An abstract, layered composition. The background is a mix of dark green, teal, and orange-red, with visible brushstrokes and textures. In the center, a dark silhouette of a person is perched on a jagged, dark rock formation, carrying a large, textured, dark rock on their back. The overall mood is one of struggle and resilience.

issue no. 9

IF NOT ME,
THEN WHO?

at the core

VULNERABILITY + DESIGN PUBLICATION

Editor's Letter:

The myth of Sisyphus is often regarded as a tragic tale.

It tells the story of a man destined for eternity to repeat the same meaningless task. When I first had the idea for this issue, I was unsatisfied with my new job, and maybe more of my life than I was willing to admit—my tumultuous relationship with my parents, the end of my 5-year relationship, and a deep frustration over the thought that I was going backwards in life. This issue was to be an exploration of how the working world stops for no one and no personal issue, trapping us in a pitiful cycle similar to that of Sisyphus.

But I'm unfortunately a raging optimist and since pitching this idea I've found glimpses of what this job, and life, can be. For the first time in awhile, my feet hit solid ground and I gained an acute sense of clarity of where I want to go next. In some ways, ATC has always been a journey of my life. **The Gray Zone** was healing disguised as pain, **La Vie En Rose** was a reach for love, and **If Not Me, Then Who?** is a kindled fire pushing me forth. Perhaps this issue is simply delusion in its purest form, but rock bottom is no longer a stranger. I know that when I reach the top of wherever I'm heading now, I'll eventually fall back down, but this time the climb feels a little less difficult than the time before, and the time before that. In fact, it's a little enjoyable.

In the words of Camus, "The struggle itself...is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

Ibby Day
Editor in Chief

special thanks to: Anna Grace Cook
Copyeditor

AT
THE
CORE

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.

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Hammermill 60lb Color Copy Digital Cover

FAWN

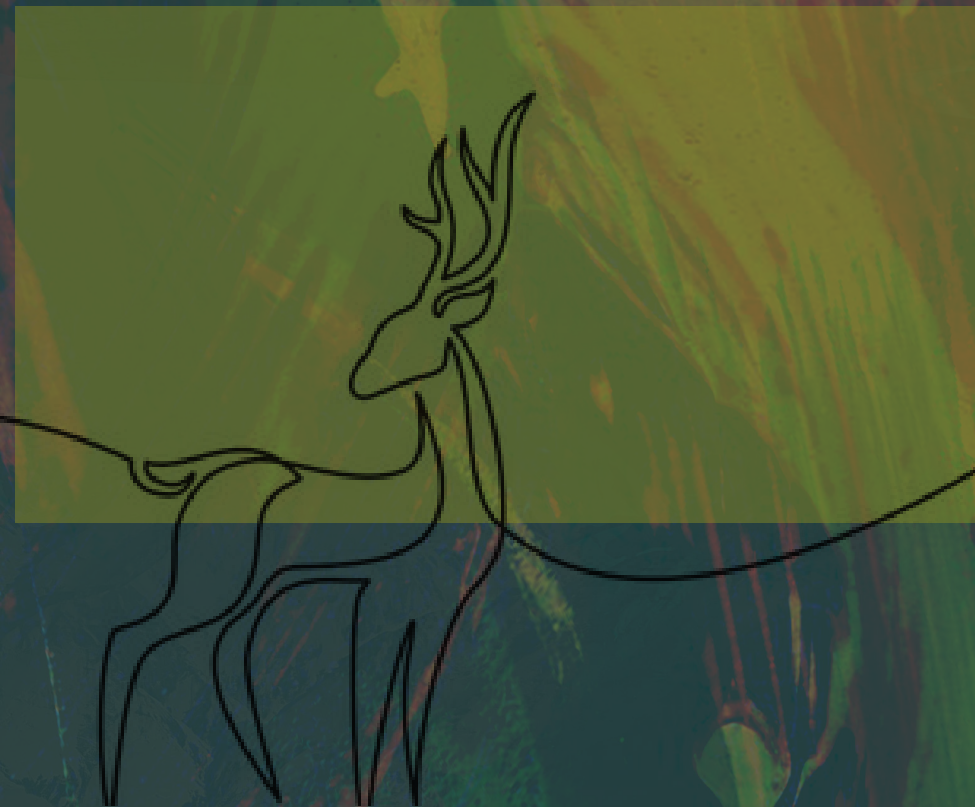
Writing by George Wood

A number of years ago—how many exactly it doesn't matter, just that I was younger—I was working someplace in the woods, a camp, with a lake and fires and tents. And here, at this place where I worked in the woods, I had a favorite spot, a small bridge without railings that tidily spanned a gushing creek that darted its way through the pines and overgrowth. I preferred to frequent this spot alone but would have along company if I was in the right mood.

It was a simple spot, a point without contentions or chores of any kind. There were many afternoons, sun blazing bright and humid air hanging, that I spent in this place but there is one I consider far beyond the rest. Funny, to me, because of how many times I can remember gazing into the lapping brook and

imagining 'I will never forget this precise moment because I am thinking of it right now.' But I had no such intention on that day, that day when, like so many others before it, I found myself draping my untanned toes into the cool, clear water and watching for hiding minnows among the reeds.

And on that day there stood, almost entirely unnoticed by my sole human eye, a fawn, staggered legs pressed into the soft, sandy creek bed, leering at me as though from underneath bramble or thicket. But there was nothing obstructing our gazes and so they met and lingered. Then my feet were immersed and slid into oozing sand and bark chips which scratched my blistered toes. I made my way upstream, cautious step by cautious step, towards my companion, our gazes never wavering. As I neared her—or



him, but I assumed her without knowing why—my arm unfurled with the uncertain motion of a questioning pupil, stretching to touch its sun-warmed flank.

But as I reached toward fawn, unshaken, a rustle of brush and leaves arose from downstream, and as soon as my eyes could realize it, the testament to my

oneness with nature and all its base creatures took flight in a splashing, panicked flurry of gangly legs and retreating brown fur dappled with white spots.

And so I, too, retreated, slower than the fawn, back to the bridge, and back to my friends. I told them that I touched a fawn in the creek. I don't know why I lied.

JO JAY

What do you currently do for work and what do you enjoy most about it?

I'm currently freelancing as a writer and artist. It's equal parts enjoyable and terrifying - I love the flexibility and the fact that I'm able to spend a lot of time with my dog (as he's a puppy right now) and that we're able to enjoy spring together as it starts popping up in the parks around us! I also work part-time in a bar and at a copywriting agency as well to help balance the books. I know I get bored very easily and like being able to flip between projects without the rigmarole of being tied to an office desk. I love how creative and vibrant Edinburgh is as a city to live in, it's full of creative outlets and emerging talent which is lovely to witness.

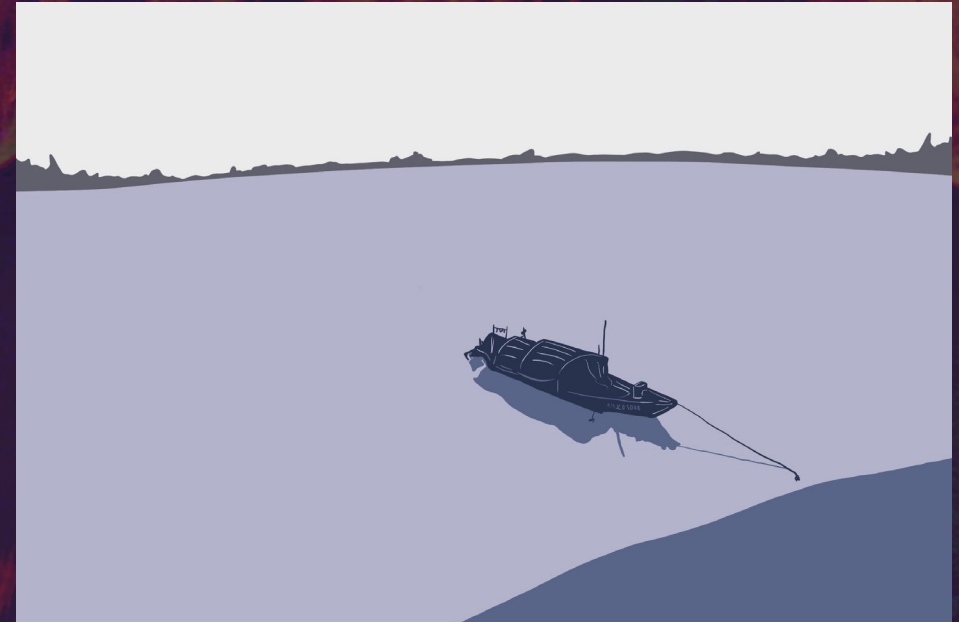
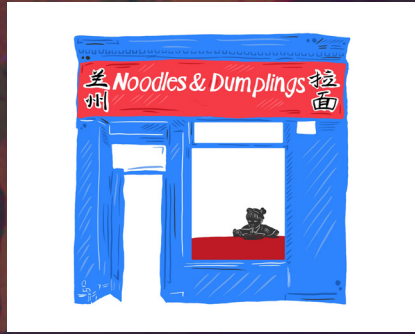
Would you ever consider doing art as a career?

I don't think I'd ever rely on art full-time. The dance between art and writing have always pulled me in different directions and I've realised that I go to both for different things. The writing has always fuelled the art and vice-versa. I'd always be anxious about the financial viability of full-time artist work which has held me back. Unfortunately, there's more money in writing for me and that is a deciding swing-factor at this stage.



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The dance between art and writing have always pulled me in different directions



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I love the satisfaction
of creating beauty; it’s
incredibly rewarding

What do you love about art?

I’ve always found art extremely cathartic. It’s always been a retreat for me to immerse myself in and I love the satisfaction of creating beauty; it’s incredibly rewarding. I was an only child growing up, and a quiet one at that. I got used to entertaining myself and would spend hours painting to fill the gaps.

Do you share art online?

I hate sharing art online; I know that it’s a necessary evil of social media I guess I find the self-promotion aspect quite

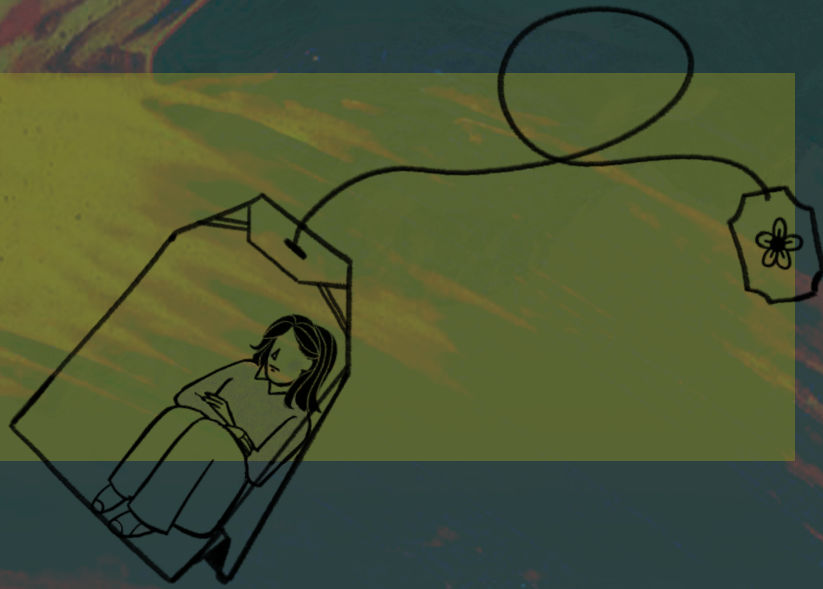
embarrassing-taking up space on people’s feed is not one I enjoy.

What holds you back from being creative?

Life blows in all directions and sometimes it blows a little harder and faster than I would like. The responsibilities of being a semi-functioning adult do take up a considerable amount of brain space (as does having a five-month puppy) and these can sometimes interfere. However, I find I work in (manic) bursts where I need a few weeks of tedium to get to a point where my brain is bored enough to create.

IT'S GOTTA BE LIKE THIS

Writing & Illustration by Elinda Xiao



So, here's the thing, little miss drama queen: You're freshly twenty-two, and you're pretty sure your whole damn life is over because nothing's fallen into place in the two months that it's been since everything you knew ended, and it's probably permanent, right? Because your pre-frontal cortex has yet to develop, and so your thoughts are

limited and small, and anxiety makes everything feel even more limited and small, until you're squeezed and constrained into a tissue box. You've cried over boys, girls, smart women who don't write you back, smart women who don't write you back fast enough, your cat, your hair, crying too much. Sometimes you want to cry because everything

seems fine for a little bit, and that's wrong.

So, it's yoga, pressed juices, Midol, endless online quizzes, bikinis, sporadic travel plans. Boarding a plane to Portland or Hong Kong, hoping that the different air and different skies will grant you Divine Knowledge. And there's that cliché, you know? How your problems are your problems no matter where you are? But it's terrible to realize that no, that's not really true if your problem is with where you are to begin with - endless suburbs and hundreds of miles from people you're trying to keep knowing, hundreds of miles from people you want to know. You're so sick of the same car, the same views, the same people telling you their same backstory. And yeah, you're judgmental. You're unfair. You're critical of yourself to such an extent that it spills over to others. But you don't want to change.

Stubborn bitch.

Two months is, I presume, more or less an eternity. So damn the job market, the bank failures, the pandemic that ate up the first two years of your twenties, the fact that eggs are practically six dollars a carton. It's all your fault, obviously! YOU'VE crashed the economy!

How does it feel to have single-handedly molded yourself into the ONLY PERSON WHO HAS EVER BEEN CONFUSED IN THEIR TWENTIES, EVER?

Comparison is eating your self-esteem alive. You want to be the hot "It" girl, the mysterious art wench, a yoga mom, a disco queen, unknowable yet universally adored all at once. And you know you're not quite any of those archetypes, yet you also know you're not-not any of those archetypes, because humans are so rarely definable in such neat boxes, so why do you keep trying to carve off parts of yourself?

There are so many paths to happiness. You see it, you know it comes for others. The tiny square of your heart that can identify with the mysterious force known as "logic" understands that this is temporary, that this is all temporary, that beauty will wax and wane, that time will pass and wounds will heal and the world around you will change.

But, to hell with all that. Just steep in it all a little longer. When else are you going to be allowed such quiet mess?

What do you currently do for work and what do you enjoy most about it?

As of right now I'm doing a year of service through Americorps. I had always thought that a year of volunteer work after college would be good for me to extend the timeframe that I have to figure out my life. That and I liked the idea of doing something positive for the world before I was sucked into some corporate machine or something adjacent. So I chose a position that allowed me to work with underprivileged children, as that population hit close to home. While I was lucky to grow in a supportive and nurturing environment with two parents who supported me in basically everything I did, I also grew up around a lot of people who did not have as positive of an upbringing as I did. I think that noticing the negatives around you is a symptom of growing up in a Mexican neighborhood in the southside

of Chicago. Even if you're doing fine, that doesn't mean everyone else is. So you grow up hearing about kids getting into gang-related activities, having to work overnight to help afford groceries, or about the fear of being deported due to not being a documented citizen. I always wondered that if there had been more support for the kids who ended up in those unfortunate situations, would things have ended differently for them? I myself am Mexican-American and my parents rather than shield me always made sure to talk to me about the possible negative outcomes that I could face in my life, and how I could avoid them. Were it not for the adults I've had in my life, I don't believe I would be where I am now.

So I hope that what I can do through my position is to serve as a role model for the kids around me, especially since I work with black and brown children. And I like to think that my presence is helping, as the kids always seem excited to talk to me about their plans for the future, or the things that they like to do for fun. And I really like that I can be an adult



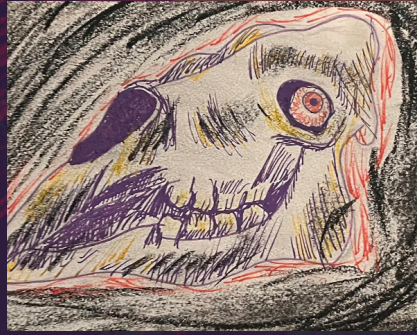
in their life that encourages them to pursue their dreams. I know that I can't do everything I wish for them, there is only so much I as an individual can help with. But it's also nice to educate them on social issues that affect them, and what barriers they will face along the way. And perhaps saying "nice to educate" is not the right phrasing, but my sentiments are fostered from a hope that going forward as they mature into adults they can be aware of the problems around them and how they should act going forward.

Would you ever consider doing art as a career?

Personally I do not see myself as ever being an artist. It's not necessarily that I dislike the idea of being an artist, but just that I don't think I could do the title justice. I don't feel as if I have a greater truth to share with the world through art, I do art because it's fun. When I sit down to draw it's not because I have some experience I must communicate, but rather because at that moment I usually need something therapeutic to do. And maybe it is the case that people like to look at the things I create,

SAL TINAJERO

but it's also not something I do for adulation or praise. Maybe someday if I feel I have a message that needs to be put out into the world really badly, I would consider trying to break out as an artist. But for now I'm content making drawings and pieces for myself to enjoy.



What do you love about art?

I like that it's a progressive skill, as a person I tend to be hypercritical of myself but I try to be objective with art. I can see myself improve as time goes on and it feels nice to have that measured progress. And I've liked to draw since I was a kid, but for me art was never a priority. I see art as a hobby of mine, and one I've only really taken seriously for about a year or two now. And that has manifested in me trying to pay more attention to my technique and final products, while probably criticizing myself more than I should, but it's always

constructive and done with the intent of nurturing growth. And that mindset is one I hope to apply to my everyday life. I want to be better as a person, self-growth has always been one of those things that I've come to appreciate in myself and the people around me. It's a core tenet of mine at this point. So in the end what I love about art is that not only is it a progressive skill, but also something that allows me to think more critically about myself in a healthier manner.

Do you share art online?

Sharing my art has always been weird to me, not because I find it embarrassing or personal, it just feels weird. Like I'm shouting out "Hey everybody, here's something I made! You should look at it!" But I also tend to feel that way about most things in my life, I typically have a hard time sharing parts of myself with the people around me. Despite my insistence in trying to be a good friend with those I'm



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Art is not easy dopamine, it requires effort

close with, whenever it comes to relaying anything personal I turn tacit and reticent. If it stems from anywhere, it's probably that I have a hard time seeing myself as someone worthwhile to interact with. I often feel like I'm a lost passenger drifting along a cosmic sea, a particle of dust in a dusty universe. So I won't make the first step in sharing because I just assume no one will care about what I have to share or say.

This is not because I see myself as worthless or any sort of self-deprecating sentiment, it's just the way things are when it comes to me. Yet the second someone asks to see something I made or am doing, I'm usually cool with that. Because I don't hate talking or sharing things about myself, it just feels weird to be the one to reach out and share. And it is fun to have people ask to see my works, because I can't help but think "Wow, I can't believe someone is interested in something I made!" So I don't share online because I feel like I'd rather my

works be seen by those who are interested, rather than just assume people will be.

What holds you back from being creative?

The creative process is something I thoroughly enjoy, but it is also difficult to participate in. Exhaustion from work, burnout, depression or just general busyness make it difficult to take the time out of my day to just sit down and be creative. Sometimes I just need a hit of easy dopamine and would rather just watch a show, drink a beer, or smoke a blunt. Art is not easy dopamine, it requires effort and engaging in a mindset that requires focus and an intensive thought process. Yes art is very therapeutic for me, but art is an active process for me as well. Sometimes I just need to turn my brain off for a bit and engage in mindless activities, because otherwise I'd end up just feeling overstimulated all the time.

THE NEXT ITERATION

Writing by Ibbly Day

This July, I celebrate 11 years as an artist.

From Disney fanart to high school paintings to museum sketches to pre-college programs to design school to professional work, art has been at my side longer than most people I know. At this point, art is like breathing. Unassuming, but critical.

It is my outlet to communicate because I often struggle to find the words to express myself. It's taken 11 years to become a working artist, but I started a new job and it's not in art or design; it's in digital communications. And suddenly, I'm searching for air with no luck finding it.

I've only cried in front of a handful of people, which is a fact I'm annoyingly prideful about yet incredibly embarrassed by, but the truth is this new job is

hard, and I've spent many drives home crying all witnessed by total strangers in traffic. In ways, it has felt like I failed as an artist, and the blood, sweat, and tears were all for nothing.

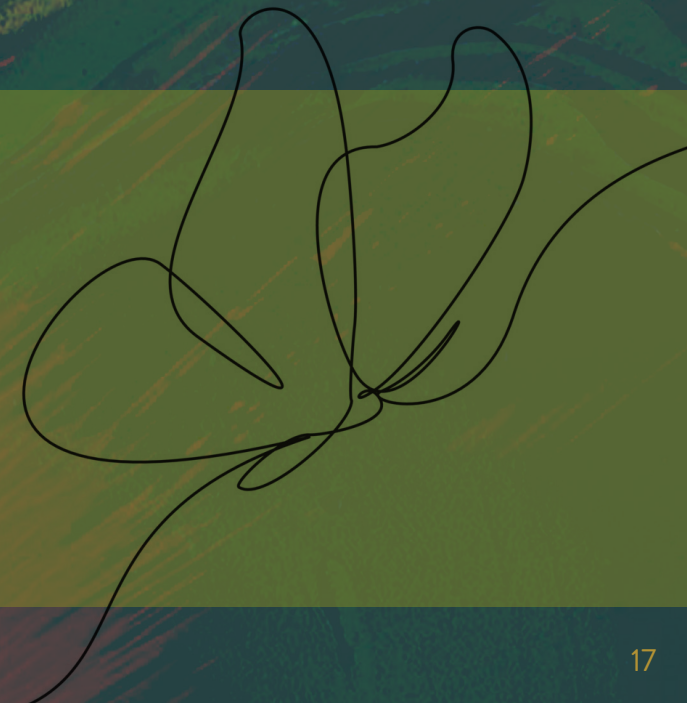
Not only that, but for the first two months I felt anxious knowing that I was letting my team down because I didn't know what I was doing. If there's one thing I hate more than anything, it's burdening others by not carrying my weight. It's been hard to do my job knowing my coworkers and I were all thinking the same thing—I was on the wrong team. I didn't belong in digital and because of that, I took a backseat, doing my work quietly to the best of my abilities.

But that's not who I am. I don't settle. I'm not an introvert, and I'm not an extrovert either. I just blend in because what I do think

I excel at is being a great listener and advocate of everyone.

When I first started my art journey, I was incredibly timid. I learned from others through observation, and although I've gained a lot of confidence in my artistic abilities and people skills over the last 11 years, my roots still lie in a quiet nature. I'd like to think this is now my strength, and can help me in a sea of the outspoken. What I think many of my coworkers have yet to learn about me is that despite a quiet strength, I'm stubborn about my goals. I love what I do for work, annoyingly so, and although that can make me a pain in the ass, it also makes passion and persistence two core traits of mine. I don't give up, and I never take the easiest path.

I chose art as a career because it was the one thing I could never master (so not Virgo of me). Other pathways always felt like they had endings, but with design there was always a new style, medium, or way to express the same thing. So as I face this new job, I'm starting to reframe the situation: communications as a new style, digital as a new medium, with the same goal of supporting and learning from others. This job is just something I've never tried before, and I don't have to lose sight of myself as an artist. Design is in everything if you look for it... so to 11 years and counting.



What do you currently do for work and what do you enjoy most about it?

I currently work at Whole Foods Market in the produce department. As for what I enjoy most about it, some days can differ but the common aspects are the people, the physical workout, the flexibility, and learning just how much I don't know about produce (and a little bit of floral) in an aesthetically colorful environment.

As long as the floor remains stocked to the best of our ability, the schedule, what you choose and when are flexible. The days can be repetitive, but various interesting conversations are happening between coworkers and customers, sometimes talking about ourselves, our interests, and giving recommendations or tips. For instance, recently a customer asked me about roasting tomatoes. First off, I barely knew there were various types besides the typical big tomato and the cherry tomato. Like there are Heirloom tomatoes, no idea that existed, or if I did I associated it with the general name of tomato. I've learned that the best tomatoes for roasting are small tomatoes like cherry tomatoes (sometimes romas).

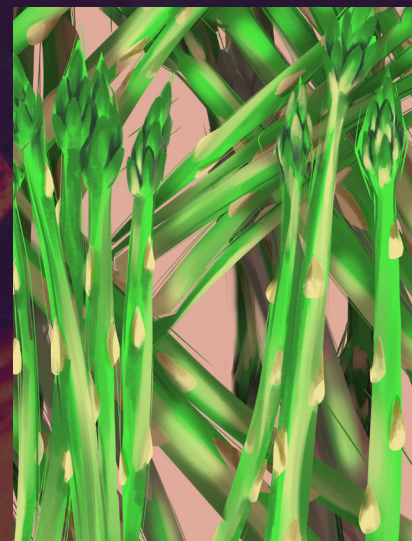


Would you ever consider doing art as a career?

100% but my question then is which field in art I truly want to do as a career? Right now I'm looking into a graphic design career. I've spoken to a recruiter before and something she mentioned to me that stood out was that I should stay away from branding since I fall into more of the creative side. So then I've been questioning if graphic design is truly the direction I want to go or if it might be too constricting. In college, I did graphic design for my college's Wellness Center and I appreciated the creative freedom within a style guide and the opportunities for me to integrate my illustrations into the brand. At the same time I was able to learn skills and strategies for my own wellness and what that means.

LISSIE CHIN

As I've been applying to jobs, sometimes the thought that maybe an art career might not be my thing pops up with each rejection. I can get into my head about it but I find myself falling on the idea that I should just find a job that allows me to invest into my hobbies on the side—this is where I am. While that strategy allows me to create financial support, I can continue to work and learn skills for a career or involvement in the arts. I enjoy working with websites and coding (HTML/CSS), maybe that might be a route I want to consider or



even UI/UX design. I have always been good with my hands and building things, so a career in carpentry was another thought, in addition to, archaeological drawing, volunteering with Catch A Fire for illustration/art, freelancing, and web development (coding).

I have also always admired CGI and animation in films as well as motion graphics using software like blender, maya, adobe etc. That being said, I've been considering an animation course with the Animation Collective but for a later date. For now, I need to stop overwhelming myself with thinking about the "destination" because "what is meant to be will be" and "I'll eventually find the right job for me" as many have told me. Easier said than done especially when career counselors and colleges stress the idea of getting a job immediately after you graduate. When in reality sometimes you may end up trying various things in a variety of positions before finally getting there.

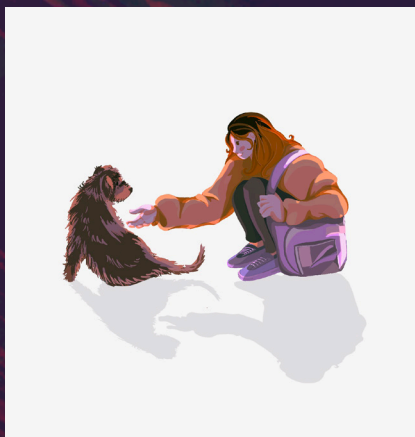
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At some point creating became more about others

What do you love about art?

I love that art is a form of expression, imagination, and freedom. If you get to know me, many people would usually say, “she is quiet,” “doesn’t talk a lot,” or ask if something is wrong because I’m so quiet. In most of those cases, I’ll probably be observing, distracted, listening, or hyperfocused on who knows what; although, any verbal indication of which is happening may be minimal. While I wouldn’t consider myself an eloquent speaker as I buffer to find the right words, art allows my words to flow onto the page. It’s my medium of journaling so to speak. Very therapeutic with a hint of spontaneity, plus I absolutely love adding in my commentary. I enjoy the endless possibilities of drawing from life or creating from

nothing — limitless or depending on the 2D medium limited to your gigs of storage or 100 pages until you get more. Moreover, I enjoy the way it feels to use the different tools and the marks each create. Like how a fine tip ballpoint pen can effortlessly glide over the paper or the feeling of the brush as you gently adjust the pressure. Even how the texture of the brush looks the digital canvas.



Do you share art online?

In terms of social media, it has been awhile since I’ve actively shared my work. For me social media has become a little daunting and tiring because at some point creating became more about others than it was focused on myself. I’ve found myself mindlessly and endlessly scrolling through post after post which became too much for me. And at some point I begin to overthink and get into my own head about concerns that are just a speck of the size in reality. Nevertheless, that doesn’t prevent me from collecting inspiration and tips from other artists on the platform. But more recently, I’ve been sharing my art through my portfolio and on platforms such as FineArtAmerica. There is a little more sense of disconnectedness that I find comforting. Maybe because despite all the support I receive from family and friends it’s that little internal battle of imposter syndrome that lingers in the feelings...feeling that I’m not good enough or not worthy. Although my mind knows very well that is far from reality.

What holds you back from being creative?

I have been lacking the mood and motivation. I’d like to think that it’s because of the transition period after college that I’ve fallen into an artist rut but not entirely true. After the transition from college it’s been a bit more lonely and feelings of depression began to settle in. There’s less of that community and constantly seeing friends. I felt that a lot because I rather spend quality time in person with someone than on FaceTime although it is more convenient. But once I began working and interacting with people more frequently, that loneliness dissipated. I think in some sense I definitely hold myself back from being creative. There are many moments during the day or throughout the week I could have but couldn’t bring myself



to create something. Whether that be an abstract collection of scribbles on a page, designing an elaborate fantastical vision that I conjured up in my imagination, or even just playing around with the various tools around me. I could make the case by saying that the whole work-life balance thing was new since I never really did the whole 40 hours in the last four years being in college, but seven months in—at this point—my choices contribute to if any creation/creativity

will occur during my days off. I forgot where I've seen this but there was an artist in a similar situation and they talked about the times when they didn't have the motivation to create but by pushing through that block and just doing it daily until it becomes a practice. That's what I'm aiming for.

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I love that art is a form of expression, imagination, and freedom.

