

**What the Lockdown Gave Me - Anjali Britto ([School of Foreign Service, STIA major,](#)
Class of 2022)**

Mixed media

When Georgetown closed in March 2020, I left DC and went back home to Goa, India. A few hours were the difference between me being on one side of the world and on the other. The pace at which events happened that I could never have anticipated was outstanding. Being at home felt surreal. Time felt weird. It felt as if my few years at college had never happened, because it felt like it was suspended so quickly. I was back home, the same place I was before I left for college. It felt like a twilight was dawning.

But being home was not just feeling like I was stuck in a time loop. During lockdown, the creek by my house got so clean I could see the sand at the bottom. The beach was unrecognisable. There were no people and the dogs were running wild. I have always loved the water, and the changes happening around me were manifest in the changes I could see in the water and land around me. Around this time, I found Frida Kahlo's *What the Water Gave Me*, and I was struck by the eloquence with which she captured the very feeling I was feeling. The capacity for the mundane to amplify and magnify emotion, the capacity for water to betray these emotions, and to bring up these feelings.

I tried to think about how people and societies dealt with pandemics before. Falling back on mythology, religion, and stories, for me, meant falling back on mythologies and stories that I held close, and continue to hold close. Experiences, memories, and feelings from a long time ago, that surface again with renewed vigour that returning to the same geography will often do. I started reading *The Decameron*, and I was completely taken with how familiar it felt. I wanted to do a *Decameron* of my own; stories, mythologies, histories, that are not *about* the pandemic but in being so, they are.

In putting my thoughts together, I found four themes that I built my piece around. The first was time. Time really did feel like a circle, with every point on the circle feeling so all-encompassing that you can't believe you were ever on a different point on the circle. British historian C.V. Wedgwood wrote about how history is written in retrospect. One can never re-capture what it was like to know the beginning only. I found myself at the beginning, and this is my attempt to write it before it gets coloured by the end.

Closely related to time was the twilight that seemed to weigh down heavily then. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche said that ugliness is perceived from the hatred man feels towards the decline of his own kind. The twilight of ugliness, mourning, and tragedy — the decline of normalcy — was a sharp contrast to the imaginings I had for those months.

The next theme was about what the water gave me. Water is the foundation of this piece. I wanted to capture the way water stays with you. It's unpredictable, and you never know how you'll come away feeling. The last theme had to do with religion, mythology, and stories. Just like in *The Decameron*, seemingly trivial and frivolous stories can say much more than one would think. Myths and stories of those who went before provide comfort, and comfort enough to tell your own story.

Reflection:

Working on *What the Lockdown Gave Me*, made possible by the Medical Humanities Fellowship, was an incredible experience. One of the objectives I hoped to achieve through this project was understanding how visual media and storytelling can be more than the sum of the narratives that make it up. This was an extraordinary challenge for me. Never before had I worked on a visual arts project of this scale, or one that required as much thought, analysis, and experimentation. In working on this project, I have grown in my abilities to create visual art, and have gained confidence in my ability to create visual narratives. I think of the time spent on this project as one of most humbling, exciting, and rewarding experiences I have had in a while.