



CULTURATOR

A Journal of Global Voices

America's First Student-Led Journal of Interdisciplinary Cultural and Social Science

Spring Theme —
Systems
April 2024

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OUR ARTISTS



Marissa D'Zio

Article: Hidden Imperfections

Marissa D'Zio is an artist at Eastlake High School in Seattle, Washington. She finds herself constantly immersed in the artistic scene. Mimicking the fusion of traditional Chinese expectations and the American diverse cultural evolution that is her identity, Marissa works to fuse seemingly unrelated details to touch on a new hidden meaning.



Jenna Choy

Article: Virtual Revolution

Jenna is a sophomore in Early College, a program through Rodriguez High School in Fairfield, CA. She has been interested in art, but has recently started taking it a bit more seriously. Her other interests include books, music and her pets.



Laura Li

Article: Home

Laura is a sophomore at Charles Best Secondary School in Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada. She aspires to become an illustrator in the future and greatly values her upbringing and culture in China. In her free time, Laura's either inhaling her favourite food or playing brawl stars!



Gloria Tang

Article: Memento Vivere

Gloria Tang is a senior at Hwa Chong Institution in Singapore. She is a self-taught artist who picked up painting as a hobby during March of 2020. Painting became an avenue of catharsis and has transformed into a love language she uses to express her gratitude towards the life she has come to love in a tangible way.



Pranali Vora

Article: Festival of Lights

Pranali Vora is a junior at Centennial High School in Frisco, Texas. She is extremely interested in learning about all things neuroscience and cherishes her Indian heritage deeply. In her spare time, she enjoys partaking in Bollywood dance, spending quality time with friends and family, and volunteering at the local senior home.

HIDDEN IMPERFECTIONS

Marissa D'Zio — Eastlake High School, Seattle, WA



Hidden Imperfections by Marissa D'Zio, 4th Place in the STARS Art Competition 2024

Hidden Perfections was my way of drawing awareness to imperfections we may see in ourselves and highlight them instead of covering them up. Makeup is a hobby of mine and I constantly marvel at the industry's obsession with covering up the faults in our skin. Not only for red spots, acne, and hyperpigmentation, but many people will exclude stray hairs and moles from their photos in order to look more picturesque. In defiance of these norms, I decided to go against what the beauty industry and internet works so hard on to hide and bring the eyes attention to parts of myself that I feel insecure about. Focusing on what people would call, imperfections, I decided to draw light to those areas by adding colorful butterflies which contrasted with my white attire and black hair. This piece guides the viewer through a captivating journey from concealment to celebration, an invitation to let your true self shine.

I began my self-portrait by setting up an area in my house that had even lighting so I could take a photo later and use it as the base. Instead of painting what I what I looked like straight onto a canvas, inadvertently edited myself to look more picturesque, by taking a non-morphed photo using my iPhone. Originally the lighting was not golden enough (as my house uses a certain type of light bulb) therefore I uploaded the image to Photoshop and altered the lighting

which would work as a complementary colored background for the purple flowers I was to add later. From Photoshop, I transferred my portrait to Procreate where I used a soft and medium blending brush to add in stray hairs floating around my character. My initial reason for adding the floating hairs was to fill up the negative space, however, I would later revise my piece when I was adding finishing touches to bring out the movement in the hairs with light and dark strokes of acrylic paint. Once I finished my digitized process I printed the image out in legal size and moved on to painting. Due to the flimsiness of the printing paper, I needed to add Bristol paper to the back of the photo so it had additional structure. I did not want my piece to crinkle and deform by the end of my painting process as that would obscure the viewer's perception of my face, hindering the message of showing my natural self. After my prep was ready I decided to use acrylic, which is the medium I use most often, as it is easy to layer colors onto and has my preferred opacity and viscosity. With acrylic, I painted 10 butterflies on my forehead, my hair, my shoulders, my chest, and areas I had moles. For each area I have an insecurity about I added a butterfly. It may seem at first to be on a multitude of places, but through my revision stage, I grew to not exclude any part of myself that I wanted to learn to accept. Through this piece, I not only looked closer at my feelings towards my body but grew to be more understanding that there is no need to hide parts of myself for the enjoyment of others.

VIRTUAL REVOLUTION

Jenna Choy — Rodriguez High School, Fairfield, CA



Modern Art by Jenna Choy, 1st Place in the STARS Art Competition 2024

“Modern Art” is one of the first times that I’ve thought deeply and applied genuine meaning to an art piece. To be honest, I initially found the contest prompt to be a bit complex and I wasn’t sure if I would be able to visually depict it. It took me a few days of just thinking about it. There are so many important inventions that have reshaped the way we live our lives and I wondered which out of all of them would best fit.

A lot of things passed through my mind. For instance, the specific symbols that have always been associated with the advancement of technology. Flying cars, time machines, and more have always been quintessential commodities of a far away future. Just look at any movie in a futuristic setting. All of these concepts have been so romanticized that they seem impossible for us to ever achieve. Yet as time passes, we only grow closer to making these things a reality. Time machines may be a bit out of reach, but looking at it objectively, it’s not as if our world is completely unremarkable.

Take the internet, for example, the epitome of human innovation. Originally a government-funded means of communication, it has evolved into something much larger than anybody could have expected. It definitely still retains an information sharing aspect, but on a much larger scale that can’t be understated.

People can use it for entertainment, communication, business and so much more. Going to the movies equates to opening Netflix. If you want to host a meeting, just join a zoom call. The internet as a whole mirrors the physical world in a virtual form. It is an amalgamation of systems meant to mirror different components of life; thus, it is humanity in a virtual form. In short, it is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent and intricate systems to be created. I figured I could manage something interesting from that.

Because as amazing as the internet is, it's human nature to constantly strive for more. And in that ambition, we create things larger than ourselves. In this case, we are bringing about the existence of AI, a concept that has existed before the internet itself. (Fun fact: the internet was created in 1938, yet the concept of AI was introduced in 1952.)

Undoubtedly, it is already impacting this intricate system of systems in a way that challenges our perspective of reality. Because where humans used to be the sole population of the virtual world, we may soon be accompanied by another entity. In fact, it has already started to become more and more present in our day-to-day lives. "Viewers have also watched..." "Customers have also purchased..." "Hey, Alexa." "Hey, Siri." Calculations. Algorithms. Technology has already undergone the next evolutionary step. Now, it's just a matter of how far it can get before real problems start to arise. Or rather, even more.

While AI was intended to assist humanity, it has also presented us with a new set of ethical and practical challenges. Just ask any class who has reverted to writing essays with pencil and paper to combat AI-generated papers. It's not convenient for anybody, especially when you injure your thumb in PE. At least in my experience. And as I mentioned in my artist statement, AI-generated videos and images keep improving to the point where any video out there could be completely fake.

When it comes down to it, do you have any way of differentiating AI from a human without the assistance of yet another algorithm? Who knows if I actually wrote this or not? How many of these words are really mine? I could've traced over an AI-generated image to win this contest and you would be none the wiser. This goes without saying, but we lose a certain human touch. The use and the identity of humanity all come into question.

At its core, my artwork is meant to symbolize the ever-evolving system that is the internet and how we react to it. But the message can ultimately be applied to a much wider aspect of human life. Considering our reliance on the digital world, what that occurs there is reflected back into the physical one.

It's not as if AI is being created to see the downfall of humanity. Like I've already stated, "A knife is only as good as the one who wields it." Because if the internet itself is reflective of the world we live in, our usage of AI is reflective of humanity itself. It is simply important to address all of the aforementioned concerns in order to navigate life away from an apocalyptic-post-robot-revolution world. Well, that specific scenario is likely as far away from us as time machines. In the end, AI is still no more than a child within a sandbox for now. How we adapt responsibly to its presence in our virtual world is all up to us.

HOME

Laura Li — Charles Best Secondary School, Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada



Home by Laura Li, 6th Place in the STARS Art Competition 2024

We deserve an education system that recognizes and nurtures our individual strengths, passions, and potentials. It's time to move away from the narrow focus on standardized testing and rigid grading systems that fail to capture the richness of human experience and learning. Instead, we should embrace holistic assessment methods that consider creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence, and collaboration abilities. Education should be about empowering students to explore their interests, develop their unique talents, and contribute meaningfully to society. We need educators who are not just teachers, but mentors and guides who inspire and support us on our journey of self-discovery and growth. It's time for a paradigm shift in education, one that prioritizes the well-being and development of every individual, rather than reducing them to mere statistics and grades.

Furthermore, the current education system often perpetuates inequality and reinforces existing social hierarchies. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds face numerous barriers to academic success, including limited access to resources, systemic biases, and discrimination. As a result, many talented individuals are overlooked or marginalized, unable to fulfill their potential due to circumstances beyond their control. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and inequality, depriving society of the diverse perspectives and talents needed for progress and innovation.

Moreover, the emphasis on standardized testing places undue pressure on students, leading to anxiety, stress, and mental health issues. Instead of fostering a love of learning, students are taught to memorize information and regurgitate it on exams, without truly understanding or internalizing the material. This approach not only fails to prepare students for the challenges of the real world but also stifles their curiosity and creativity. Education should be about more than just acquiring knowledge; it should be about developing critical thinking skills, fostering a passion for lifelong learning, and cultivating well-rounded individuals who are capable of navigating the complexities of the modern world.

In addition, the narrow focus on academic achievement neglects the importance of emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills. Success in life depends not only on what you know but also on how you relate to others and manage your emotions. Yet, these essential skills are often overlooked in traditional educational settings, leaving students ill-equipped to navigate relationships, handle conflicts, and cope with the ups and downs of life. The method of transportation in my artwork are traditional Chinese kites rather than rockets or satellites - By prioritizing holistic development, we can ensure that students graduate not only with a strong academic foundation but also with the social and cultural connections necessary for success in all areas of life.

Furthermore, the one-size-fits-all approach to education fails to accommodate the diverse needs and learning styles of students. Every individual is unique, with their own strengths, weaknesses, interests, and preferences. Yet, the current system expects all students to follow the same curriculum, adhere to the same standards, and demonstrate their understanding in the same way. This not only alienates students who learn differently but also stifles their potential and undermines their confidence. My artwork not only represents technological advancement, but also the importance of a more flexible and inclusive approach to education that allows students to learn at their own pace, pursue their passions, and discover their own path to success.

In conclusion, the education system in North America is in desperate need of reform. By shifting our focus from standardized testing and rigid grading systems to holistic assessment methods, prioritizing the well-being and development of every individual, and embracing diversity and inclusion, we can create a more equitable, empowering, and effective educational experience for all students. It's time to redefine the purpose of education and ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.

MEMENTO VIVERE

Gloria Tang — Hwa Chong Institution, Singapore



Memento Vivere by Gloria Tang, Honorable Mention in the STARS Art Competition 2024

“Memento Vivere”, which translates to “Remember you must die, so remember to live”, is a phrase that I started trying to lead life by in my last year of high school, which this painting aims to depict the essence of. Trapped in the precise yet unmovable system dictating life and death, my sense of purpose sometimes feels governed by the great beyond — it can make living feel unbearingly monotonous. Absurd, even. Yet, it was within that apparent lack of control that I realized my autonomy for the first time, and appreciated how romantic it was for humanity to persist in the way we do.

The wreath in this painting represents the unstoppable passage of time, visualized by the metamorphosis of a butterfly, and the growth and death of a plant. The snake skeleton is a piece of ouroboros-adjacent magery, famously representative of the cyclic repetition of life and death, and the concept of infinity. A stark depiction of the system we are tied to from birth. One that seemingly shackles us to our demise. A temporary but inevitable state.

However, despite the absurdity of life — of our meaningless impermanence — it is still in our nature to dream, aspire, and connect in the most human way possible. The dismantling of that initial belief system is thus depicted by the death of the Ouroboros, where only its bones remain. For there is more meaning than ever in making the most of the temporary.

Bound to an inexorable system which demands us to question the significance of our existence, we must find joy in human connection, and realize that what is rare is beautiful. In the quest to cement our permanence, we often neglect to smell the flowers on the way there. But flowers die fast, so remember to stop and enjoy their scent. For the system does not budge, but we can make the most of our time here. One must imagine Sisyphus happy, a wise man once said. And maybe we can remember Sisyphus for the way he lived.

The two reaching hands in this painting represent our innate desire to live beyond surviving, and our quest to be remembered for how we lived despite our apparent smallness. La Cueva de las Manos is evidence of this— a cave of colorful, stenciled handprints dating back to 5000 BC, seemingly created for no other purpose than to proclaim, “*I was here. And I lived*”. To be remembered is to live. Remember you must die, so remember to *live*.

Expressing something that resonated so incredibly deeply on canvas, while being at an age where I’m in desperate search of life’s guiding principles, was so incredibly cathartic. And in a romantic way, it is also my attempt to etch my handprint on the walls of a metaphorical cave, to make a piece of art that proclaims, “*Remember me, for I have lived.*”

FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Pranali Vora — Centennial High School, Frisco, TX



Festival of Lights by Pranali Vora, 9th Place in the STARS Art Competition 2024

The purpose of this piece is to depict the traditional meaning behind why most Indians celebrate the special festival of Diwali. As it is often known as the "festival of the lights", holding a diya, or a candle, emphasizes the importance of light prevailing against all darkness that may come across the receiver's path. Daniel Brici's artwork is influenced by the piece because it invokes emotion simply through stark color contrast to allow the viewer to sympathize with the subject piece. Additionally, the technique inspired me as the colorful regions of the portrait seem intentional to humanize the subject further. This artwork represents my individuality because of my personal experiences with moving from India to a foreign country and how even though I had to adapt to my surroundings, I still chose to preserve my heritage through small progressive steps. It represents my creativity since I chose to emphasize the materials associated with Indian culture because that is what often stands out to the bystander when in reality, culture is most apparent within the person.

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