

An abstract painting of a face, rendered in a style reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh's 'Owl' or 'Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear'. The face is composed of vibrant, textured brushstrokes in shades of blue, red, orange, and green. A spider is depicted on the lower part of the face, its legs extending across the features. The background is dark and textured.

Issue 2

THE STIRLING REVIEW

SPRING

2023

For the creativity that sparkles.



“WINDOW OF DREAMS”

ANIKA GOEL

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear reader,

Before you begin on your journey through these amazing works, I encourage you to understand. Often, when met with beautiful pieces of art and writing made by teenagers, people say that they write ‘beyond their years,’ or make art with ‘unnatural experience.’ When we approach art made by the youth, our first reaction is to be impressed by the quality despite their presumed inexperience.

If this point of view is one that you hold, I invite you to change your perspective as you read this issue of *The Stirling Review*. Art made by teenagers is not amazing in spite of their age, but because of it. The writing you read and art you experience in these next pages are uniquely impressive because they are made by teenagers that see the world in new and inspiring ways, ways that nobody else could see other than themselves. The form they use, diction they choose, and tones they adopt—all uniquely theirs.

Including contributors, twenty-five people were involved in the making of this magazine. All of them are teenagers.

It is not everyday that you are able to read a magazine that has become more than a sum of its parts—not just a collection of writing or art—but rather a piece of work in and of itself, wholly composed by a generation on the forefront of change, innovation, and advancement. I hope you will cherish it; we certainly did.

With that, we are ecstatic to present the second issue of *The Stirling Review*! Thank you to the *Stirling Review* Staff who made all of this possible and to the rising artists whose voices we aim to amplify. Here's to Spring 2023, and many more to come.

- Michael Liu and Tane Kim
The Stirling Review

Spring 2023

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NANANG

CATHLEEN BALID



is a word that has always sat funny in your mouth. You say it with the back of your tongue, your teeth stale and pristine, and you note the breath in its odd timedness, smooth and circular like *nanang's* rosary beads. Maybe that is why you say it like a prayer: eyes closed, lips waxy. Breathing measured like your body.

Nanang is a word that means mother, but you have never seen it before. Somehow the word only exists in the space between cost and silence, between *nanang's* antiseptic eyes, as in, *yes, nanang, I saw the bills*. As in, *no, nanang, I don't know what to do*. You only knew *nanang* through her thin, slippery body, the way her dreams slipped past her coffee-stained teeth and paused

into farming sugar. Through the absent way she said your name, like a stain of coffee knelt into a tablecloth, flattened by its bitterness. Over the years you watched *nanang's* back grow broken like webbed fruit rinds swallowed and discarded, and you palmed your spine faintly and imagined your bloody bone developed from hers—a skeletal connection. But *nanang* swallows affection as if it were bitter medicine, and you, embittered, swallow her name into the striated depths of your voice.

Nanang is a word that you have not said since you left her, dying, in the house you were born in. In time *nanang* would learn to clutch her words so they did not fracture, to amend them into a reflection of her body, but you did not stay for time. You lost your youth to mending the ripples

across nanang's lonely, absent face, smoothing a future serrated like the peel of durian, and

when you left, you brushed the wetness from her cheek. It has been years since you have seen *nanang's* filmy lips, touched her wrinkled skin, but

nanang is a word that sinks reflexive in your mouth.



About the author

Cathleen Balid is a teen writer from Queens, New York. Her writing appears or is forthcoming in Cathartic Lit, Ice Lolly Review, and the Lunar Journal. In her free time, she loves to journal, cuddle with her dog, and go on boba runs.

THE SPACE BETWEEN THE TONGUE AND MOUTH IS CALLED LOSS

NAOMI CARR



how do we get to the sky // summer kissed crimson on its cupid's bow
drawn back between your shoulder blades // i abandoned my body in ohio
when you told me you loved him // solitude is a chronic insomniac when
neither know the ending // which is not to be confused with the taste of
grapefruit, incessant stinging on the tongue // the kiss of loneliness is more
bitter than sweet // i turned seventeen around the fingers of another girl //
teeth sunk in keratin trenches, trying to retrace your words with my
tongue // back track to a time before the fruit was ripe, branches breaking
under the unknown // why are all gay love poems about fruit // my fruitless
labor // you make sodomy jokes taste sweet // i'd compare you to a
sunflower if i could // but it is february, and i am your late-spring bloomer
// a self-portrait unfurling from your tongue // spectacle close enough to
call canvas your skin // i used your body as a roadmap between here and
the afterlife // lost myself in your camera obscura // turn me upside down
again, babe // disillusionment tastes like peaches, maybe, syrupy saliva
soaked in cracked renaissance paint // titian burnt into my tongue // venus
is the mother of vengeance // urbino, you said, look at my body // how
beautiful in the nude.

FLAG BURNING

NAOMI CARR



a moth on an airplane's wing—safety pin friendship bracelet carves my skin—daisy chain reaction—I unravel my palm to you—an outline of montreal between rivers of blood—between gay bars—turbulence is slipping sorries under your—bedroom door—the muscle of you atrophies—spell velvet mood with velvet tongue—no more—all that dies eventually remains—an outline in the crease of my skin—of a palm that will never touch a beautiful thing again—your body between the bands of my pride flag—I keep trying to unsee it



About the author

Naomi Carr is a high school senior and an alumna of the Kenyon Review Young Writers Workshop. She has found a home in creative nonfiction although she dabbles in poetry. Her work has been recognized by Ringling College, Columbia College Chicago, Susquehanna University, the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, and the Bay Area Creative Foundation. You can read her work in Blue Marble Review, Sepia, National Poetry Quarterly, Vagabond City, and elsewhere.

“Descension”



ELLIOT RISEMAN

AN ODE TO COFFEEHOUSE

KATE DARGAN



We call him our work boyfriend. His hair is brown, gelled, and combed back. Maybe he is 24 or 25. I don't know. He has the body of a muscle head, but every Friday and Saturday, he sits at our coffee shop counter and drinks a decaf latte with a little bit of sugar. When he isn't flirting, he reads a book with a ruby red cover; the red is a shade too happy. He only ever seems to be a quarter-way finished.

"He's so mysterious," Natalie tells me. She points her spoon at him. "I don't know," I say. I tell our boyfriend that his chosen book is poorly written, because it is. "Isn't the protagonist such a whiner?" He disagrees. We both smile, but I hope I've pissed him off. Stupid guy who reads a whole lot of fluff.

A bearded man in a suit tells me he wants a highchair. I tell him okay.

"Is the child old enough to color? I have crayons."

"No, I said I want a highchair."

"Alright."

I take him to table 51, by the deer head and the bathrooms.

"I need a highchair."

"I know."

I carry over the highchair and wipe the pancake crumbs off the seat. Later, the devil child sits down, ignoring my four cheap crayons. Instead, he rips open all of the sugar packets. Little golden dots spread across the table like remnants, like ashes. The bearded father laughs. "You like that

buddy? You like that?” He leaves Jessica a \$2 tip.

My coworker, Pam, is 66, someone who is retired and only applied because she wanted to make friends. She has a youthful face and a hopeful, yet lonely, glow. After every shift, at 3:30pm, we roll silverware together. I never want her to roll alone. We chat about New Jersey Housewives and that hypocrite Teresa. She asks about my trip to Nashville. Pam tells me it feels like I'm her daughter and that makes me feel good, but sad for her own daughter, which I know she has. I'm not her daughter.

Chef John is a screamer. He looks 6 foot 5 inches tall, and he wears a black chef shirt and fuzzy pajama pants with egg yolks on them. He says “I'm fucking serious” about thirty times a shift, especially on weekends. He once called a server I don't like a gremlin. I thought that was funny, but sometimes I get annoyed by Chef; he has too many power trips. I wonder what he's like with his wife. I wonder if he's mean in bed. He doesn't live by ‘good enough,’ though, I'll give him that. He doesn't favor the owner's kid either, whose responsibility is limited to french toast only. He yells at him just the same, if not more.

Leaves. I just want to make the perfect latte leaves with my steamed milk. I watch videos on Instagram and TikTok and the feeling never gets old when I make the perfect one. Sheena's in the bathroom so she asks me to make a CBD cappuccino. “Sure!” I say. I steam the milk for 10 whole seconds and swizzle, swizzle, lift, and drag. I take the pot leaf stencil and fill it with matcha. I deliver it to the two women at Table 27, right by the window. They look like nice ladies. “Oh, how cute!” The blonde laughs.

“Enjoy,” I say. I walk back to my stand and peek to see if they took a picture of my pot leaf with their phone. When they don’t, something in me falls. I tell myself that maybe I just didn’t see them.

We’re not supposed to drink the CBD, but one time, I sneaked it anyway. It’s Easter Sunday and my palms have coffee grinds all over them. I missed my family movie excursion, so I decided to treat myself. I put three green drops into my coffee and on the way home I expected to feel this overwhelming sense of calm, but I felt nothing. I contemplated going for a run, but I’m so tired, and full from that free chocolate croissant too. “Go,” I said to myself, “go, you’re young and you’re good looking and you need to stay that way.”

On a Sunday a mother comes in with her son. There’s a three hour wait and I have to bus five tables, but she wants to know the price of our sweatshirts, and if the medium will fit her better or the small. I go to the back closet and bring them out. She asks for a different color, except this time in the extra-small. I tell her of course, and her son laughs. I’m self-conscious that my face reveals my annoyance, because after that, she apologizes. I wish I could have just faked it better, because I also have a mother who would get excited about sweatshirts, and I love her for it.

One day I’m pretty bored and I think perhaps that gremlin I work with actually is kind of cute; his green eyes lit up when I told him I listened to A Boogie and studied English in college. I tell my mom I may have a crush.

He's only slightly taller than me, about 5'4. He wants to cut his greasy curly hair but he never does. He has these horrible low curved shoulders and walks around like he owns the place, but he's kind of fun to work with, I guess. He'll tease me and touch my back when he passes me. My mom comes in to eat one day and has a visceral reaction to him, the hipster-doofus/guitar-playing/barista who exudes arrogance. "Way off, Kate. Way off," she tells me when I get home. I lower my head and submit to the hot shower, because I know she is right. Was I just bored or does my judgment really suck that bad?

The dishwashers arrive at 6am and leave at 5, with no breaks. None of them get breaks. They peel potatoes all day and wash our mugs and plates and put them back for us with a certain urgency. The chefs have their specialties and make food with love and take abuse from Chef John. Not all of the servers are good, but it is difficult not to admire the good ones, taking orders without their pads and knowing the ingredients of dishes for the vegan folks, for any Karens that come in. The hostesses have to deal with the hangry, impatient customers. Being a good barista is a learned talent, it's an art, one that I am proud to understand.

In three months, I'll be out of here; I'm going to law school an hour away. I'll be studying non-stop, treating myself to only one episode of tv per day, if I am lucky. Don't tell me I'm going to get a "big girl job" soon. It belittles the work we all do here, and I find you patronizing.

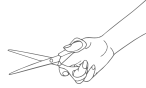


About the author

Kate Dargan is from Long Island, New York, and graduated from Miami University in 2022. Her writing has been published by Cathartic Literary Magazine, Happy Captive Magazine, and White Wall Review. She is attending Hofstra Law School in Fall 2023.

THE PROCESS OF DRAPING A SAREE

RUMAISA MARYAM



the saree

Deep blue silk pours past my fingertips, like water from the belly of the ocean. My eyes snag on the gold threads in the weave- Dado watches me as I lift the saree to the light. “Banarasi,” she tells me. “My mother-in-law’s. They don’t make the likes of these anymore.”

the process

i) I sweep the cloth around my body, the shimmering pallu momentarily out of sight. (Did Nanamma think Hyderabad would be just around the corner too?)

ii) I toss the pallu over my shoulder, a rippling movement- fluid, free. I look over at it, a still-learning eye judging the length of the cloth, as a soft weight settles next to my neck.

(Was the weight around Pardada’s neck heavy as he looked over his shoulder at his home-that-once-was? Did the burden swell as he witnessed a past life in the middle of its agonized birth?)

iii) I pull the loop at my hips straight, pleat it as evenly as I can; six wide folds like my mother showed me. I move to the pallu, slow and a little clumsy- I don’t have the elegance of Nano’s nimble fingers.

(My drapes will never be what hers are. She tells me to give it the forty years of practice she has and I'll get there. It's just that we measure our distance to India in generations, and we don't wear sarees that often anymore.)

iv) There are pleats over my shoulder and pleats tucked into my skirt, staggered and shaken out, each one a graceful pillar with a hollow between itself and its neighbor.

(Parts of the weave are hidden, like my family's story sitting silent in the dusk between the folds of my identity.)

v) I consider my features as I adjust my nath. People often ask me if I am Punjabi, or if I am Pakistani at all- maybe Arab? They never expect my answer. (South Indian. I have my father's eyes from Madras and my mother's nose from Hyderabad.)

vi) I stand still, watching the oxymoron reflected back at me- a South Indian Pakistani. (I am the child of a land gutted, carved by a pen in a white hand- a white hand, ink-stained, that drew arbitrary lines. A white hand, bloodstained, that asked us to pick a side. From where I stand, in front of my mirror with the name of Allah on my lips, I see only one choice- the one my great-grandparents made, the one drenched in sacrifice.)

Translations:

saree: a women's garment from the Indian Subcontinent, consisting of an unstitched length of cloth draped over the body, with one end forming a skirt and the other hanging over the shoulder. Sarees are no longer worn as commonly in Pakistan anymore, being seen as a form of dress reserved for formal occasions, and are often associated with Indians or Pakistanis of Indian descent.

Banarasi: a variety of saree made of woven silk cloth, known for its zari (gold or silver brocade).

pallu: the loose end of the saree that hangs over the shoulder.

Nanamma: maternal great-grandmother

Pardada: paternal great-grandfather

Nano: maternal grandmother

nath: nose-ring

Punjabi: an ethnic group from the region of Punjab in Pakistan and Northern India

Madras: Madras State– a state of India during the mid-20th century, now separated into a number of states.

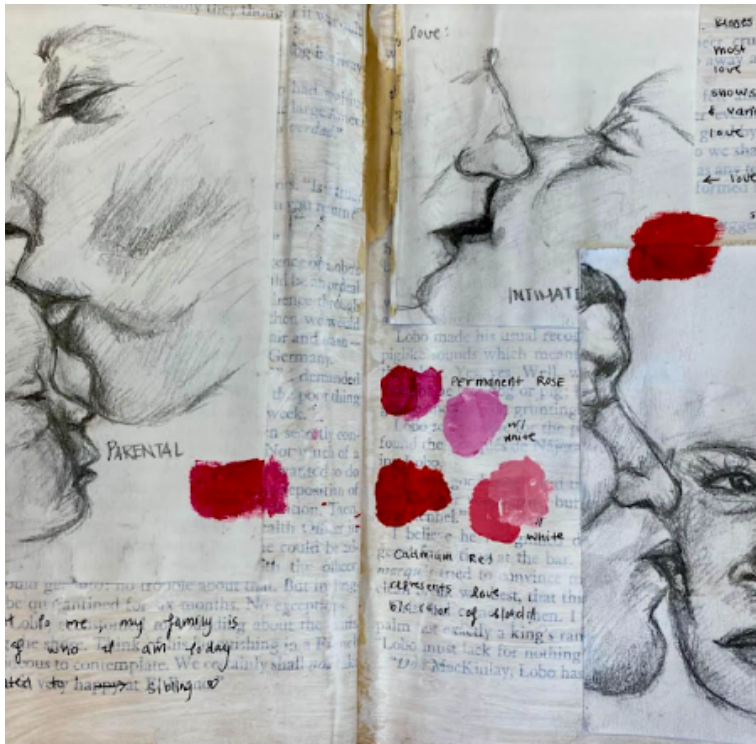
Hyderabad: the capital of the Indian State of Telangana

Allah: the Arabic word for God



About the author

Rumaisa Maryam Samir grew up near the sea in the coastal city of Karachi. As a Pakistani of Indian descent, Rumaisa's work often explores diaspora, cultural traditions and the events of the Partition of India and Pakistan, as well as her personal family history. You can find her @_rmssmr_ on Twitter, where she tweets to procrastinate on studying for her A Levels, and @discardedfirstdrafts on Instagram, where she posts the first drafts of most of her writing (because she likes cheap dopamine and is usually too lazy to rigorously edit).



"What is Love?"

Olivia Liu

IN THE MIRROR

ALLISON LIU



pull, prod, pinch
squeeze and squish—
i frown.
she frowns,
and chin becomes
apricot. walnut.
soggy fingertip. or—
a little brain?
suddenly i laugh.
i don't mean to offend.
but it seems she shares
my broken humor, for
soon we are both
convulsing.

COTTAGECORE

ALLISON LIU



By a crystal creek in the grassy wood,
A sun-warmed cabin nestles among lilac and daisy.
Gingham flutters under sighing wisteria
And wicker cradles forget-me-not
Beside sun-sparkling chamomile tea.

a fly thrashes desperately, then falls still in the cup.

By a half-raised window veiled in gently swaying lace,
I work wood across wheat,
Kneading my love into butter and berry.

sweat beads on my brow and i smear it with red-stained fingers

Oven accepts offering, and I dust my hands
Across the white linen apron tied with a bow at my waist.

making a scarlet mark among the bleach burns

I wander barefoot to the riverbank
nettle stings my bug-bitten ankles

And take a seat upon the water-worn pebbles.

mud soaks my skirt, wet cloth sucking hungrily at skin

Sunlight paints the water white as the clouds above.
and burns my arms until they peel

Beneath verdant willow I wade into the river,

frigid water shocks my legs and numbs my toes

Golden hair pooling like liquid sunlight around my head.

my dark roots have grown shamefully long

The current pulls me gently into its embrace

suddenly my feet cannot touch the bottom

Beneath verdant willow I wade into the river,
frigid water shocks my legs and numbs my toes
Golden hair pooling like liquid sunlight around my head.
my dark roots have grown shamefully long
The current pulls me gently into its embrace
suddenly my feet cannot touch the bottom
And I am drifting downstream like a fallen flower
i don't know how to swim
Splashing water makes glittering diamond-drops,
i don't—
Then the river smooths again to perfect, placid glass.
and the pie is burning in the oven



About the author

Allison Liu is 16-year-old Chinese American writer currently studying in the Boston area. She can often be found working on her novel, photographing the unusual, and reading speculative fiction. While she is a cat person through and through, she has nothing against cute dogs. Her work has appeared in Folio Literary & Art Magazine and JUST POETRY!!!, is forthcoming in #TeenWritersProject Quarterly, and has been shortlisted in Crashtest Magazine.

BABY TEETH

MILAAN VAS



I keep a jar of baby teeth by my bedside. I know them all by shape. Each little divet and groove. Sometimes, I hold each small, smooth, pearly tooth and roll it around between the tips of my fingers, savoring the sweet memories tied to each one. Childhood innocence. There's nothing purer than a child's laugh or their smile. I think that's why I keep the teeth, they're all mine and no one else can have them, the memory of each one is my own private pleasure. They remind me of simpler times, even in my old age. Because I Am Still Pure.

Adult teeth are the opposite. They are stained with coffee, cigarettes, and the residue of words they cannot take back. There's nothing pure about them. They disgust me. That's why I removed mine, So I can feel like a child again. Nothing brings me more joy than running my tongue along my soft gums, eagerly waiting for my baby teeth to come in just like when I was a child.

Sometimes, at night, when I can't sleep, I rattle my jar of teeth. They sound like jingle bells and remind me of the peculiar warmth of christmastime, the most magical time of year for a child. I loved receiving gifts when I was little, the way my little heart would skip a beat when I saw the new babydoll I asked mother for peeking out from under the red wrapping paper with little gold stars my she used every year, its eyes eerily rattling open and closed as I took it out of its packaging.

Of course now, being old, I don't receive any gifts. I haven't gotten a

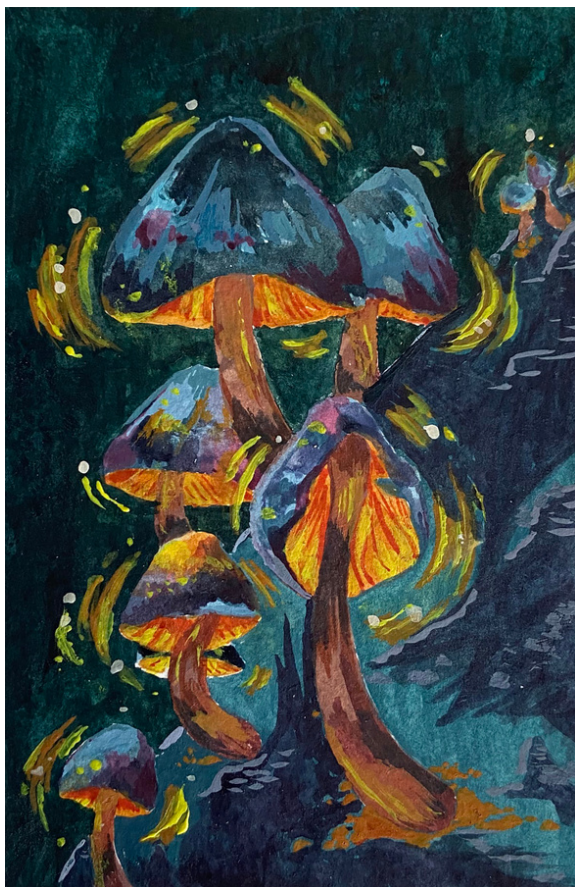
gift from someone since the last babydoll mother gave me on my twelfth christmas, and that was nearly sixty years ago now. After I turned twelve, I was no longer a child in her eyes. I remember the exact moment her face morphed from love to utter disgust when I showed her the curious ruby stain on my underwear the month before christmas. No longer pure. Only pure, sweet, good innocent children got christmas presents. But she was wrong. I was still pure, and certainly more than her. I remember smelling the liquor on her hot breath every time she leaned down to kiss me goodnight. She smelled like cooking grease and drug store perfume. Her fat, ugly face caked with sweat and cheap makeup and regret, and smeared with the coral colored lipstick she'd wear on her chapped, cracked lips, Cracks as big as canyons. I remember feeling a greasy residue on my smooth perfect cheek every time she kissed me. How dare she taint my perfect porcelain cheek with her filth? And then have the gaul to call me impure. The audacity to stop giving me christmas presents after my 12th christmas because I was no longer a child in her eyes. I deserved them. I deserved everything in the world and I still do. That's why every year I get myself a christmas present, something I know I will enjoy and cherish for years to come. Another baby tooth for the collection. Another wonderful Christmas memory. They won't miss their baby teeth, they don't even need them. After all, their bones will never leave the flowerbed of my garden. Their youth makes my roses smell even sweeter.



About the author

Milaan is a 17 year old junior in high school. She enjoys writing flash fiction with dark undertones and loves classical literature.

“The Return”



EMI LEONG

UBER DRIVERS WRITE OUR MEMOIRS

ALAYA ROCCO



I heard a story of a million girls mid-pirouette
losing the history of womanhood
dancing for the moon's reflection
through bottles on a shelf

we took the train out of my town
with a manuscript and a mug with
my mother's name written on it
we rode past cities of tents and
trash and vacuous holes
where humans left our earth

and I lost my pen over a year ago
I've been typing ever since
and my town was never
a town it was a city
where heat rose off children
in schoolyards where shots played
melodies and stolen lives lived
in spaces between

this country's population still more
guns than people
when summer forgot it was

time to end melted drugstore popsicles on

sticky streets, mango stands on corners

With the people you never talk to

uber drivers hear about all the lives you've lived

then drop you off in parking lots

with the girls that the moon told

mother's stories to pass down

on the ground with no sense of time

and I could never do ballet because

those girls looked emaciated

if beauty means starvation I guess

I'm beautiful now too

and I didn't even have to be taught.



About the author

Alaya Rocco is a High School Junior from California. She is a previously unpublished aspiring writer and poet, who is currently in the process of training to be an editor for Polyphony Lit. She grew up in bookstores and libraries and has always had an affinity for words..

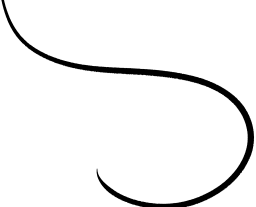
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About Our Artists



Anika Goel (*Too Late - Page 1*) is an Indian-born artist and musician, a fourth year undergraduate senior at The University of Kansas, completing a double major in Visual Arts and Astronomy with a minor in Art History. Having a strong background in fine arts, Anika enjoys exploring the unseen colors of nature hidden behind the seen matter through a surrealist composition in their work. They are enthralled by the beauty found in objects and they use this inspiration to combine the intangible nature of color seen in the world with the tangible element of mixed mediums like paint, metal, clay and charcoal. Resonating with Baroque and High renaissance art, Anika's work explores the color palette from the golden age of art with the dream-like juxtapositions of surrealism to create a believable fantasy riddled with magic, nature and much more the mind could imagine. Being an astronomer, Anika also likes to portray their curiosity for the abstract essence of the universe in their multimedia works. Anika's work has been showcased at the Lawrence Art Pride fair; as a solo show titled "Dreams and Me" at the Kansas Union Exhibit and twice at the KU Visual Arts Scholarship show in 2021 and 2022 where Anika was the recipient of the Bonine; and MacMorris Scholarships. Anika continues to create soul stimulating artwork and hopes to show their work at gallery exhibits. In the future, Anika aspires to keep working with local artists to grow their artistic skills and be an engaging member of the community.

Elliot Riseman (*Iris - Cover Page // Always About You - Page 5*) is a rising high school senior. Elliot has always had a knack for finding meaning in the seemingly meaningless and works to communicate what he sees with the world. Whether that's through the mediums of oil paint on canvas, literature, or video, Elliot seeks to create compelling stories that resonate with viewers.

Olivia Liu (*Frostbite - Page 10*) Olivia is a high school student in Irvington, NY. Inspired by her Grandmother who also loves art, Olivia has been painting and drawing since an early age. Olivia's favorite mediums are oil paints and watercolor. Olivia's work is emotional and thought provoking. One of her favorite pieces is an oil painting on canvas showing two eyes and black mask. The work depicts the struggle of high school students during the COVID pandemic and was displayed at the Irvington Public Library as part of an exhibition.

Emi Leong (*A Recollection: Dissonance- Page 15*) Emi Leong is an artist in her final year of university. She primarily does linocuts, but lately has been enjoying gouache and pastels. Outside of creating, Emi is an avid reader, traveller, and bird lover.




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