

issue no. 1

THE WORLD
BUILT AGAINST US



at the core

VULNERABILITY + DESIGN PUBLICATION

Editor's Letter:

At The Core is proud to present its first issue addressing the theme, ***The World Built Against Us***. Honing in on unique thoughts and experiences, our artists and writers aim to communicate the idea that no life is lived the same. To oppressed minorities, this often means many disadvantages. While I've experienced my fair share of privilege, I face ignorance in regards to my gender, sexuality, and cultural identity. The world thrusts labels upon me and forces me to interact with the world different than most. For those who may find these labels accurate in regards to their own self, it is hard to accept that others face these issues. Now more than ever it is important to check our privilege and accept the experiences of the oppressed for what they are and work towards a better, safer, and healthier atmosphere. We must challenge systems in place that may not just be built against minorities, but human nature as a whole. That being said, growth takes time and it is equally important to be patient with one another, understand that understanding takes time, and work together to shape our future.

As the inaugural issue, I recruited some of the most skilled artists who have a unique perspective communicated through their work. As for the writers, I asked two of my peers to step out of their comfort zone and or have the courage to share a vulnerable moment of their life with our readers. I hope to inspire others to do the same and submit to future issues. ***The World Built Against Us*** is bold, provocative, and hopes to challenge our readers in answering the bigger questions - How will you change the way the world functions? What would you do and how would you feel when the world was built against you?

Ibby Day
Editor in Chief

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ATC is an independent, not-for-profit publication driven by passion and a goal of sharing stories and artwork that remind us that we're all human at the core. If you'd like to be in our next issue, please email ibbyday@gmail.com.

Paper:
Hammermill 60lb Color Copy Digital Cover

veronica sarabia

EXISTING EN LA MARGEN

It has always been a painfully plain role that the world has had to play for me. I've never related to the rest of the world. I've never felt like I belong. Quite the contrary, they've always seemed to constantly take from my communities. There aren't many spaces where a poor, queer, woman of color can exist. Even within these identities, some part of me isn't welcome. As a woman, many spaces wish to keep me out and use my sex as a reason. There are just as many spaces that would welcome me, but only if I know my place. Other women can stand with me as one of their own only to turn their backs when addressing race or sexuality. There is always a part of me that angers someone. Whether it be the social services that ensure my survival, my agency as a woman, who I love, or the color of my skin. From its conception, this world was not built for folks like me to thrive.

As the child of immigrants, I was born into the fear and hypersensitivity of not belonging. The threat of separation and deportation has always hung over our heads and at one point it even showed up at my door. This fear always reinforced the idea that this country does not welcome me, regardless of my citizenship. The soil I was born on does not matter because this country hates the blood within me. The tiny hyphen between my identities marks me as different. It tears me apart as it declares that half of me is not good enough. My brown skin, brown hair, and brown eyes seem to say things about me that even I did not know. One look and my future can be predicted. My success can be measured. My history is known. My humanity is stripped. Even as my heritage is degraded to the most offensive and xenophobic tropes, others consume it with an ignorant hunger. Aspects of my culture are cherry-picked as aesthetics or quirky hobbies. The history and struggle of my people romanticized but perpetuated. Exploitation runs deep.

Even so, I've heard folks argue that being a minority is beneficial in our current social climate. This argument is increasingly weaponized in discussions regarding higher education. I recognize my opportunity for higher education as a privilege, despite how fragile it is, but I cannot tolerate the number of times I've been told that affirmative action provides an unfair advantage. As if we got to this point with the same experiences, resources, and opportunities. As if getting in the door guarantees my stay or protection. As if my people aren't still dying for daring to exist and fighting to survive. I speak primarily in terms of race, but this also applies to my gender and my sexuality. For those who don't know, affirmative action deals with the protection of these identities as well. It isn't a race card and it isn't to push out hardworking white students. It's meant as a protection for anyone who identifies as queer, female, or a person of color. Take this in. Those identities are enough to put our safety at risk and to limit our opportunities. Facets of ourselves that we cannot truly control and that already carry disadvantages have systemically kept marginalized communities out of academic spaces. Current admissions processes are not much of an improvement. We are now allowed to speak and make a case for our seat at the table, but only if we relive our trauma and sell it to the highest bidder. Being tokenized to increase diversity is just the fare we pay the gatekeeper for letting us in the door.

Education has always been upheld within my family as the 'way out'. The gateway to a better life and out of poverty. In many cases, it is. What needs to be understood, however, is that accomplishment in higher education does not mean these institutions are the answer. Success is found in spite of these institutions. In the face of micro-aggression, overt racism or sexism, and homophobia. In an environment that offers a myriad of support services and still manages to harm their target audience. Education isn't what we were promised. It isn't a safe environment to better yourself and thrive. At the end of the day, at the end of our studies, it still comes down to survival. Until the adversity we pass through before higher education is truly acknowledged and discussed, the struggle will remain the same. Until we address food and housing insecurity of folks outside of higher education we cannot hope to magically fix it within. For marginalized students, their lives before higher education provide baggage that can't be left at the door. So how exactly do we find this path to a better life? How do you thrive in a society that doesn't even want you to survive?

Higher education has the unique ability to feel like its corner of the world. It creates a bubble full of new experiences and exciting adventures. I'm asking you to step out of that bubble. View the world for what it truly is so it can become what you hope to see.

INTERVIEW WITH XINRUI:

Q: In what way do you think society is built against you or individuals in general?

As an artist it's really hard to make a living in our capitalistic society. It is an environment that makes it really difficult for creatives to push through new boundaries and have the mental space to make new, innovative work. When everyone is struggling their hardest just to provide for themselves food, water and the roof over their heads, it also makes finding meaningful connections in others difficult. People don't have mental or physical space just to sustain themselves, let alone to lend to other people in a genuine way.

Q: What do you believe are the challenges of developing relationships nowadays?

There are a lot of challenges. Society is very clustered off - most people I know have a very hard time meeting people outside of their friend circles or their work relations. So people turn to apps like Tinder. I think that can create meaningful, real connections, but at the same time they can be alienating. Every person you meet is a node out in space, connected to you by the loosest strand. The context of their existence is often invisible. I think these loose connections mean that people feel less entitled to pay due respect to others. Then of course people are more likely to get themselves into dangerous situations, have their boundaries stepped on, misunderstand the other's motives, etc. And I think it teaches people that relationships with others are disposable and temporary. Even if that is true to some extent, I think it's a really stressful and unhealthy mindset to carry.

Q: What advice would you give to individuals struggling with identity or relationships?

I think a lot about projection. Sometimes I get into situations where I lash out at others and I realize that, in that moment, for whatever reason, I was projecting my own insecurities and judgement onto them. It's important to take assessment of your own trauma and separate what are truly your needs and what is unreasonable to expect from others. It's in close relationships where these sort of personal problems become most apparent and can do the most damage to yourself and others if they are not examined closely. I think it's healthy to dive deep into these issues. Concrete things that have proved to be very useful for me are the basics of CBT therapy and the ideas behind cognitive distortions or faulty thinking. For better communication, I think a lot about this great book I've read called "Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most".



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SUPPRESSING OUR HUMANITY

I've been told I'm too emotional. By my closest friends, in fact. So this piece is for them: I'm calling you out. Are you shaming me for feeling emotions? I think that you're deeply misunderstood for I see emotions as the beauty of being human, and frankly, I think you need to dig deeper as to why you feel that way.

We've built our society with the end goal of "happiness", but happiness isn't forever, it's a temporary feeling, like every other emotion. There will always be moments of stress, of anger, of sadness. It's important to embrace these emotions and accept them as they are since life is full of them, and you can't always control them. I know this is hard to grasp. I'm someone who likes and values control, but I've come to accept that I don't, and won't, always have it. Humans are so complex and I just don't think it's possible to fully understand everything in life. I wouldn't want to live my life never feeling anything or not having the ability to rationalize, antagonize, and humanize thoughts and feelings. It's what makes us so remarkable, the capacity to think and share our thoughts with the world. It makes each of us different because no two people will ever think the same. It's important for individuals to capitalize on this and develop a well-rounded set of morals and ideology to live by, but it's also important to challenge it along the way. In society, we hone in on the idea of "the future" and how we can leave a lasting impact. While it's important to positively make your mark on the world, pushing against the status quo of life can be challenging, and tiring. It's exhausting to talk about your feelings, the state of the world, and the past, but it's essential to go in the right direction. How can we learn without challenging what we feel, see, and know? We can't.

Trust me, I know how unbelievably hard it is. I've broken friendships, ended relationships, and been through hell and back for the way I think. Not all my thoughts and views have been correct, and adjusting them takes time, practice, and emotional energy. I've had days where I just want to be alone and not think. I used to live in a mental state where I constantly thought of the past and would proceed to shove those thoughts out of my head. It tortured me because all my moments of happiness were just blissful ignorance. I just didn't know it at the time because I was content being content. I had convinced myself that I didn't need to change or reflect for

anyone. I had friends, a partner, and good grades. I had it all, and I wasn't actively working on myself because life was good, and I was happy. It wasn't until I wound up with no friends, no partner, and no motivation to do the things I loved that I thought, maybe it was time to leave my comfort zone. That's why I think it's so important to let feelings out when you feel them, share them with others, and be willing to talk about everything that makes you human. I'd hate for my peers to be like me and realize that self growth is essential only when you've hit rock bottom. We share more in common than you think, and people are more willing to work together on emotional baggage (I'm always available to talk, within boundaries, of course). We've built ourselves to suppress our emotions and instead work to our death and pretend we're happy when deep down, there's something missing. We're missing real connections and more importantly real happiness. We're missing it in the smallest things. We've grown accustomed to superficial things and forgotten our roots and how they shape us. Challenge the person who you are and the kind of happiness you want to achieve.



INTERVIEW WITH KELLY:

Q: What was your process with this series?

The assignment was to buy a used book and gesso the pages. The book could be whatever we wanted it to be. The goal of this assignment was to break the traditional grounds of what a sketchbook "is". I found this book for .99 cents at a second-hand book store. I love black and white photos and found the large scale of this book perfect for allowing movement. As I began the sketchbook assignment I treated it as you would a typical sketchbook. Each page designated and ultimately precious. The process I developed with this series began from a mistake when I had accidentally closed a page of half-dried gesso. Initially, I was angry that the gesso permanently stained the page which I so preciously wanted to keep pristine. The mark in its randomness left something interesting, and there it took me where I needed to go. I began every other page that way. Sometimes with gesso, closing and opening the book to see what random mark it left, or I would stare and allow the photograph to guide me, cutting, deconstructing, losing myself in continuous tracing on whatever ever pulled me in. Quick and slow, messy and focused. I never planned a page beforehand but allowed one mistake or unconscious action to guide me to the next conscious response and back and forth that continued. Some didn't work and somewhere recycled into another, it felt like a dance between deliberate choice and losing control. It was through this process and the help of some beautiful photographs and the subjects they contained that I created something deeply personal and valuable to my personal growth as a designer.

Q: How is this your artistic process reflective of your struggles as an individual?

Losing control is the most difficult for me to embrace but it is also where some of my best work comes from. I enjoy working meticulously and calculated but sometimes in my efforts to make every mark perfect, I can find myself losing the humanity or soul in the work. This series was freeing for that reason and tapped into both of my extremes. I often find myself coming back to this work, either pulling from its aesthetic or the place I needed to be in to create it.

Q: In what ways do you think this work reflects the way society is shaped?

Why do we all cling to one side so tightly? Why not fall between the extremes with the balance of both, together, and create something new.



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GRAPPLING

It's the day before New Years and I am grappling with what just happened. I have this coping mechanism where I downplay the severity of any situation. I tend to move on quickly because that's what I learned growing up. I can't be too hung up on one thing because the next battle will begin before I know it.

I'm hurting. A lot. I have been for years now. I suffer from Major Depressive Disorder, Moderate & Borderline to Severe Anxiety Disorder, and my depression is categorized as high functioning. I suffer from suicidal thoughts and almost acted on it on multiple occasions. I know that I do not want to truly die, but for the pain to go away. And right as everything was going well, as I began to take antidepressants, the next wave hits.

I am gay. This is not new to my friends who are close to me, but my family knows now. My father disowned me yesterday, kicked me out of the house, told me to never come back, and I am now without a home. There hasn't been much time for me to process what's been going on, so writing is a way for me to heal. But now, I don't have a family. I mean, growing up I never really had it because my dad was physically, emotionally, and verbally abusive to me. My mom was neglectful to me, which forced me to grow up and be independent. For those who know me, they know that I am incredibly self-sufficient. This attribute of me stems from being abandoned from the very two that were suppose to take care, love, and nurture despite and in spite of anything.

My dad is dying. He has pancreatic cancer and has less than 3 years to live. Prior to that, we had a rocky and little to no relationship due to the abuse. To jump from hate to an artificial rebuilding has been difficult and taxed me both mentally and physically. Because of that, I decided to accelerate my college education to two years and two quarters, take on two jobs, and maintain a competitive transcript in order to begin graduate school right away. I'm 19. This is still the crux of my childhood, and here I am grappling with what seems to be the world for me.

I get it, though. I get it. My life isn't theirs. I didn't have to haul ass working in extreme conditions, I didn't have to sleep in cramped spaces in Hong Kong, I was able to finish elementary school and even make it out to college. I didn't have it "as hard" as them. But this is a new time with a whole different set of struggles and tribulations. There shouldn't ever need to be a conversation to justify abuse as a way to discipline and teach their kid. There shouldn't need to be a phone call in the middle of the street asking "when did you know you were gay?" as if that matters followed by "you might just be confused" from your own mother. There shouldn't ever be calling your aunt for support and having them tell you to "find God" because what I am isn't "normal" as if normal is a guy liking a girl and a girl liking a guy. How the fuck is that normal? Who even gets to define that as normal anyways?

So here I am. Entering 2019 without a home. Without a family. The only people I have in my life are my friends, who are so so so dear to me. They are family. I have my brother and my grandma, two people who I won't see for a while as I won't be returning back to the Bay. And I am entering 2019 knowing that I won't be there at my dad's dying hours. But know what? That's okay for me. It really is. There are worst things than dying. One of that is dying while alive. And he's killed me. Over and over again.

I can now live without the weight of him looming over me and triggering PTSD, my depression, and constant fight-or-flight. I have accepted that I have no father. I move forward now, free.

I am Marco-Landon Siu. I still have his last name, but that's okay. It's a battle scar, if anything. I'm Marco-Landon Siu. I'm gay. I'm a gay man. I'm gay! How liberating that is to finally be public about it. Yeah, I'm gay.



INTERVIEW WITH JOEL:

Q: How does your identity shape your work?

I'm Native American, Irish and Bermudan American. My family's story is that of deep tragedy and loss, I think a lot of my work is introspective as a result of that. I tend to be present era-focused, while taking cues from a lot of Black and Native history, my attitude is that the future is now, and while we should take note of the past, we shouldn't be burdened by it or wear the baggage of those who came before us. Daido Moriyama, Yasujiro Ozu, Gordon Parks and Steve McQueen are immediate influences out of a long list of other people who've helped influence my design sense.

Q: Why is it important to recognize the ways in which society is flawed?

I mean, we are keeping kids in cages at the border, our planet is in the middle of another mass extinction level event, and to say we shouldn't be aware or recognize is egregiously irresponsible. To do things just because they're "cool" is fucking stupid. Here's the thing, some people will say "keep politics out of my art, games etc" but I believe design (and the act of making) itself is political, to try and make a forum where we are purposefully communicating ideas to be neutral, or at least centrist, I believe is dangerous. Film and by extension, both photography and motion design have a responsibility at a minimum to recognize that the images and expressions we create, do have an impact, do mean things to younger people watching them and can shift social perception on issues. In that, I think it's important now more than ever since we either refuse to learn from history or flat out don't care as a society (I'm not sure which at this time).

Q: What is your greatest fear as an artist?

Specifically, stagnating, and making connections for the sake of them. A hard lesson I've learned at AC [ArtCenter College of Design] is that not every bridge and garden is worth tending or building. More often than not people expect you to just do things or push through for them without any mutual support or collaboration in return. That word gets thrown around a lot- collaboration and I think it's really important, vital to do but not with yes men or individuals who are just thirsty to get their name on a project.



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