ratrock magazine

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WHAT WE DO

(ratrock mission statement)

Provide a platform for students to showcase their art

Share the methods and inspirations of featured artists through original interviews, photography, and video content

Foster a community of creatives on campus by organizing galleries and events

Print bi-annual magazine issues

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENTS

Dear Readers,

We are so pleased to bring you Yearbook 7, Issue 1 of Ratrock Magazine. As always, we have prioritized bringing together a variety of artists, showcasing the incredible artistic diversity within Barnumbia. We have specifically featured eleven undergraduate artists specializing in a range of mediums, from sculpture, to graphic design, to crochet work. Each artist has a unique story and spirit revealed in their interviews and photoshoots, and we are so excited to celebrate their creativity and talent in our Fall 2024 publication.

We want to thank our amazing board members and staff who work closely with our featured artists to tell their stories and celebrate their work. We are especially grateful for the design team's hard work in putting together this physical publication. Ratrock is a magazine for artists and by artists, and our dedicated writers, photographers, videographers, designers, curators, web team, and social media team are truly the backbone of this club. Each of our contributors has poured so much love and hard work into the magazine, and we are confident that is reflected in these pages.

Being Ratrock Co-Presidents this semester has been such an amazing and whirlwind experience. We've seen our community flourish, and have been lucky enough to work with so many incredibly talented people. We look forward to continuing to support Barnumbia's wonderful artists and creatives in the future.

Of course, we want to thank you, our Ratrock readers, for your support, love of the arts, and for being part of our community! We hope you enjoy!

Nora Cazenave and Will Park
Ratrock Magazine Co-Presidents

class of 2024/2025 superlatives

board photos

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iman taha
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7

Maya (she/her) is a senior at Columbia College studying Russian Literature (CC '25). She works in both digital and film to showcase not only her technical skills but also her deep emotional intelligence and connection to her subjects. Her ability to capture the "little details" of someone's character through her photography gives her photos depth and an atmospheric quality. She is curious and excited to keep pushing the boundaries of her photography, always eager to learn more and capture more of her world.

Maya Shkolnik

Maya and I agreed to meet at her apartment near campus, and as I walked through the hallway to her door I was anxious to see what would come of the conversation. After conducting some light reconnaissance of her portfolio before the interview, I got the sense that Maya's view of the world is bold and electrifying. Often working in black and white to amplify the contrast in her images, her style captures animated and thought-provoking moments. I was unsure of the best way to approach asking about a style like hers.

Yet Maya welcomed me in, and as I set up my things, she and her roommate finished cooking their fried eggs for breakfast. Seeing them as they live informally and without preparation was inviting.

A row of various black boots lined the wall, housed under a rack of eclectic jackets. Funky chairs and a coffee table with magazines and newspapers filled the living room, and my eye was immediately drawn to a large sparkly Gustav Klimt painting hanging on the wall that Maya later told me was from HomeGoods. Wine bottles with dainty flowers inside and printed photographs of household items (I think one of them was of the inside of a dishwasher) muddled my preconceived notions of Maya from her work and immediately ignited my curiosity about who she is.

I began by asking her about the beginning of her interest in photography. She replied with a smile that she first started getting into photography when she was very young, about 7, and she and her best friend would pose for the camera and make content about "how to be a fashion model" and what to wear. Perhaps this fueled Maya's interest in fashion photography because she has since worked as a photography assistant for a Vogue Portugal shoot and has had her work featured in Interview Magazine among other well-known publications. She is also the Editor-at-large for Hoot Magazine, Columbia/Barnard's fashion magazine.

"I had a lot of really good photography influences in my life, just felt like a natural progression. One of my friends asked me to do a photography job; would take photos for weekly gatherings hosted by the New York chapter of the UN. On my way to that I would take pictures of my friends, and felt this was bringing me so much joy. I just went from there."

Many of Maya's photographs capture her friends, and I asked her how she goes about shooting people she knows. She responded that she lets her relationship with her subjects dictate the direction of the shoot. This casual format and spontaneity of the shoots allow the nature of Maya's relationships to show through. She clearly sees beyond what the camera lens shows. She is able to capture emotions that perhaps people don't even know they're expressing, like the subtle nuances of their expressions, quick glances and movements, or even just capturing the emotion behind someone's eyes.

"I'm naturally very good at psychoanalysis, so I want to continue that theme in my work. I'm obsessed with people's, like, tiny details."

When Maya revealed her skills for reading people, I, too, felt analyzed. There were many times throughout the interview that I had to redirect the line of questioning back to her because we would fall into easy conversation and she would begin asking me questions about myself. This speaks to a natural inquisitiveness and interest in uncovering the parts of people below the surface. I immediately thought of one of the first photographs I saw in her portfolio from an Alice in Wonderland-inspired shoot. The model stares directly at the camera, with an ornate, sculptural headdress, and tears streaming down her face. Maya captured the model's mood so vividly, and even though it's not a wild facial expression, something in her eyes tells viewers more.

She also works in self-portraiture. "When I am choosing myself [as the subject]" she explained "it's to make a point. It's to say something, to reflect on how I'm feeling. There's the first self-portrait stuff that I really did when I was first starting to get a grasp on what photography really was. That was really powerful, to be in the studio by myself and just pose in front of the camera" .

The self-portraiture she engages in seems to serve as a form of introspection, allowing her to explore her feelings and identity. This power is evident in her self-portraiture, which she seldom seems to do. It's clear that this practice holds significant weight for her, and it adds another layer to her understanding of photography as a medium for both personal expression and capturing the world through her eyes.

Her current project is with darkroom photography, a new medium for her. As a senior herself, she has been capturing her subjects in graduation caps and gowns in various scenes. Her concept aims to highlight the instability of graduation in a society that is increasingly unstable itself. By photographing graduates in unorthodox and imaginative ways, she wants to convey the uncertainty of post-graduate life and the future of the world.

"People didn't really post-grad photos last semester unless you didn't care at all about what was going on. And the ones that were posted were super shiny and really contrasted everything else that was being posted online. So I thought, well, I think that a lot of my friends could not see themselves smiling in front of Columbia in the same pose."

Thus, the idea to make quasi-grad photos was born. Some images show her friend, dressed in a Columbia-blue gown eating in John Jay, while another shows a graduate in a bathtub. Darkroom is an unfamiliar process for Maya, but she's excited to work with a photography medium that produces a physical object. There's a chemistry and materiality to the process that brings a different element to the final photographs.

Maya spoke about the community of artists she is surrounded by at Columbia and in New York in general. She mentioned the underground Russian Queer community (which is perhaps a little less underground now, sorry) and the way she, perhaps subconsciously, represents elements of this community in her work. She spoke about the nonconformist art they create "about extremism, internet culture and smoking weed, and weed addiction and schizophrenia".

This artist community who inspires and creates alongside Maya was the focus of her exhibition in the very apartment we were in. She hosted an exhibition titled Immediate Art, in which 20 of her friends displayed their work in the empty apartment before Maya and her roommates moved in. Some of the artwork still hung as we spoke, and Maya smiled as she said, 'I'm just gonna keep your work. Yeah, if you don't want it back, you don't ask for it back, and then I'll just keep it".

Maya sees herself putting on more exhibitions and displaying more of her work too. She will continue to take Photography classes at Columbia, but she sees herself going back to school for Russian Literature as well. Perhaps her experience with fashion photography will open doors, but for right now "[She's] more interested in reflecting on what's going on around me, and kind of picking up pieces here and there".

Feature by *Kate Henry*
Photos by *Iris Pope*

Kathleen Halley-Segal

Kathleen Halley-Segal CC' 28 is majoring in Art History and Visual Arts. She paints mostly in acrylic and watercolor. Her work was featured at the Bronx Borough Art Festival, the Met, and the YoungArts Week Exhibition and focuses mostly on topics of gender norms, adolescence, and intergenerational connection.

Thanksgiving at my Grandma's house was an elaborate affair: 20 cousins, 4 uncles, 3 aunts, and 2 or so turkeys. A hodgepodge of tables pushed together piled high with an assortment of dishes sustained the conversation from afternoon into the evening. Kathleen Halley-Segal observes that the labor required for events like this one tends to fall on women. For them, these preparations are not necessarily a choice. Rather, they are a requirement of gendered expectations.

Both the hardship and the strength granted by this subjection are main themes in Kathleen's art work. Her grandmothers and mother feature often. The settings are quotidian. One painting shows Kathleen's mother breastfeeding. A suburban family home stands out in a melange of pink, blue, and green. Her mother's lips are parted as though mid speech. In one hand, she supports her daughter. The other is placed casually behind her.

There's a radical quality to this painting. In contemporary society, images of breastfeeding remain taboo. At the same time, women with children are frequently isolated from the identity of caretaker. Kathleen's portrait both embodies this experience, and disrupts it. The woman in the painting is visibly interested in things besides the child. She challenges traditional depictions of mother and child.

The women in Kathleen's life also produced her interest in art. In my conversation with her, she described visiting her paternal grandmother's home.

"She loved art. She'd compiled clippings over the course of her life that we would look through together."

Her grandmother inspired the younger Kathleen as she puts it, "to capture the intricacies of the small details in the world."

"She Looks Forward", a painting of her Grandmother, seems to do just that. Every fold is visible in her sweater. Her hair is silver, but also black, and gray. She gazes away from the viewer, in reflection. She is both the older version of herself and all the years before. They all exist at once.

In high school Kathleen began a formal training at the Arts Student League on 59th Street. Classes helped to develop her technical abilities and other students offered a cohort of artistic peers.

Many of those peers are in art school now. Kathleen chose to study Aart History at Columbia. She didn't think studying art full time would be a good fit.

"I think that would not only be limiting in my life, but also limiting in my own artistic practice," she says. "I think making art, or doing anything creative is about constantly getting inspiration from many different sources."
One source of inspiration has been the City itself.

Growing up in New York, Kathleen was tasked with navigating the subway from an early age. She noticed a sweetness and a holiness of people through these experiences, qualities not often noted in descriptions of New Yorkers. In her painting Sleeping on the D Train, a pair of teenage girls, heading to or from school, rest on each other. The window of the subway car is blue, as though looking out over the ocean or the sky.

Her scenes of the city are reminiscent of artists Jordan Casteel and Alice Neel. Kathleen says they provided an outline for what representation of New York could look like to the young artist. Neel was particularly known for her subversion of the male gaze, painting women conscious of

their objectification. The two artists famously explored identity, sexuality, and subjectivity.

Kathleen has a style of her own. Behind many of her quotidian subjects are loud backgrounds. There are stars and wispy strands that make the wind appear to come alive. Many of the paintings use neon blues and pinks. She describes herself as "loose with her colors" and "very experimental." I ask Kathleen what inspires her more dramatic choices.

"There's an energy and youthfulness and creativity to the women in my life," Kathleen says. "That's the way I see them, but that isn't really translated into their physical being."

As her grandmother aged, photography captured less and less the person that she was. Kathleen remembers the way she talked to people and the little objects around her home. Scattered, like a huge gallery piece, they are embedded in her grandmother's personhood.

In one painting, a pastiche of fiery colors frame the older woman. She seems to breathe in, breathing out oranges and reds. I tell Kathleen I feel as though I've met her.

I see my grandmother too. Louise was a mother to eight and the image of a dotting wife. She was also a social worker for over 30 years.

For Kathleen, the physical and emotional labor women are forced to take on is unfair, but it's also a source of liberation.

"The expectation that women do a lot of the cooking and preparing everything is a role that's constricting. But it's also this position of authority that women have." Kathleen says.

As she reflects on the women in her family gathering in her kitchen over the High Holidays and Christmas, both important in her interfaith family, Kathleen is reminded of this physical and emotional labor. She notes how within her family they represent both a sort of injustice and simultaneously a meaningful role.

"It's so much work to plan these events and these dinners, but it's also like this really creative task. You're putting together this huge meal. Those two things exist at the same time."

The possibility of both power and subjugation exist at once. It is exemplary of the complexity visible in all her art work.

Feature by *Eve Rosenblum*
Photos by *Kendall Bartel*

Originally from Dallas, Texas, Amber Li is currently a sophomore at Columbia University, majoring in computer science and minoring in statistics. She draws inspiration from her studies in the STEM field and her passion for ballet to create across various mediums, from traditional oil painting to technological art, and even fashion design. Much like herself, her work carries a whimsical, graceful, and innovative spirit.

Amber Li

October 4, 2024. 10:00 AM EST. 60°F. A sunny fall Friday morning.

I perched on a bench outside Dodge, anxiously waiting for Amber. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was in the wrong place—why did we decide to meet outside the gym? My instincts proved right, as that morning I discovered that both Dodge Physical Fitness Center and Dodge Hall exist. I scrambled to get to our actual rendezvous, feeling silly for my mix-up and even more anxious about making a bad first impression. Luckily, when I found her outside Dodge Hall, she greeted me with a warm, bubbly smile. Wearing a cozy sweater, flowing white skirt, and brown leather boots, Amber looked like she stepped out right out of a storybook. The breeze danced through her wispy bangs, framing her blushed face, and I felt a strange familiarity with her. Both being second-generation immigrants with Chinese parents, we bonded over our shared experiences: the push towards STEM, the weight of the "American dream," piano, and then quitting piano...

Amber was drawn to the allure of New York City and its seemingly boundless opportunities, yearning to break free from the comfortable bubble of her hometown and the—unfortunately much too often—linear path of STEM careers.
"The diversity of New York, and what it claims [to be], and the art space has always attracted me. I wanted to immerse myself in a place where I feel like I could truly be myself. Although I love home, I feel like I conformed rather than was myself."

Amber has been immersed in the field of arts her entire life—visual and performing. At Columbia, she's the assistant artistic director for Columbia Ballet Collaborative, where she manages the behind-the-scenes operations while performing. Her love for dance is evident in many of her works.

"One thing that really drives my artistic investigation is my background in ballet. As a dancer, you really have to see the body as a vessel of movement, expressing emotion. I'm so entranced by the human body. It's capable of so many things, and I've realized it's a trend in my art, not purposefully. I have a lot of pieces that investigate bodily movement, and if not the body, movement and dynamism."

The painting that drew me to her, "Silhouette" (2022), depicts a minimalistic outline of a figure folded over; the detail in the painting is found in the hands and feet, which grasp the body in a sensual, intimate manner. It's both one of her and my favorites. When I asked her about the story behind this painting, she opened up to me about her struggle with body image as a result of

dance. Taking a sip from her Joe's matcha, she explained, "I can't lie to you, I think dancing has instilled in me this almost too keen awareness

of my body. I struggled a lot with body image, almost all my life, until college; I feel like it's so much freer here". "Silhouette" (2022) alludes to this keen awareness of the body, capturing both a delicate fluidity and tender stillness. Her other works, such as "Maneuver" (2021), demonstrate a similar investigation of the body, its function, capabilities, and limits.

Of the various mediums she explores, Amber tells me that she favors oil painting for its familiarity. She explains, "it's so flexible, and you're able to do so much. It's very organic and closely aligns with humanism. You're able to portray real life in the way that we see it, more accurately than other mediums." Looking through her portfolio, I found that most of her works combine traditional elements with a whimsicality. In one of her most recent oil paintings, "Cupid and Psyche" (2024), she took inspiration from one of her favorite artists, Colleen Barry. Amber said that she wanted to break free from a realist point of view by merging vibrant, funky colors into her depiction of an Italian sculpture she came across at the MET. Scrolling through her portfolio, I noticed that she has consistent fairytale references and themes in her work, and when I asked her about them, she seemed taken aback. Her art is intimate and oozes from her memory unconsciously. She told me, "I'm just a girl at heart...I think before even realizing that I tended towards fairy tales, maybe more than the next person, I had been already creating so many artworks about that. I think there's a portrait of my sister in a Cinderella dress, and I didn't realize that was something I was doing." Her subconscious integration of fantasy is a comforting reminder that youth, whim, and wonder remain with us as we navigate the complexities of aging.

With a software engineer for a father and an accountant for a mother, Amber was gently herded toward studying mathematics growing up. "In high school, or actually for all my life, I found that finding time for art was the single biggest challenge I faced, because the interdisciplinary sector between math and art isn't that big. There's only so much you can do, and I found myself just living two lives," she said. Surprisingly, computer science became the in-between. Similar to her artistic process, Amber loved how computer science requires intensive research, technicality, and creativity.

"It really combines the creative portion I love about art and the super technical, problem-solving. I love to think about things from a quantitative approach, while also being creative. So for me, that was my balance. I was able to combine both my passions into one"
In some of her recent works, Amber explores a new medium by meshing technology with art, drawing inspiration from algorithms, while also experimenting with generative arts, like "DALL-E."

"Everything that I have been doing has been technology adjacent, but these two pieces, one

of them was called Ultraviolet and the other is called Yin and Yang, are literally, computer generated art. And I think the inspiration behind that was: How can I use computer processes to still emulate the same emotions you get through oil painting? They're completely different mediums, but the creative process that I took was very similar.

Her digital pieces introduce the intricate nuances of computer science while retaining aspects of movement reminiscent of her oil paintings. Her works serve as a synergy between the analytical and the expressive, reflecting her deep understanding of both realms. Contrary to popular opinion, Amber views the emergence of AI-generated art as a new source of inspiration and possibility, rather than a creative hindrance to humanity. Initially apprehensive, she discovered once she began experimenting with it that it was just another medium.

"It truly is just another tool. If you know how to use it, it can inspire so much more about your own creative process. I used it to augment the boundaries of one of my pieces. It provokes you to think about your art in a different way that you otherwise couldn't. In completing those two projects, I realized that it's coming from you, and you're recursively editing, revising, shaping, and completely reimagining your own code. In that sense, it really is just like an artistic process."

Amber recently began venturing into fashion design, actualizing her digital creations to life in corporeal form. Made of tape, wire, and ink, Murmuration Garment Design (2022) was heavily inspired by her obsession with Iris van Herpen, who she discovered similarly tries to marry her background in ballet with math and engineering.

As a STEM student at Columbia, Amber talked in depth about her challenges juggling her intended career path with her involvement in the arts. She reflected on her experiences, saying, "It's tough to balance timelines. You only have so many hours in the day, so perhaps college is the biggest creative block for me." Having a similar dilemma myself, I asked her how she does it, and so successfully too. Her answer: "Art isn't going to escape you." She emphasized that creativity is an intrinsic part of who we are, and it doesn't simply vanish when life gets hectic. Being an artist, she reminded me, doesn't necessitate constant creation; instead, it's also important to savor the moments when you can engage and appreciate the creative expression of others. Her words of advice: take advantage of Columbia Arts Initiative.

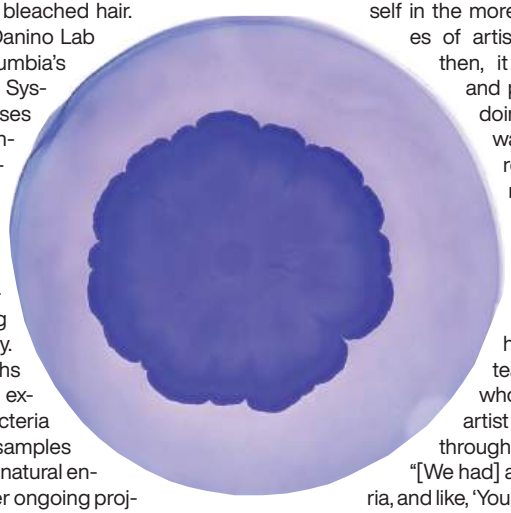
When I asked about her future career plans, she told me she hopes to find herself in data science, AI, quantitative analysis, or even architecture. For now, art simply serves as a personal indulgence, but she toys with the idea of pursuing a masters in art, should life lead her that way.

Feature by *Vivian Wang*
Photos by *Chantel Hope*

Julia Kirby

Julia is a visual artist from San Fransisco in the class of 2027 at Columbia College also studying physics and archeology. She is a painter (oil, acrylic, watercolor), tattoo artist, illustrator, welder, leatherworker, jewelry maker, glassworker, photographer, and bacterial bio-artist at Columbia Biomedical Engineering. Speaking with her on the steps of St. John's Cathedral, it's almost as if she can't not create. "You give me a material, and I'll give you art. I guess for me, art is just anything that I work with my hands." Her art experiments with how we create memories, their preservation, their distortion; she wants to create these memories synthetically.

As the Thursday evening sun leaves us on a blue-gray and cold Amsterdam Ave, Julia tells me about her bio-art in between Mount Sinai sirens, a hand in her bleached hair. Working out of the Danino Lab – a studio part of Columbia's Synthetic Biological Systems Lab – Kirby uses microbiology techniques that are usually found in scientific research to make art. "Instead of using bacteria to make a drug that cures cancer, you're making bacteria look pretty. Way better (she laughs sarcastically)." After extracting strains of bacteria with a solution from samples usually sourced from natural environments, like for her ongoing project focalizing national parks, she'll pipette that solution onto an agar plate that helps the bacteria grow. She then incubates these, sometimes just overnight, other times for up to two weeks, and returns them to colonies of bacteria of all different shapes and colors. Once the bacteria has covered the agar plate she scans it and lets the plate dry out, sometimes adding chemical stains or food dye to augment the plate's coloring. Other times though, like some of her recent work with bright orange and yellow bacterial samples from musical instruments, she'll leave the plates with their natural color.



This process is highly selective, and she often goes through many iterations of plates experimenting with different strains or agar mediums, or changing the nutrient mediums or broths. When she inoculates a plate with bacteria, it's in this malleable liquid culture that she can manipulate and create shapes with. "Recently, I made a plate with a smiley face." With all this experimentation, Kirby says she sees herself more as a scientist in the lab than an artist. The beauty jumps out from the natural patterns, then she recreates them.

Julia's scientific creativity stems from her Northern California roots. Up until middle school, she focused her energy mostly on the fine arts, yet was also inspired by the nature around her and captivated by at-home chemistry kits; the tension between science and art in her life was always present, but it wasn't until she discovered a warehouse in Oakland that housed an industrial arts studio that the two collided. Going every summer with her friends, she immersed herself in the more mechanical processes of artistic creation. "Up until then, it was mostly drawing and painting, and I was still doing that, but I think this warehouse made me realize 'Wow, there's so much science that can be applied to art, and art that can be applied to science.'" It is now that we must issue a sizable 'thank you' to her high school biology teacher Christine Bois, who introduced the young artist to the field of bio-art through a lab one day in class. "[We had] all these colorful bacteria, and like, 'You can make a flower with bacteria'. And I [thought] 'This is so novel", at the time I was like, this is really cool. It was a cute, fun science experiment. I need to go tell her that I'm working [in bio-art] because she's literally gonna pass out."

Often when creating her plates, Kirby tries to pick bacteria that are particularly motile, meaning their growth moves around the plate significantly. "My favorite species that I've found is called bacillus piscis" (she identifies the strain through sequencing) "and it grows very beautifully in this spider-like formation on MRS. I found it because I collected dirt from Grand Teton. I went to Jenny Lake and got this strain of bacteria, and it's beautiful. And it was sequenced from, [the muscle of] this Antarctic fish!"

When Julia is satisfied with a plate she'll cast it in PDMS (a translucent silicone preservative). But regardless of the outcome, she keeps all of the plates. Those that she doesn't cast eventually dry out. "It's just kind of wrinkly, and it's not beautiful, but it's also not ugly. The plate is always aging. If you look at the work of previous plates that were made years ago they're still changing shape, even now."

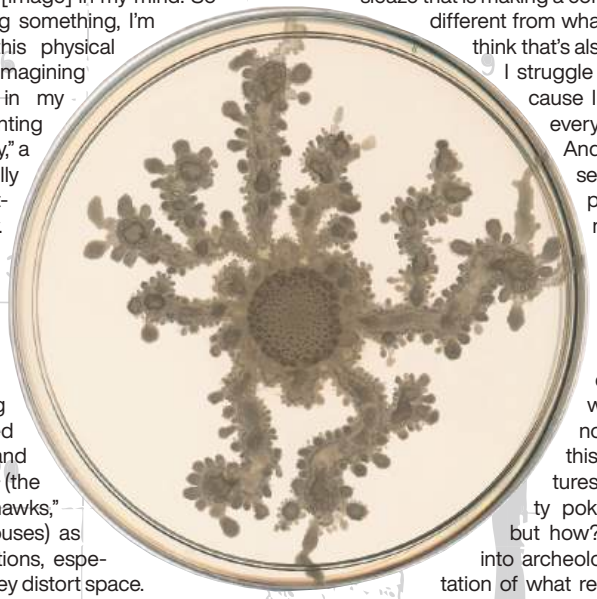
This transformation of the physical form, or distortion of image, is present almost everywhere in Kirby's artwork, but especially in her tattooing. "Recently, a lot of the tattoos that I'm doing are copies of this childhood illustration. I did a tattoo on my mom that was an illustration my brother had made when he was little. I tattooed like a star on myself. It's very much in this childlike, kind of fat lines, distorted shapes. There's a beauty in the imperfections." Particularly with her tattoo for her mother, she felt a strong meaning in the fusion of mother, daughter, and son through an atemporal artwork on an aging body, almost a connection to her mother's past self via maternity. It was her mother who also taught her how to watercolor in elementary school, setting the foundation for Julia's artistic journey, or rather, explosion. In this sense, it's come full circle in the form of permanent ink.

This comparison between the agent of agar and tattooing is also a strong parallel for how Julia thinks about memory, a core tenet of her artistry. Her eyes light up when she remembers a quote from the introduction of photographer and activist Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*:

"Memory allows an endless flow of connections. Stories can be rewritten, memory can't. If each picture is a story, then the accumulation of these pictures comes closer to the experience of memory, a story without end. I want to be able to experience fully, without restraint. People who are obsessed with remembering their experiences usually impose strict self-disciplines. I want to be uncontrolled and controlled at the same time. The diary is my form of control over my life. It allows me to obsessively record every detail. It enables me to remember."

"She's kind of putting into words how I think about memory, and how I think about my art. Because I feel like my memory is not great, and I often distort memories of people, places and things. I think my art is me searching for the preservation of the past. That's why I deal with so much scrapbooking. It's why I obsessively keep the train tickets and the receipts whenever I travel."

This thread is what Kirby uses to weave her infinite spiderweb of mediums and disciplines, connecting the academic with the artistic and everything in between, hoping to catch as much authentic experience in her 'synthetic memory' as possible. But she doesn't always stick to staunch realism; often, authentic replication of the subjective mind's warping of past events is just as necessary. I mentioned to Julia how I find this distortion in her paintings especially, and she agreed. "80% of the paintings that I make are based off of this [image] in my mind. So when I'm painting something, I'm not observing this physical landscape. I'm imagining this landscape in my mind and painting from that memory," a memory beautifully warped and twisted by subjectivity.



Julia cites Max Beckmann (showing me "The Night" and "Family Picture", bodies twisting in hyperbolized personality) and Edward Hopper (the famous "Nighthawks," "Gas," his lighthouses) as her main inspirations, especially with how they distort space. "With Max Beckmann, it's a very clear distortion of space where I'm like, 'Wow, this is so interesting, how you've made me feel very uncomfortable with these people, but also, like, intrigued.' It's wonderful. And then with Edward Hopper, the way that he [paints] solitude and the emptiness of this space. Every single time he paints it has this sense of nostalgia."

This distortion manifests materially in her leatherwork and jewelry. Julia often takes discarded materials and turns them into wearable art, usually gifting them to friends for birthday gifts. "I'm like, 'If you don't take this, you hate me.' even though what I'm giving you is literally trash, but I made it into art." This fascination with trash came from an archive photography class she took freshman year, investigating how we remember photos (which are often as dishonest as they are honest), how we preserve an archive, and what a selective archive is. Kirby saw trash as a clear archive of our environment, accentuating the contrast between today's trash and the trash of the same communities some 200 years ago, culminating in a photo book on the subject.

We laugh about the elusive and confusing nature of nostalgia, and its similarly manipulative effects. "I look back at the bags that I made in middle school, and I'm like, bro, you were so weird. That's also how we're looking back at fashion cycles, like how we're remembering indie sleaze. The indie sleaze that is making a comeback now is so different from what it actually was. I think that's also a part of where I struggle with my art, because I want to capture everything, but I can't. And so how do we select what's important and what's not, and what's worth telling or communicating? I can't preserve every memory. I can't keep this conversation we're having right now. But will I keep this bowl?" (she gestures to her new empty poke bowl) "Maybe, but how? This is why I'm into archeology, this interpretation of what remains, or this interpretation of a culture or a society based on what remains and the physical manifestation of that."

Julia Kirby posts all her art on her Instagram account @juliamakesartz, where she also takes commissions and tattoo bookings through DMs. Julia's ongoing musical instrument project with the Danino Lab will experiment with programming code that can combine bio-art with music generated from bacterial patterns. The Lab will also be exhibiting her bio-art along with others at the Mosesian Center for the Arts in Watertown, Massachusetts from November 15 - January 03, 2025. And don't be shy to ask her about it in person as well. "I'll be around campus selling my art!"

Feature by *Eli Schalet*
Photos by *Moksha Akil*

Iman Taha

Iman (she/her) is a senior at Barnard College in the class of '25 double majoring in Art History (Visual Art) and Architecture. Her fervor for photography began at a young age and has blossomed into a diverse collection of photos that experiment with color, lighting, composition, and subject. This experimentation often comes with the spontaneity of Iman's preferred photography style: street photography.

In preparation for my conversation with Iman, I wanted to get a feeling for how an artist like her would treat the walk from Mudd to Dodge. From my review of her work, Iman seemed to primarily practice street photography, a practice that waits for the perfect shot rather than creates it in detail. As I walked in front of Avery and across Low Steps, I tried as hard as I could to find at least one image worth taking. I came up incredibly short. Nothing seemed to come together, no matter how hard I tried. Thus, I entered my conversation with Iman with a looming question on my mind: How the hell do you do this?

Iman, a senior at Barnard College, had an unconventional start to her photography career. As a child, her medium of choice was not photography, but fashion design. She laughed about those days, explaining how her teacher told her that her designs "were never that good"—but her photography was. In the process of photographing her fashion designs, Iman found her inspiration for another medium. It was not only the best part of her fashion work, but the part where she had the most fun. So, slowly yet surely, Iman began to focus on photography as her main artistic medium. Today, she has an instagram account (@imansphotographs) burgeoning with photos from Turkey to New York City. As her portfolio has grown, so has her practice. While she still uses her father's old film camera, she has expanded to digital photography as well. As her work has grown, I wondered how the years honed her craft. Concerning my original brewing question, Iman gave me a tour of her artistic mind and process as she patrols the streets.

Iman describes her draw towards street photography as a desire to discover more about herself. Through a documentation of the world as it is, she carves out a place for herself in it. The scenes she captures through her photography,—scenes she describes as distinctly "without her intervention"—provide a space for reflective meditation on her own place in the world. Although she is devoid from the photographs themselves, she is the one shaping them and the ultimate judge of its worth to her film. This meditative practice continues in the development of these photos. As a film photographer, Iman loves both the process of capturing a scene and the labor of processing it and bringing it to life. As she develops these photos, she sees herself developing a story. What draws her to the specific scenes she photographs is a feeling that there is a story hiding in the movement and organic composition of the world. The photograph, as much as it informs Iman, becomes a way to capture her own perspective and the own story she's seeing. She describes her favorite photos as the ones with the most potential for that "story." Whether it's a little girl peering through a window or the soft touch of hands over a bin of vinyls, Iman hopes to capture and preserve the stories of her streets as a way to define her and her world.

Most of the people in Iman's photos are strangers to her, yet she still develops a relationship with them through her lens. When asked about her approach to street photography and the art of capturing someone, she noted that there is a specific approach she sees in photographing strangers versus someone she's familiar with. This difference in context foregrounds the photographic relationship Iman has with her subjects on the street. She observes that in her practice,

the people blend into the environment, almost like a building. The human form becomes an object of beauty considered for its individual aesthetic qualities in relation to space. This environment, Iman shared, is the key to the beauty she finds in street photography. The confluence of all the aspects of the environment is not something that can be made, only encountered. It only exists out there. It's just a matter of finding it. The hunt for the perfect street shot becomes one for treasure where gold is dug up and Iman lies in wait for the sun to hit and make the whole scene shimmer. Iman beautifully mused, "Everything you need is on the street."

To Iman, her street photography is like jazz. Despite its spontaneity and improvisation, like jazz, there is a rule in the noise. The unpredictability of light, shadow, composition, environment, and people all combine in a band of noise that Iman tunes to perfection. Iman notices this intricate balance of having a controlled eye and an open mind that truly makes her photos distinct.

One of the instruments in Iman's symphony is color. When I first saw Iman's photographs, my mind was instantly drawn to her use of color. Her photos swam in tones of sepia, black, white, blue. Some of her photos were practically dripping with saturation while others were quiet in their display. In Iman's black and white photos, she specifically gives attention to contrast. She seeks out the shadows and lights that bring a scene to life. By desaturating the photo, this stark contrast is brought to life. In her photos of color, Iman loves to play with distortion. Whether its light bouncing between ripples of water or glaring off of window panes, Iman understands light and its effect on color as vitally important to the life of a scene. The color and the light can obscure or highlight; focus or distract; liven or dull. Despite this love for color, Iman has shied away from editing her photos. She speaks to how the editing process takes something away from her photos rather than adding it. She just wants to "capture what I capture." So, Iman's alterations come before the photo is taken, in the various camera settings that change the wash of the photo. Iman uses daylight and night settings to elevate her photos, enhancing them without necessarily changing them. Iman values color (values) in how they exist and how they can be created, and she turns those dials accordingly.

As someone who splits the year's time in New York City and Turkey, I wanted to probe the matter of location for Iman. Do opposite sides of the world warrant different practices? While Iman's

general approach stays the same, she identifies some key differences in her practice in Turkey versus in the US versus in the places she travels to. Between Turkey and the US, the energy and tone of her photographs are incredibly different. In Turkey, Iman finds her eyes drawn to architecture while her eyes are more drawn to the people in the US. Despite these differences, both places have a "home-y" feeling for her and this familiarity contrasts with the feeling of her photography from places she's visited or vacationed in. Iman stated that this feeling of the "outside eye" in these places affects the perspective of her photographs. The difference is clear.

Iman currently maintains photography as an artistic hobby, though she practices it more formally as a photographer for Columbia's Daily Spectator. The Spectator gave her the unique and fulfilling opportunity to join a community of student photographers. Whether it's from simple help cleaning a camera or sharing knowledge and approaches, Iman's involvement in The Daily Spectator has provided her a new avenue to explore her art.

Iman hopes to be able to start a professional practice with her photography, but she knows that, no matter what, photography will always be in her life. She's currently trying to expand her practice and experimenting with different approaches to her work. She's particularly interested in exploring narrative photography—bringing new meaning to her curation and compilation of images. You can follow this journey with her on her instagram @imansphotographs.

Iman's handle of the camera is like no other. Through her lens, she captures those fleeting moments whose significance, intimacy, and emotion only becomes legible on a second meditation. Iman's art shows us that in the hustle and bustle of NYC where all anyone is thinking about is where to go next—everything we need is in the streets. All you need to do is look.

Feature by *Nathan Cho*
Photos by *Arden Sklar*

Lixin Yan

Lixin Yan is a sophomore ('27) at Barnard College studying art history, visual arts, and psychology. While her primary discipline is fashion design, her portfolio includes sculptures, photography, drawings, and paintings. We met on the Diana patio, easing into our conversation soon after.

Lixin begins her creative process with rumination—pulled towards ideas that are particularly hard to process. As such, her work tackles diverse subjects, be it grief or political turmoil. Two of her recent projects, "The Mirror of Erised" and "Survival of the Fittest," were inspired by the pain she experienced while navigating an emotional breakup.

In a period of loss, change, and coping, Lixin's turmoil began to bleed into her subconscious.

"I have a lot of nightmares and I draw all of them. Immediately after I wake up from one, I start sketching," said Lixin.

The sketches in question are a synthesis of swirling colors, landscapes, and figures. In our discussion, she mentioned waking up to feelings of drowning and suffocation. These moments are captured fresh from Lixin's mind, evocative of the fear she felt immediately prior. As the first stage of her artistic process, these sketches depict grief at its most tender.

Lixin's sketches are brought to life as textiles, which she typically embroiders or crochets by hand, utilizing a variety of materials, textures, and hues. Many of these samples incorporate elements of the natural world using patterns and shapes.

"The Mirror of Erised," juxtaposes distressed denim with bright, flowery yarn, representing the complex, often contradictory emotions she experiences. I took note of the positive connotation of nature in Lixin's work, which is used across mediums to evoke feelings of peace and inner growth. She often places nature in contrast with inorganic elements, symbolic of the acrimony she experiences.

In the midst of her breakup, while tossing and turning due to her nightmares, Lixin realized that her dreams were a defense mechanism, attempting to shield her conscious mind from pain. "Survival of the Fittest," draws inspiration from the evolutionary traits of animals, which develop as a form of protection from harm. Both looks feature wearable shells, based on armadillos and turtles.

Lixin drafts upwards of six designs using her textiles. As expected, this process can be lengthy. According to Lixin, these looks take upwards of a

year to complete, developing in tandem with her emotional evolution.

Not only is Lixin inspired by her difficult emotions, but she is also motivated by them. The moments when she struggles the most, Lixin says, are the ones that drive her projects forward.

"When I'm really sad, I can only do a few things; that's when I turn to art. When I'm happy, I have less free time–I'll spend time with friends and go outside," said Lixin.

Once assembled, Lixin directs the styling and staging of her looks, aspects that play a critical role in completing her narrative. Lixin's designs take on a new life when photographed, presenting a new condition of healing.

For "Survival of the Fittest," the subject occupies a liminal space between nature and sterility. Illuminated by the moss below, Lixin's designs are placed on a pedestal.

The subject's solitude is a reminder that Lixin's journey is internal—a product of her isolation. Placed in this space, the subject embodies a newfound strength. I interpreted these displays as a 'return to nature,' recalling Lixin's inclination to immerse herself in the external world following the intense process of isolation.

Upon completing a project, Lixin finds herself with a new perspective—one of gratitude for the turmoil she experiences. This is one of the reasons why her work is so cathartic. By accepting her emotions as they occur, her art drives personal growth and healing.

What I found most striking about Lixin's looks is the way they proudly display her most vulnerable moments, never losing sight of the emotions from which they were inspired.

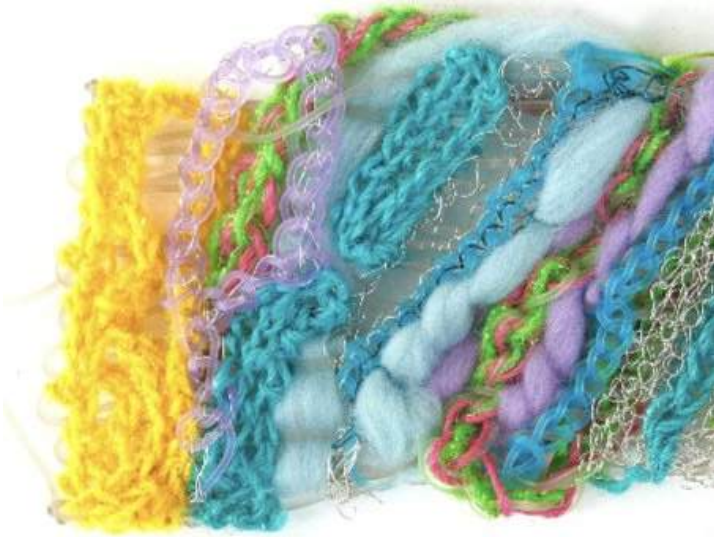
"I use art to heal myself. I don't see my struggles as entirely negative, because I use them to make art. It's like a transition of everything bad into something good. It feels powerful to display my personal growth," said Lixin.

"Sweet Dreams are Made of These" is a sculpture made of candy wrappers, wire mesh, polyurethane foam, and candles. The candy wrappers are displayed bearing the weight of melted candles and wire mesh, making the sculpture appear fragile. This installation was inspired by Lixin's sugar addiction, a coping mechanism during a difficult period of her life. When her life felt as if it was falling apart, candy became a 'quick fix,' providing an instant of relief. However, just as this installation depicts, 'quick fixes' can only bear weight for so long, and the only way through a hard time is to face it head-on.

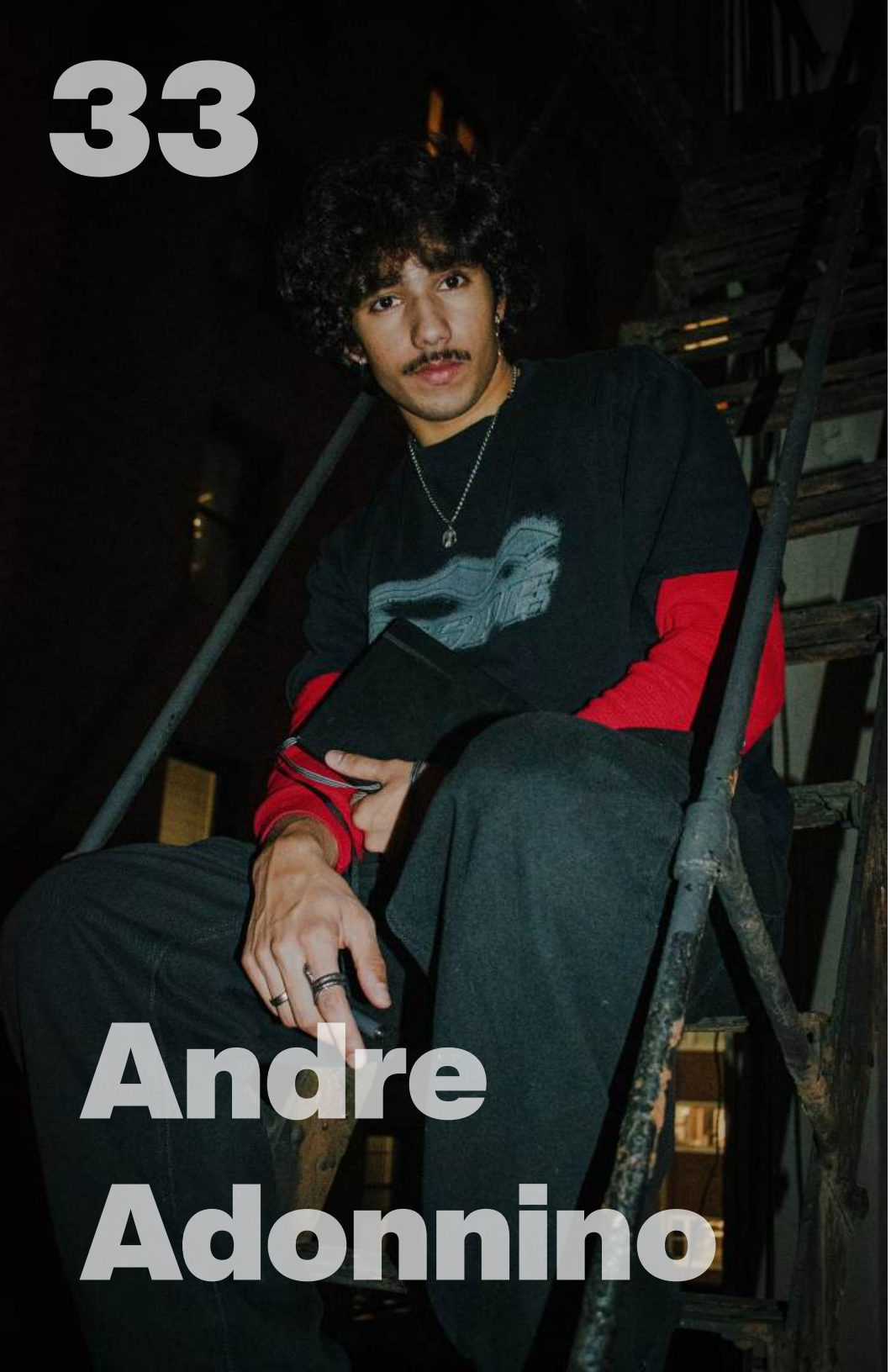
"Eat Well" was inspired by Lixin's relationship with her grandmother. Due to language barriers and age differences, the pair do not communicate well verbally. Instead, Lixin bonds with her grandmother through food, a subject where they share common ground. Lixin used clay to model different foods, which are displayed across a cloudy arch, symbolic of the bridge between her and her grandmother.

In "Shape of Fear," Lixin depicts the illusionary nature of fear. While the unknown can feel dangerous and paralyzing, it is often just a trick of the mind. When Lixin first arrived in the US, she was afraid of speaking to her classmates because of language barriers. However, when she finally conversed with one of her peers, her fear dissipated. This sculpture depicts a black shell, with rows of black spikes lining its interior. While seemingly harmful, the spikes are soft to-the-touch, posing no real threat to the semi-abstract human form at the shell's center. Despite how material fear can feel, it is often a product of the imagination and is meant to be overcome.

Feature by *Anushka Pai*
Photos by *Alicia Tang*



cycle 2*
andre adonnino
viela hu
ariana eftimiu
em chmiel
charlotte lawrence



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Andre Adonnino

Andre Adonnino (CC'26) is a junior studying Biochemistry. He is also a pre-med student. Andre primarily works in the medium of drawing and his go-to tools for this are a simple black pen and white paper. Andre finds artistic inspiration in the body and its many contortions while infusing all of his work with the "scribble." Andre leans into the line and the restraint and freedom of it. He often fuses his medical studies with his artistic passions.

I had barely put my bag and jacket down when I looked up to see Andre Adonnino (CC '26) standing there eager and early – really early. He showed up twenty minutes before our scheduled interview. There was a lot I had hoped to do in those twenty minutes: print out my notes, go to the bathroom, assemble my recording, and generally look at least somewhat presentable. Caught off guard, I quickly rushed through my preparations and tried to compose a setting for our interview. As Andre began, I grew glad for his early arrival. Andre's story, rich and compelling, was barely contained within those twenty extra minutes and surely would've been incomplete if he had come on time.

Andre's journey with art is one filled with twists and turns. Although Andre's love and passion for art is palpable, he intentionally resists any formal education of it. In fact, he is currently a Pre-Med student studying biochemistry. Andre cites his experience with arts education in high school as having contributed to his complicated views on formal arts education. In high school, so much importance was placed on realism. However, this strict emphasis wasn't something that spoke to him. During this time, Andre found himself spiraling in the competition of art, pushing himself against standards that he himself didn't embrace or aspire to meet. Art began to lose its expressive value– becoming a means to a competitive end. As Andre transitioned out of that environment and came to Columbia, he wanted to free his art of competitive pressures. Now, art is something he orients around himself and his community. In his personal journal, Andre sketches, though many of these drawings never see the public light. Now, his growth comes from consistent personal practice and community interaction. His community provides a space where his art can grow without being restricted.

However, this is not to say that Andre entirely opposes an arts education. In fact, one of the most influential experiences in his artistic career came from an interaction with his high school art teacher. She was the first teacher to shake Andre's confidence and tell him "NO." This was Andre's first experience with the semblance of failure. He felt shaken by his teacher's critical assessment of his artwork. The teacher provided him with valuable criticism that proved vital to his artistic practice. Andre describes this experience as crucial to the development of his art. This encounter pushed him to invest more in his practice while starting to shake him from the perfectionist mentality that constrained him early on. He still keeps in contact with that teacher today. Over the three years he's been at Columbia, He has slowly recuperated art as a practice for himself. This focus on the self is a distinguishing quality of Andre's style. Having moved away from the standards and confines of hyperrealism, Andre has stripped drawings down to their basics.

Andre's drawing style is primarily characterized by black pen on paper. These drawings are usu-

ally sparse in background and center around figures in dynamic contortions that emphasize the possibility of the human–particularly masculine– form. In these dialed down compositions, the line gains a special importance. This line, as it traces and forms the body, is a key subject of exploration for Andre. Just as Andre resists the conventional route of arts education, so does he resis the expectations of the line. In Andre's drawings, line has the equal power of creating form and destroying it. Lines create the arms and legs as they fling in various positions, but they also leap out and form webs and tentacles that at once distinguish and blur the figure. These "tentacles" have become exaggerated over time as Andre himself began to reckon with his impulse towards them. According to Andre, his exploration of line is "the fun part" that imbues a piece with emotion while also controlling the weight of his composition. These tentacles perform the dual purpose of technical and emotive weight.

This focus on form and figure explains, in part, the running motif of Spiderman present in much of Andre's work and life. Whether he's sporting a Spiderman T-shirt around campus, filling his sketchbook with him, or setting him as his phone background, Spiderman has always been one of Andre's biggest and longest-lasting inspirations, a fact he is not ashamed of. On an artistic level, Spiderman acts as an important exercise in form. Spiderman is often associated with iconic poses that push the boundaries of the body as he is flinging through the air or swinging through cities. Spiderman has also always played an important role in Andre's personal life – having been introduced to his comics from a young age. Spiderman's intelligence and ambition made him an aspirational figure for Andre who reflected that: "It's good to have heroes." And to the people who think his inspiration is childish or cringe, Andre offers straightforward response: "F**k the haters." Andre knows who he is and what he loves unabashedly. He demonstrates that whether in art or life, "sophistication" is overrated.

As Andre has formed his own identity through and with his art, he has been able to take a personal and unique approach to art. As Chief Illustrator for the Columbia Science Review, Andre combines his interests and passions together. However, his multifaceted practice is not just confined to Columbia's campus. Andre is a project manager for the Dementia Art Therapy Alliance where he practices art as a form of healing. Working with patients suffering from dementia, Andre implements a collaborative and emotionally attuned approach to artistic creation. Art becomes an active site for healing and connection that is really important to Andre and speaks to the value of art past its technical expectation. Andre was able to expand this work as he was brought onto a pilot program for the Lenox Hill Hospital where he had the opportunity to meet with patients one-on-one and draw as they engage in conversation. Art becomes a space where patients can listen and be heard. It's a place where even the cagiest let their guard down and share a story that Andre can immortalize through his drawings. Art is a practice as much as it is a craft, and Andre engages with it in all its unique facets. His layered understanding of art is something he owes to his occupation of both the scientific and artistic realm. His experience at the intersection of different disciplines is a huge reason why he sees the "divide" between these two spaces– art and science– as "stupid." They intersect and rely on each other in so many ways, and this is a truth that Andre not only knows but practices.

Andre's artwork is constantly changing, and he is open to anything and everything that could help his art grow. So, his future is hard to predict. Although he currently works in black pen, Andre expressed a keen interest in color. Though it isn't necessarily evident in his current, public artwork, he assured me that color is something he is investigating in private. He wants to ensure that he truly has a handle on color before publicizing it in any of his pieces. Color opens a huge realm of possibility that he wishes to investigate for himself first. With this intention comes to light another important aspect of Andre's artistic philosophy: the process is just as important as the product. Andre sees the process of creation as if not more important than what is left at the end. If Andre doesn't find himself enjoying and indulging in the process, he sees very little purpose in the product. This philosophy takes shape in Andre's handle of time. Rather than slaving away at a piece for the purpose of unattainable hyperrealism, Andre prefers the spontaneity of flash drawing. He finds himself feeling more empowered and connected to the process when engaging in flash drawing. Importantly, his fast-paced drawing is not indicative of a lack of artistic dedication. Andre leans into time and allows it to have its own influence on his artwork. In this sense, time becomes its own space– one where he can push himself and discover new techniques or practices as he races against the clock. Just like the adage goes, for Andre, the journey is more important than the destination.

Andre hopes to always have art in his life, despite his career path not going directly into the art field. He views art as a crucial outlet for expression that he hopes to continue to tap into both formally, such as in medicine, and informally, in ways like his doodling. He sees the interweaving of medicine and art as endless– particularly in the realm of volunteering. He hopes to continue the work he currently does as a volunteer throughout his career. Andre is also interested in investigating some new forms of drawing that engage with medicine more explicitly like anatomical drawings or medical illustrations that push his focus on form to new contexts.

Feature by *Nathan Cho*
Photos by *Aliaya Nesru*

Viela Hu

Viela Hu (CC'27) is from Vancouver, Canada, studying art history and visual arts at Columbia. Her multimedia creative works have expanded far beyond her traditional training for technical works, investigating concepts of the female body, nature, cosmic connection, and more. Rather than conveying a definitive message, her art documents a continuous exploration of her evolving understanding of herself and the world around her.

As I made my way to the sundial to meet Viela, I tried to remember all the questions I had prepared, wondering how (and if it was even possible) to encapsulate her vast portfolio in one article. Both of us were bundled up against the sudden chill that's picked up in this year's unpredictable weather, and having just come out of

class, we unanimously decided to grab something to eat first. After finding an empty table in Lerner to settle down with our sushi, we tried to get to know each other in a casual conversation, giving us time to finish our meal before the formal interview began, but even in casual conversation, we couldn't help but circle back to her art.

Creating has always been an intrinsic part of who Viela is– an instinctive way of expressing herself that comes more naturally than words. There is no clear "beginning" to her creative process; it's simply something that exists alongside her, as constant and natural as breathing.

"Art is so central to me. It's a comfort place because there's an intimacy that you have with your work. I always say I feel like it's alive. You interact with it."

Viela describes her work as a "curated chaos." Her artistic process, she explained, usually sparks from a very banal moment in her day-to-day life. From there, the creation unfolds through a highly mechanical process, one that she compares to a scientific experiment. She often pulls from a variety of foreign materials to express the specific concepts she explores, resulting in a lot of trial and error in her work. Despite the presence of recurring elements, from Barbie dolls to peonies, that seem to connect her work, Viela doesn't seek to convey a singular, overarching theme. Her portfolio, she says, is more like an exploration of the random, the serious and the absurd, with no grand intention behind it.

"It goes back to a conversation with my French professor. Our conversation was centering on 'is there even a message that the author's trying to convey?' And I really agree with this point. There really isn't anything behind my art that I'm trying to convey where I haven't figured out already. My work isn't even a final product, as opposed to an accumulation of my exploration. If I knew what I wanted to convey, I would have told everybody in a very simplified way."

Much of Viela's artwork is an exploration of the body and meditates on how it shapes one's sense of self and their relationship with the world. In Garden of Life, Viela confronts the interplay between life and pain that stems from the uterus. "There's no religious reference," she clarified. "I only realized after I named it that the garden could be interpreted as religious. I meant it as the uterus is the garden of life." This three-dimensional collage embodies a maximalist aesthetic that she tends towards in her artworks, emphasizing depth, texture, and a rich palette of colors. As I gazed at the collage, I felt as if I was looking through an I-Spy book, trying to identify all the elements that strung together to form this symbolic orchid.

Flower Womb serves as a striking visual and tactile manifestation of the journey through the psychological and physical shifts of puberty, using peonies as a metaphor for the uterus. For this project, sourcing materials became a crucial part of her process, as she experimented with a variety of silicon samples to simulate the look

and texture of skin. Functioning as headpieces, Flower Womb invites the spectator to become a part of the work. "I wanted it to be that your head is inside the uterus, so you're seeing and feeling the psychological changes as well as physical changes," she said. Each of the three headpieces explores a different stage of transformation. The first, with a blue peony peeking out from the corner, symbolizes the subtle unfolding of physical change. The second, featuring pom poms and draped yarn, conveys a surge of energy, while the third, in bold fuchsia, reflects an awakening.

Viela is also fascinated with the relationship between herself, the people around her, and the entire universe, a concept sparked from an astronomy class that she took at Columbia, "Stars and Atoms." She explained to me that the universe began with hydrogen as the basic element, and the remainder of the periodic table was built from the bursting of stars, which ultimately comes together to form us. "There's this connection between all things and everything," she notes thoughtfully, resting her hand on her chin. "Me, Others, and the Universe," is a 1 minute video artwork that took two years to make. The video opens with her eye staring directly into the viewer. Her eye becomes a metonym for herself and her deeper inquiry into the feeling of insignificance amidst larger natural forces and the expansive world around her. As her breath becomes the dominant sound, it drowns out the hum of static chatter, placing the viewer in a position of vulnerability and overwhelming presence. Throughout the video, different clips of the bustling city and natural disasters come together, and the rhythm of her breathing subtly shifts, becoming erratic at times, almost as if it's struggling to keep pace with the enormity of the universe. By the end, we're left with the sound of her breathing and the subsiding of a wave, leaving the viewer with a lingering sense of intimacy.

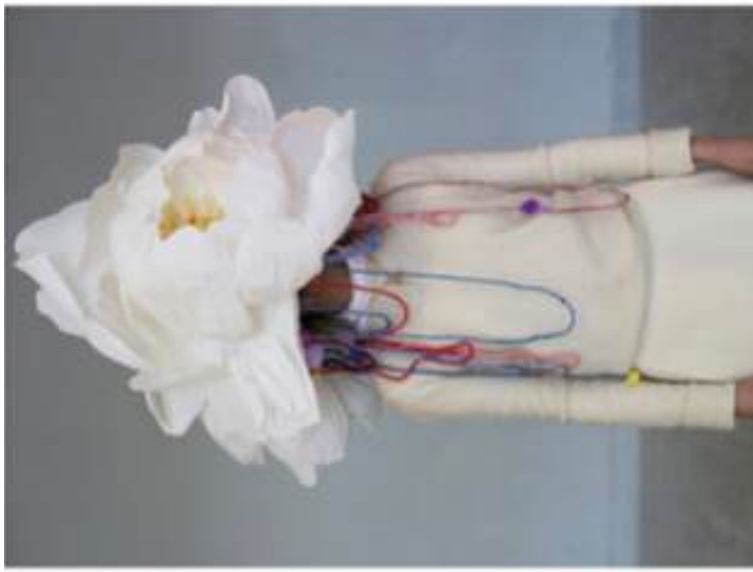
"Exploration is so central to me. Through the eye, you see the world, and through the eye you're interpreting the world in a visual sense. I take more of a passive position in my explorations, like I'm looking and I'm interpreting. Unlike the mouth, I'm not projecting things into the audience. With the eye, I'm just looking and interpreting, so it's a more reflective process."

"From Stars" is a continuation of this idea of cosmic connection through a laborious collage of oil paintings. Viela focuses on circular forms, both industrial and natural, while revisiting motifs of her own body, including her eye and mouth, positioning these symbols along the Milky Way. Returning to her multimedia roots by using yarn, she constructs a tangible linear line that ties these earthly elements to the cosmos.

Other pieces take on more playful tones. Split into two series, "Me, Life In The Wild," is a satirical commentary inspired by a jarring camping experience. "I have an affinity towards nature, in a quarantined sense. I don't hate camping. I just think that there's something funny about the idea of going outside and camping, but then having to isolate yourself in a tent that's plastic," she said. While lying on her plastic air mattress, trying to ignore the itch from her constellation of bug bites, Viela began to reflect on our increasingly industrial lives. She saw Barbie as a token of the industrial robot, as well as herself. In series one, she positions the doll in various awkward poses, where the very idea of connecting with the natural world is at odds with its synthetic, plastic form, drawing a dystopian parallel with the artificial boundaries we've created between ourselves and the environment. Series two takes a metafictional approach; the dolls seem to be trapped in a continuous loop of self-examination, which I found mirrors Viela's own process of self-discovery and questioning.

With her art history and visual arts degree, Viela is thinking about going into education, given the impact her various professors have had on her life and her artwork. Viela's website (vielahu.com) houses more of her portfolio and delves deeper into her rigorous artistic process, alongside glimpses into her life beyond the studio– whether it's baking or skiing. My favorite section, the sketchbook page, shows fragments of her raw, unfiltered creative thoughts and early concepts. You can also connect with her through her instagram @hu.fineart.

Feature by *Vivian Wang*
Photos by *Colson Struss*



Ariana Eftimiu

Ariana Eftimiu (BC' 25) is a senior at Barnard majoring in Political Science and Human Rights. She has been writing for years, using poetry as a method to find and unravel meaning. She also runs an online magazine, Potted Purple, with her childhood best friend since they were 17. For her, poetry has been a medium for catch and release for years. In our conversation, she reflected on the temporality of her poetry, collaging beloved forms of media, and creating space for artists to thrive.

When I enter Ariana's bedroom, the first thing I notice is how thoughtfully and artfully each decoration is placed on her walls. She walks me through each image, tchotchke, poster, and sketch– with each having a deliberate meaning, position, and coordination with the rest of the decor. Next to her bed are a myriad of postcards, receipts, and photos sharing the same pink hue, while above her desk features large, dark, and haunting posters–representing her love of "everything black and white and a little scary". Her friend Macy's art is spread around the room, as well as images of her favorite Depeche Mode album and memorabilia from her favorite restaurants and cafes. This thoughtfulness and sentimentality for her world extends deeply into her writing.

Her process for writing a poem always begins with an "impetus to write". She describes to me the sensation of being struck with the "need to write about this". First, the moment must fully pass, and only in its aftermath she writes most honestly. "I need to act on the desire to write or it'll die" she confesses, explaining that the truest feelings expressed in her poetry are the ones first put down on paper. With her poems, she hopes to conjure a distinct and palpable image for her readers, expressing that " I really want us to be seeing the same thing". Her writing is both melodic and visual; as she muses that a poem exists almost as a collage of "what does this feeling sound like and what does it look like? How can I make it very clearly look like that to other people? How can I make them see what I'm seeing?" She reveals that each poem has a set of songs that goes alongside them, with meticulously crafted Spotify playlists titled after them. (At the end of our conversation, I confess that I share the same intensity for crafting Spotify playlists for each moment of my life. We laugh and share in our love for writing, music, poetry, and the devotion to it all, and she immediately follows my page.)

As she describes her efforts to conjure images through her poetry, she also jokes how her mother and her sister are incredible visual artists and painters, but she can barely draw–so the gene must've skipped her. Then why poetry? Ariana states that "poetry is extremely honest–it's honest even when it's evasive. I like that it can hide something to an extent. There's a thin veil over everything, but otherwise, all of it is confessional." The abstraction of a raw confession is sown throughout Ariana's poetry. She invites you into her world, to see, hear, and feel what it's like, and put your own meaning into it. (She may even write about you, but can obscure it enough that you might never truly know.) Her work is "an open letter to whoever is willing to understand it." In a way, it is how she paints.

Within her poetry, Ariana works to understand her place in both suburbia and the city. She grew up directly across the Hudson River, telling me how she stared at the New York skyline from a secret corner of the woods only accessed through a hole in the fence. Her poetry is evocative and critical of the suburban, portraying high school imagery of cars, pool parties, and sneaking into the garage, as well as the loneliness and conformity of it all. Yet, when she works to characterize New York City, she tells me "it is not necessarily less lonely than a suburban area. There's loneliness and struggle in both spaces". She reflects, now on the other side of the river and embedded in the sparkling skyline, that "a space will not be your saving grace. You need to be your own saving grace, and you can find it in community and people–that love is what makes the space what it is."

For Ariana, poetry is a reckoning. She writes and encounters yearning, anger, femininity, and sweetness. She tells me how she finds beauty in the fact that poetry is open-ended and can exist without arriving at an answer. Furthermore, she tells me how poetry helps her sift through these emotions, working through wants and desires within the words, expressing how "a poem grounds them as things that can be ethereal and linger in the air, while still being incredibly real."

I find that her work takes these huge emotions and grounds them in specific, intricate, direct things. Her poem "mandarins and roses at the dinner table tonight" starts with "he colors me in, red and white plaid, / poppy on the kitchen table." In a few words, she evokes a simple yet profound image. She tells me that her ability to see poetry in the mundane comes from her belief that "poet-

ry can make things that are delicate and quiet be seen with a new importance." She jokes that she might care too much, but that care is what drives her passion for her work. "My overarching sentiment is that everything is that deep," she adds "and writing about something super mundane is choosing to be inquisitive about it and choosing to ask: what is the significance that this small thing has to me? The beauty of feeling and the beauty of poetry is that they're very constant. It's like listening to a song that was also one of your favorites 10 years ago."

More recently, she has tried a more outright, staccato style in her poetry with the poem "THE DOW WILL TRADE ALMOST FORTY FIVE THOUSAND POINTS THIS YEAR & YOU EXIST HERE BY CHOICE OR BY FORCE". In it, Ariana chronicles a desire to "return to a world where art governs," revealing to me how "that poem came out of a frustration that art doesn't seem to matter. I've interviewed professors and I've talked to friends about this, and it seems like there's an overarching feeling that to be an artist, you must consider what you have to give up" I am stuck on the "return"--has this world existed, or will it? Ariana tells me the want to "return" is born from watching dissent of public trust in journalism, the difficulties of getting published, the loss of funding for the arts, and the inability to get your art into different spaces. She also adds that "'return' is also idealistic because it's this world that doesn't entirely exist, but it definitely could. It would just take a giant breaking apart and restructuring [of our society]."

i want to return to a world where art governs
he speaks in how it must be bled free of political biology none of
that sick sweet gene that
makes you care about
pseudo resolution they
want to pacify you not be
pacifists they want to
make sure you're well rested and
restored so you come back
ready to work better for
work that's what's
good
for the workplace they're
not inspired or encouraged the
laws don't make the people move
music makes the
he says these things can't be
reconciled let us
not taint art with
political
outcry but
art is already tainted art is
it all and
it all is tainted everything
cannot bleed free of
this
political biology we are
all making up the dna sequence
of a sleepy stagnant quieted
body
and i cannot
yell because who is listening i
need to talk to artists and they
need to talk to me
Not through
saccharine american money saliva in the kiss
i want to return to a world where art governs

However, Ariana has been working to provide these spaces for artists since her sophomore year of high school, when she and her best friend Nina Evans decided to make an online magazine: *Potted Purple*. Their website describes how the magazine was "built from a shared dream to collaborate with other creatives in an effort to foster a community of art and writing; encouraging their community to advocate for what matters and vocalize what is on their minds." Ariana expresses how they wanted to create a magazine with no barrier to entry which young people can get their work published in. Since its founding in August 2019, it has grown a following of more than 3,000 people, with submissions from over 35 countries in its 13 published issues. Furthermore, it partners with Universal Music's program that boosts musical and artistic projects by 18 to 24-year olds. This has allowed Ariana and Nina to interview a multitude of artists for the magazine, such as Jon Batiste, Billie Marten, and Ariana's favorite, Vlad Holiday. Because of the magazine, they have attended once-in-a-lifetime concerts and music events and followed their passion for loving and dissecting all things music. Yet, even with its continued growth and success, Ariana confides "I think it'll always feel like an idea that we came up with sitting in our hometown tea shop together." Nina and she have spent the past years side-by-side, both making their way to New York City for college and being able to continue not only the magazine but their love for songwriting together and exchanging their art. She tells me that talking to other creative people is such a lifeblood–it is so important." Our conversation leaves me feeling the same way. Her infectious enthusiasm for poetry, music, and art, as well as her passion for both pursuing it and opening doors for others is incredibly inspiring.

the great American

i'm usually not allowed out this late, slipping under the garage door past two a.m. i am happy, and i am buzzing, all with an undertone of guilt. my reasoning is all over the place. the cicadas know better than i do.

the water's lukewarm, and it occasionally drizzles. we have joint custody of four beers, various types. he reaches for more on his own – modelo, coors, yuenglings. he takes me to the freezer to pick them out, i say it doesn't matter, since they'll all taste pretty shit anyhow.

he's got an entire pack of marlboro greens, and just might go through them all. he lights one. he offers; i say i don't smoke with addicts; he swears he's not addicted. "quit." i dare. he tells us all his grandparents died of lung cancer; do i *look him dead in the eyes* and ask if he wants to fulfill that prophecy?; he's quiet; that was an overstep, it's always an overstep, *backbackbackbackbackback b ackbegentlertotheoffering*
[[*I take a DRAG Myself*]]

he says the words "too smart for your own good," followed by my saying i don't think "too smart" exists. he tells me he has more important things to worry about than picking up a book. his lips are pursed, i play with mine. he passes me the beer. everything's a little humid. my stomach aches. i softly nod. i feel comforted by the fact the beer's not mine alone; by the warm space that hangs in the air between our bodies. *PLEASE!!!!!!!touch me but*
god fuck, stay the Fuck away, i
Where did the cigarettes go? No i was kidding about what i *said i get it yeah,* we don't
Know how long we'll
Be here yeah, everything is
fleeting *i don't really want to kiss right now but i think i*
right now

i'm tired, and i pull away. he's tired, and i offer up my shoulder.

"it's bony," he says, and shifts closer. i sit up semi-stiff; i fight a smile.

i watch closely, i take the next cigarette out of his mouth, i let it get watery, i break it in half.

Her efforts in pursuing her art are meticulous and deliberate. She often feels that her poetry and her magazine are a "lore drop" that completely dismantles her image as a poli-sci major. Yet, her art is not an afterthought, but the center of her life. She has worked to strike a balance between her academics and her art these past four years and thus follows every small spark of creation. Whether it's 11pm and she realizes she needs to go play piano and write a song, or at the kitchen table after everyone's gone to bed writing the poem that struck her earlier in the day, Ariana always fans the fires of her art.

She hopes in her future that she never loses sight of her artistic practices, and maintains her wonderful devotion. She recognizes that in college it often seems like we have no time for these endeavors, but we don't realize that we do, we can, and we should.

Feature by *Sayuri Govender*
Photos by *Arden Sklar and Audrea Chen*

Em Chmiel

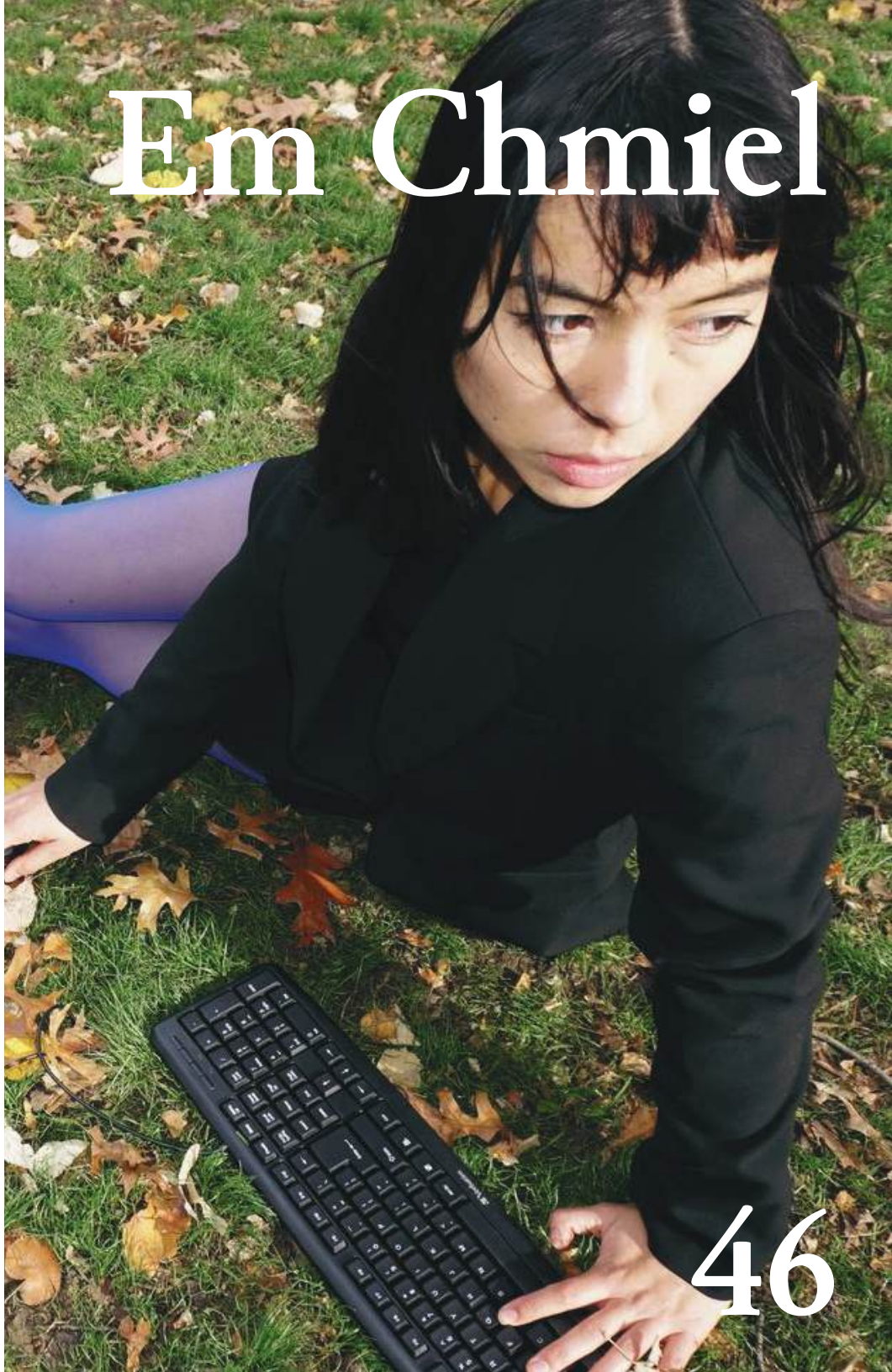
Em Chmiel is a senior at Columbia College studying political science and fine art. She is a photographer working primarily in digital and recently exploring film photography.

I met Em on a Thursday, and we stood on one of the longer lines outside of the Hungarian Pastry Shop. She snagged a table for us while I waited, and we bantered until we sat down with our respective drinks (mine a coffee, hers a tea) and could speak freely.

After browsing her portfolio, it was clear to me that Em's photography can't be confined to one style. Bleak interiors, barren landscapes, and nightlife shots all make up the scope of Em's vision. She works with a brand of digital consciousness—an astute awareness of the screen's power to create an alternative truth. The internet, and social media in particular, has become infamous for allowing ultra-curated versions of the self to pose as reality. But with the screen as an intermediary, Em sees this power to manipulate as an extension of the artist's perspective. "A theme I'm really interested in is the presence of the medium," said Em. "[Much of the time] we're viewing on a screen, and I want to make viewers very aware of that." She doesn't ignore the fact that her photographs are shot digitally, in fact, she embraces how unnatural some of her work can feel. Her images feel irreplicable in the real world, often overexposed, double exposed, or curved inward with a wide lens.

It tracks that Em finds inspiration in the digital world—the first camera she used was attached to her blue Nintendo DSI. She eventually upgraded to a small point-and-shoot camera, a gift for a family vacation, and took the liberty to capture everything in sight. Her appetite for observance stayed with her as she grew, yielding images that feel fresh, rarely premeditated. But these days, there's a distance between an inciting inspiration and the choice to pick up a camera. Em is careful about the work she chooses to make, and even more cautious of what she shares. "I don't really like to make [creative] things for the sake of making them," said Em, "It's really hard to motivate myself if I don't feel a calling to do it."

As a political science major, Em is inclined to view social phenomena with more scrutiny than most. She treats photography as an extension of her perspective, where her own thoughts and biases are intrinsic to her artistic output. Em and I talked about Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, which positions a photograph as a small death, a memento mori of an irreplicable moment. This makes Em wary of street photography—even when a subject consents to the use of their like-



ness, they're still at the will of the artist's perspective. "You don't think about taking iPhone pictures like that. [It wasn't until I began] using a camera on a pretty regular basis [that I seriously] considered the moral implications," said Em. Sontag couldn't have foreseen the meaning of her work in the digital age, where images take on a new life when posted online. Inimitable moments become basically disposable images that can take on meanings entirely divorced from their context.

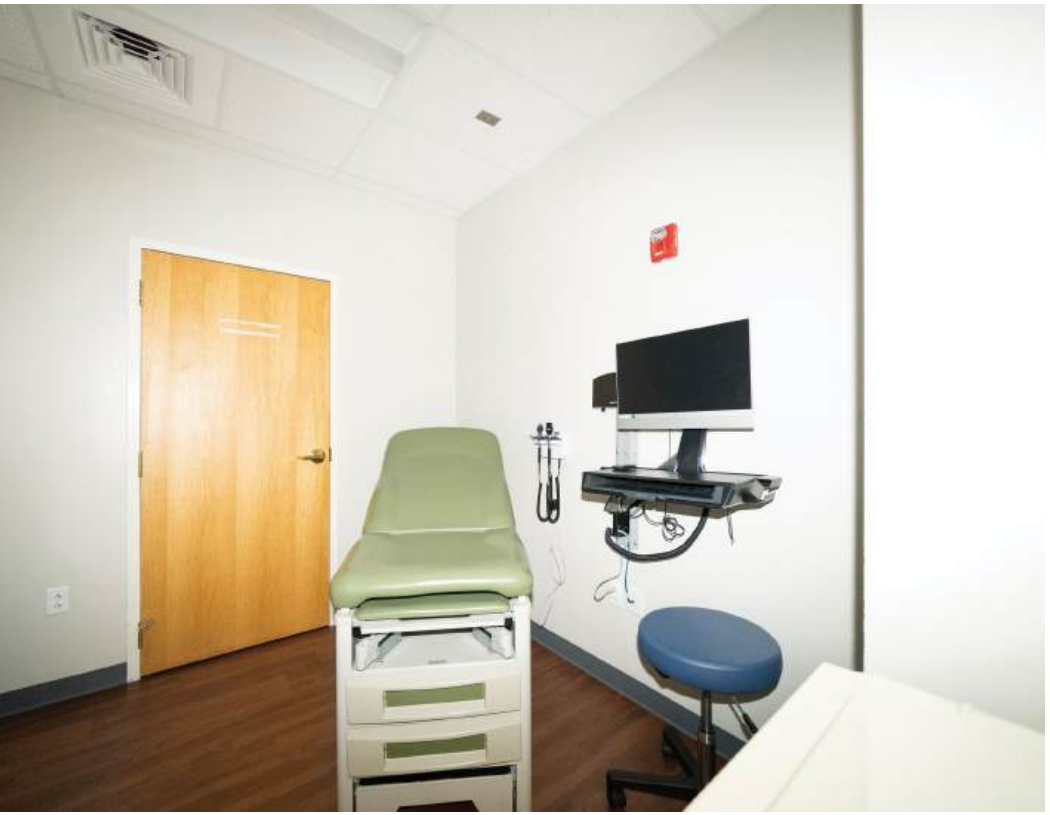
Instead, Em turns the invasion of photography onto herself. Her photo series, "Unbaby" came from a period of personal struggle—just days before leaving the country to study abroad, she discovered she was pregnant. She knew almost immediately that she would go through the process of having an abortion, leaving her less than a week to parse through the medical red tape. The pressure of this situation led Em to create her photo series, "Unbaby," a walk through her experience with sexual health. Her own well-being, both reproductive and mental, had been at the top of her mind since the removal of her IUD last year; despite the inner turmoil brought about by both the insertion process and the ensuing hormonal effects, her doctors insisted she keep her IUD in. She questioned whether to prioritize her mental or reproductive health—her own instinct or the doctor's orders.

Abortion is an issue as personal as it is political, and Em doesn't try to define where one stops and the other begins, saying, "I don't like drawing lines between where something's art versus politics [...] I think it's best to just receive things at an emotional, face value [level] and then go from there." Given the precariousness of reproductive rights post-Roe v. Wade, Em doesn't need to spell out a message in her work that's already implicit. "Unbaby" presents a vision of sex education that hinges on its disturbance—each image holds the weight of discomfort associated with its setting. Em included a prose poem to go along with the images where she verbalizes this unease, describing "Unbaby" through the moments in her life when sex education played a pivotal role. To Em, the series can be described by "The metallic middle-school fountain tap water that I resuscitated myself with when I had my first panic attack in sex ed" or "The globs of Vaseline my grandmother taught me to coat my tampon in when I was learning how to insert it dry."

"Unbaby" begins with an image of Em's apartment, the place where she became pregnant, shrouded in darkness save for two dim lamps. Then a picture of a classroom in her elementary school, where she received her first lesson in sex education. There are two pictures of the waiting rooms of abortion clinics, the second being where Em actually got her abortion. This room is painted baby blue and lined with fluorescent lights. A mounted television shows a stock image of a lake, maybe a weak attempt to tame the austerity of the environment.

The image that stands out most captures a medical examination room with a green gynecological chair in the center. Taken with a wide-angle lens, the image seems to close in on itself, aided by a flash that brings out the room's actual darkness. Considering the intimacy of the procedures it houses, the room is uncanny, or as Em called it, "otherworldly and distorted."

Though most of "Unbaby" is characterized by eerie interiors, the final image upends this theme, depicting the parking garage of the clinic where Em got her abortion. Above the empty parking spaces is a barred window completely filled with greenery. It's the only photo in the series taken entirely with natural light, allowing for the shadow of leaves to reflect on the concrete ground. Em ends the series with a beacon of hope that growth can happen anywhere and in spite of everything. As she writes in her poem, "Unbaby" is not only marked by the sickly green of the gynecological chair, but "The window that I saw when the world began / to grow back green."



Feature by *Caroline Nieto*
Photos by *Yawen Yuan and Harper Rosenberg*

Charlotte Lawrence

Two weeks ago, I hosted an unexpected guest in my dorm. Dressed in her best knitwear and draped in pearls, the doll lay on my dresser, glaring. After three days under her watchful gaze, I walked her across the hall to the room of Charlotte Lawrence (they/she), BC' 25. As an architecture and environmental science student, Charlotte is passionate about the intersection of design and sustainability. While they often spend their time sketching and doing graphic design, their most beloved hobby is crocheting.

The doll is one of Charlotte's many projects, made over several months. Since then, she has quickly accumulated a collection of jewelry and crocheted outfits, which she routinely alternates.

Having lived together for the last four years, I have witnessed Charlotte's creative process from beginning to end, ten times over. The doll began as a textile, evolving into a head, body, and limbs. Starting each project without a blueprint, their vision materializes as they work,

turning textiles into dolls, dresses, and accessories.

"It's kind of hard to pinpoint when I decide what it's going to be because crocheting has always been more about the act of doing it than making something for me. As a textile grows, it kind of starts to take shape into something, and that's when I realize what it can be," said Charlotte.

Charlotte allows their mind to wander freely while crocheting. The repetitive motion of creating stitches provides them with a sense of relief. More than once, I have tried to call out to Charlotte from across the room, only to be met with silence. Lost deep in thought, and crochet, it would take me numerous tries to get her attention.

"I've gotten to the point skill-wise where my mind can really wander anywhere and my hands just take over. I'm half focused on the motions and trying to get consistent stitches, but for the most part, I just let my mind wander wherever it goes. I've found myself in a meditative state before, where my mind is completely detached from the movements of my body," they stated.

Charlotte began crocheting at the age of 5, learning the craft from their aunt. Over time, it became a way to bond with family, relieve stress, and pass time in their hometown, Kansas City.

"My Aunt Lizzie taught me how to knit when I was young. She's a fiber artist as well. I got really into crochet when I was about 15 and my math teacher was teaching a crochet class. When I took that class with her, I fell in love with it all over again. Once the pandemic hit, it became a daily activity for me," they said.

While at home, Charlotte spends their time crocheting with their sister, Ella. Having learned most of their technical skills from her, Ella has played an important role in Charlotte's artistic development.

"Crocheting with my sister is the way we bond. We often sit side by side, put on a show, and crochet for hours. It's the most comforting feeling. She is also the one who has taught me the most over the years, and I'm grateful to have someone so creative to guide me," Charlotte stated.

After entering college, Charlotte's background in sustainability began to influence their creative process, inspiring them to change how they consume and dispose of materials.

"The more I learned about sustainability and the more classes I took, the more environmental consciousness came into focus in my passions. I used to use acrylic yarn because it's so widely available. When you use it, it sheds all of these little fibers. However, after taking classes in environmental science, I realized that the shedding of the yarn was basically microplastics and that every time I disposed of little scraps of yarn, I was just putting those chemicals back into the environment."

While Charlotte almost exclusively purchases her yarn from a second-hand store in Kansas City, she just as frequently reuses materials from previous projects. On their shelf, sit two large bags of old designs, textiles, scraps, and balls of yarn. Many of these materials date back to freshman or sophomore year, made while holed up in our dorm. Often, Charlotte revisits old projects, reworking them into something new. Likewise, she incorporates scrap yarn into her pieces, ensuring nothing goes to waste.

"In the machine age, we've all become somewhat obsessed with perfection–artistically, design-wise, and functionally. Mechanizing forms of creativity, like crochet, generates a lot of waste. It's weird to throw that stuff away when you can just use it, even if what it makes isn't completely perfect," said Charlotte.

Embracing the 'imperfections' of hand-stitched crochet, Charlotte gravitates toward organic shapes and free-flowing lines. In their clothing, these preferences manifest as swirling patterns, unique silhouettes, and alternating stitching. Working without a pattern, each piece is wholly individual.

After dropping several hints to her, Charlotte gifted me a pair of bright pink fingerless gloves, which she had made earlier that year. One of the reasons that I liked them so much was because, like so much of Charlotte's work, the gloves were made with complete spontaneity, yet came together so cohesively that it was hard to imagine it wasn't planned.

"I've always been drawn to organic shapes because it feels the most natural to me. It also just kind of happens when I let my hands do the work without interfering," they stated.

Charlotte emphasized that, above all, it is important to them that crochet remains enjoyable, free from becoming something they 'have' to do. So long as it remains fun, they plan to continue crocheting for the rest of their life.

"Crochet is one of the few things in my life with no deadline. I can pick up any project I want, but I don't feel pressured to do so. My timeframe is all of eternity, or at least until I get severe carpal tunnel"

To learn about Charlotte's latest projects, visit @c.lawmachine on Instagram.

Feature by *Anushka Pai*
Photos by *Natasha Last-Bernal*

signatures

Special Thanks To

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