

AN ANNUAL LITERARY MAGAZINE ORGANIZED BY
TUFTS ASIAN STUDENT COALITION



VOICES

VISIONS
VISIONS

FALL
2017

letter from the editors

Dear Reader,

We could not be more excited to have made it to this point. Our theme this year is Vision, something that resonates deeply within Asian America. For us, representation is about seeing possibility -- in our personal futures and how we can begin to confront stereotyped pasts. There's power in giving us the camera, the paintbrush, the pen. Voices is Tufts' only Asian and Asian American-centered publication -- the art and prose you see is made by and made for Asian and Asian American students.

For us, creating this identity-based magazine is a political act, one that creates a platform to challenge the static idea of Asian America. We want to speak to the diversity within this racialized category and show what is intentionally made invisible under aggregated data and through the model minority myth. Our collective voices work to confront dominant media's portrayals and definitions of who we are, what we do, and what we will fight and stand for.

We are so grateful for each and every person involved in the process of creating this magazine. Thanks to everyone who submitted art and prose, their truths and secrets. Thank you for being brave with us. Thank you for contributing to this ongoing knowledge-creating process. We also want to make visible the many examples of Asian American literary role models who have paved the way for us and for continuously doing the work of getting future generations involved in artistic thought. Thank you to Grace Talusan and all the other Asian American artists who have influenced our work.

With love and care,

Tufts Asian Student Coalition

VOICES LAUNCH PARTY

• AND •

OPEN MIC NIGHT



MARCH 8

7 – 8:30 PM

CURTIS HALL
(BROWN & BREW)

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vision

"Remember that consciousness is power. Tomorrow's world is yours to build." -- Yuri Kochiyama

"I want to help us hold a mirror to ourselves." -- Mira Nair

When oppression remains invisible, we falter. When acts of love remain unseen, we forget. Through storytelling, collective sharing, imagery, and conversation, we can begin to etch our experiences into visibility and claim domains for ourselves. We can learn to see how our histories and perspectives direct our livelihoods; we can attune ourselves to different realities, and face what has been erased or obscured all along.

Let's think about vision. What has shaped and continues to shape how you view the world? Who or what did you grow up watching? How do you see yourself? How do others see you? What's in the mirror? Do you trust your vision? What do you want the future to look like? What's your utopia/dystopia? How might we make the impossible, possible? When was the last time you noticed something new? Who/What represents you or speaks for you when you cannot? How is your identity portrayed? Do you like how you are seen?

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1.

It started out small.
No one knew about it
No real indication it was there
No harm no foul
No concern

But it did last
It grew
It kicked and pushed and prodded
It was terrifying yet amazing
It devastated

And the world reacted
The world retaliated
The world pushed and pressed and screamed
The world endured and persevered
The world won

And it was forced to leave
Leave its home It had known forever
the home that was comfortable and quiet
the home
the home
the home

A baby is born

Not too important
Maybe it would last and maybe it wouldn't
Not a big concern

2.

I was gulping down lies

Wearing privilege on my sleeve
Colorblind glasses to protect me

I was stealing what was "mine"

Ending the lives of innocent souls
Making the world safer

I was becoming a success story

Gold stars for gun shots
Guns shot

Trophies for trials

I was making history
Pledging allegiance to tradition



BY RACHEL WAHLERT



Riot

art by

**Maxine
Bell**



Double Lid

Do Not Touch

Delivery Boy

BY KYLE LUI

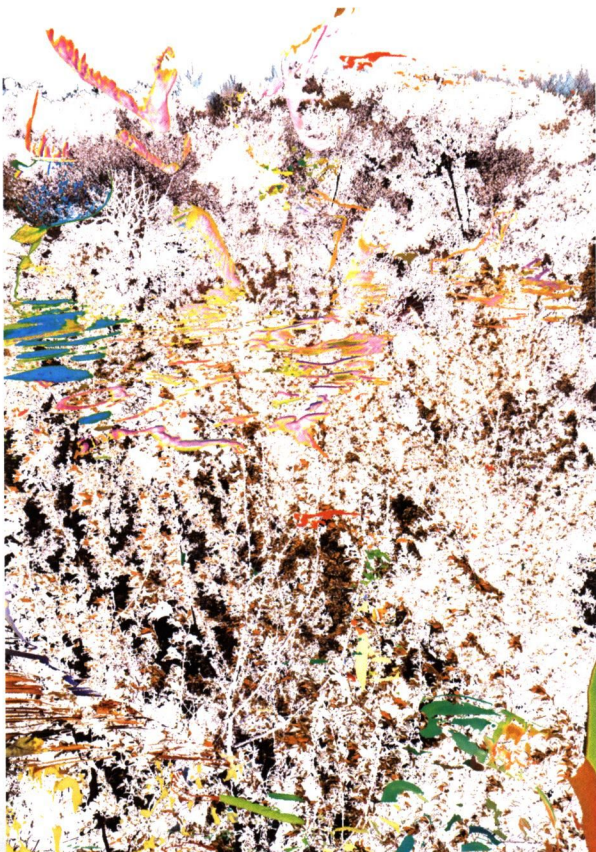
To the Tufts student who angrily asked me if I was his delivery boy.
I now know I am.
My body blooms from those that labored for their survival and my own.
I bloom from my uncle
who delivered Chinese food around Chinatown,
remembering the exact streets to avoid
because of gangs that would've
jumped him for going down their block.
His brave delivery boy blood unabashedly flows through my bones.
I bloom from my grandfather
who my mother never saw growing up
because he came home so late and woke up so early.
I bloom from my father
who managed to be top of his class
even though he had to sprint to the bus stop every day
so his classmates wouldn't beat him up and sprawl his books on the cold concrete,
for him to pick up again, and again, and again.
My family lived in fear of unbelonging,
of being chased down the block,
chased back to the land they crossed oceans to leave.
I did not come to your home for you to deliver me home.
My family and I exist in this country
because of my great grandfather
who toiled and worked in his Laundromat for 1 cent a shirt
accumulating enough wealth to buy whole buildings in Hong Kong
then bring the rest of his family
to this land that consumed him.
His labor was formidable enough to
transport bodies,
transform cities,
transfigure cultures.
The voices of my family called him across oceans as he worked
begging him to bring them to this promise land
that only promised him solitude and drudgery.
His back bent lower each time he ironed a shirt
as if he was slowly becoming the v shape of the iron that was his third hand.
He slept in the back of his Laundromat on his wooden ironing board for 20 years,
his life's work truly his life.
My family did not toil for me to serve you Chinese takeout.
We are your delivery,
boy,
waiting for our deliverance





“I really miss the **fresh air**
and **pure water** which only
existed in my **childhood.**”

Art by Si Chen





art by

***Amy
Chu***



I don't know

I don't know if anyone can love me the same as I love them. If anyone can truly care for me at all. The connections, seemingly sturdy as a mountain, as powerful as thunder, mean something only to me. It becomes clear when I look in your direction: I'm just a wastebasket. You just take my time, words and love when you need me but when you find a better deal you leave me behind, only leaving remnants of what could've been in my disposal. The cycle of feeling like your garbage makes me numb, numb to the hurt and rejection. You just think you can give me a glance and a smile then walk away from me and I won't know the difference because that's all I need. But I can't go on under this hollow illusion. Despite the insecurities and sorrow, I smile back at you as you leave me. Even though all I want to do is cry, to wallow in the pain, to fill my emptiness, I smile.

I feel myself breaking. I'm under this spell of rotten words and empty promises that leave me in the darkest shadows of my soul. I'm at the edge of the cliff, the point where my heart beats inside my chest and the anticipation ripples through my nerves up to my fingertips. I have not plunged yet, into the darkness below. A part of me wants to. Just fall. For all the feelings and numbness and unexplainable sadness to hit me like a boulder so I can leave the cliff and hit the bottom. I want to break completely whole, burn down to the ground until I am just ashes on the dirt. Because from ashes sometimes something beautiful can grow, something pure and fresh as the morning dew.

But I can't go to the end because goodbyes scare the shit out of me. Goodbyes build expectations too sweet for my reality; goodbyes build up a sentimental fantasy that will only leave me broken hearted. It's the moment when how much I mean to you comes out, where you tell me how much I'll be missed. I fear I'll hear the words but when you say them, your eyes will remain as blank as the white walls around us. That if I vanish, your life wouldn't even miss a beat, proving that my existence was never a chord in your harmonies. Goodbyes were never meant for a person like me.

So if I ever leave you, I'll leave without a whisper in your ear. Because I will always be too afraid to ask, "Do I mean something to you?"

I tell myself not to

I tell myself not to, but deep inside I know it's too late.
I start scrolling; I start comparing

I do this to myself too often. Fill up with sentiments of disappointment and failure. It feels like in the morning like I was sipping on something bubbly, something fresh and new. But then at the night comes the hitting hangover. The dryness. The emptiness. My breathing shallows.

Sometimes I feel like this perfectionism internalized over the years, years of getting asked if I got the highest grade, the fastest time, the best place, that worthiness means being number one. End of story.

That's what caused crying in the bathroom stall because I left myself be defined by the numbers. Looking at my writing comparing how many edits the other kids got. Ranking myself, even though I know it's poisonous. Whispering to myself you do not have what it takes. Wishing I could just melt away because the insurmountable pressure will never be released. My breathing shallows.

Where I once felt bliss, this moment where I am walking among the clouds because I can conquer and I feel talented, leaves a sour aftertaste in my mouth. Now I just feel like I need to bury myself deeper. Further into the ground. Into the shadows until so the old confidence is hidden away, too dark for any light to discover it. When I do not reach the moon, I do not land among the stars. Instead, I plummet. My chest tightens.

It took years- years of introspection, reflection and self-love to climb above these destructive thoughts. To build up self-esteem because mine was a façade. And it helped. But a second of a flip of a switch, and years wash away to a bottomless pit of insecurity. The back of my mind screams, "do not fall in, you know this isn't good! Be easier on yourself" But any yells are fruitless because I already made the leap.

"You were never good enough"

I can't breathe.

by

Sonya Bhatia

Sometimes

Sometimes all I can feel is my sadness. It makes me feel numb. I feel disconnected, parasites eating at my heart only spitting out the bones. My soul is a graveyard, desolate and empty, corpses where there should be thoughts. I feel so empty, so weightless but at the same time a force bears down on me, rendering me immovable. I can't be free. This sadness chains me, burrows me into a ball, dense and alone. In the corner, I am just a stone with two eyes, stoic yet filled with tears. I cannot comprehend this state; I know this is not myself. I am fire. But, now, I am nothing: I can't see myself burning brightly ever again.

What if I run away?

Away from the responsibilities, from the inevitability of my life, from the rejection, from the hurt, from the pain, from the emptiness. I always feel peace when I am alone, among nature. Like this afternoon. I sat on the bench to look at the lake, just watching the scenery. My senses brightened to the cool breeze through my unbrushed hair, the elegance of the birds, the taste of clean, pure air and the smell of dampness and familiarity. The simplicity and beauty of it all makes my soul feel peaceful. The wheels in my mind cease to turn like usual, faster and faster until they don't work at all. Sadness becomes a distant memory. I feel lightness and bliss. Because in this moment all other complications are thrown out the window, I am just a human in nature. I am just existing, no strings attached. I can taste the freedom.

So I can only imagine being away from it all, I would feel lighter than air. Walking through an infinite expanse, any tangible, limiting goals blown away by the wind, so any path can be mine. I would live by the smallest means, only enough to get by, to not let myself fall prey to the parasites that used to feast on my heart. In this life, I would just exist, just be a human in nature through my eternity. I would be the freedom.

But I can't. And I won't. Because sadness eventually fades from dark, daunting blacks into pale, gentle greys. It hurts now, but it won't hurt forever. I may be empty, but every empty tank gets refueled. I will feel again. I will burn again. But I can't lose the things that set my soul on fire. I have too much going to throw it all away. There's a difference between freedom and purposelessness. No flame can ever ignite in purposelessness.

So I fight back.

Haiku

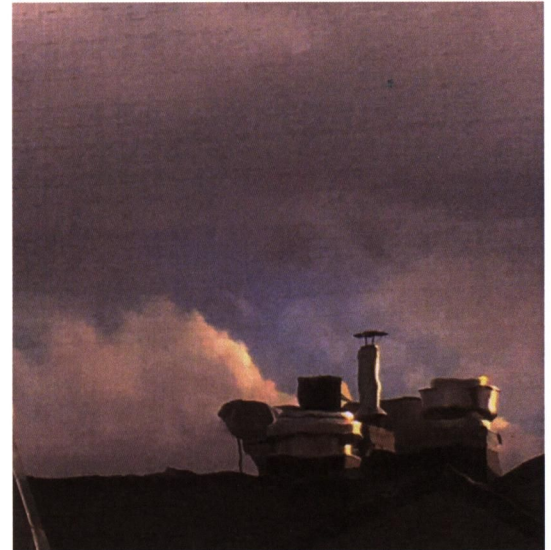
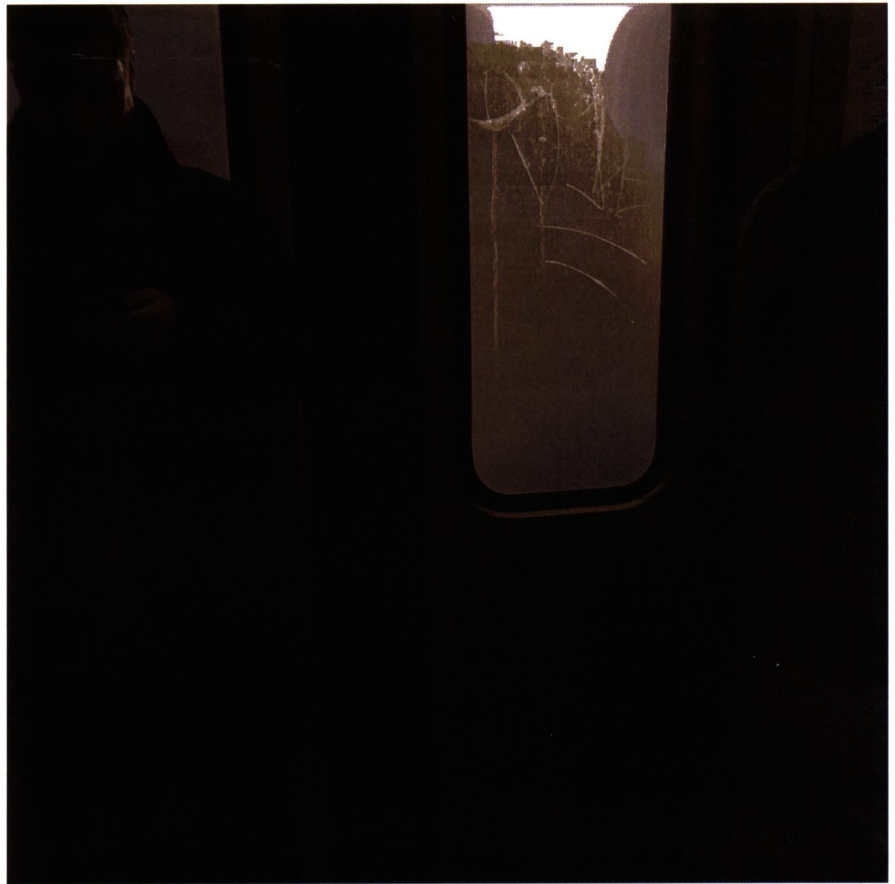
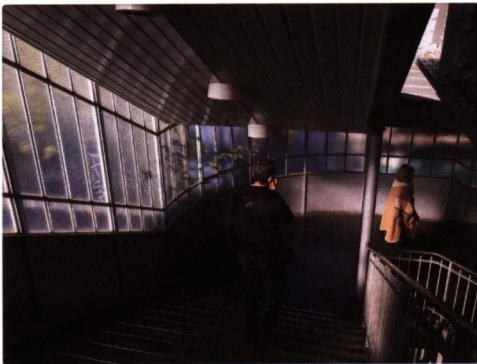
With unholy screams
conformity still whispers
into your eardrums

A stroke of a brush
pearly whites, glistening pinks
bury ashes of shame

Golden, boastful glimmer
the tangle in your palms
but your nerves are numb

Perpetuate the
impossible standards;
a hollow drumbeat

never addressing
bloodsucking insecurity
that gnaws on your skin



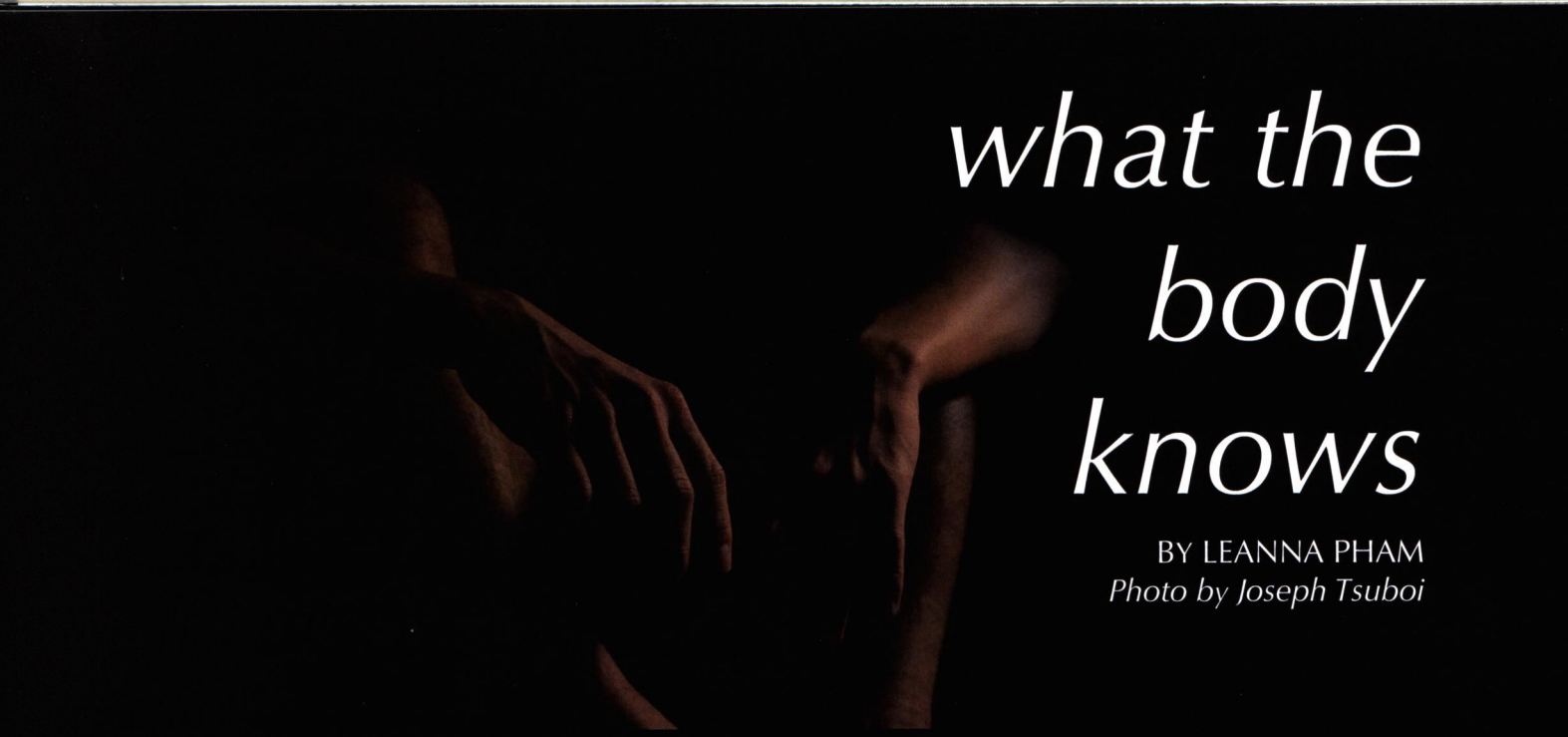
revisiting 2016 - yearning for nostalgia

BY LIEN PHAM

In 2016, influenced by Makoto Shinkai's film *5 Centimeters per Second*, I photographed to explore how my understanding and experience of love shaped my interaction with the environment around me.

The film explores how nostalgia and longing for a former lover can become haunting, and illustrates this through somber and dream-like commonplace landscapes. Ordinary scenes that are otherwise unimpressible, such as train stations, are rendered romantically nostalgic in dreamy colors and light. Influenced by Shinkai, I had seen love as a beautiful and tragic thing that must be yearned for.

As a result, I became hyperaware of the dream-like qualities in the landscape I experienced everyday: changing lines at the La Motte-Piquet-Grenelle train station, waiting for the train at Franklin D. Roosevelt, the view of smoke pipes distorted by my window screen, and so on. These sceneries embodied the somber mood that was my constant state of mind, as I was struggling in an unending confusing relationship.



what the body knows

BY LEANNA PHAM
Photo by Joseph Tsuboi

*hello
hiii
what are you doing
just some homework
hows school
it's okay just busy
one more year. time is fast.
one more year and you're done.
one more year. you should get a masters.*

i am tired of having the same conversations. i am so tired of talking about how much time is left. i'm so tired of trying to choose what's next and trying to make sense of what i know when i keep hearing different advice, when i keep needing to justify the decisions i've finally chosen and doubting it all over again because i can't tell who to trust.

i've learned how unreliable google searches can be, but more importantly how teachers and career centers don't always help either. hardly anyone ever really conceptualizes what is feasible for low-income people, for people carrying the weight of sacrifice, for people muddled between obligations to serve the people they know are most marginalized and neglected while hoping to still hold onto their own dreams. or how time always feels pressing and always too fast for me calculate the cost-benefit analyses, to know that if this never happens again this is the best of what else might be possible, and knowing i am not wasting this, whatever this is.

i do not want to get angry and it is too late. why am i expected to know what i want to do by now. i'm told i am young, i have time, i can explore but i am reminded that i am ready to make money, ready to settle, ready to make decisions when i already have so many options.

that's what always gets me - why am i waiting and searching for ways to find work that makes this violent world a little better when it will always be the way it is. my parents know this well enough. i feel tired already and i realize this is not what they imagine for me. i used to think it was all about the prestige of health professions, but perhaps the ease of financial stability is what my parents refer to when they say "be a doctor, it's easy," especially in a world that is not apologetic.

my dad mentions that he tried calling my other two sisters but hasn't heard back. he asks if my sister found a job yet. i pretend not to know that she found her first job as a dentist weeks ago so he doesn't feel bad. he keeps asking if i talk to them and i say yes and no and give answers that are confusing but somewhere our conversation gets confusing because we don't share the same language and someone in my house keeps calling my name. i can't focus through different frustrations and forget to move the phone as i yell out to the person calling me. my dad is confused and i'm trying to tell him i was talking to someone else so he says okay talk to you later co di goi ba. but i feel like i missed a lot of what he was saying and i try to stay on the line.

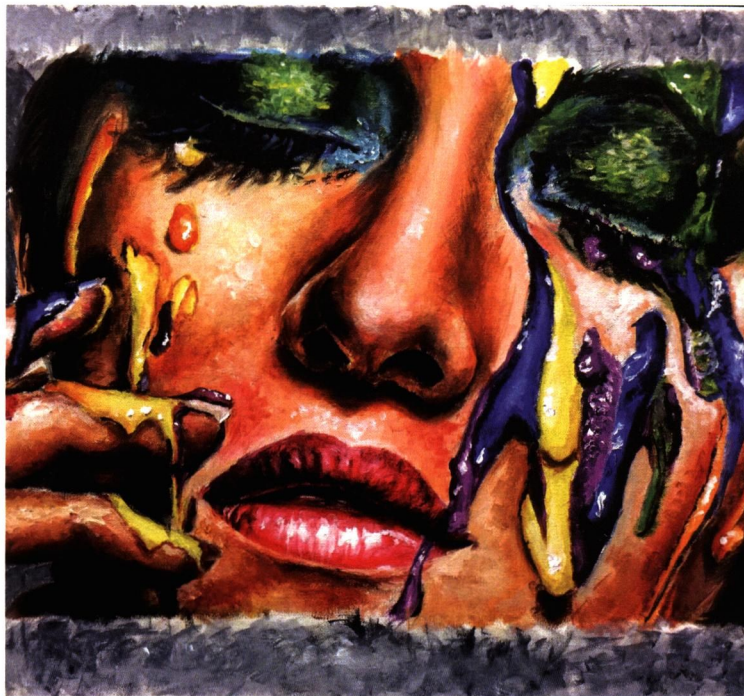
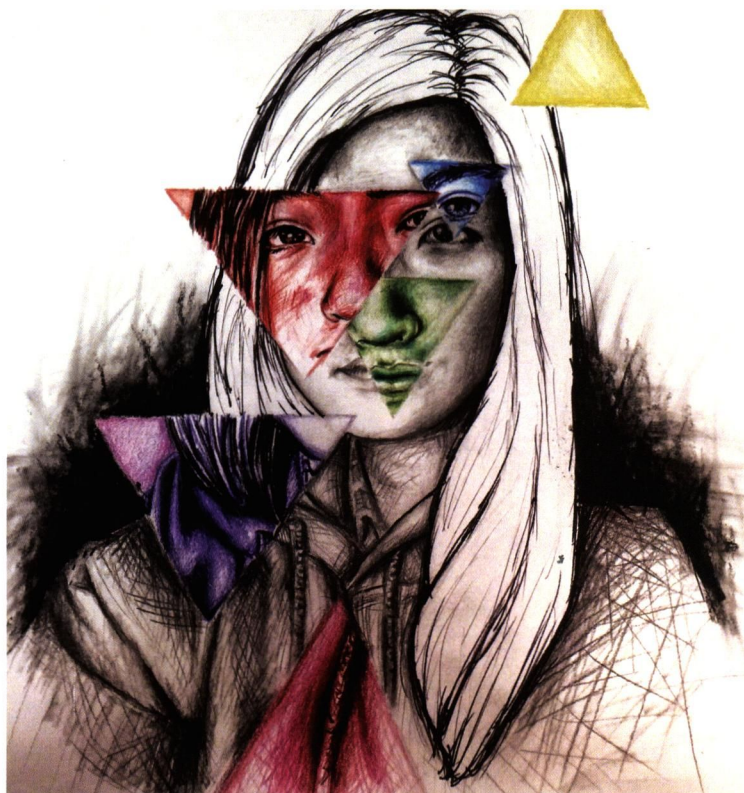
it's the first time i hear the tiredness in his voice. i always feel so tired of our conversations because i know what's going to happen. i know he only hears a portion of what i say so i never try to start new conversations. but today, i feel him hang up and there is a resignation there that is new.

i've decided to note these moments rather than let them pass. i write, "sometimes its so hard to imagine what being able to speak to your parents is like." some tears start to roll down, but it's easy to regain composure because there's nothing new to grieve and my body seems to know that too



art by
Amy Tong

clockwise from top left:
Untitled, Fragmented, Splash, Smudged





ART BY



RIVA DHAMALA



Manhattan est belle

BY THIEN KHUU

Somewhere in a French song I heard something like, "Madame est belle." I don't speak French, only enough to know that the phrase roughly translates as, "The lady is beautiful." So I thought that it was kind of beautiful. Not the lady, although she might have been to the lyricist of the song, but the way people in different countries say, "Beautiful." It's so much more romantic than the boring, "She's beautiful," but maybe the French thinks that English is romantic, too.

I think anything in French sounds erotic and fancy, if you sing it, that is. I suppose I may have been looking for love by listening to French love songs. Could be my unconscious desires. When I was still a virgin, I thought that having friends with benefits would be enough, since I was curious and sexually frustrated without any outlets. I have many friends now, but I'm still not satisfied. I think I might be ready to commit.

Scary, right?

I'm twenty years old, have never been in a relationship, but probably been in all of the typical sex positions and invented some new ones, too. Never thought I would ever want to commit to someone. Regardless, I don't know how to find someone to commit to anyway. None of my friends are interested in a relationship, and I've only had experiences with asking people to have sex with me, not on a date. People say, "Love will find you," instead of the other way around-- but I think that's bullshit.

I thought it did once when a friend from middle school, who's now enrolled in a nearby college, messaged me on Facebook. We had small talk, and then he said that he saw me on Tinder.

"Great," I typed, "so you're, what, gay?"

"No, I'm bi, you?" he replied.

"Cool," I said. "I'm bi too." A pause. "Anything else?" I asked.

"Nope," he said, "just surprised that you are, too." Great, so maybe not.

I imagine myself singing it in front of a crowd when I listen to French songs, wearing a tux and have people falling in love with me. That would be an easy way to find love, you know, having people confess to you instead of having to confess to someone else. Then I imagine waltzing to the song. Slow dancing is so much better than grinding on a sweaty dance floor. But I'm skeptical of finding a person who would like to slow dance with me.

One of my favorite things to do after sex is to cuddle and talk to my partner. The warmth from his body and the feeling of the embrace is better than sex. The guy who took my virginity usually cuddled and talked to me every time after we finished. I guess that could be why I like to do it so much: it was a standard that he set. He and I were just friend with benefits, but I liked him very much, so I asked him if he would like to make it exclusive. He said he'd think about it. He said he just entered college and stressed from the transition, so he didn't want to rush. I said okay. Two weeks later he said he didn't think it'd be a good idea for us to date. I thought that he really was overwhelmed, so I said okay. I liked him a lot, so I was willing to make compromises as long as I can keep seeing him. But he didn't want to see me anymore. I thought it was just him feeling awkward and not want to see me for a while. The week after, he announced to the world through Facebook that he's in a relationship. "Stressed about the college transition" my ass.

I have many friends of my own now, but they just come to my room, *come*, and then leave. I want something more, and I had high hopes for the middle school guy when he messaged me, but it was just another disappointment.



Blend
by Amy Tong

I thought about asking him on a date, but then again, I was like, "Nah." I didn't want to appear desperate. He would think that I'd take any dick comes my way (though he wouldn't be totally incorrect), but I'd rather him come to me. After all, we'd never really talk, and I just found out that he likes guys, too. It'd be weird if I just messaged him out of the blue and ask him to go on a date with me. So, I just let it be once again and steadily forgot about him.

Two weeks passed, and I unexpectedly received a message from Facebook while drunk in my dorm room. It was him. Fuck, messaging me when I'm incapable of making the right decisions. He says he's drinking alone in his room.

"Why?" I ask. Then, an essay spills on the screen.

"I met this guy online and we went on this date...and the first date went well and he said he'd want to come back for a second date...but then he blocked me," blah blah blah. The gist is that he was stood up and now he's drinking in his room and wants some company and pity from another bi guy. So...

"Would you like to go on a date with me?" I ask.

"Sure," he said. "Why not?"

"Yeah, why not?" I replied. Great, what do I do now?

The date was supposed to be on Sunday. Yes, I know, who goes on a date on a Sunday? I was asking for dinner, but I guess we could do brunch instead (it's the gays in us, I suppose). I was so excited the week prior to that Sunday, but what to do until then? Should I message him? What would we talk about?

But then, it's like, God doesn't want me to go on a date 'cause even though it was sunny the whole week, a snow storm suddenly comes down on Sunday. So, we had to reschedule.

"So next weekend?" I ask.

"Yeah," he says, "I'll text you."

Okay, so he'll text me. So I wait, for a day, then a few more days, then the weekend comes. He hasn't texted me. Why hasn't he texted me? Should I have messaged him instead for it? But I've already tried to set up the last one, and I asked him out on a date. If I were to message him and facilitate this on, too, it'd seem as if I'm super desperate and that is the last thing I want. I learned through my first experience to be the one in power instead of being the vulnerable one. I can't let him be in power. I have to wait for him to text me.

Of course, he never did. I concluded that he's just being a shy piece of shit, and I really don't have time to deal with him or his insecurity. My friends said I should have messaged him, but is it really worth it to contact him? I mean, if he is not thinking about me the same way I'm thinking about him, then I guess he isn't really ready to be in a committed relationship. What a piece of shit! If he isn't thinking of me enough to text me then I guess he's not worth my time.

I forgot about him and went on with my life, I keep on seeing my friends. Until, one day, I see him in my college dining hall on a fine Sunday morning. Why would he be here? In my college dining hall? At the same time that I go to eat? This could not be a coincidence. I try to avoid him, but he just so happened to walk my way when I walked in the opposite direction. We make eye contact, and the awkwardness begins.

"Hi," he says. "Hi," my ass.

"Hi," I smile with a cringe. He hugs me on the side. It wasn't even a passionate hug, it was just like a social hug where it would have been awkward to do anything else but to hug.

"It's been, what, ten years?" he says.

"Eight," I reply, "but yeah, it's been a long time. Why didn't you tell me you were coming here?"

"Dude, I didn't know?"

"Know what? That I live here or that you were coming here?" I say with a little sass. He mumbles something.

"How did you get in the dining hall?" I ask.

"Oh, my friend goes here," he says, introducing some guy that I don't know and quite frankly, don't care about. "Friend," my ass. They were having breakfast together on a Sunday morning in a college dining hall! He probably slept over. His "friend" is not even remotely attractive, and he came all the way here to meet him but not me? So I was right. He is a piece of shit. As I talked to him, all that was going on in my mind was, "I hope that he never finds love and that he dies alone and when he dies, his soul will burn in Hell." Though all the gays gonna burn in Hell anyway, so that's kinda redundant.

He excuses himself because his Uber is here. He doesn't even offer to text me this time, probably because he knows that he fucked up too hard to go back now. I become moody for the rest of the day.

A few more weeks passed, I start listening to more French songs. They're still beautiful, as always, probably because I can't understand a word they're singing. Then that song comes on again, the song that has the words, "Madame est belle." This time, though, I pay more attention listening to it and heard something else. It's not "Madame est belle," it's "Manhattan est belle." Fuck, so the song writer was talking about a place instead of a woman. Wow, misheard lyrics of the year.

Well, je suppose que Mahattan est belle.

I used to wear windows for eyes

BY TONY NGUYEN

My sister likes to joke about
Her husband's eyes
How he puts them in every morning. . .

Now I do the same.

The salt of contact lens solution
Awakens me and
Accompanies me to bed. . .

I find this to be a comforting affirmation.

When I was a child,
I was told that my eyes should be rigged with
Pinholes MAGNIFIED by glass.

That eyes were meant to S T R E T C H to
The length of the other children. . .

"You look so asian without your glasses. . ."
"You look so different without them on. . ."

You don't look like us.

What does it mean for a child to be
Criticized
For the distance from eyelid to eyelid?

What does it mean for a child to hear
That his WINDOW into the world
Is not enough

To let others in. . .
To be seen by others?

His eyes are framed in the vision of
Those who do not see what is
Behind them.

Do they need to
Magnify features
To blur lines between others

Like him?

I wear my eyes in
Little folds of plastic,
For I think my window into the world is

Mine to have.

I believe that someday
Others will be able to look in
And see that light moves through this window

In two directions.

To see that I do not need to hide
Vietnamese eyes under glass that is
Easily shattered.

In taking out the window frame. . .
I finally feel the light on my skin.
I can finally feel comfortable in my own skin.



Photos by Rachel Stein

art by

***Rachel Orlang
&
Keith Robitaille***



Maxine, 2017
by Rachel Orlang
Archival Inkjet Print



Sean, 2017
by Keith Robitaille
Scan of 8x10" Color Negative

rlang

aille

Cleo, 2017
by Keith Robitaille
Scan of 8x10" Color Negative



Mom, 2017
by Keith Robitaille
Platinum Palladium Print



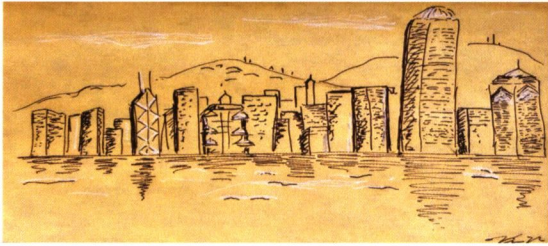


One Year Custom, 2017

art by
**Madeline
Lee**

Tolerance and Yellow Skin, 2017





Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong

3" x 5" Pen sketch on Post-it note



Dotonbori

16"x20" Oil Painting of Dotonbori in Osaka Prefecture, Japan

art by
**Vivian
Zhong**



Lizhi Wan in Guangzhou

16"x20" Oil Painting of Lizhi Wan (or Lychee Bay) in Guangzhou.

My dad was so excited to show me about Guangzhou, the city in which he grew up. Our short visit there was filled with lots of stories of his childhood mischief and adventures. Sadly, a lot has changed since he last took me here when I was 3 years old. However, I'm very glad I will remember wandering the city with my dad this time around.

I am but a leaf, gently drifting down the river of life, pushed along by the flow of time and the currents of my mother's influence.



“一直慢,” my childhood nickname. “Always slow.”
“When I was your age, I was so much skinnier than you.”
“Why can't you be like (literally anybody)”
“She's such a good daughter, unlike you.”
“你連狗也不如, You're worse than a dog.”
“Pizza Face.” My middle school nickname, perfect for puberty anxiety and ugly breakouts.

My mother and I didn't have the best relationship. For most of my childhood, I wondered if she actually loved me, or her vision of my “successful” future. I wondered if she loved my brother, the only one who could “carry on the family name” from my dad's side of the family, more than she loved me. I hated the long hours of activity after activity after learning center after crying in front of the piano because I didn't want to play anymore. I hated the feeling of hating my activities, but begging my mother not to cancel them, because she made me believe that I would be worthless without them... or her. Of taping my sheet music back together after my mother tore it up and threw it in the trash. I hated having nothing to look forward to because all that awaited me was work and stress and insults. I hated everything so much that I began to hate myself.

Puberty was such a wonderful time. It. Was. So. Fun. I developed a bit earlier than others, so I began slouching. Cue hard slaps to the back because slouching “isn't ladylike”. I developed acne, and so began my beloved nickname, pizza face. My confidence and self-worth plummeted. I started getting regular migraines, manifesting in my mom's voice repeatedly screaming my name in anger, each time getting louder and louder until I would begin banging my head in an effort for it to stop. I couldn't go a day without a screaming match with my mother, ending in my hiding behind the couch to cry. Stress built up and I began planning how I could run away or even kill myself.

A major red flag, I know. But mental health was never discussed or really believed in my family. Discussing this or even admitting to myself that I couldn't continue living like this would be akin to sharing a fatal weakness and becoming a bigger disappointment to my family. So it took a while. And I slowly realized that just getting perfect scores on tests or getting into a certain sport or music group wasn't worth my health and happiness. That asking for help didn't mean I was weak.

“Okay, but from now on, everything is your responsibility. Do not blame me for what happens now,” is what she said the last time I confronted her. I quit everything but violin and tennis. I started taking time to relax, to hang out with friends, and to watch TV. And my mom stopped pushing me so hard. She stopped criticizing and comparing me with others so often. Our interactions grew more comfortable; instead of stubbornly orbiting planet academics, like a fly gunning for a plate of food, our conversations began exploring other topics.

And while my mother still doesn't understand, her allowing me to step back from activities, to stop spreading myself so thin, to stop being so harsh with her criticism, to stop pushing me so hard, meant that she cared. Her letting go of her dreams for me meant that I was worth more than being the envy of other mothers. Her letting me be myself meant that she loved me for who I was, not who I could be. Although we still don't see eye-to-eye on most things, she is the person I am closest to. I call her every day.

Recently, she asked if she was a failure of a mother. I think not.

BY EC LIU



A Conversation

BY KATY LEE

I am sitting under the AC. I pull my jacket tighter. Surrounding us are sounds of clinking glass, low chatter in Taiwanese and Mandarin, and rushed conversation between waiters. The space smells of sweet soy sauce and humidity of Taipei.

I raise my head and see baba (dad) scrolling through his phone with his left index finger, while a piece of sukiyaki beef dangles from the chopsticks on his right hand.

Mama (mom) pushes her plate of fish towards me. "Eat this, I can't finish it," she says.

"Did you see the link I sent to the family group chat?" Baba asks me, suddenly jerked awake from being hypnotized by the phone.

"No, what was it?"

"It's an article about a speech that a professor at the National Taiwan University gave. It mentioned our company."

"Oh, that's cool."

Baba looks at me for a second with a glance of disappointment. He then goes back to his phone.

"Kang-Hsin, why do you never say anything in the group chat? It's like you're invisible," my mom suddenly chimes in. She must have gotten bored from overhearing the neighboring table's conversation.

"Um... I've been busy. Time difference is hard to navigate. I forget to reply sometimes."

"But It's not like we ask you to reply to us everyday. At least send us a sticker or something, so that we know you've seen our messages."

"You never reply to important messages either. The last time I sent money to your bank account, you never told me if you got it or not," baba joins in.

"Okay, okay, I know, I know. I should've sent you a confirmation e-mail."

"It's very irresponsible of you to only ask for money but never let us know if you actually got it," he continues.

"Hao lah, hao lah. I will next time! I promise! And it's not like I just vanished! I call you guys once in while!"

"Yeah, you only call mama once after like, what, seven missed calls? Are you really that busy? I have business to do, but I still manage to find time to send you updates."

"But I do call her! Mama, I do call you, right?"

Mama looks down and nods.

"Aiyah (sighing out loud like Taiwanese aunties do), you're such a wild child. Once we let you leave, you just disappeared. You never come back." I don't know what baba was pushing for, but he is not about to give up.

"What do you mean 'I never come back?'"

"You came back two and a half weeks ago. You stayed in Taipei for two days, went to grandma's for three days, then you went to Taitung (eastern Taiwan) for two weeks. And in two days, you're going to Hong Kong for two months. Then you stay for who knows how long and you go back to America. It's been a year since you came home, and all you're willing to spend with us is two weeks?"

"Baba, that's enough. There's no need to push it further," mama comes to my rescue.

"Do we really mean that little to you?" baba ignores her.

"What? Where do you even get that idea from?"

"Don't you know how much your mom has missed you? You're her only child! She's all by herself. She just wants you to be there and spend time with her. That's the least you can do, and you aren't even

willing to do that. You're a grown up now. It's about time to start acting like a grateful adult."

"You are not a good daughter" is all I hear.

What right does he have to say that? How dare he? He even had the audacity to say in front of mama that she's all by herself? It's because he left her. He left us. None of this argument would have happened if he'd stayed, if we could've been the happy family that all my childhood friends had.

It hurts. It hurts because what he said was partly true. Maybe I am an irresponsible daughter. I did leave mama. I did hit the cancel button most of the time I see her calls. I knew she just wanted to hear my voice. But somehow, I just couldn't.

It's as if moving across the Pacific has stretched our tie that thin.

How do I tell them how it feels to be in diaspora? I know I am very privileged to be able to study abroad. For the opportunities to experience life outside of Taiwan, I am grateful.

But how do I tell them the loss that I've felt when I first came to the US at age 15, then 18, 19, 20, 21, 22?

How do I tell them that the real reason I don't respond is because I don't know how? How do I connect our worlds when my reality has become so different from theirs?

How do I tell mama that I don't pick up the phone because every time I do, I can hear in her voice the yearning for her baby daughter to come home? I can see her prancing around in our empty apartment, staring out in the window towards the mountains of Taipei, as if she could find me there? I can see that in her voice because that's what I do too.

How do I tell her that I don't know how to be home? Everytime I lie on my bed in my orange bedroom (that I insisted on painting it orange because that's the color of my White host sister's room in Michigan when I lived with them when I was 15), I see, on the wall, the ticket for my high school graduation ceremony from the school I'd been in for 10 years. The ticket resembled a boarding pass. Destination: Boston. I thought that was my exit ticket, my escape from the culture I had deemed inferior from the White culture I'd lived in at age 15 for 12 months. Escape from the language I had stopped reading and writing in, even though the Chinese language is mama's biggest passion. Four years later, the ticket seems especially ironic.

I want to go home. I want to feel what it feels to be at home again.

How it feels to be able to speak in my voice so easily. I want to take the lessons I've learned abroad and bring them back to make Taiwan a better place. I want to unlearn all the messages I've internalized, everything that told me, in order to succeed as a Taiwanese girl like me, I must go to America and try to make it.

How do I tell mama that I want to be there for her. I want her to see me grow, but being home feels so suffocating?

How do I tell her that I feel suffocated by guilt?

That's why I run away.

"Okay, I understand. I'm sorry. I'll try better next time. Please forgive me." Does that make me a good daughter now?

"Here, have this piece of beef. It's really good," mama put her last piece of food on my plate.

It's still dark in the room when you wake up. The light in the bathroom turns on -- he's got a meeting somewhere early. He's trying not stir you so you fake asleep. When you finally rotate your body towards him, he's ready to leave, and you slightly open your eyes to see his back disappearing behind the doorway, and he closes the door.

You've done this gaze before with those who can't sleep in like you can: with lovers, with strangers, with roommates, with family, looking at the back of your mother's sleeping gown while on vacation. Each time it's different, but the feeling is the same; you are there, watching the curious way they collect themselves in the morning, their small sense of urgency as they ready to depart. You listen as they mutter to themselves in the mirror, incantations that help them face the day.

All around you, the people
waking up in the world
before you.

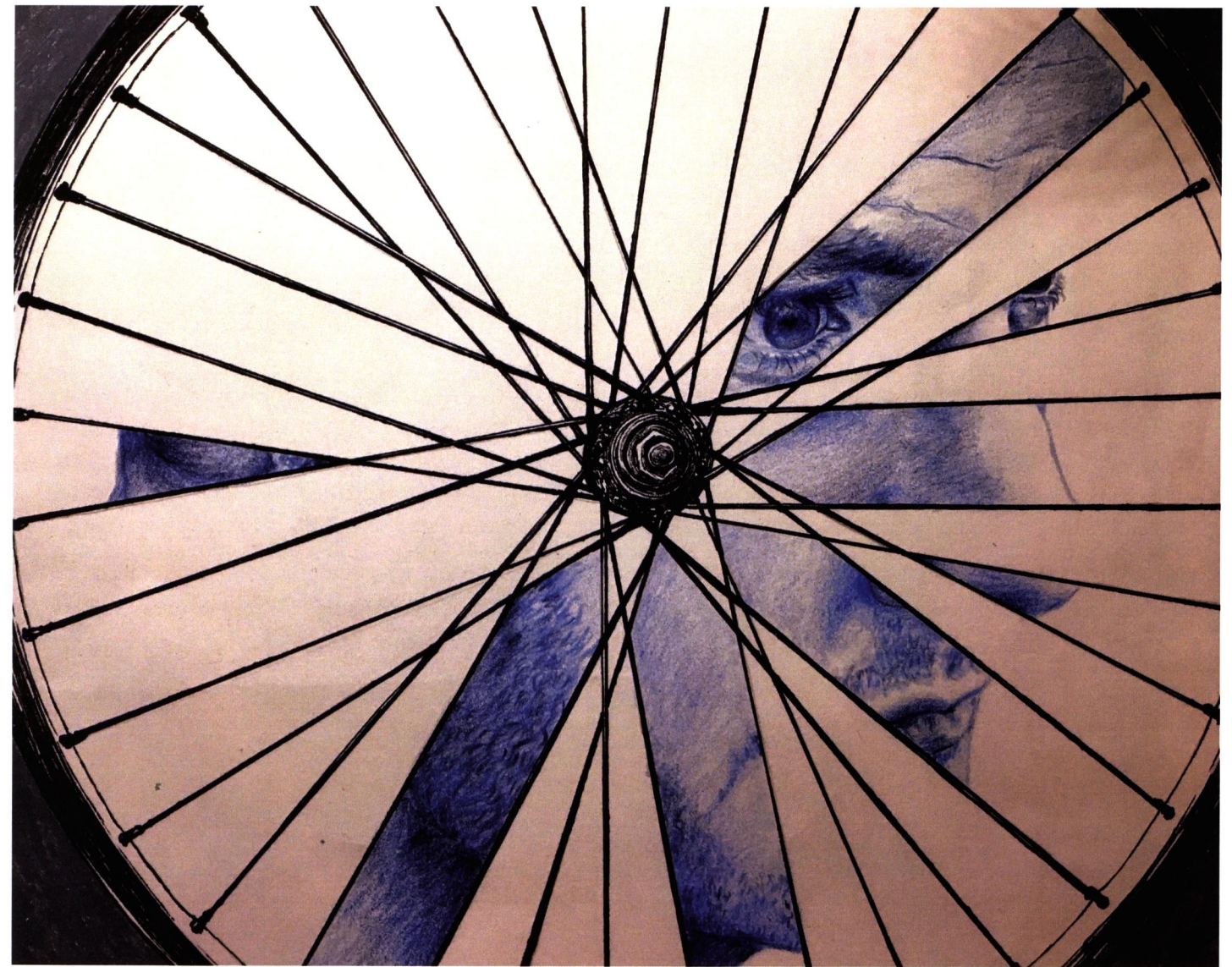
What is your breathing like, you wonder, when you're in deep sleep, and you try to copy that pace. If you concentrate too hard you won't be able to sleep anymore, and if you close your eyes more than halfway shut you'll fall asleep again and miss it all. What expression on your face, you wonder, looks so nice to touch, to stroke, to kiss, to linger upon as they glance back.

Will they say goodbye before they part?

You're always the second one up, observing, watching.

VINES 1.1

BY SHIRLEY WANG



Tire(d)

by Riva Dhamala

I place the headphones in her ears and her eyes close as she concentrates on the song. Her tense shoulders relax as she sinks down into the car seat. Her frail body starts to sway every so slightly in rhythm to the music. And slowly but surely, I hear something. Her voice croaks barely above a whisper and she quietly sings along.

Within the span of three minutes, my Aji has relaxed in a way that I have never seen before.

Within those three minutes, she has become a different person.

Within those three minutes, I think she is happy again.

My Aji, a quiet and reserved woman of 78 years of age, is singing to Moon River.

BY PRIYA VAISHAMPAYAN

Bad Metaphors

BY ANONYMOUS

I don't remember a time when I didn't wear glasses. I do remember that I first got them when I was five, and already optometrists were marvelling at how awful my eyesight was. "Too much reading," they said. In photos I am wearing thick black plastic frames and thick black pigtails, my face always ruddy and glowing from sweat, sticking in the collar of my school uniform. I don't remember a time when I could wholly trust in my gaze, not when a whole world existed on the periphery of these frames.

this becomes one of our running jokes, as i perpetually lose things in the chaos of his room and he deigns to rescue them for me. "i forgot you have bad eyes," reads one text message. he patiently, teasingly points things out when they slip my notice. he doesn't know that my bad eyes are very good at seeing things that aren't there.

I cried the first time I read Haraway's *Situated Knowledges*. Everything makes sense now - the contradictions that shred everything I know of education and academia and belief - because "only partial perspective promises objective vision", and the ultimate goal of learning and knowledge is really a gesture of taking responsibility. "It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see." Haraway has a specific repertoire of metaphors, but the one she relies on here is vision and the falsehood of an objective, unmarked gaze. All gazes are located and partial. All gazes are marked by power. "Vision is always a question of the power to see - and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?"

Could you read that question again for me?

My gaze is most violent when turned on queer women of colour, jagged-edged with everything I can love and loathe about myself refracted back to me - all the misplaced love and loathing in the world. I, too, can make other people into objects. And my bad eyes are best at doing that to myself.

My dad used to tell me not to feel too awful about my eyesight, because "You can always get Lasik when you're older!" This is not the reassurance he wants it to be. My glasses are magical; my glasses are lucky charms. My glasses are a nightly and morning ritual. I forgo contact lenses - too intrusive - and prefer the comforting, powerful weight of my glasses on the bridge of my nose. I control the clarity of my vision. I have bad eyes and I am in love with them. Here's Haraway again: "The eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity - honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, and male supremacy - to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power." The visualising tricks of modern science and technology have deluded us into assuming that we can see infinitely from where we stand, but I don't remember ever believing this - I can see within the constraints of these lenses and no further. And so girls with bad eyes don't get to fly planes or play rugby or be pretty.

this played out over months of trading snaps, and not even the kind you'd think (!), but everyday exchanges; daily commutes over the summer, enigmatic book covers, mealtimes, sunsets. i become a version of myself that i can love, and who's to say the recipient isn't doing the same? images - they lie.

his ex-girlfriend looks like me. i've been trying not to see this; i've been trying to call it paranoia, the uncanny similarity of us both being queer east asian women. it feels voyeuristic to notice that we have similar body types. i could ask him about this, but i don't, because i don't feel entitled to that question and i don't feel entitled to seeing. someone i love deeply yells at me to "Stop APOLOGIZING." another someone i love deeply calls him a "mediocre white man" and tell me to get my shit together. people i love deeply are always telling/yelling me the truth, but here is my own: that i am deeply unloveable, that i don't deserve the happiness i have, that i can grow myself into "adequacy" by twisting myself to fit someone else's vision. and all these truths can coexist.

at some point i should bring it up and affirm, you know, what are we, but i think that would first require some firmer sense of what am i? so let's not get ahead of ourselves here.

Haraway writes that the analytic tradition we live in "turns everything into a resource for appropriation", so the object of knowledge becomes a source of power for the knower; the object of knowledge cannot have agency. (The object is objectified.) Haraway gives the example of "sex" as an object of biological knowledge, which becomes a resource that, by some strange leap, we are able to control. Bodies too, are objects, and we can only make sense of them through their boundaries. Where do I end and where do you begin? We interact and engage and the boundaries materialise and shift. Your body is independent of your intentions, much as language, in a poem, is "independent of intentions and authors." My body is an actor, is not so easy to read.

I don't know where this ends, and i don't know where it begins - "boundaries shift from within; boundaries are very tricky." i am still finding better ways, better words, to build accounts of personal history and public history. everything is optics and i have no way to see from within what we are.



White Washed Beauty
by Maxine Bell



art by Erica Chau

I promise to love this body and all that it has given me
Even in times when I look in the mirror
And see someone too short,
Too thin,
Too pale,
Not enough.
Thank you
For bearing the weights of generations and traumas
Never asked of you.
For continuing to hold me up and together.
This is for you.
For healing and hopeful closure of wounds that continuously open.

BY JOSEPH TSUBOI



Scribbles
by Amy Tong

