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Hillsborough College
Volume XLV
TRIAD

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Adviser's Note



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Volume LIX

Hillsborough College provides an array of opportunities for students at various stages of their educational journeys, serving as a gateway to learning regardless of the direction they choose. This biennial edition of the Triad emerges during a period filled with both innovation and challenges within journalism, mass communications, and the arts. Thanks to the steadfast efforts of the Hawk Media Club, the Triad has become a celebrated platform that embodies the essence of all our students.

Art takes shape in numerous forms—expressing love, pain, comfort, or vulnerability—but fundamentally, each piece conveys a distinct narrative. In this edition, I wish to highlight the dedication of every contributor. The courage to create and share your story amid today's hurdles is truly admirable. This commitment encourages the Triad to feature the rich diversity of artistic expression, showcasing the beauty and emotion present in student creations.

I am immensely proud to have advised this latest volume. A sincere thank you to all the students who submitted their work. I warmly invite you to explore the 2025 edition of Hawk Media's Triad!

Dr. Richard F. Gaspar
Adviser

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Purple

By Tiara Rowland

Purple was your favorite color.
You wore it whenever you could.
Your closet was full of shirts, ties, socks, all in that color.

Purple.

It was such a happy color.
One that represented wisdom, bravery, and love.
It lost all its meaning when push came to shove.

Purple.

I used to love purple, too.
But since that night, all I can think about is how purple left us and took you.

I'll never forget that night; It's a memory I cannot erase.
It seems everyone loves purple, until someone they love is purple in the face.

Purple.

It has new meaning now.
It's the color of flowers placed at your grave.
A reminder of the love you gave.

It gives hope when days seem duller.
That's because purple was your favorite color.



Truly Happy
Natasha Alvarez
Digital Art

Travolta Trouble

Trouble—that's what John Travolta's security ended up calling me.

By Faride Sukni

I had the opportunity to attend the closing night of the Gasparilla Film Festival on March 31. The final film was "High Rollers," directed by Randall Emmett. Right before the screening, the cast, including John Travolta, who played the main character, came on stage to say a few words and answer questions from the audience.

This was my first real adventure as a journalist. I was one of many who raised their hands for a chance to speak to Travolta. A couple of guys were lucky enough to ask some fun questions, and I could hardly believe it when one of them exclaimed, "I just spoke with John freaking Travolta!" Meanwhile, I was left with my hand in the air.

As I watched the actors walk off stage, my first thought was, I can't be left hanging. So, I followed them through the corridors to the backstage room. I passed by workers and security, and honestly, I credit my outfit for helping me blend in with the actors. That's likely how I made it into the backstage area, where sushi, drinks, and John Travolta were all just… chilling. I was so nervous, almost frozen.

In a room full of happy, relaxed actors and actresses sharing drinks, I probably looked like a statue. But then I saw Travolta standing alone, and I thought, here goes nothing. So, I walked up to him and conducted a brief interview.

My voice was shaky, but I tried my best to sound professional. I asked him how he would rank his "High Rollers" character, Mason, compared to other iconic roles he's played. Travolta told me that Mason is actually a bit more like himself—someone who enjoys taking risks. An important part of Mason's personality is adrenaline. Travolta said he enjoys it too, but added, "I don't have to have it; I can enjoy it if I'm required to perform."

What convinced him to take the role in this second movie? "The second script was even better," he told me, and he confirmed that production for the third film in the series would start the very next day, April 1.

The way Travolta treated me—a random college student who had bent a few rules just to get an interview—was surprisingly kind and gentle. But that changed the moment I turned off the audio recorder and asked for a photo.



GIFF Facebook Post

Right then, security grabbed me by the wrist, took my phone, and began questioning me. “Who are you?” “What were you doing here?” “Who did you come with?” “Who let you in?”

I mumbled some not-so-helpful answers, but the fear kicked in fast. I tried to convince them to let me take one picture, but I couldn’t keep fighting security. They dragged me out of the backstage area and all the way out of the theater.

As they escorted me down the stairs, I kept hearing more questions. Finally, just before I was fully kicked out, one of the security guys looked me dead in the eye and said, “You are trouble. You can’t come in again.”

I couldn’t believe it—no picture with Travolta, no popcorn, not even a chance to sit down and watch the movie. I was supposed to be covering the final night of the Gasparilla Film Festival.

While I didn’t get to write a review of “High Rollers,” everything worked in my favor because I walked away with something far better: an interview with John Travolta and a wild story I’ll never forget.

giff GASPARILLA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
Presented by FILM TAMPA BAY



At Least You Still Have a Side
Raelyn Fernandez
Photography

Cigarette Smoke

By Christina Powell

A spark, a lick of fire, smoke-filled lungs.

Exhale.

I grimace.

There was always a pang of dread whenever I smelt the acrid scent of smoke-- a vision-- faded white leather beneath my legs, seated in the front of a truck. Soul-forged hatred always burned the hearth of my chest when its stench flooded my nose. Father, silver-rimmed glasses and chocolate hair-tinged smoke-grey with age; breath laden with the cigarettes. Times of hacking the second-hand smoke from the pillowed organs of my lungs and scrubbing my scalp until traces of blood lined my nails always resurfaced when silver streams danced across my face. A memento of smoke himself, there was no escape from the hauntings of the empty parental figure.

Though as years passed, the smoke-ridden memento of a flawed individual washed away and forgotten. Smoke became smoke, an awful habit to whittle one's life force down and blacken their lungs.

Then a spark: a spark of change.

Evenings spent with windows rolled down on highways, a cigarette clutched between worn and wise hands, pained lectures in the front seat of his car turned life lessons and a garnering bond. The clinging scent of cigarette smoke still plagued my hair and clothes, but I did not find myself scrubbing my scalp raw or digging my nails into my palms until they bled: I smiled as a sense of comfort washed over me. The appearance of smoke no longer repulsed me; silver dancers performing as the wind dissipated their performance replaced gnarled hands reaching to pull me under. A memento of smoke himself, there was always a silent reminder of Father in crowded city streets.

A spark, a lick of fire, smoke-filled lungs.

Exhale.

I smile.

After All These Years, There is a Calm After the Bear

By Cody Harper

A silence creeps through the house like an icy breeze only to be pierced every few seconds by the aggressive raspy sounds of snoring echoing through the hallways that led to my bedroom door as darkness enveloped the emptiness of the witching hour after each last syllable had escaped. “The bear is asleep.” I thought to myself. Sliding down my bed onto the carpet as if I were a snake uncoiling to go catch some prey, I quietly slithered along the ground to keep as quiet as possible to reach my door. After what seemed like an eternity of moving slowly, I made it to my door. Reaching up, I felt a glimmer of relief gently massaging the knots in my stomach as I found the door handle’s reversed privacy lock was unlocked. Able to move freely into the kitchen now, I decided it was my chance to get a coveted late-night snack.

Just as silently and methodically as before, I tip-toed out into the hallway, the hairs on my head standing attentively as I peered down the long hallway towards where the bear slept. It seems safe, the bear can’t possibly hear me, he’s asleep. Not much of a reassurance, nonetheless, I continued my journey for the late-night snack and edged my way around the corner from the hallway into archway of a faint light emitting out of the kitchen. Scanning upwards I locked onto my prize; the tri-flavored canister of Christmas-themed popcorn—the joy of any 8-year-old boy.

Taking a chair from the kitchen counter, I prodded it up against the fridge and climbed atop so I could reach my prize. I gleamed with joy as I ever so silently popped the top off of the top of the canister and reached for my favorite of the three provided flavors, caramel. Enjoying my snack, I was feeling quite accomplished without a thought to my name, all the way up until I heard it.

Rather, it was what I could no longer hear that invoked a paralyzing fear which in turn made my knees so weak it forced me to hold myself up on the fridge with my hands--of which were now cemented in upending terror. “No.” The snoring had subsided completely. “Maybe he just turned over” was my self-reassuring thought to help me quickly and efficiently out the popcorn back away and move the chair back in place as if I had never existed to me it. I wish I hadn’t existed in this moment as I was now facing the arduous task of attempting to return to my bedroom unscathed. I began tip-toeing into the darkness trying to calm myself that I was being overly paranoid, yet as soon as I was surrounded in darkness, I heard a quick rustle as, what could only be compared to being trapped in a tumbler dryer with bricks, came a furious cacophony of open hands while the bear growled expletives. I felt like I was being suspended in air, time was standing still, the rage in the bears eyes were glowing hotter and burning through me hotter than any fire I could stick my hand in. Although I couldn’t place where in the air I was, I wasn’t confused about what was happening; I knew being awake after bed time was punishment. “This is my fault.” Was my last thought.

My eyes started rolling into the back of my head as a numbing sensation began encrusting itself over my body like a chrysalis of nothingness. I felt I was going completely out of it, fledgling towards the place of no return amidst the

continuing flurry of blows; I suddenly opened my eyes realizing I was just violently expunged out of the bear's attack and into a clear pool of water.

Quickly as I realized that I was engulfed in this watery abyss I could feel a pressure developing around me which was preventing me from being able to feel my own movement. "Swim up" was the only thought I could articulate to myself. For whatever reason, I could do nothing. I could not breathe. I could not move. I was drowning in a suspended motion. My body was starting to panic, I could feel it. With every fiber of my being, I just wanted to reach up and break the waterline to grasp for breath. With the greatest effort I had ever managed, I contorted my arm upwards as I disappointingly found that the surface of the water was solid, I could not break it even with all the will power I was mustering. After a few seconds of eternity, I accepted my fate, I wasn't going to make it. I could no longer bare to hold my breath, my insides felt as though they were breaking at the seams; the pain was meeting no end. My eyes began to roll back as the darkness began to surround me yet again. I reached my hand out one last time in a desperate attempt to break through. Silence.

Abruptly, I shot up out of my sleep inhaling an unswallowable amount of air while drenched in thick sweat with a headache soring so radiantly it had me falling out of bed and onto the wooden floor of my bedroom. While looking around between panting breaths to asses my surroundings I couldn't help but wonder. "Where am I?"

I feel an instant confusion start to set in as the first wave of emotions fade out, this room seemed familiar but I wasn't sure how I got here. I pull myself up and start to wonder around this house I am in, where, upon inspection has nobody else in it but me, although it was clearly lived-in by other people as well by the set-up. I sat down on the couch in the living room blankly staring around trying to grasp an idea of my surroundings when in the faint distance I hear a phone ringing from the same bedroom I had aggressively awakened in.

I walk towards the ringing and peer down at the phone hopeful for a helpful clue as this confusion was gradually going from peaceful to alarming. The word "Dad" just appeared on the phone's screen, I reluctantly answer not knowing if this was mine or not, but thought to myself maybe they can help. "Hello?" I shyly whispered through the phone. "Son?" I heard a warm voice chip in from the other side in a slight hesitation. I paused for a moment, "I don't know. I just saw the phone and answered it, I'm not sure who I am right now."

Unsure whether this conversation was going to go anywhere, I could feel my emotions rising from within and just as quicky plateau with my heart stopping as soon as I heard through an assured calmness protruding out of the man's voice, "Oh son… I think maybe you've had another seizure in your sleep again."

"Again?" I shakily said. "We aren't exactly sure when, but sometime when you were younger you started having seizures in the middle of the night. You are my son, and you are 22 now. Just give yourself time to breathe, your memory will come back soon, it is just a temporary side effect. Hang tight bud, I'm on my way over to check on you."

I felt a wave of comforting relief come over me with those words said to me that made the once frozen blood coursing through my veins finally start to flow freely again. "Thank you."

"I love you, son."

"I love you too, dad."

~~Critical Race Theory~~

By Nicole Brown

Oppressed, depressed, suppressed,
led to a Nation of unrest.

Shackled and chained
while going mentally insane.

Captured and defeated,
led to a place without our history.

Black and blue, bruised and beaten
from the masters, from the pastors.

Taking our bodies, then our souls.
A mass Exodus, led by Garvey.

Then a slaughter, led by the US Army.
Our leaders became martyrs.

Our wealth and knowledge became bartered.
How do we overcome.

We were never welcome.
Families torn and sold.

Again, our minds are unsettled.
Peace is an illusion.

Until my brothers and sisters reach the conclusion,
the chains are no longer there on our bodies.

They run through our veins
carrying the blood of the enslaved.



The Numbers
Camille Denmark
Mixed Media

The Ballad of Sexual Dependency

By Jean Robert Delos Santos

Jack. Mark was another guy. He had this laid-back house in St. Pete. It honestly gave the impression of Southern California. In the backyard, was an artificial pond. “I can’t help it,” he had said one day, “if I live out here.” I had asked him how he could tolerate the humidity. “Lana Del Rey would belong here,” he said, as if that was an answer. I looked at him confused. “I thought you liked that kind of vibe,” he said. I didn’t know why my liking Lana anything had to do with it, but I hated Florida trash, loved the richer side of it though. It was so easy to deal with rich people. The poor was full of platitudes. He was looking out past the screen doors to the pond, drink in hand. Something about the view unnerved me. It was too sunny outside.

It was cold in his house; he liked it that way. He took a swig of the beer. I wanted to say to him that it was too early to be depressed. “You may be right,” said Mark. He came up to me and kissed me on the cheek. Which surprised me. “I don’t like it when you’re so sad,” I said. “It bothers me because you’re more uncontrollable.”

He looked at me incredulously, “In what way?” I stared at the whiteness of his house, all the decorations, what was supposed to be a nautical theme—an anchor, a helm, some fishes—all of which came from his father, and all of which were black. What had actually turned out was a Catholic theme. Though I didn’t know if this was because Mark was Catholic, and he had suppurated it into everything around him, or that the fishes looked vaguely like teeth. I felt like drowning. I turned to him and said, “I don’t think you like me very much when you’re depressed.” I paused. “That’s all.” He nodded. “It’s not everyone either,” I said. “Just me.” He didn’t say anything. I somehow felt desperate. I tried to speak softly, “what’s wrong?”

He smiled and stood up. “I’m going to get coffee.”

“Is your wife having problems?” I asked.

“My wife is done,” he said sullenly.

How will this bode for the Catholic I thought. I should know, my thoughts ran, I’m Catholic too. How do I feel? Pensive. Not quite empty. It was a feeling that I hadn’t had in a while. He came back with coffee, which he took a swig out of. He stayed there, on his chair, looking out over the pond in the backyard. He had his legs spread. I kept myself from looking at his crotch. I had sucked him off last night and it felt wrong. I was running on Valium which messed with my memory a bit. I swore never to do it again and stick to ket. I got up and took a shower. All the while, the fishes stuck with me. I had a nightmare about them that night. Apparently, I was convulsing in my sleep but Mark didn’t wake me. I was just yelling and swinging at nothing. I woke up in a sweat; Mark was next to me. “What did I do?” I asked him. He shrugged and told me everything. “What were you dreaming about?” he asked. “Fishes,” I said. I felt like I was about to cry. I took another Valium anyway.

#

Vincent. Jack was sitting on the couch watching music videos on the YouTube app on Mark’s T.V. It was The Smiths playing, How Soon is Now. Mark was making coffee in the kitchen. I was watching Jack; who had said nothing the whole time. Both were acting strange. I was still checking messages from Camila; she was

talking a lot more now; a lot more. She was in one of those phases where I had to pay attention to her. I looked up her pictures on Instagram, her on the beach, her in a blue dress in some festival or party. Messages were popping up, she was talking about a lot of things, the reason I only mention she was talking is because her messages were incomprehensible, layered with facts here and there. About her life, her mental state. If Jack saw them, he would probably tell me something like, “what she wants you to tell her is somewhere in the middle”, but I still didn’t know what to tell her. The truth is somewhere in the middle. He had said that once, I think it was this confusing story he was writing. I still didn’t get him. I looked up again, and Mark was looking at Jack. He was drinking coffee, and Jack looked like he was high. It seemed weird. I felt like leaving. There was abnormal tension in the room, like something was about to break out. I had to leave. I had to leave. I threw my phone on the floor. Jack looked at me, Mark stared at the screen where it started playing something by Blondie. “What is it?” Jack asked. “Camila,” was all I said. He just looked at me, shrugged, then turned to Mark, who smiled at him. The tension was dissipated. But I still wanted to go.

#

Jack. This was the house of one of Vincent’s friends. Vincent said he wouldn’t mind. It was decorated with posters of video games and superhero movies. Above us, looking down was a poster of The Dark Knight, with a blurred image of the Joker, with smudged lipstick. I was getting an impression of Vincent’s friend that was not at all favorable.

Vincent pulled up his pants and got dressed again. I laid back supine, looking up at that idiotic Joker poster. I was almost out of breath. He went back on the bed. We lay there for a few minutes, then I said I probably wouldn’t like his friend. He agreed. I told him a story from my childhood, the one about a Jesus apparition the church shed, it was a nightmare I had. I was selective about details. I wanted him to pity me. “That’s a scary story,” he said in what felt like an hour later. “Yeah,” I said. “How freaky,” he said. We were quiet the rest of the night.

#

Mark. Bridget and Lucy were sitting on a couple of white patio chairs I set up. The weather today was surprising; it was cool, windy. I could hear the wind chimes in front of my house; I liked the breeze. The sun was glistening on the artificial pond; it was a funny thing to think about, these artificial ponds. Florida was a strange piece of land; someone had to try and make this large swampland into something habitable. It was a tenuous relationship. We were all teetering on the edge of something. If climate change was real, then Florida would sink, and that house my father had in Palm Beach, and one my uncle bought in Key West, along with the house of a guy I knew—who kept his wife buried in his backyard, taking it out every year or so to ruminate on death (some ritual in his home country)—all of these properties would sink. People would celebrate, because we were all a bit conservative. My father was Republican, I was working with Lucy, who worked with Republicans, the guy with the dead wife didn’t participate in politics, but he was conservative. We all would have it coming, wouldn’t we?

Lucy was even more beautiful. She was someone, I knew, who would be beautiful with age. She would not lose it, it would always

evolve into a different kind, but one just as radiant as the last. Bridget stood up and walked towards the pond; she was wearing a cropped black shirt and jean shorts. She bent down and looked into the water. “There’re alligators there you know?” I told her. She kept on staring, then Lucy next to me says, “she has a good eye.” As if that mattered. She was sipping on vodka and orange juice. “What are you going to do about Jack?” she asked. “I asked him to come on Sunday.” I didn’t answer. Jack was someone I couldn’t figure out. Whether he was actually into me or not. I don’t know how to describe it; he mentioned meta-attraction once, which was plausible, I guessed. At one point, he thought he was a woman. He didn’t like to go into detail with this. He’d since de-transitioned.

Bridget stood up. She was definitely high on something—started rambling on about animal sacrifices. Suddenly, Lucy blurted out, “Rachel’s PCOS is acting up.” As if that was somehow the natural course the conversation would take. “She’s been bleeding out for a week now.” “Oh wow,” Bridget said. Then she laughed. “Alligators!” she started yelling at the water. I really didn’t know what she was on about.

#

Jack. I gave Vincent the rest of the cocaine when he went. It’s not like I needed it, I was going to get more from Evan anyway. I had found a stable dealer, who I could trust, and took the effort to make sure fentanyl wasn’t involved, since that had us all on edge when it regarded drugs. Mark sat next to me, I turned off the T.V. Vincent had a little episode. Me and Mark were honestly afraid of him. He felt off that day, which put us both on edge.

Mark told me that he wanted to take me somewhere. “Where?” I asked. A golf club. “I don’t want to go golfing,” I said. “Me neither,” he said. “It’s just a nice place is all.”

I got up, put on my jacket, waited for him. Ignored the fishes on the wall.

When we got there, the sky was purple, with orange streaks. The clouds oscillated in sharp shapes across the horizon. He had to drive a golf cart to a specific spot, one that overlooked the whole club and there was a roar of some gathering coming from the main building. I asked him how long he’s been a member. A year, he said. I asked him if his father got him in. “God no,” he said laughing, he had this Robert De Niro smile, which was charming. He fixed his hair by slicking it back with his left hand. “No, I got it myself. Plus, I knew some guys from when I was in construction.” “Right,” I said. “You good at golf?”

“Not very,” he said. “But it’s still fun.” He paused. “When the weather’s nice, and there’s good people around.”

He stayed silent for a bit, I watched as the sky turned dark, and the lights around the place went on. “They let us stay around here?” I asked. “They let me stay,” he said. He was probably richer than I thought. Again, a bout of silence. “What do you think of Vincent?” I asked.

“Why?”

“Just asking.”

He turned towards the main building, then the sky. There was a plane overhead. That was what he was looking at. Are you dreaming of your wife? I was thinking. I took a drag off my vape. Apparently it would’ve been declassee if I had pulled it out in broad daylight, but it was dark now, and we were under a lamp, and far away from everyone else; and at that point, I

didn't care about ethics. I asked him another question, "What do you think about Lucy?"

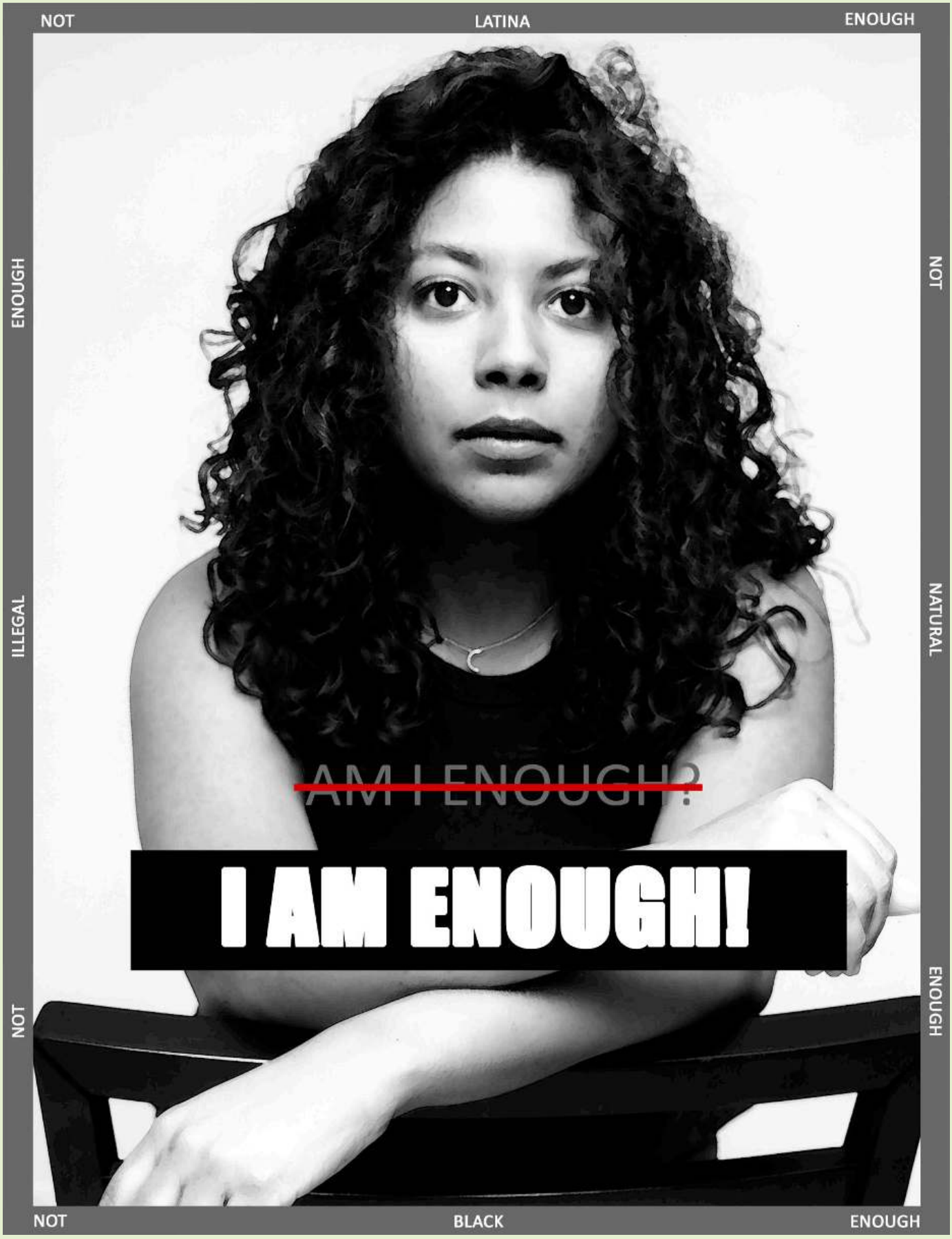
"Why do you get jealous of everyone?" was all he said. I looked at him, then he smiled and turned back to where the plane was. It was gone now. Only stars. The moon was brighter, and we were under it. I heard a whispering in my ear, but it was only me recalling Bridget's voice, who had told me the name of this goddess. A name I had forgotten. I was getting dizzy. I thought of the fishes in Mark's house. He repeated his question, still smiling, amused at my apparent envy. "I don't get jealous," I said.

"Fair enough."

I laid down on the grass. I hadn't been in a space this open before. I stared up at the starry sky. At one point, I carried a belief that was rampant among the kids in America. That we were all just space dust. That there were probably aliens out there that didn't care about us; or did, and would soon make themselves known to us. It seemed a lot of people were thinking about that. But sitting there, with the lights of the main house in the distance and the occasional animal croak, I thought of nothing. Yes, nothing was running through my mind. And I was completely sober.



Red Room
Aracellie Rodriguez
Charcoal Drawing



I am Enough
Gabriella Mendez
Digital Art

My Right Hand

By Richard F. Gaspar

Someone has cut off my right hand,
and left a limb to bleed.

A cut so quick and so deep,
it took a moment to see.

Gone is the hand that held you tight,
The strongest part of me.

It can no longer wave goodbye.
There are no fingers to wipe the tears.

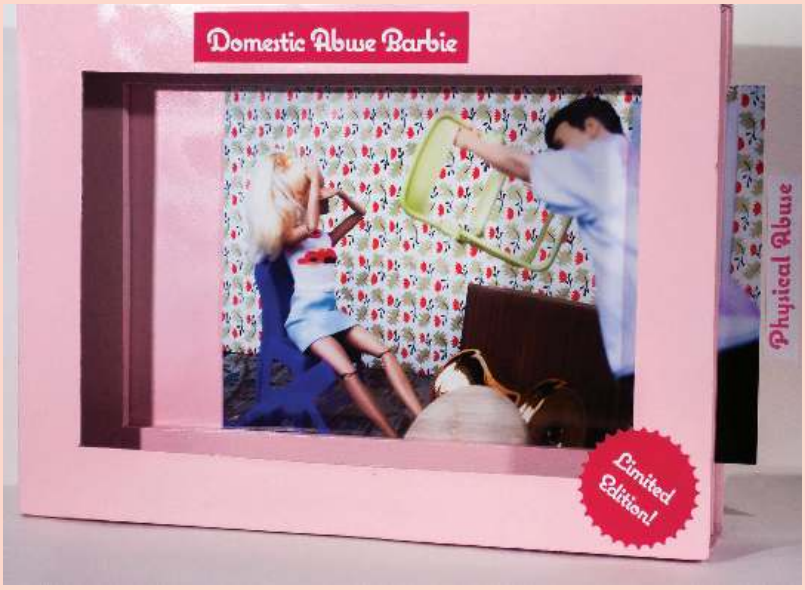
Love and kindness may dull the pain,
in the coming years.

Only time can heal this loss
and help me to feel,
the severed limb of my right hand
made of flesh and not of steel.

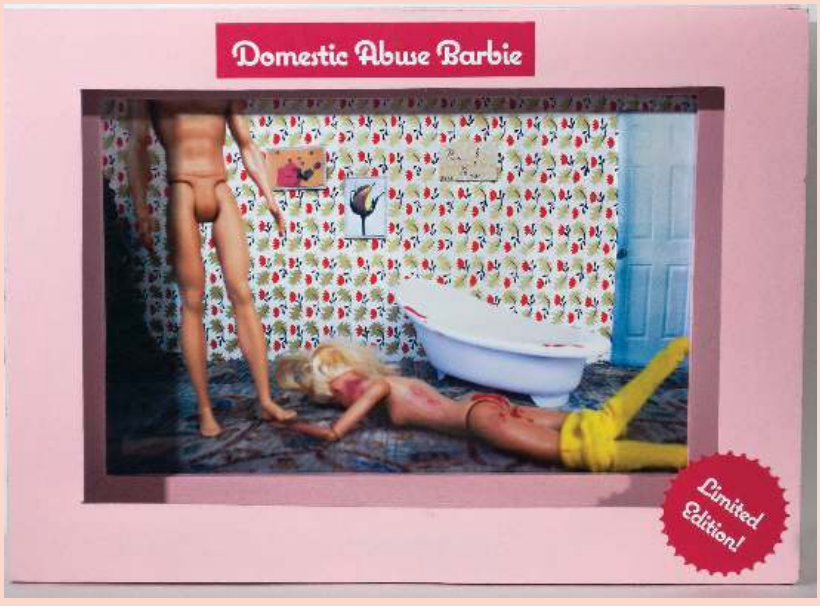


Hands of Time
Richard F. Gaspar
Microsoft Designer Digital Art

Domestic Abuse Barbie



Featured Artist
Ivy Ramirez-Corona
Diorama Artwork and Photography





Domestic Abuse Barbie



Limited Edition!

Domestic Abuse Barbie



Limited Edition!

Domestic Abuse Barbie



Limited Edition!

Domestic Abuse Barbie



Limited Edition!

Missing Monkeys

By Bill Reeves

A strange thing happened at the zoo today.
Before the doors opened the monkeys got away.
Careless zookeepers left the cages unlocked.
Dumbfounded, the monkeys found their exit unblocked.

Everyone knew who the bosses would blame.
“Fire that new intern.” they’d surely proclaim.
“Give her the boot when she walks through the door.
Her services here are needed no more.”

Inside the breakroom, a meeting was held,
Just to discuss if she shouldn’t be jailed.
“Keeping her on is a bad precedent.
Let’s all agree, it was no accident."

“Meeting adjourned. I’m calling the cops.”
“Now wait just a minute.” the new intern cried.
“Okay, I took the monkeys, that can’t be denied.
Please understand it was at their request."

Queer as it sounds, they are really our guests.
Reason enough to respond to their pleas.
Simply, there was something they needed to see.
Together we left in the dead of the night.

Under cover of darkness and to their delight.
Viewed as a group, we were surely quite odd.
Waiting for Uber our plan might be flawed.
Xmas came early with Uber’s GOAT of escapes.

Yes, the monkeys and I saw "The Planet of the Apes.”



El Pilar Invisible
Ivy Ramirez-Corona
Watercolor Painting

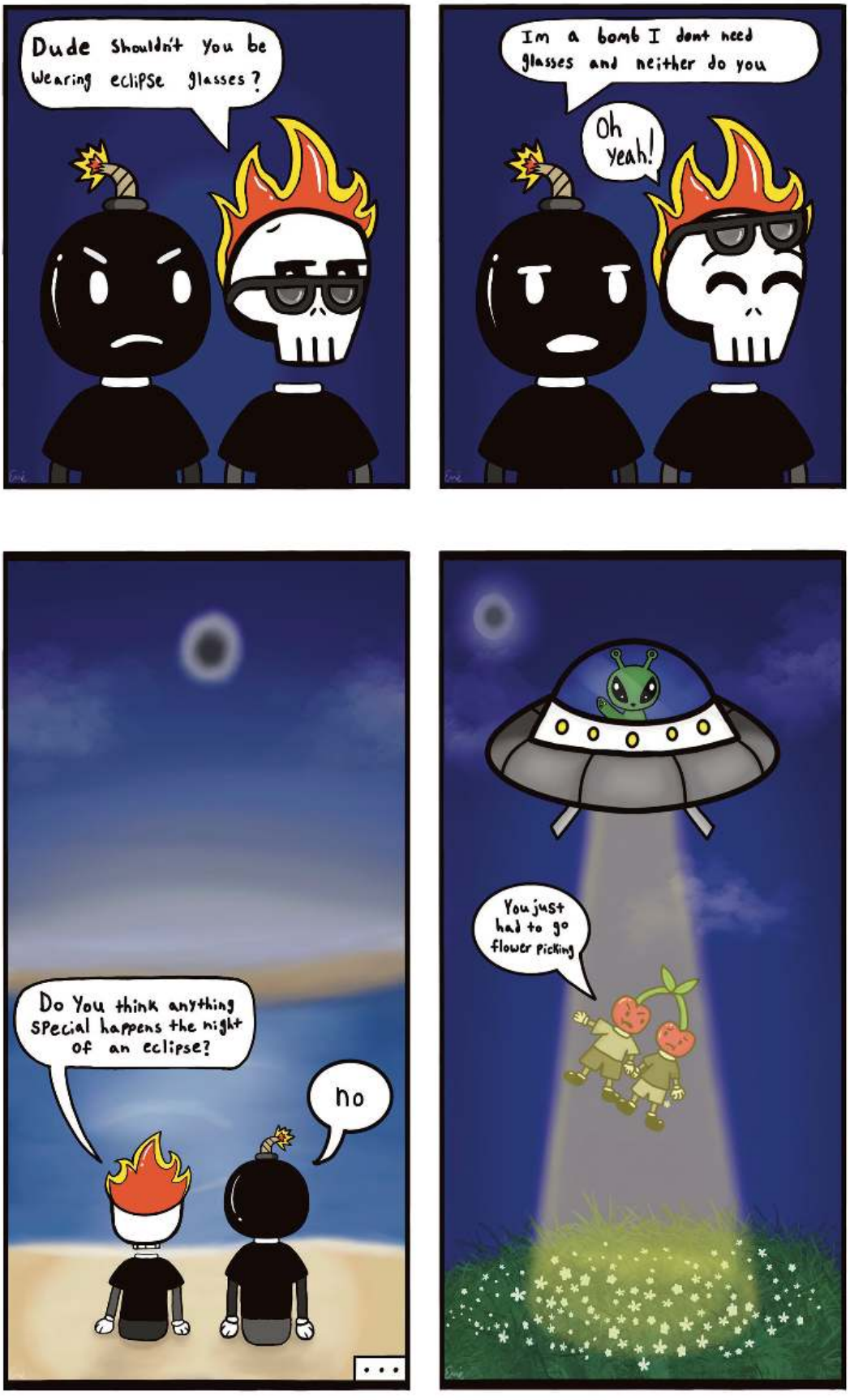




Mom's Room
Sabrina Telis
Illustrator Art



Just Breathe
Ashley Lopez
Photography



The Eclipsters
Emelé Gaspar
Digital Art





Holding on to Death
Guadalupe Diaz
Oil on Canvas

The Elegance of Wretchedness: Allen's Interlude

By Thomas Grine

I live alone in a house on the beach. It is an average house with a bed and bath, creaky floorboards, and a stained shower curtain. The fireplace is stone cold with old ash stains running up and out of the house. The walls are covered with muted pinks, greens, and blues that have begun to chip away. Some parts of the walls are painted while other parts are bare. Most days, I don't go out as it is much easier to stay secluded.

When I was young, I thought I understood how to make myself feel something. That rush of excitement for anything I could find. That comfort color that has now been watered down and forgotten. How long must I search for that feeling again? Was that feeling ever real to begin with?

Every morning, I remember a new color. The cool but comforting purple that my mother showed me, as well as the burgundy-colored pillows my siblings and I used to make forts. The lush green of the woods that transported me away from my troubles. Or even the dark blue night skies that stayed with me as tears fell from my eyes. Colors of emotions I can't paint or explain, memories and falsehoods left out in the rain.

I no longer feel happiness the way I once did. My smile feels like a mask; an alter ego to hide my true color. Why can't people understand not feeling like yourself or to be told what you used to feel was not real?

Cans of paint are lined up on the walls, some are empty, and some are full. The wooden floors have been dented and scuffed up from the constant shifting and moving of old furniture. Growing pains are constant, as the need of forgetting the old me grows larger each day. Why do I chase after that familiar feeling? People seem to not understand why it's so hard to move on from that romanticized or so-called fairytale world.

My Fairytale World

On the days it was too cold to think, I would sneak out to the woods to be consumed in the silence. The cold air helped to numb the pain and drove her to me. The beautiful woman that showed me the brightness I could not find in myself. I never understood why, but for years she was my reason for being.

She showed me what I believed was happiness. That heightened sense of life for us to share. Euphoric adventures we went on together, for she stayed with me year in and year out. I loved her because she loved me at my lowest and my highest. When I dragged my feet, she pulled me further, kept me moving. Running into her arms, she felt cold, but not sad.

When I could not find her there was nothing. I searched and searched for her until I broke down in tears. Months passed and still she didn't return. I couldn't breathe without her, and my colorful world turned sour and cold. I lay by the lake as fog covered the water and the darkness made my spine twitch. I gazed out onto the pond as it slowly began to freeze over.

Tears had frozen before they could fall in my lap, and no one could save me. I had failed to find her. Yet maybe I could force her to come back to me. I stood up and ventured to her flower beds,

walking miles up hills and through the trees until I finally found her favorite oak tree, surrounded by dozens of red roses.

I start to feel some hope as I rip four of them out of the ground. I return to the lake as fast as I can and search the ice below me. Any sign of her was gone, the gray blue pond only gave a disfigured reflection of myself. My heart starts to race as I can feel her near me. Ice cracks loudly beneath my feet and the moonlight disappears. A dark shade of green consumes the cold water below. My heart is in my throat now and goose bumps have covered my arms. Finally, I see her floating in the water beneath me. Dropping to my hands and knees, I call out to her. I just need her to make me feel something again, but she has changed. Her beautiful blue eyes are now a vacant shadow of dying love.

The thin ice breaks beneath me as she pulls me into the cold water plunging me into the abyss. Her cold lips touch mine but don't feel as they once did. The ice freezes above us and I feel her grip tighten as we finally descend slowly into madness. To let our false reality unfold would leave me with no control. If I escape now, who will be the light I need?

Lost Memories

I remember the calmness that washed over me as we began to sink. To hold on for so long knowing my grip was slipping when I became disconnected from reality. When I eventually let go, the pain seemed to stop. That light in my eyes faded and the tears dried up. Finally, I could stop personifying the boy everyone wanted me to be.

What was that idea or fantasy? Can I recapture that feeling from that time? Is it wrong to long for desperation again? To paint that picture and feel what I believe is who I am meant to be. Even today, I will pick the dying roses hoping she will come back to me, mold me into the boy I still believe I am. To finally be at peace with the person I hate the most.

When I slipped away, it was like nothing else mattered. I beat myself up every day until I didn't feel anything. Everything felt numb to me, the light had gone out. Falling, giving up and letting go felt right. To drift off, not believing you would make it out, that was it. No one truly understands the beauty in that.

And in this house, I wandered from room to room. Just waiting. Waiting for the buildup of damage to turn into breakage. I still tried to get her flowers, only to pick all the petals in anticipation, waiting for her, hoping one day, she will return.

I soon realized that she would not be back. Life went on, continuing without her. Years of being in constant disillusionment have kept me from leaving my house. To face life like this is not what I thought it would be. Everyone said they understood and even tried to show sympathy for me. Rebuilding this life according to other people's ideas and standards felt dishonest.

I identified with misery and tragic endings, waited for it to be over one day, to be free of mind, free of the person I hated most. When I was wrenched out of that state, it broke me. To leave such a big piece of me behind felt like dying again. The reason why I chase that feeling is to reconnect to the essence of self.

The Essence of Self

My dissociation from self has made me question my sense of time and direction. To lose such a negative but large piece of who I identified as, was like watching a loved one pass away. In my heart, I am that lost, angry boy. Even after years of suffering, I am truly more lost than ever before.

Some believe that once it's over, I am meant to be new, to move on and become who everyone tells me I am. When I paint that starry night sky, to try to explain myself, many misunderstand why the stars shine so bright. The beautiful white stars are strong specs of light, though we cannot gaze upon their beauty as clearly in absence of darkness. Without the darkness, light has no meaning.

If I can't feel that overarching darkness, what is my meaning? Is happiness really just finding little fragments of it, cherishing it, then letting it run away? Can I tackle that feeling and make it stay?

Who am I? I know the name I was given, but how do I define it? I could paint you a vivid image of who I was for seventeen years, but that's not who I am now or who I could be tomorrow. As I move farther away from the old idea of me, I long to connect with the vibrant colors of my past.

Fragments

I live with loved ones in a house on the beach, away from the cold and the rain. Everything seems perfect and fixed up how everyone wants it to be, always expecting me to be something I'm not. To allow myself to heal, I need to accept who I used to be and build a new life from the imperfect past.

In a weird way, I have never felt less like myself than I do now. Years have passed and I have searched inside and out for that color I would never find. My paintbrush moves swiftly up and down, side to side, though I can never feel completely whole inside. I can change out my shower curtain, fix up my floorboards, redo the roof and paint until my hands are sore, yet it never seems to make much difference or help me heal from my mental illness.

I still don't believe that this is it, to be stuck in this watered-down world. Locked away in this house, crying out and pleading for anyone to understand. Can someone please tell me it's ok, to hate myself so much that I chase after the person who tried to take my life? The same woman who tried to drown me in my sorrows. The one who took my breath away then showed me I didn't need to drown when I can swim. When I could swim in my sorrows and the need for air no longer existed, not having to breathe was easier than reminding myself to live.

Maybe one person will see my painting and understand my unhealthy obsession with misery, or maybe I am more alone than I truly thought. If one could show me how to cope and recover instead of running away from the past, then maybe it would all make sense.

I still have not seen that woman, felt her warmth or found that color. I feel alone and lost in this world, but I've found new beauty in today. I felt like I was running after something I could never find as I walked away and left the dying rose petals behind. Who I am now and who I was then, will never collide or be together and coincide. The rose died and left no seed, no option for regrowth. The only thing remaining was an old paintbrush, dry petals scattered around the dusty table and the suffocating memory of…

When I was
When I wasn't
When I tried
And when I died.



Can't Hide from the Clown
Natasha Alvarez
Photography

The Effect of Political Affiliation on Mental Health

By Vu Tran

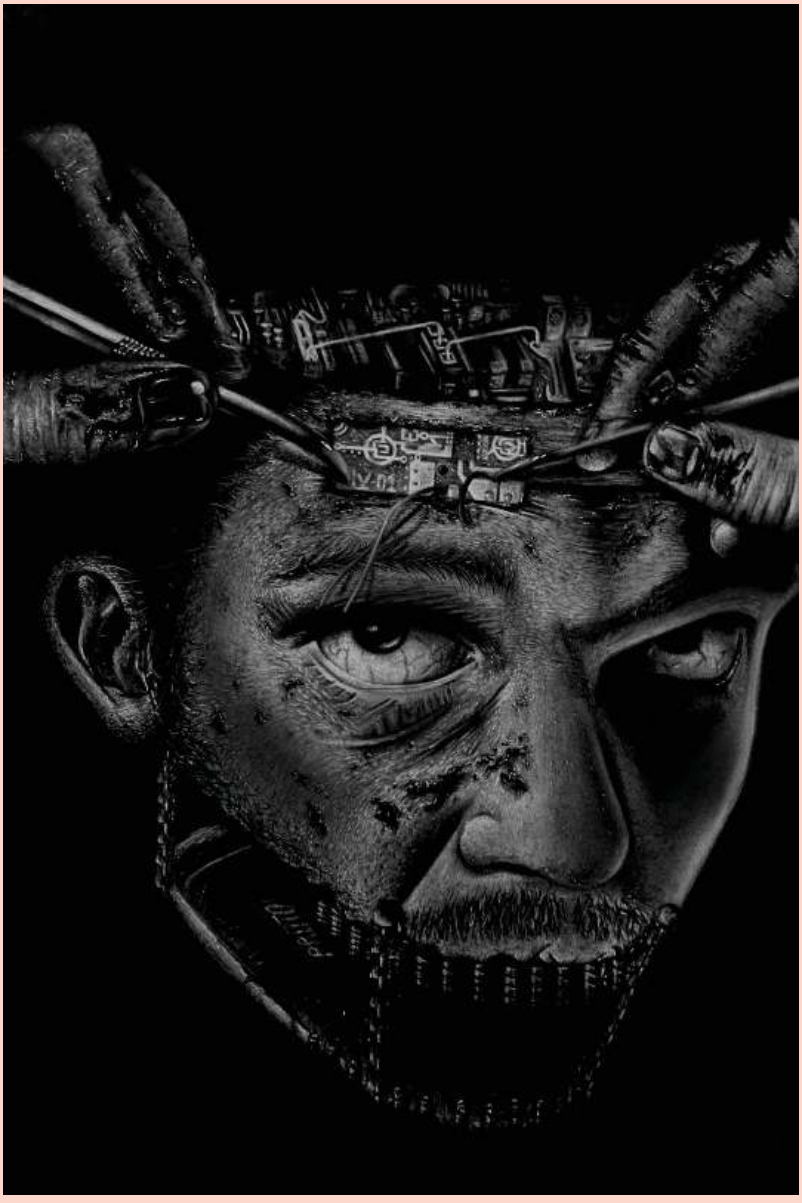
Political affiliation is a vital part of human identity as it reflects to individual's belief and attitude toward political parties and ideologies. People have rights to take part in decisions that influence their country, but escalating polarization and divisiveness in politics seem to show no sign of stopping, which is allowing stress and anxiety over politics to get under people's skin. Political absorption can lead to significant negative impact on well-being, including loneliness and hopelessness, highlighting the importance of addressing the impact of political inclination on mental health.

Political affiliation in a polarized world creates divisions within communities and workplaces as people may feel ostracized or discriminated against for holding minority views. Covid-19 surfaced in a society that was already fractured; the pandemic became the catalyst for political polarization and ideological stances, which in turn shaped how people perceive it and their willingness to follow preventive measures such as mask-wearing, lockdowns, and vaccinations. A study conducted in the United States in 2020 exemplified this phenomenon by finding that conservatives were more likely to believe that Covid-19 was receiving excessive media attention, and people were overreacting to the virus. Conversely, liberals tended to express their view that the government was not doing enough to curb the fast spread of the disease (Christensen et. al). People holding progressive views on this social issue may feel isolated and unsupported if they live in conservative communities and vice versa. Individuals may only seek out and interact with people sharing their political views, leading to social estrangement from those having opposite views. It drives to a sense of disconnection and despair in a self-reinforcing cycle of social isolation and political polarization, so it particularly damages mental health with loneliness, as social support is crucial for emotional well-being. Social support is important for maintaining good mental health when it provides individuals with a sense of belonging and emotional support. In the polarized society, however, toxic weapons such as negative new stories or social media content reinforce political divisions and exacerbate the negative impact on mental health.

Political affiliation can also lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair when one's preferred candidate or party loses an election. The 2016 US presidential election might be unforgettable for a great number of people; indeed, it was during that race that the expression "election stress disorder" was coined, as the strong emotions and controversy surrounding it caused mental stress for myriad of individuals. The intense polarization that characterized the campaign resulted from supporters of both candidates feeling passionate about their vote. When Donald Trump won the election, plenty of people who had supported Hilary Clinton were devastated, feeling as though their values and beliefs had been rejected by the electorate (Reed). This sense of loss and disappointment was felts most strongly by many women, members of minority

communities and others inspired by Clinton's historic candidacy. The contentious nature of the election and subsequent presidential administration has continued to exacerbate feelings of hopelessness and despair among those who disagree with the policies and actions of the administration. This has led to ongoing political protests and activism, as well as a sense of frustration and disillusionment among many Americans. It is important to note that the effects of political affiliation on mental health are not limited to the election cycle. In today's highly polarized political climate, political discussions can become contentious, leading to feelings of anger, frustration, and helplessness. Social media platforms have made it easier than ever for individuals to engage in political discussions, but they have also created echo chambers that reinforce our beliefs and values. This can lead to a distorted view of reality and make it more difficult to empathize with others who hold different opinions. As a result, individuals may only seek out and interact with people who share their political views, leading to social isolation from those who hold opposing views. This can create a self-reinforcing cycle of social isolation and political polarization, which can exacerbate mental health issues.

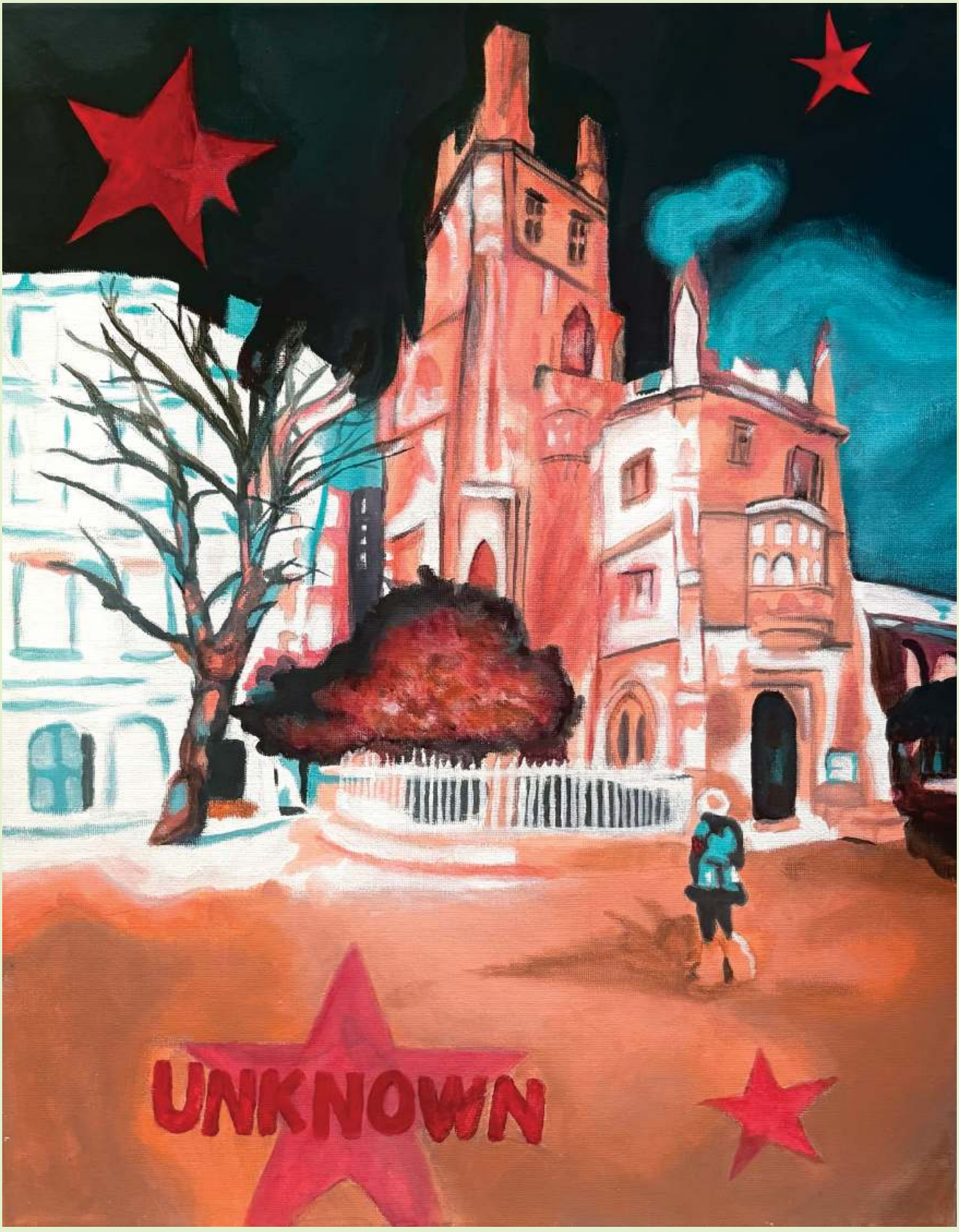
Political affiliation has become an important aspect of personal identity, which can lead to a sense of tribalism that further polarizes individuals and groups. The consequences of political affiliation on mental health are significant, and it is imperative that we address them. It is important that we recognize these effects and work together to find solutions that promote mental well-being for all individuals. By fostering a culture of respect, understanding, and inclusivity, we can mitigate the negative consequences of political polarization on mental health and build a better future for ourselves and our communities.



Defilement
Ahmad Hasan
Charcoal



The World is Yours
Emiliano Infante
Digital Art



Complete Unknown
Emelé Gaspar
Acrylic on Canvas

Staff

HELLO
my name is



Emelé Gaspar

Editor-in-Chief

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my name is



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Non-Fiction Editor

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Ivy Ramirez Corona

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Awards

College Media Association
Apple Award
2014

Columbia Scholastic Press Association
Medalist
1983, 1985, 1986, 1993, 1994, 1995,
2007, 2008, 2009

Collegiate Crown Awards Finalist
2009

Society of Professional Journalists
Mark of Excellence
Best All-Around Magazine
1983

Associated Collegiate Press
Hall of Fame
1999

Pacemaker
1990

All American
1985, 1989, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003,
2007, 2008, 2009, 2013

Florida Community College Press Association
General Excellence
1985, 1989, 1992, 1994, 1997, 2003,
2006, 2007, 2008, 2009

