality between ephemerality and longevity: Heraclitus and Parmenides.

Embraced in this eternal being and becoming is what motivates me to live. I thought for a long time that putting down roots would be the same as being and living—form to justify my reality. As an ancient tree with nests, vines and different species of birds feeding on its fruit creates a stable ecosystem, I thought that was how life should be: going to college, finding a job, having a partner, having kids, dying. That was the formula of living sold to and bought by me for a long time. Happiness would come from dedication and faithfulness to routine and rites. However, looking closely at this ecosystem, we see that the birds are not the same.

The branches die and fall. The leaves change. The roots decay. The tree is in constant modification. Its immutability is a macroscopic and chronological illusion. One must get closer to see that happiness is not built from recipes and steps already defined. It is a daily choice.

It takes time to realize that everything transforms, even in small steps.

Leaving my family and meeting people from different backgrounds and perspectives made me see that there is so much similarity between so many different peoples and beliefs—just like branches in a big tree. And like a bird, I fled my home and tried to nest in other trees. Many welcomed me— – many did not. They changed and so did I. I met other birds looking out for the greatest metamorphosis. Just like me, they did not know it was already inside of them. Mustard seeds ready to germinate.

In a society driven by instant consumerism where everything is disposable, we find ourselves trapped in this volatile lifestyle. Never taking roots. Always flying. Never stopping and enjoying the raindrops that glisten on the ground. But always moving, getting wet and dry and wet again.

Loneliness lies there. In that gap between the ephemeral being and the eternal becoming of self.

For the first time, I made my solo trip. In Bangkok, I created nests. Local and foreign friends welcomed me with a warmth that I thought belonged to the restlessness.

Working in a hostel teaches you about the transience of encounters. Some went unnoticed if they left too soon—others, like me, took a while. Became rooted. Some already had well-established roots. In them, I created nests, and when I flew, they were empty.

What is life if not the embrace of what will exist and what has already existed? I read from a fellow countrywoman that living is more than accepting the lack, it is wanting it not to go away. Empty nests are necessary for a living tree. They indicate there was life, and always will be. Although, each branch is an endless possibility – the drunkard's walk.

Then I flew to Costa Rica.

The certainty that I would fly again did not stop me from making my home with people and letting them live with me. Fear is important, but if not handled well, it becomes a great enemy. It paralyzes rooting and prevents first-throw momentum. It stagnates. Fear is part of life, and the stagnation it generates must be temporary, otherwise there is no life. Its liveliness is created from its being and becoming. Here is a sacred continuum. The Brazilian romanticist, Adelia Prado, used to say that what seems static, waits; and what seems dead, fertilizes. Just like stagnation and death, fear can still be a valuable pathway to something greater.

Accepting and embarking on this paradoxical motion is a constant learning process. EARTH University— – where I engaged with different differences. Coming from Brazil, it was a great joy for me to meet the diversity of people and peoples that I had always heard about but had never spoken to. People that have always been around me unnoticed: Peruvians, Paraguayans, Ecuadorians, Bolivians, Caribbeans, Kenyans, Rwandans. Open-veins bodies. Everyone was there. Not idealized, their presences were acts of resistance. Not transient, not static. Constant. They taught me a lot about their lives. And I listened.

I also found a Brazilian community that welcomed me like a returning son. I could not understand this feeling of home away from home. In my life, its concept has changed. Sometimes I wanted it to be like a foundation stone, other times, like a holy dance.

After all, everything passes—and they did. However, I have learned that some things stay. Pieces of my heart remained. I planted them. Roots and nests.

I flew and I did not look back—or perhaps, I did, but my friends did not notice. They were receiving new birds and I was creating new nests.

