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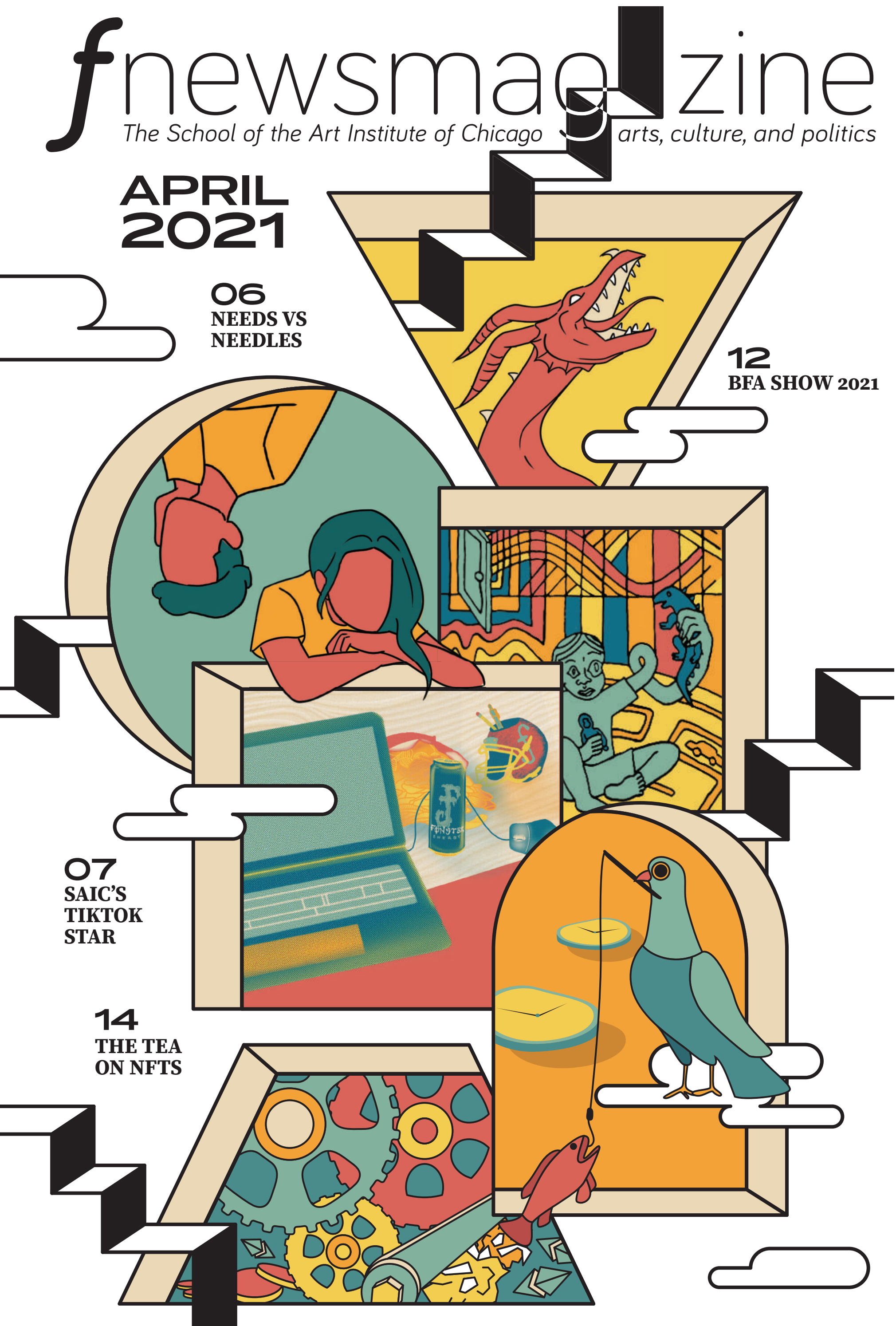
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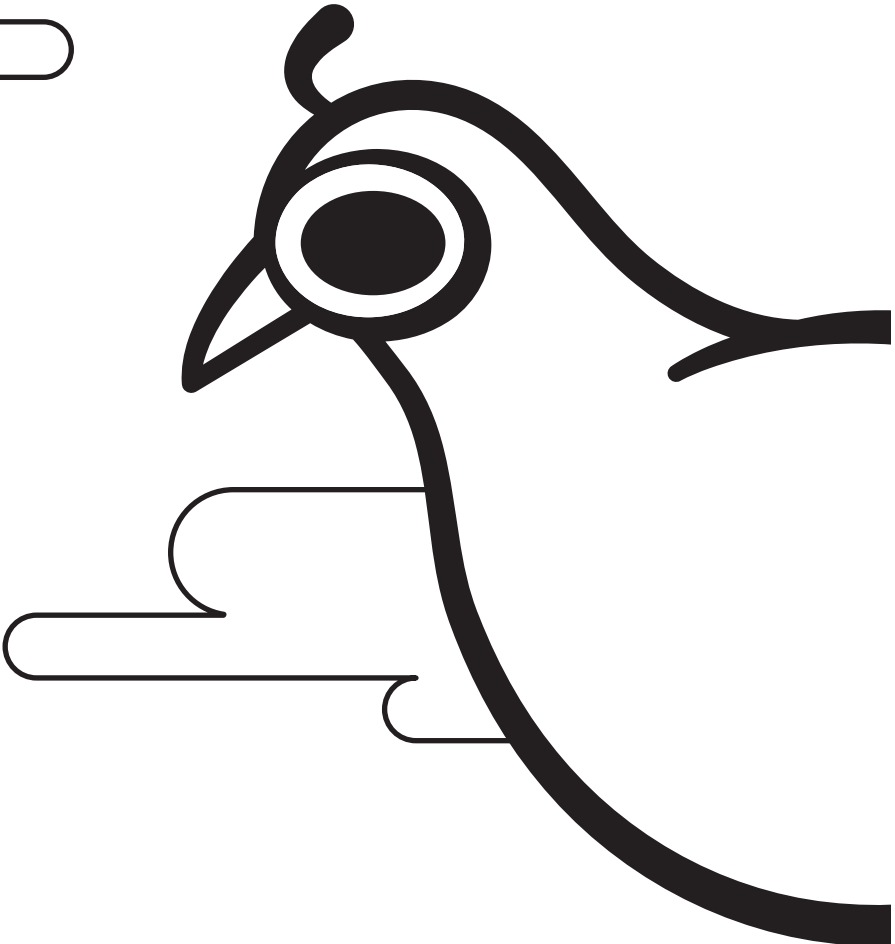
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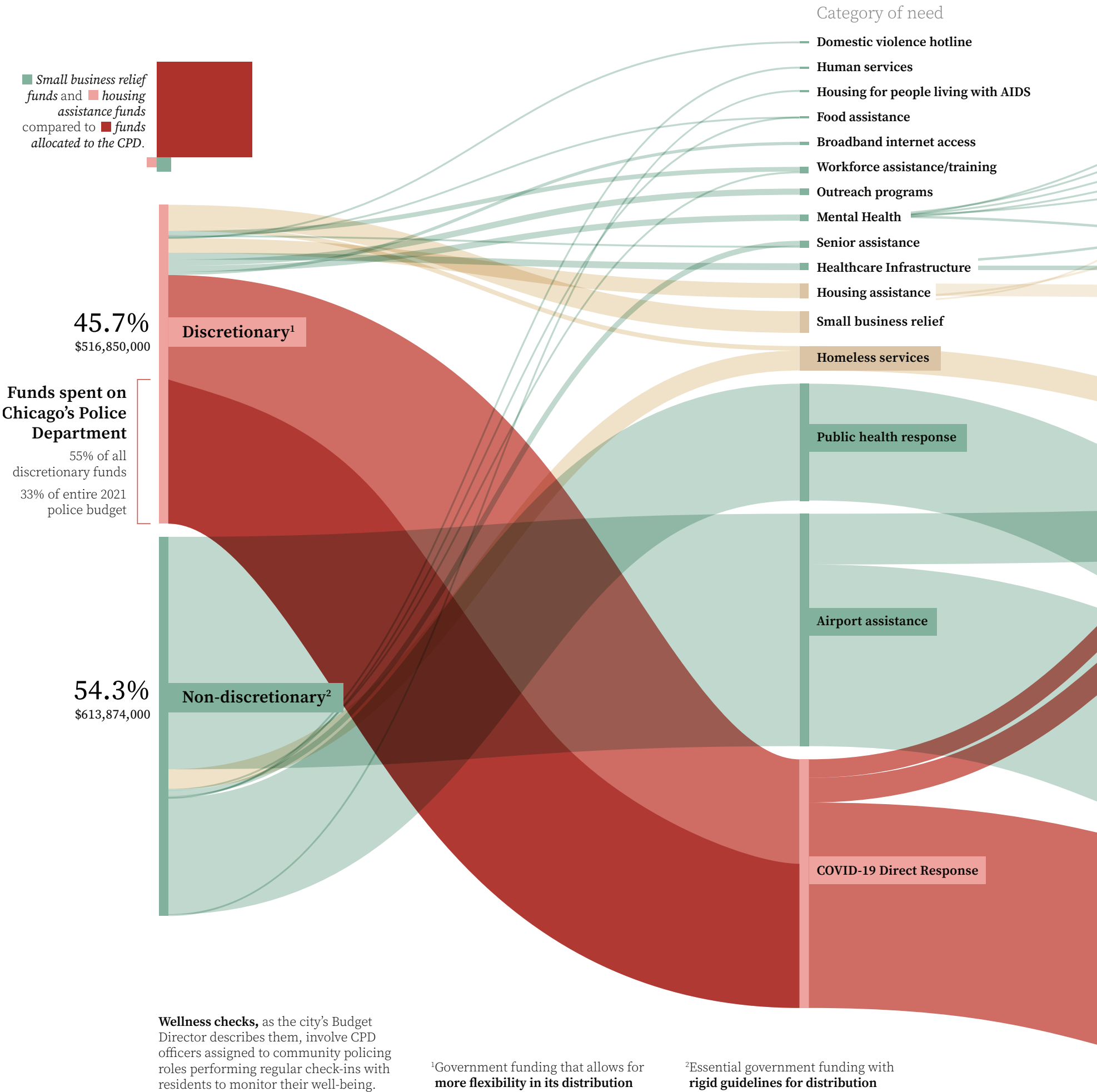
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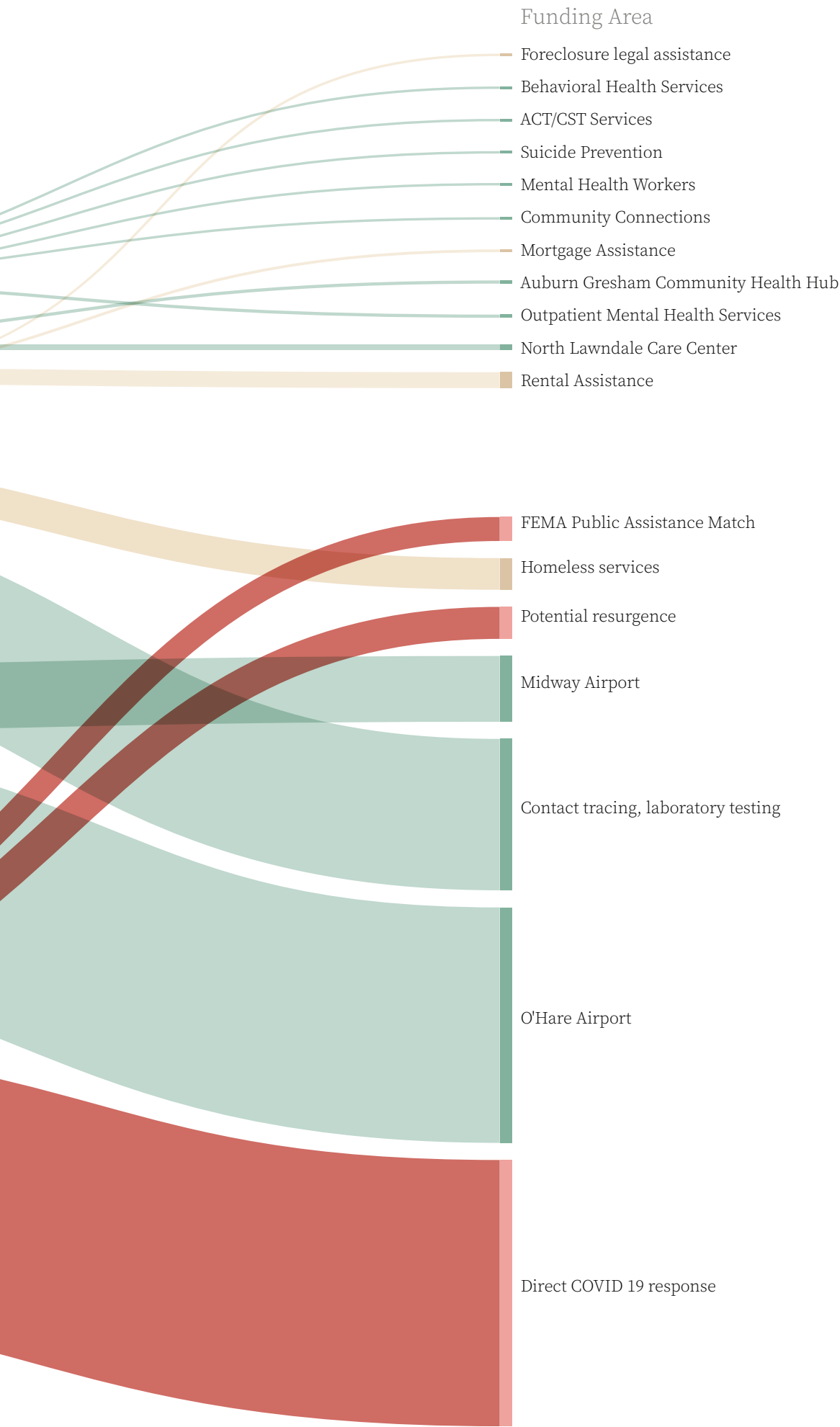




Where Did That \$281.5 Million Go?

Chicago got millions in COVID relief from the CARES Act. Why did so much of that money go to the police? Aldermen weigh in.

by **Olivia Canny** and **Lela Johnson**



Of the \$1.2 billion in federal funding that Chicago received in June 2020 from The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES), the city was allowed \$470 million to use for discretionary expenses incurred during the pandemic; 60 percent of these funds went to personnel expenses for the Chicago Police Department (CPD).

When this fact came to light in February 2021, it was met with outcry not only from the public, but from a handful of the 50 elected members of Chicago’s City Council.

We’ve broken down the city’s distribution of its CARES funding into various areas of need: rental

assistance, contact tracing, homeless services, etc. The \$281.5 million in discretionary funds that CPD received was not accompanied by precise data in terms of where it went and how it was distributed, and that’s one of the main criticisms that aldermen brought to both the Committee on Budget and

“
I’m just having a very hard time understanding how the coronavirus relief fund went to fund essentially CPD personnel expenses. I would have thought it went to the Chicago Department of Public Health for direct support there.”
—Ald. Michael Rodriguez (22), Feb. 19 Committee on Budget and Government Operations meeting

Other cities have made other choices when it comes particularly to personnel costs. **We’ve seen other cities that are a fraction [of] the size of Chicago spend a lot more money on different types of support programs for residents in need during this crisis.**
—Ald. Carlos Ramirez-Rosa (35), Feb. 19 Committee on Budget and Government Operations meeting

I’m sure most of us drove by McCormick Place when the facility was being remodeled to accommodate patients. I think most of us have neighbors that might be in need of wellness checks. **I’d be hard pressed to understand how wellness checks could account for hundreds of millions of dollars.**
—Ald. Edward M. Burke (14), Feb. 19 Committee on Budget and Government Operations meeting

Across the city we see the disproportionate effect that this pandemic has had on Black and brown communities. Over 5,000 Black and brown residents in the Black majority have died. We have serious suffering in our communities — over 750 murders last year. And with all those tragedies, mainly affecting the most vulnerable, **I truly think it was a slap in the face to our communities to see \$280 million dollars go to the Chicago police department.**
—Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez (25), Feb. 26 City Council meeting

”

Government Operations meeting on Feb. 19 and the City Council meeting on Feb. 26, which saw the finalized approval to appropriate the \$281.5 million to the CPD despite staunch opposition from several of Chicago’s aldermen.

In Chicago and almost everywhere else, COVID-19 has proven to exacerbate disparities in health and resources which existed long before the pandemic, and which will almost certainly persist after its decline. That said, it’s important to consider how these disparities came to be and what stands in the way of diminishing them, now. In the statements above from Chicago aldermen about CPD’s \$281.5 million of CARES funding, there’s a question of whether the city’s financial priorities match the needs of its residents.

Lela Johnson (VCD MFA 2022) is the infographics editor at F Newsmagazine. She forgets the rest. // **Olivia Canny** (MANAJ 2021) is the News and Podcast Editor at F. She likes taking long walks on Google Street View.

Struggling to Get Vaccinated

My mother's medical conditions make her a high risk for COVID. So why is it so hard for her to get a vaccine?

by Aidan Bryant

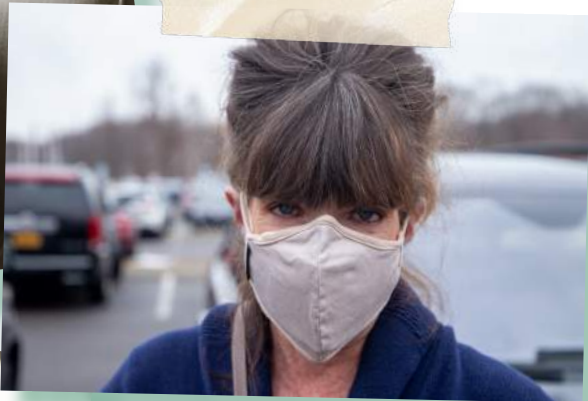
“I think it's fascinating that at the beginning, the people we have to protect are the older people, or the people with underlying conditions, and that's what they told us all along. But when the time came for the vaccine, they didn't do any of the people with an underlying condition. The people like myself, who are the most fragile, were just left out there.”



“I lost an appointment because I can't get vaccinated at pharmacies in New York. I almost lost another appointment due to a glitch in the system. How many people with comorbidities died waiting for a spot to open up? The people with comorbidities who had to go out there, who had to work, who had to go to court, who had to go on the train, weren't protected at all.”



“This is three months of medication for me. This is \$120,000 worth of medication. In the middle of the pandemic I had to fight for coverage on one of my most important medications from my insurance company. It costs half a million dollars a year to keep my heart functioning, not including medical care.”



“Seven years ago, somehow a flu turned into pneumonia, and things got out of hand very quickly. I didn't realize it was bad until I got to the emergency room, they gave me something to knock me out, and I woke up in New York Presbyterian. I was intubated for two weeks. I thought I was being tortured, by the time I left there I was a shell of myself. And that is the COVID experience. The intubation, the fear of not being able to breathe. That's the fear that everyone with a comorbidity has. I wasn't sure if my body could handle it again. They told Dad I was going to die the first time. As much as everyone was afraid, I feel that people with comorbidities were even more afraid because we knew what was in store. Which makes it even more tragic that we weren't the first ones vaccinated.”



“Long Island has three million people on it, we only have two state-sponsored sites. Old people can go to pharmacies and the state sites, but I can only get it at the state-run sites. And I can't get it in the city, even though they have multiple state run sites. After all the stress of getting the letter from my doctor, my medical charts, my medications, nobody even checked if I qualified. I went through at least four people who didn't check my paperwork.”

An SAIC Student's Journey to TikTok Stardom

From the 162 dorms to viral sensation to digging up clay in his backyard.

by **Darien Ridenour**

Evan Marnell (former BFA 2022, @greggiana on TikTok) surprised us all last May. Or maybe it wasn't that shocking, because if you've met Evan, you know how bubbly and outgoing he is. However, at the time, I was shocked to see Evan's face pop up on my For You Page on TikTok. The like count was enough to make me do a double take.

The premise of his first viral TikTok was the perfect story — an out-of-the-ordinary circumstance and a mesmerizing cliffhanger. Isabel Cooling (BFA 2022, @imnotisvbel on TikTok) had a hearty 48,000 followers on her TikTok, and lucky Evan happened upon her unsupervised and unlocked phone in the stairwell of SAIC's 162 Residence Hall. He opened this mysterious phone to find almost 50 thousand people ready to listen to him.

"Um, so I just found this phone in the stairs ... you didn't have a password, silly, silly girl, and you have 48 thousand followers on TikTok?! Don't mind if I do!" Evan said sassily. It looked as if he had just picked up the phone as he was making his way down the stairs. He changed angles quickly, zoomed in and out, and shook the phone to emphasize points.

"I don't really know what I'm supposed to do with this, I'm gonna give your phone back to security I guess? But in the meantime ... anyone got any ideas what I should do with this page? Cause ... got 48k here, what's good fam?" This video was posted on May 19, 2020. It currently has 2.7 million views, 730,000 likes, and 1,500 comments.

As it turns out, this wasn't exactly the sequence of events that happened. Reality is a bit less dramatic. I asked Evan to tell me his side of the story.

"It all started off as a joke. Just because quarantine was a thing, I needed to find something to stimulate myself that was outside of art. Isabel was really bored with her TikTok and she was like, 'Ya know, I kinda just wanna give you the username and password.' And I was like, 'Okay, I think I have an idea!'"

The fact that this wasn't a funny coincidence shows how much thought Evan put into this venture. He truly carpe-d that diem — he constructed a storyline that he knew would do well with the TikTok algorithm.



As he told me, "My job is just to make stuff, and TikTok does all the work for me: finding the right customers, clients, personality types that will clash with what I'm putting out there." Having a video go viral and getting your 15 minutes of fame is one thing, but Evan was able to retain and gain attention.

Part of his hook was these funny little ceramic eggs that he created. "The eggs came about," Evan explained, "from this one video I took in my dorm that was about random things in my college dorm. It was just little knick-knacks and posters and different things that friends from school had made me. And then I had my eggs in it, and I called them my 'window eggs,' and everyone was like, 'I need a window egg.'"

That's when Evan knew he had found his thing, his niche.

Evan essentially has two types of videos: marketing for his artwork, and what can only be described as a form of very absurd performance art. When he's not

"My job is just to make stuff, and TikTok does all the work for me: finding the right customers, clients, personality types that will clash with what I'm putting out there."

promoting his art, he is in the middle of nowhere, comedically discussing existential topics, always accompanied by his eggs, and sometimes a chinchilla. A lot of comedy on TikTok is just so absurd, you can't help but laugh, and Evan fits right in with the rest of them.

He explains a bit of his thought process: "How I got people excited about the eggs was using them as a prop for so many different videos. I started making P.O.V. and transition edits to Billie Eilish [songs] with them, and then I started running around in the forest chaotically, with them, and then I started doing cult-vibe videos with them. I was trying to saturate the market and get them used to this idea before I released my first set of products."

Despite having this exciting opportunity fall into his lap, Evan, like most of us, was not immune to the effects of the pandemic. He moved back home with his mother in Vermont, started working at a preschool, and decided to take a semester off of school. "I thought to myself, 'Well, I should use the money I make from the preschool to start my own business and fund startup costs.' I got a cheap, \$500 kiln off Amazon that was so tiny it was a joke, but big enough to work!" Digging up mud from a stream in his backyard, he started learning how to make his own clay. He was able to use the clay from his backyard to make his ceramics.

"I say it to everyone, in all of my thank-you letters that go out with every order: 'You're getting a piece of my home, this is very special to me, and you have, therefore, not only a piece of my home but a piece of me.' He has made over 400 ceramic pieces in the last six months in that tiny little 5x5 kiln.

Describing how he felt during his first launch, Evan said, "I was sitting at the preschool job realizing orders were coming in ... While I was sitting there at this one job, making minimum wage, I was making more off of my website."

Once he realized what this venture could become, he decided that returning to SAIC wasn't in his best interests, at least for now. However, he is planning on returning to Chicago soon. This, of course, means he will lose access to his backyard clay, but he talked about how it can be limiting in some ways, so he's excited to expand what he's able to create.

Evan seems happy making his eggs ... or, well, kind of: "I was starting to feel like that was all I could ever be," he told me. "My entire branding was based around it, like I am The Egg Man."

However, he seems to be taking steps to change this. In our conversation, Evan revealed that he is currently working on a new collection, and gave me a sneak peek at the pieces. It won't be a complete re-branding — he still plans to make eggs — but more of a shift to showcase more that he's capable of. He said that this next launch will not only include his ceramic pieces, but also paintings, prints, and clothing, which he is doing in collaboration with his partner. He hopes to launch in April or May.

Despite Evan's hefty following on TikTok, he is currently on a hiatus, having not really posted anything since January. However, I'm glad he's taking time for himself. I'm excited to see what the Egg Man does next — as are his 400,900 followers, I'm sure.



Performance Art On Demand

IMPACT, SAIC's annual performance art festival, turns to a new venue this year: Zoom.

by EJ Kok

If you had told any performance artist in 2019 that we would all be locked in our homes one year later, turning to streaming platforms and virtual entertainment for solace, they probably wouldn't have believed you. And on top of that disbelief — reasonable, given that COVID-19 was a wrecking ball to the face that nobody saw coming — would be fear, because to envision such a thing would be to envision a huge and unimaginable threat to the very spirit of performance art itself, and all performance-based arts and culture.

Performance art is a medium that relies on the phenomenological experience of its viewers being in a space and experiencing the work in person. Given this, one could assume at first blush that performance art would have been left in the dust by COVID-19 lockdowns, now that the option to congregate in person is no longer available. However, consider the adaptability of the medium's artistic element — performance art is less rigidly rooted in the kind of space the work is performed in, than, say, theatre plays. Surely, then, it wouldn't be too big a leap for performance artists to adapt their pieces for the virtual realm?

It is this question that the 2021 IMPACT Performance Art Festival at SAIC aims to probe, and hopefully answer, with a resounding, affirmative "Yes!" Jointly coordinated by SAIC's Performance Department and the Department of Exhibitions and Exhibition Studies, the IMPACT Festival is a thesis exhibition for graduating students creating time-based work, live art, and performance. IMPACT is being placed online this year to comply with COVID-19 health and safety measures, while still providing students with a much-needed platform to showcase the culmination of their art practice as they approach graduation. The show will take place on April 17 from 5 p.m. to 9:30

p.m. CST, and on April 18 from 1 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. CST, streamed live to a dedicated webpage hosted by SAIC. Additionally, to foster the community spirit that is so integral to performance art as a medium, SAIC will be hosting a Zoom watch party for the festival, allowing faculty, students, and participating artists to partake in moments of shared celebration and bond over the works being broadcast.

Despite the festival's new, unprecedented online format, the IMPACT production team have not been discouraged: "I believe that showing thesis work is such a celebratory moment at SAIC," said Lauren Steinberg, Assistant Director of Exhibitions, and one of the members of the IMPACT production team.

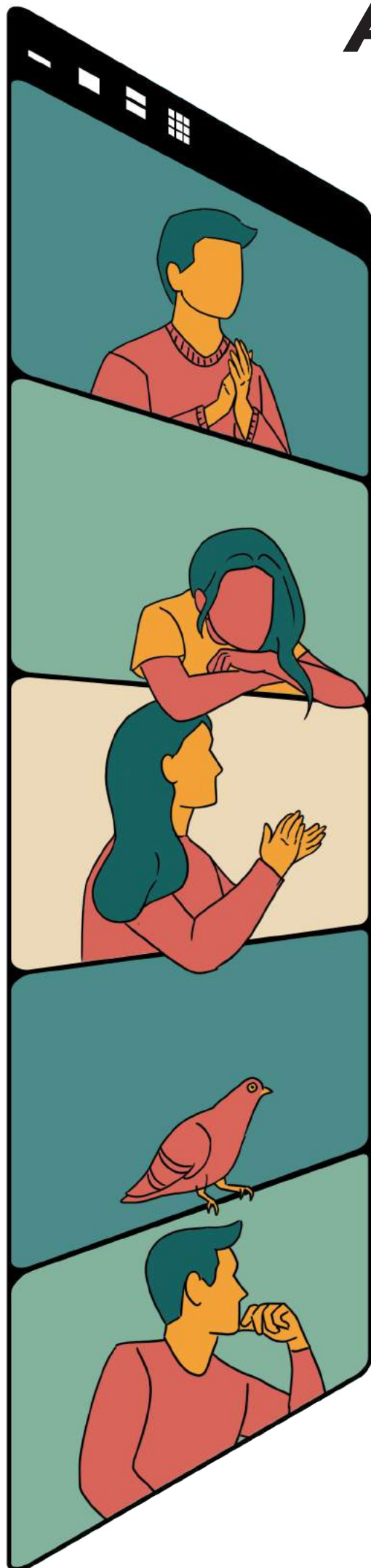
"As an alum myself, I know how emotional it can feel when you're ending your time here at school. I want the artists to embrace that feeling and be proud of what we are helping them put out into the world."

The festival's guidelines for students also

present it as "an exciting opportunity to explore the possibilities of presenting live streamed performance," with a committed team from the Performance Department on hand to "support students in pushing the boundaries of this [online] medium."

Student artists participating in the festival could choose between three methods of online broadcast — a live broadcast directly from the B1-12 Performance Art space in SAIC's 280 Building as facilitated by the IMPACT production team, a live-stream from any other location secured and set up by the artists themselves, or broadcasting pre-recorded and edited performance footage. For the artists in the former two categories, this was undoubtedly a sea change in the landscape of their practices. How does one account for the fact that the audience is now behind a screen?

Consider the adaptability of the medium's artistic element — performance art is less rigidly rooted in the kind of space the work is performed in, than, say, theatre plays.



Some artists, like Corey Smith (MFA Performance 2021), had already planned to exhibit a piece engineered for the live broadcast format. Smith’s piece, which he described as “études for the webcam,” was created specifically with the framing of Zoom and the capabilities of the software in mind.

“Knowing that the thesis festival was moving online was a very spiritually difficult challenge to think through,” said Smith. “How can we find moments of live-ness here? How can we find the sort of presence and connection that makes live performance so exciting?”

For him, the webcam was the key to finding those qualities — by addressing the frame through which we see into other people’s worlds, Smith hopes to “short-circuit our normal Zoom presentation modes” and restore the zeitgeist of virtual performance art pieces.

Similarly, Jordan Knecht (MFA Performance 2021), whose piece was also designed specifically for an online format, noted that the festival’s new format was an opportunity for him to expand his practice by “exploring curiously outside of syntax and rationality.”

Others, like Ilio sophia (MFA Performance 2021), simply refuse to see the festival’s new livestream format as a barrier to their work. “I don’t feel like I need to fit my work into the parameters of the Zoom context,” they said. “I’m going to perform it exactly how I would if I was in the B-12 space with people. The only thing I have to really consider is where the cameras are going to be.”

It is perhaps a testament to the adaptability of performance art that the artists who were willing to be interviewed did not consider the lack of a live audience as an insurmountable loss for their individual pieces, or their practices at large.

“It’s apples and oranges,” said sophia, “it’s just a different experience. This is a historic time in the arts; this time of Zoom performances is going to be something that hits the history books. It’s incredibly innovative, the way people keep challenging what you can do with it, and ... the festival is going to be a great example of people doing it in different ways.”

In a similar vein, Knecht stated that he did not think of the new online format as a loss, but rather, as a shift. “This style of presentation is not less than live, it is other than,” he commented. “Of course, there are things not the same. The space not filled by what we expect from in-person performances can be filled by something else, perhaps even something outside the realm of our current imaginations.”

On the other hand, Smith did note that he worried about the online format of the festival cultivating an atmosphere in which audiences do not pay full attention to the pieces being performed. “A really critical thing about live performances in person is that

“The space not filled by what we expect from in-person performances can be filled by something else, perhaps even something outside the realm of our current imaginations.”

you’re around other people,” he said, “and if you start checking your phone or leave, other people will notice that ... and there is this little bit of social friction that says, ‘Don’t get up in the middle of the performance and leave.’ ... Whereas with Zoom, there’s nothing stopping you from being on Wikipedia, reading about the Golden Gate Bridge, during my show.”

To Smith, it is this “social friction” that unlocks the full potential of experimental works such as performance art, which may often be challenging or confusing, and which require audiences to stick with a piece to fully understand it. While he admits that there is nothing he can do to control this, he nonetheless sculpts his performances with the intention that someone will be paying attention the whole time, even if there is no way to guarantee this in an online broadcast.

From a technical standpoint, there are many other uncertainties that IMPACT’s new online format has brought into the fray. Joshua Hoglund, IMPACT’s Technical Director, noted that “in addition to the production needs in the 280 performance space, we now have to contend with the production of getting performances that are remote into our system, and both in-person and remote performances out to the audience. The implications of this are wide ranging.”

However, much like the artists he works with, Hoglund is approaching this spiritedly. “I wouldn’t say [the work] is ‘worse.’ We love a good challenge! It’s been an exciting partnership, as it always is, between the amazing team at Exhibitions, the Performance Dept, the Media Centers, and IRFM/Campus AV. When we are engaged in working interdepartmentally ... we are SAIC at its best.” Both the artists and the production team on the festival met every week in the run-up to the festival, and were constantly in contact, sharing their work and critiquing each other as their pieces progressed. Smith was particularly heartened by this, expressing that he was very grateful to see that “the usual camaraderie between people is still around, even in Zoom-space.”

“I feel so invested in their work and their visions,” Smith said, “and I didn’t expect to feel that. I expected to feel isolated and alone. It’s a testament to both everyone’s commitment and this real need to feel a sense of togetherness in this moment.”

Clearly, then, all is not lost for the future of performance art. “We grapple with the absence of a live audience and with how the necessary changes to how we are able to collaborate with others affect our practices and our lives,” said Hoglund. “But we continue to communicate through performance in new ways, using tools both new and old, because we must.”

The show, after all, must go on.



EJ Kok (MFA VCD 2022) is the SAIC editor at F Newsmagazine. He is the current reigning champion of wearing Birkenstocks in inappropriate weather.

What Happened to ‘Godzilla vs. the Art World’

After the MoCA show’s cancellation, and after the Atlanta shooting, Todd Ayoung of the Godzilla art collective searches for solidarity.

by J. Livy Li

Everyday on my way home, I walk past the United Methodist Church on Broadway. Since the George Floyd protests last summer, the church’s iron fences bore the names and faces of Black and brown Americans killed by police. The top of every one of these mini-memorials reads “Say their names.” The other day, I noticed that more faces had been added. Faces that looked like my aunties’, faces that looked like how I will age.

These faces, of course, have by now been broadcast across the world. On March 16, eight people, six of whom were Asian women, were killed by a shooter in Atlanta. Much has been published, and much coddling done, about the shooter. Parts of the Internet are still talking about his “sex addiction” or his “bad day,” so to make it very clear: He attacked three Asian spas in quick succession. According to Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo, a surviving employee said the shooter said that he’d “kill all Asians.”

Anti-Asian sentiment is nothing new. During this pandemic, however, it’s become deadly. Hate crimes against us are up 150 percent from 2019, and 40 percent of Asian-Americans say that people have been uncomfortable around them since COVID-19 started. What this translates into is a barrage of hate crimes. Attacks on Asian elders have been making headlines for months. Vicha Ratanapakdee, 84, was sent flying into a garage door by an assailant; he died from the ensuing head injury shortly after. Henry Cheng, 30, along with his grandparents, 73 and 80, were attacked at a subway station; his grandmother was pushed onto the tracks. The day after the Atlanta shootings, Xiao Zhen Xie, 75, was assaulted by a man who threw a punch at her face; she managed to fight back with a wooden plank, but sustained injuries regardless. Footage in the immediate aftermath shows Xiao with paramedics, face swollen, choking back sobs while she explains in our language how the assailant hit her.

On March 9, the Museum of Chinese in America (MoCA) moved to cancel an exhibition ironically entitled “Godzilla vs. The Art World: 1990-2001.” The show was meant to look back on the groundbreaking work and politics of Godzilla: Asian American Arts Network, a collective and network founded in 1990 to, in their own words, “establish a forum that will foster information and networking among Asian and Pacific Islander visual artists and arts professionals.”

The reason the MoCA show was cancelled? Because 19 Godzilla members withdrew from the show. An open letter from the collective cited, among many reasons, the MoCA board’s co-chair Jonathan Chu being a major property owner in Manhattan Chinatown — an area deeply affected by the pandemic.

Todd Ayoung, a member of the steering committee of Godzilla and a professor at Pratt Institute, brought up the shuttering of Jing Fong, an iconic New York dim sum place and the only unionized restaurant in Chinatown. “Chu, the largest real estate owner in Chinatown and a board key member at MoCA, wants to close the restaurant, to possibly build a luxury hotel. This will devastate many lives dependent on the restaurant’s survival.”

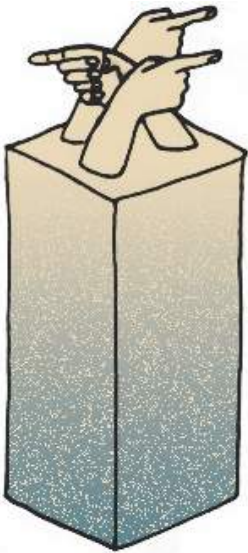
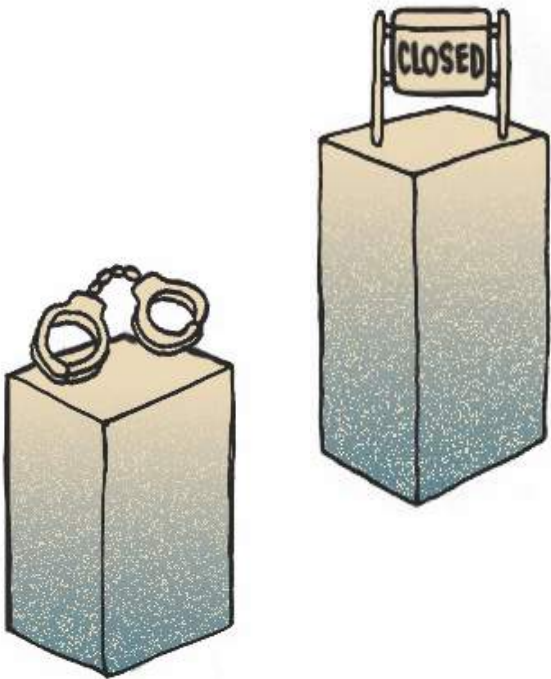
Another major point of contention is the museum’s complicity with a new plan for a bigger, larger jail in Chinatown. ArtForum reports that the existing Manhattan Detention Center, a 15-story building, is to be replaced with a larger jail of double the size on the same lot. In their open letter, Godzilla asks how and why a museum that often preaches support for Black and brown lives can remain silent as the prison industrial complex expands further in Chinatown, opining that the city’s \$35 million funding to the museum may explain the MoCA’s silence. They cite “war profiteer Warren Kanders” and “the opiate-dealing Sackler family” as other examples of recent controversies surrounding art donor complicity, whose affiliated museums have been roundly criticized by the art world.

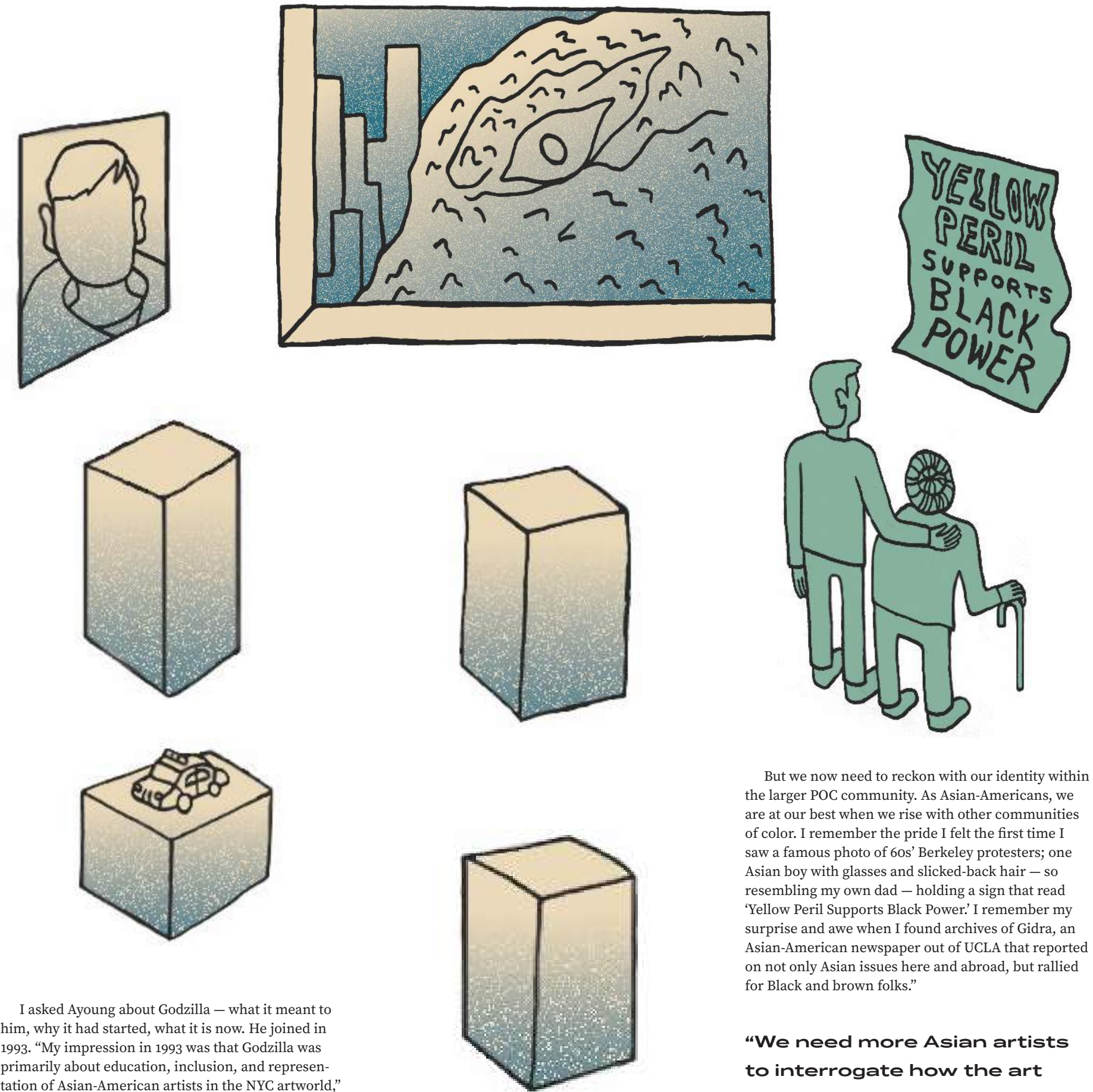


Among some swaths of the Asian community, there was a deeply damaging surge of anti-Blackness in response to the violence. This took two different forms: unfounded beliefs that the majority of anti-Asian crimes were being committed by Black people, and calls for more policing. A subreddit made to track instances of anti-Asian violence became an immediate breeding ground for more racism in the comments, forgetting that there’s deep bias in crime reporting, especially when it comes to violent crimes. On top of that, a study by the American Journal of Criminal Justice (using available data from 1992 - 2014) showed that a staggering 74.5 percent of hate crimes against Asians were committed by white offenders.

The second form of anti-Blackness, calls for more policing and more arrests, is more innocuous, but troubling in the long term. Asian-Americans have been calling for these hate crimes to be classified as, well, hate crimes, and lobbying for more policing. This has resulted in, first, hotlines for reporting anti-Asian crimes and now, the deployment of plainclothes officers in a new initiative for the Asian Hate Crime Task Force. Police Commissioner Dermot Shea of the NYPD said of this new initiative that “the next person you target [...] may be a plainclothes New York City police officer, so think twice.”

This threat becomes all the more ominous when racial profiling is so prolific. I have no faith that plainclothes NYPD officers would have stopped the white man who attacked Xiao. In Atlanta, police arrested the shooter without incident, but accosted Mario Gonzales, a survivor of the shooting whose wife had been murdered, with guns drawn, and subsequently detained him for four hours. As journalist Sophia Li tweeted, “We all know that massive policing is anti-Black and leads to violence against Black [and brown] bodies.”





I asked Ayoung about Godzilla — what it meant to him, why it had started, what it is now. He joined in 1993. “My impression in 1993 was that Godzilla was primarily about education, inclusion, and representation of Asian-American artists in the NYC artworld,” he says. He recounts how Godzilla, especially member curator Eugenie Tsai, demanded that the Whitney Museum include more Asian-American artists. “So that year, a Godzilla painter was accepted into the [Whitney] Biennial, along with a few other Asian artists.”

But in 2021, the goalpost is different. He says, “There are many Asian-American and Asian artists practicing now and visible in the global art market, so it is not about inclusivity and representation anymore, but ideology and collective politics. We need more Asian artists to interrogate how the art machine works hand-in-hand with capitalism, especially since the neoliberal art market is about artwashing, whitewashing, absorbing political contestations.”

Ayoung continued: “Asian artists engaged in the transformative context of events such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, anti-gentrification movements, abolition, dismantling the prison industrial complex, defunding the police, income inequality especially magnified in the pandemic, climate change, the living wage, free health care for all, affordable housing, and anti-Asian violence. [We] must initiate paths of intersectional solidarity.”

Ayoung also spoke on collectivism, that practice of caring for our community. “Recently, we reflected that Godzilla was a network in the 1990s, not a collective,” he says, citing that “we were able, because of the ‘withdrawal’ letter, to take a political stand, an ethical embodiment of a collective action, instead of an act of individuation [...] In the museum’s corporate posturing, Godzilla as a network meant we were dispersed actors, not necessarily acting together, because we were being curated. A collective means a coming together, in struggle, to enact ethical and political demands. Withdrawing from the MoCA’s Godzilla vs. the Art World is an act of solidarity.”

Asian-Americans have always been able to look out for each other. Ayoung noted that “in part, due to our solidarity in showing up, there has been discussion that the \$35 million that MoCA is supposed to get for the jail plan will be given to Chinatown restaurants and workers struggling because of the pandemic instead.”

But we now need to reckon with our identity within the larger POC community. As Asian-Americans, we are at our best when we rise with other communities of color. I remember the pride I felt the first time I saw a famous photo of 60s’ Berkeley protesters; one Asian boy with glasses and slicked-back hair — so resembling my own dad — holding a sign that read ‘Yellow Peril Supports Black Power.’ I remember my surprise and awe when I found archives of *Gidra*, an Asian-American newspaper out of UCLA that reported on not only Asian issues here and abroad, but rallied for Black and brown folks.”

“We need more Asian artists to interrogate how the art machine works hand-in-hand with capitalism, especially since the neoliberal art market is about artwashing, whitewashing, absorbing political contestations.”

Instead of advocating for mass policing, you can volunteer to walk elders if you’re in California or New York (Chicago has no such organization yet), report incidents of hate crimes, and keep your mental health in check. The model minority myth may have changed how Asians are perceived in relation to whiteness, but our forefathers of Asian-American activism have always known that we are people of color. COVID has shown as much. As Ayoung says, “Asian-American artists are an essential part of this collective narrative revolution towards environmental and social justice, and they must build this through comradeship, allyship, and solidarity with other struggles and change makers.”

J. Livy Li (BFA 2020) is the interim Arts Editor for F News (apply on Handshake!). She shares one single brain cell with her dog.

Spring 2021 BFA Show

The graduating class of 2021 goes out in style at the undergraduate exhibition.

Photos by **Nina Liu**

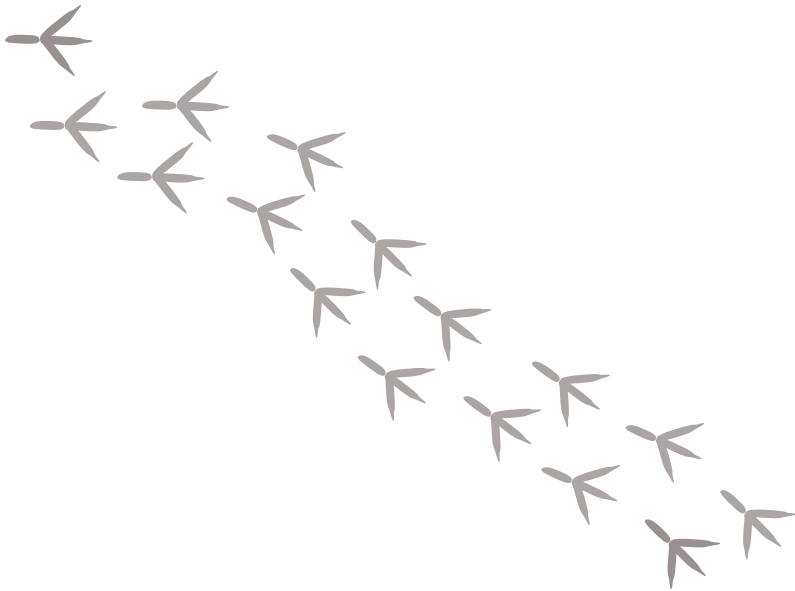


→ From left to right: Hannah Marguerite Klepper, *Self*, 2021; Annaleigh Kimes, *Seeking Stability*, 2021; Victoria Salgado, *Furniture of the Planets*, 2021; Kayla Deneen Smith, *Fable of Black Follicles*, 2021



↑ Celina Xu, *Seijaku* (静寂), 2020

Luisa De Silva Milmo, *Functional 3*, 2021 →



Mora Anderson, *Playground*, ↑ 2021



Eliza Wagner, *What Happened to the Mills?*, 2021 ↑



←
Lillie Blevins Walstrom, *future plans//past self*, 2021



←
Todd Barrera-Disler, *A/W 2021: BOUND*, 2021



Cortney Anderson, *Synergistic Interaction of Mind and Body*, 2021 →

↑ Yanqi Wang, *Why we end up like this*, 2020

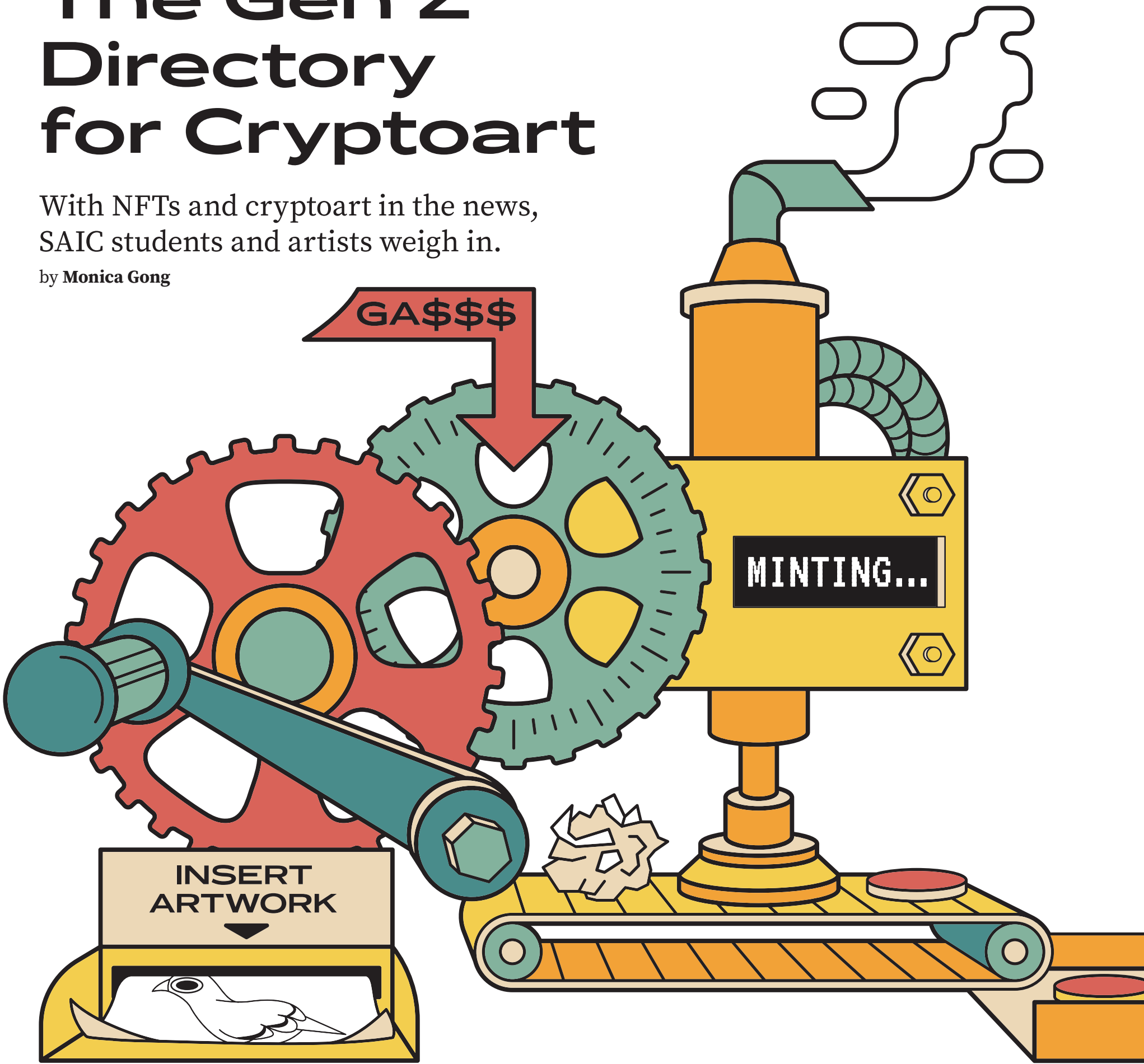


Nina Liu (BFA 2021) is a photographer and visual artist who has an obsession with all things red, and a constant craving for white cheddar Cheez-Its.

The Gen Z Directory for Cryptoart

With NFTs and cryptoart in the news, SAIC students and artists weigh in.

by Monica Gong



Generation Z is synonymous with internet.

We are branded as internet natives, yet late-capitalism’s technological innovations leave even us scratching our heads in confusion. Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies have kept a relatively low profile in cyberspace, whispered amongst niche tech circles and obscured by an impenetrable veil of mysticism. This has changed with the rise of cryptoart. New media discourse is being pushed into public consciousness, but the rhetoric surrounding this phenomenon can be perplexing. Blockchain? NFT? WTF is that? Where did it come from? And why should I care?

Cryptoart 101

New Media is an ever-changing terminology loosely definable as art that is conceived, stored, and spread

via digital means. Cryptoart lives within this realm. Everest Pipkin, gaming and software artist, simplifies this subcategory in their viral Medium post:

“Cryptoart is a piece of metadata (including an image or link to an image/file, the creator of that file, timestamps, associated contracts or text, and the purchaser of the piece) which is attached to a ‘token’ (which has monetary value in a marketplace) and stored in a blockchain. An individual piece of cryptoart is called an NFT.”

NFT stands for non-fungible token. “Non-fungible” means that it cannot be traded equally with another item, therefore verifying its uniqueness and creating a system of digital scarcity. Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, on the other hand, are fungible: One bitcoin can be traded with another, and both are rendered equivalent. Cryptoart’s monetary value lies in Ethereum, or ETH, a currency that fluctuates like

all other currencies. Anyone can “mint” any digital image and sell it on the blockchain.

Digital scarcity must be emphasized, for it is this which displays the value of cryptoart. While cryptoart preserves the digital image’s ability to be downloaded and shared across social media, it attempts to reconcile the question of ownership in cyberspace. Platforms such as SuperRare position the “true owner” of a digital artwork as whoever owns its NFT in the blockchain, thus presenting new media with a type of ownership that is socially construed and legitimized with money.

Is Cryptoart Good or Bad?

It’s not that simple.

Cryptoart yearns to de-mediate the relationship between artist and consumer in the contemporary

age. Digital art is notoriously difficult to sell, and cryptoart could be subversive in helping small artists earn a sustainable income. Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that cryptoart comes with a wide range of discourse surrounding its social and ecological ramifications.

Loudest in the cultural criticism of cryptoart is the fear of depreciated value. Pipkin believes that digital media “can proliferate over a network and be held by many people at once without cheapening or breaking the aura of a first-hand experience,” and that the digital scarcity created by cryptoart destroys this open-source network.

Rosa Menkman, glitch artist and author of “Glitch Studies Manifesto” echoes this sentiment in her article “Remarks on Crypto-Art,” which responds to unregulated instances of her stolen artwork. Menkman criticizes the non-consensual minting of her artwork (all of which is free to view on the web) and the possible changes in its cultural value.

By now it is undeniable that cryptocurrency, especially Bitcoin and Ethereum, uses an incredible amount of energy and is actively contributing to the climate crisis. Menkman laments the effect of her stolen artwork on the climate, all without her direct participation in the crypto world. In “The Unreasonable Ecological Cost of #CryptoArt,” computational artist Memo Akten calculated that the average carbon footprint for an NFT “is equivalent to a E.U. resident’s total electric power consumption for more than a month, with emissions equivalent to driving for 1000Km, or flying for 2 hours.” Most poignant in the ecological criticism of cryptoart is the fact that climate change will affect poor communities of color worst of all.

This problem is exasperated by the nauseating price tags on cryptoart platforms, including Azealia Banks and Ryder Ripp’s \$17,000 audio sex tape and Beeple’s \$69 million digital mosaic, which is the most expensive digital artwork sold to date as well as the third most expensive artwork ever sold by a living artist. The mosaic is comprised of 5,000 images that Beeple has published on the internet daily since May 1, 2007.

While the carbon footprint of a working crypto artist could be justifiable, especially with the more eco-friendly platforms such as KodaDot or Kalamint, the previous examples generate egregious amounts of unnecessary waste in exchange for blue-chip greed. Many artists have responded to the ecological ramifications of the cryptoart market. Some insist that the only ethical response is complete abstinence from cryptoart platforms and urge for new solutions for supporting digital artists — although nothing substantial has been proposed.

Small cryptoartists struggle with the responsibility that comes with their practice, and are looking for ways to rectify their damage. This typically takes the form of carbon offsets, which raise a separate crop of issues. Not only is it difficult to gauge how effective they are, but reforestation efforts can be harmful to local populations.

The Gen Z Circumstance

The convergence of cyberspace and climate change are a situation specific to Generation Z. As a result, possible solutions to this problem fall on our shoulders, whether we want them to or not. I spoke with fellow Gen Z artists and art students at SAIC, to hear what they think.

On selling cryptoart

I think a lot of young/student artists, and myself as well, are waiting for this big wave to calm down. We’re trying to gather more information for something that seems like it will hugely impact our careers. I’m just trying to learn how to move myself into this NFT world — which is here to stay. I won’t be involved with NFT until I find more convincing convictions of its ethics.

— Sarah Kim (BFA 2022)

I will continue to participate and I’m aware of the negative ramifications. I believe that anybody has the right to choose whether to participate or not and I respect their choice and opinion. I don’t think that anybody can get rid of it or stop it, though. It’s part of something much larger and has been in motion for a few years. Many people say ETH 2.0 could fix many of the ecological issues, but who knows when that’s coming out. There’s also some eco-friendly NFT platforms with their own currency that I’ve seen,

but unfortunately, they’re nowhere near as popular.
— Thomas Stokes III, Painter and Digital NFT Artist

On the ecological ramifications of cryptoart

Yeah, fuck that. Those stats are scary as fuck. Weren’t we supposed to go forward in reducing our carbon footprint? We just threw everything out the window for some hype. My echo chamber of social media show digital artists not in support of NFTs, and this is predominately where I get my information about NFTs. Maybe I am pessimistic about NFTs because of this echo chamber bias, but I’m open-minded about getting more information to try to participate ethically.

— Sarah Kim

I do feel responsible to an extent. One thing that I think about is how much I would have to donate to cover the damage, and how much that would cut into my profit because of how much damage it is. But I need to do research. I would really like to switch to a more eco-friendly platform. The problem is that they’re so small and don’t get much traffic at all compared to other platforms, from what I’ve seen. If they were as popular and had the same collectors as SuperRare then I definitely would switch over.

— Thomas Stokes III

On the changing conceptions of ownership and value in cryptoart

I love the fact the internet is open-sourced and created to share, consume, remix, etc. I embrace this part of the digital world. We wouldn’t have inventive ideas if it weren’t for the sharing — maybe over-pollution — of human creation or ideas. Digital ownership has always been a problem seen on social media, which is why this (MIS)conception of “digital ownership” is oh-so-falsely attractive. Also, this neoliberalist blockchain playground is falsely supportive of disadvantaged artists — it’s just the art world now mixed with the hype of digital coin.

— Sarah Kim

It must be emphasized that cryptoart is a branch of the meme economy that parallels the patronage model of fine art. Wealthy art patrons mutually bolster their social standing of having “refined tastes” while financially sustaining the artist. At its core, memes generate their power through cultural know-how, whether you are in on the joke or not, while cryptoart derives its value from (monetary) provenance. The landscape of the net wrangles intellectual property and cultural dominance, akin to Richard Dawkins’ conception of memes and cultural evolution. If both are to co-exist, we should not have memes devalued and debased as has occurred in the art world with exclusive galleries and exhibitions which define “good” art.

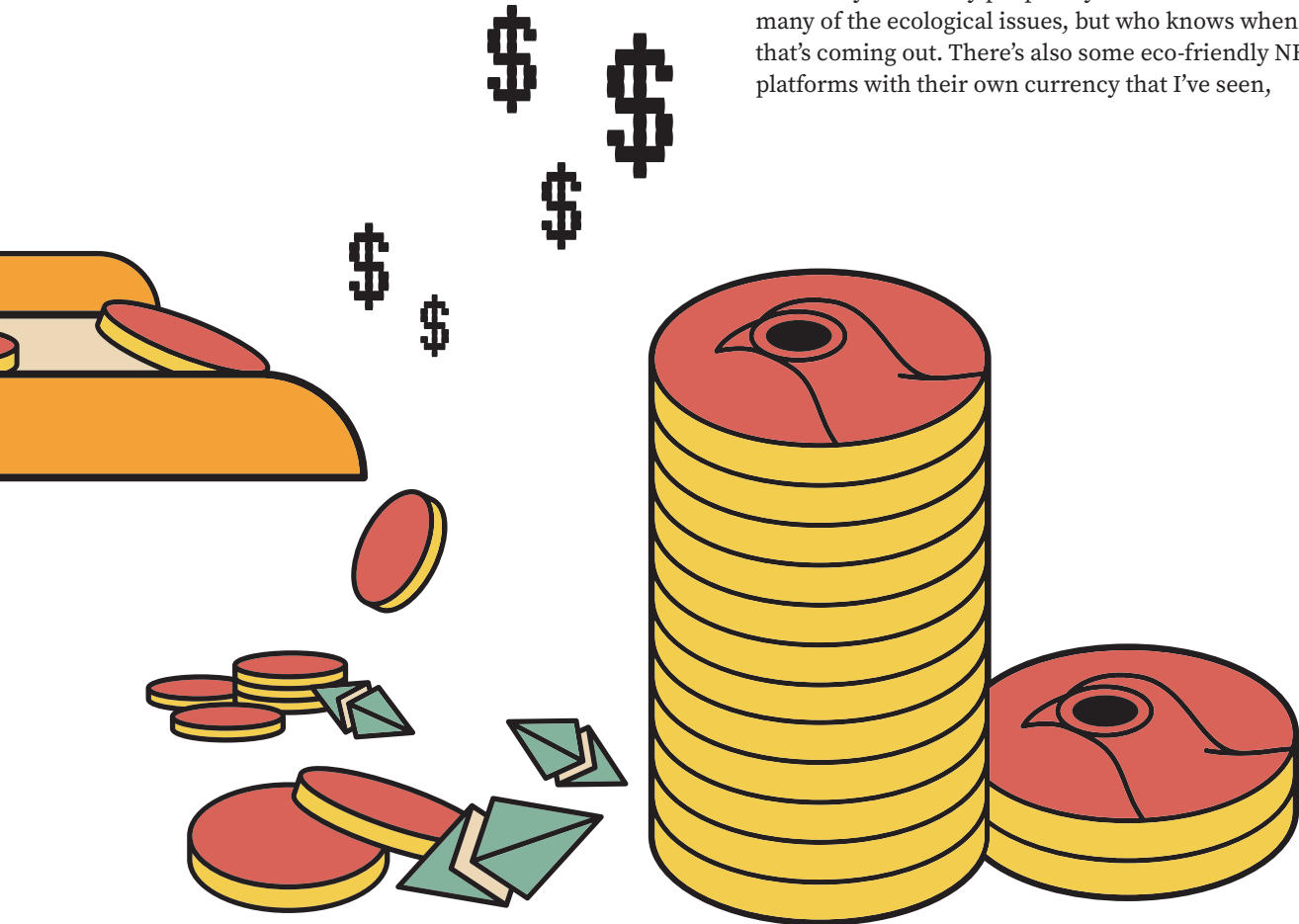
— Steven Hou (BFAW 2023)

Overflow

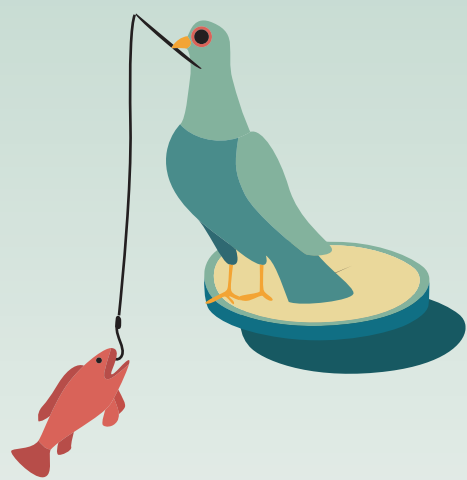
A common sentiment amongst Generation Z is about the obscurity of cryptoart. This is understandable, considering its newness. Recent exposure to cryptoart might be limited to its sensationalization by big media outlets or social media posts. This piece aims to provide insight into the world of cryptoart through New Media academics and artists, although the only extensive considerations I could find surrounding this phenomenon have been raised by white professionals. Perhaps this is why the explicit mention of race is largely absent from this official discourse, though many on social media have expressed distaste for cryptoart’s overwhelming rich-white-male-centricity which only mimics the existing art market.

Gen Z will experience the ecological and social effects of cryptoart. Because of this, it is imperative that we analyze and discuss its potential consequences. Hopefully, this piece can act as a starting point.

Monica Gong (BAVCS 2023) is an amateur student, professional shitposter, and lover of all things internet. You can find her and her puppy, Meelo, on any dating app if you look hard enough.



While cryptoart still allows the digital image to be downloaded and shared, it also attempts to reconcile the question of ownership in cyberspace.



No TikToker Is An Island

A look at the creators on TikTok making a difference for mental health around the world.

by Ishani Syngal

“I’m ready if you are!” my new therapist enthusiastically greets me. Four years and four months ago: That was the day I was diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I was a sophomore at NYU. Coming from a family with two immigrant parents from India, balancing living a hyphenated identity (Indian-American), and always having been praised for being “the mature one,” in hindsight this was not a surprise.

I can firmly say now that those diagnoses changed my life. I started going to therapy weekly, took my antidepressants daily (tasks that are still challenging), and worked on unlearning the stigma around mental health that had been drilled into me by my culture and the hush-hush nature of the topic among my peers.

“Find your communities,” my therapist had said. “Find your communities.”

Fast-forward four years. It’s 2021, and while mental health awareness has increased, the stigma still remains, especially on college campuses. bell hooks writes of building a “love ethic,” in which love is defined as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” With the pandemic still ongoing, it’s easy to wonder: Is anyone practicing this anymore?

After talking one night with a friend, she convinced me to give TikTok a chance.

I was skeptical, but I downloaded TikTok anyway — and delightfully discovered I had been wrong. I found many accounts that advocated for self-love,

mental wellbeing, and connection. I reached out to three of these TikTokers to share their thoughts on what it’s like to create a space for open, educational conversation.

@theproductivitycoach, Mackenzie Sweeney

Sweeney heard about TikTok through her 13-year-old daughter and uploaded her first video in July 2020, about how the brain only has 3 hours and 53 minutes of focus in a day.

“As a productivity coach — people go to TikTok to procrastinate. I wanted to support people in their productivity journey, and it was such a fun and easy mechanism.”

Now, with over 492,000 followers, Sweeney explains, “I was literally knocked into productivity.” Seven years ago, Sweeney was struck by a car walking across the street that left her with a traumatic brain injury. “Seven years and a whole lot of healing, therapy, research, education, and practice — I now teach others to be so in control of their brains that they get everything they want, starting with mastering their time and energy by combining neuroscience, therapeutic techniques, biology, psychology, and physiology when talking about productivity.”

Sweeney’s most noteworthy videos are “The Ideal Day Series,” in which she focuses on the

neuroscience of the rhythms and currents of the brain through episodes featuring different aspects of “the ideal day.” These episodes also respond to specific questions in her comments or in her DMs.

“My favorite part of this work is witnessing or hearing someone’s breakthrough. A simple tool or deep neurolinguistic programming work — seeing how it has created a course correction in someone’s path is fuel to my fire.”

@jakegoodman.med, Jake Goodman

An incoming Psychiatry Resident Physician, Jake Goodman is using his platform to upload content that centers the importance of mental health. With 912,000 followers and growing, Goodman’s TikTok originally tracked his journey to medical school, provided tips for pre-med students, and made content about depression, anxiety, and how to seek help.

He had always wanted to be a doctor, and when one of his fraternity brothers passed away from suicide in college, he became more determined to pursue medicine in mental health.

“I really saw the damage untreated mental health can have.”

The first time around, Goodman was rejected from every medical school he applied to. In the midst of reapplying, he worked many jobs, including driving for Uber, and began volunteering at the University of Georgia to offer advice to pre-med students. The sessions started increasing in student turnout and



need, so he started traveling around to other colleges. Goodman also used Instagram to share educational posts, but found TikTok right before the pandemic began.

Goodman went viral pretty quickly. The video was titled “What getting into medical school actually looks like.”

After gaining followers overnight, Goodman chose to start making videos advocating for mental wellbeing. He is most popularly known for creating a virtual FaceTime video.

“The purpose of these FaceTime calls is to simulate a real call in order to help people feel more comfortable and safe in uncomfortable situations such as a bad first date, or walking home alone at night,” he told me. “These videos have been viewed over 100 millions times in the last few months.”

Moving forward, Goodman wants to move into policy and advocate for mental health education, especially with college students. “What I want to do with this platform is I want to be at the table when mental health policies get enacted and bills get proposed. ... I am motivated by the people that I reach and help. I get DMs everyday and emails everyday from people, that they’ve been having suicidal thoughts, or are in a depressive state, but when they’re on my

account they feel less alone, more empowered ... that sense of community and empowerment is what motivates me.”

@mdmotivator, Zachery Dereniowski
Now with 1.5 million followers and growing, Dereniowski uses his story to talk about mental health, common misconceptions about the way depression and anxiety are experienced, and why it’s important to get help. His most famous videos feature him running through the city with red block text at the top of the screen,

“I am motivated by the people that I reach and help. I get DMs and emails every day from people that my TikToks gave them the push to go to therapy for the first time.”

exploring some aspect of mental health, like “6 signs you’re beginning to heal.” With music and voiceover, Dereniowski addresses the things that are silenced when it comes to mental health, like “Toxic is Toxic: Do YOU Agree?” which addresses unhealthy family dynamics.

Originally from Canada, he failed out of college at 18. “I was really at an all-time low in my own personal life, on top of my academic life,” he told me.

Over the next seven years Dereniowski did everything he could academically to become a competitive applicant for medical schools, and realized he had a story he wanted to share. He started an Instagram account and posted his story “in hopes that maybe I’d reach that one person” who needed it. And there was that one person — this person opened up and shared his struggles with

Dereniowski, thanking him for speaking up.

“He was really real,” Dereniowski told me.

After that, Dereniowski held an Instagram Live every night for three months with medical students, residents, and doctors around the world. The mentee/mentor relationship was something that inspired Dereniowski to encourage those who were experienced, to share their struggles and how where they’d gotten to wasn’t a linear path.

Through this work he created this formula: vulnerability = relatability = empowerment. This was so powerful, he got invited to speak across North America to medical students and share his story.

In January 2020 he moved to Sydney, Australia to attend medical school, and the pandemic hit. He had ACL knee surgery, went through a breakup, still had medical school — and the weight of all that plus not being able to go home really hit him.

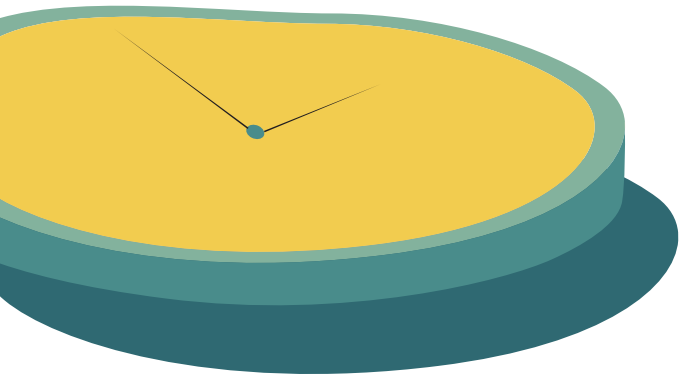
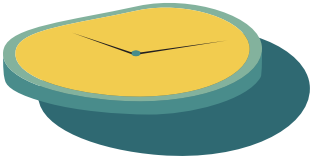
“I remember days I would go on runs in the city and cry because there were all these random strangers around me and no one would know me.” Dereniowski sought support and ultimately found himself on TikTok after Jake Goodman, a good friend, encouraged him to join the platform.

“The formula wasn’t just about academics, but also how I speak from a mental health perspective.”

Even though Goodman and Dereniowski have never met in person, they founded “Mental Health Movement” in October of 2020 as a clothing company on a mission to normalize conversations around mental health and break mental health stigma. Since launching, they have raised over \$2,000 for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention through a portion of clothing sales and philanthropic events. They have also started three \$1,000 scholarships in partnership with bold.org available to students in the U.S. who have battled mental illness.

Dereniowski believes vulnerability is about coming to terms with your true self, and how you never know who will become empowered by relating to your story.

TikTok communities like these three are changing the way we approach mental health conversations. All possess a determined awareness of the work that must continually be done to build communities that hold all the intimacies of grief and joy: two emotions on the same island, just on opposite sides. All are doing it out of a place of love — the kind of love that is embedded in the arteries of community, the kind of love that breathes life, the kind of love that proves the “love ethic” exists. Perhaps then it’s not crazy to think that TikTok has the power to become a radical empathy machine. Regardless, belonging is hard, and it is hard for everyone, but these three content creators are making it just a little easier.



Ishani Singh (MFA 2021) is fire on mountains as signal and welcome to come to dinner, have you eaten rice today? She is an emerging experimental artist and the Literary Editor for F News who currently lives in Chicago, IL, with her puppy Moo-Moo.

Dear Sports Fans: Let's Be Heard

It's time for a new era of the sports fan.

by **Katherine E. Pitré**

Uh-oh, the star player of your favorite team has said something racist, sexist, or homophobic. Now what?

I've written at length about how politics and sports have, historically, always intersected, and how important it is for athletes to use their voices in political spaces. But today, I'm not here to talk about athletes who use their platforms for social justice — I'm here to talk about the ones who don't.

Social media has allowed us to communicate with each other like never before. Apps like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and even Snapchat let us form those same emotional connections with athletes and sports teams as we do with our peers. As we follow their lives through our feeds, we feel like we get to know them on a personal level. And when

we assume that much, we feel betrayed when their views fail to align with our own.

So what happens when your favorite athlete becomes “problematic”?

We expect a lot from professional athletes. We idealize them, see ourselves in their success, and look to them for inspiration. They represent ideas outside of themselves — but should we separate an athlete's personhood from their playing ability?

This isn't a new question, but the widespread visibility of the Black Lives Matter movement and social media has changed the landscape of athletes and social justice. How do we, as fans, address issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia?

Part of that anticipatory response in addressing systemic oppression in the sports industry comes from how we react and respond to athletes' statements. The players are part of the playing culture — and while not every athlete thinks the same way, of course, how a league or a team responds to a player's controversial or inflammatory opinion is a good litmus test for determining a sport's culture.

We can think of how Colin Kaepernick was ostracized from the NFL, or the way the USWNT's fight for equal pay has been regarded, or even how issues of domestic violence within the NFL and NHL have been handled ... and sometimes not.

It's easy to say “no thanks” out loud, but what does that look like in practice?

For myself, I can make small actions against an individual player who says or acts with bigotry and prejudice. I can choose not to forgive someone for refusing to acknowledge the dignity and personhood of

others, and I certainly will not pretend that an athlete hasn't subjugated someone else's existence by exhibiting dehumanizing behaviour.

When I think of my favorite sports team, individual athletes aren't the first thing that comes to mind — it's the identity of the team that I think of and how that identity makes me feel. That's where it gets complicated. Notice how I said “my” team. We speak about our favorite players and teams in terms of possession. We have a relationship with whatever identity we attach to them, and that sort of emotional investment means that it hurts when a player's actions demonstrate that they just aren't who we thought they were.

I love sports and I love my sports teams. But if this past year has taught me anything, it's taught me this: It's okay to love your team, as long as you acknowledge the issues within it.

At the end of the day, if an athlete makes problematic remarks and behaviors, then you *should* be upset. Be angry. As we transition out of the Trump era, no longer can someone pretend that systemic oppression and entrenched, internalized hate in American culture and politics don't exist, or those same attitudes, behaviors and values aren't perpetuated in sports culture, sports media, and yes, athlete's actions.

It's time for a new era of the sports fan. As fans, as consumers, we're in the unique position of being able to work towards changing our teams and sports community for the better. We can't change rosters and we aren't in the executive suites, but we can call out problematic behavior when we see it. Use social media to our advantage. We can be as visible as we want. We can create more productive, informed conversations about the existence and perpetuations of systemic oppression in our sports. We can direct dialogue about our reality, and what we want our future to be, with more than just our wallets — with our words.

It's OK To Run the Dishwasher Twice

How the pandemic made me re-examine the rules that dictate my life.

by Erica Franchino

This semester I have been struggling with my physical health, which has made mental health much harder to manage. Recently, I stumbled on a post that changed my thinking. It was about a patient whose depression was preventing them from completing everyday tasks. Everything seemed overwhelming and impossible, even something as simple as washing the dishes. Their therapist's advice? "Run the dishwasher twice."

I've had the phrase "run the dishwasher twice" on repeat in my head for over a month now, and it's made me realize yet another way in which I need to rewire my brain and re-learn what I previously accepted. When I first read this, I couldn't get over the thought of running a dishwasher twice. "That's just ... illegal," I thought to myself. The dishwasher is the control in the dishwashing process, and based on the dishwasher, it is my responsibility to adapt so that the dishes are washed.

But wait — that's not logical!

So if a dishwasher doesn't logically need to run only once, what does that mean for sitting in the shower, or waiting for a taxi with a specific advertisement? What if I didn't swerve to let people keep walking straight, or what if I actually hibernated like I've always wanted to? Suddenly, I was questioning everything. I was able to articulate that many of my preconceived notions and their justifications are no more complex or nuanced than "because that's how it is."

One meaningful application of this questioning of rules that just "are" has been my battle and ultimate divorce from the phrase "You're welcome." There are many issues with the English language, but why is "You're welcome" the most accepted response to "Thank you?" What does it even mean to welcome someone?



I found that if I must welcome someone after being thanked by them, I had been exhibiting hospitable, courteous, and cordial behavior that I performed with pleasure. This is not a logical statement, because I do many things worth thanking not out of hospitality, courtesy, or cordiality, and very rarely out of pleasure. If someone drops something and I pick it up, I do so because I believe that person deserves their belonging back. I don't enjoy bending down, nor bringing attention to myself as I wiggle and squirm to retrieve the belonging. Conversely, even if I didn't want to be courteous or hospitable to someone, I would still help them out. I realized that it is a value of mine to try hard to bring comfort to others, and I believe everyone deserves what I am able to give. So for myself, and I believe for many others, "You're welcome" is not a logical statement. I instead say "of course" after being thanked, because I believe what I do for others is at its most reduced form simply the right thing to do.

Of course I will listen to you when you need it (even if I've heard it a million times).

Of course I believe you are doing the best you can do with what you've got (even if you don't have much).

Of course I will accept you for who you are (even if inconvenient).

Of course I will help you (even when it is hard).

Of course. (Always.)

I've found a clearer and more logical way of framing the legitimacy of rules — not by "why it is the way it is," but based on "why it is the right thing to do." It is not wrong to run a dishwasher twice, same as it is not wrong to speak outside of programmed responses like "you're welcome." The sense in which two comparable things are different is the key to understanding the nuances that surround us.

Too many concepts exist legitimately in America only because they are legitimated by consensus. In fact, it is this supposition with lack of regards to what is the *right* thing to do that is undoubtedly responsible for most of the massive scale suffering that takes place here. "Because that's the way it's always been" and logic are so far from one another that mixing them together is like mixing oil with vinegar.





Tales from the Exercise Bed

How a disability bed baptized my imagination and made me into a storyteller.

by Ben Kim Paplham

I have a physical disability that keeps me bow-legged and constantly fighting my knees' natural instinct to flex inward. On the bright side, I probably do a thousand (unintentional) squats a day, which is why my calves are so thick.

Growing up, though, there was a lot of concern that my leg muscles would atrophy if I didn't have orthopedics and a daily exercise routine to keep the tendons stretched out.

That's where the idea of the exercise bed was introduced. I think there's a more technical term for it, but exercise bed is what my 4-year-old self called it, and who am I to deny my younger self as the main authority on the subject?

I don't remember exactly when I transitioned from this "exercise bed" to my later nighttime ritual of sleeping in a prosthetic device with an equally disconcerting name — the "mother's hug," which was basically a hard plastic corset that compressed my pelvis and upper legs into a knee extension — but I know it must have been before I was 9, because "Chasing Vermeer" came out in 2004 and the Percy Jackson explosion didn't happen until 2005. So I'm putting the timeline at roughly 4–5 years, between the ages of 3 and 8.

It was basically a medieval torture device, but padded. The exercise bed sloped down at a 45-degree

angle and shoes connected to Velcro straps hung from the top of the bed. And whenever I was placed in the exercise bed, in the shoes, my head would be stuck in perpetual motion toward the foot of the bed and gravity would do the rest.

This gave me a lot of free time as a kid. There isn't a whole lot I could do during these 1-2 hours in the slammer (the baby crib railings framing the bed didn't exactly help to dissuade me of this impression), but sleep or read or imagine. And I kinda wish I had slept more, because I'm currently working on this theory that sleep works like a savings bond — the time you spend sleeping as an early adolescent gets placed in the emergency brain reserves for adulthood.

But I spent most of my time reading.

There was "The Hobbit," The Chronicles of Narnia, "Inkheart," "Artemis Fowl," "Redwall," Calvin and Hobbes, "Chicka Chicka Boom Boom," Mrs. Piggle Wiggle, Warriors, The Secrets of Droon, "Eragon," Guardians of Ga'Hoole, The Ranger's Apprentice, Peanuts comics, Andrew Clements, Santa Paws, "Hatchet," Harry Potter, The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, Encyclopedia Brown, Wayside School, Enchanted Forest

C

Chronicles, “Everest,” “Pirates,” A Series of Unfortunate Events, The Magic Tree House, “Ruby Holler,” Avalon, I Spy, The Boxcar Children, Little Critter Stories, The Magic School Bus, “Among the Hidden,” The Bailey School Kids, “Once Upon a Picnic,” Charlie Bone, The Spiderwick Chronicles, “The Rainbow Fish,” “The Dark at the Top of the Stairs,” “City of Ember,” Foxtrot, Berenstain Bears, Shel Silverstein, “Time Stops for No Mouse,” Keys to the Kingdom, Jigsaw Jones, Hank Zipzer, Bloodhounds Inc, Wishbone, Get Fuzzy, The Bartimaeus Sequence — and every now and then, my mother would throw in an illustrated children’s Bible to make sure I stayed cultured.

I learned how to tell stories during this relatively short period of my life.

I learned how to discover and conjure magic.

Much of my time was spent reading and rereading the same fantasy books. I knew the story and I knew the characters, but what kept me eternally entertained was my own imagination. And I would never simply pretend to be the main character, because then I didn’t have any say in how my role played out. The author had already decided that. So I started to build my own characters within these fantasy worlds. They would often be close family members or friends to the main character; for “Redwall,” I just made myself the brother of Matthias and took it from there. (I was also never very original with the names; it was almost always just Ben or some variation of that.) I would probably have to reread the book now to jar my memory on how this mouse named Ben helped defend Redwall Abbey from Cluny the Scourge, but I do know that it had to do with being a ranged archer and knife-thrower of some kind, who, at some point in a completely self-made chapter, snuck out of the Abbey to assassinate Cluny at his base camp. I always made a concerted effort to differentiate myself from the rest of the main characters — since Matthias’ weapons of choice are a sword and shield, obviously that meant I had to go in the opposite direction.

Now, of course I didn’t do this with every book I read during this time — it’d be very hard to plug oneself into the plot of “Chicka Chicka Boom Boom” without inventing a 27th letter of the alphabet. And somehow it never felt exactly right to do that with the children’s Bible my mom made me read. But as I grew slightly older, I became more and more selective of the stories that I would imagine myself in this way.

Books like “Charlie Bone” or “Artemis Fowl” were easier because of the inherent magical powers of the characters. There’d even be days when I wouldn’t read — I’d have a sheet of paper and I’d jot down plot ideas and character traits for my fictional characters inside ready-made fantasy universes. And for the longest time I didn’t tell anyone that this was a thing I did. When I was young, the idea of fanfiction or DnD or RPG wasn’t on my radar; it wasn’t as widely accepted as it is now, and so I kept this side of myself very private. The one time that this almost got revealed was when my sister accidentally stumbled upon my note sheet on “Warriors” in which I had given myself a character for each of the clans in the forest and had created this intricate network of how each of my cat characters lived their daily lives inside the ThunderClan or the ShadowClan. And out of a sense of deep embarrassment, when my sister asked me what this piece of paper was, I remember screaming, “It’s nothing!” and immediately tearing it up and throwing the scraps in the trash. It was very much a moment out of sketch comedy. Fortunately, most of the information (at the time; now ... not so much) existed inside my head.

It was basically a medieval torture device, but padded. The exercise bed sloped down at a 45-degree angle and shoes connected to Velcro straps hung from the top of the bed.

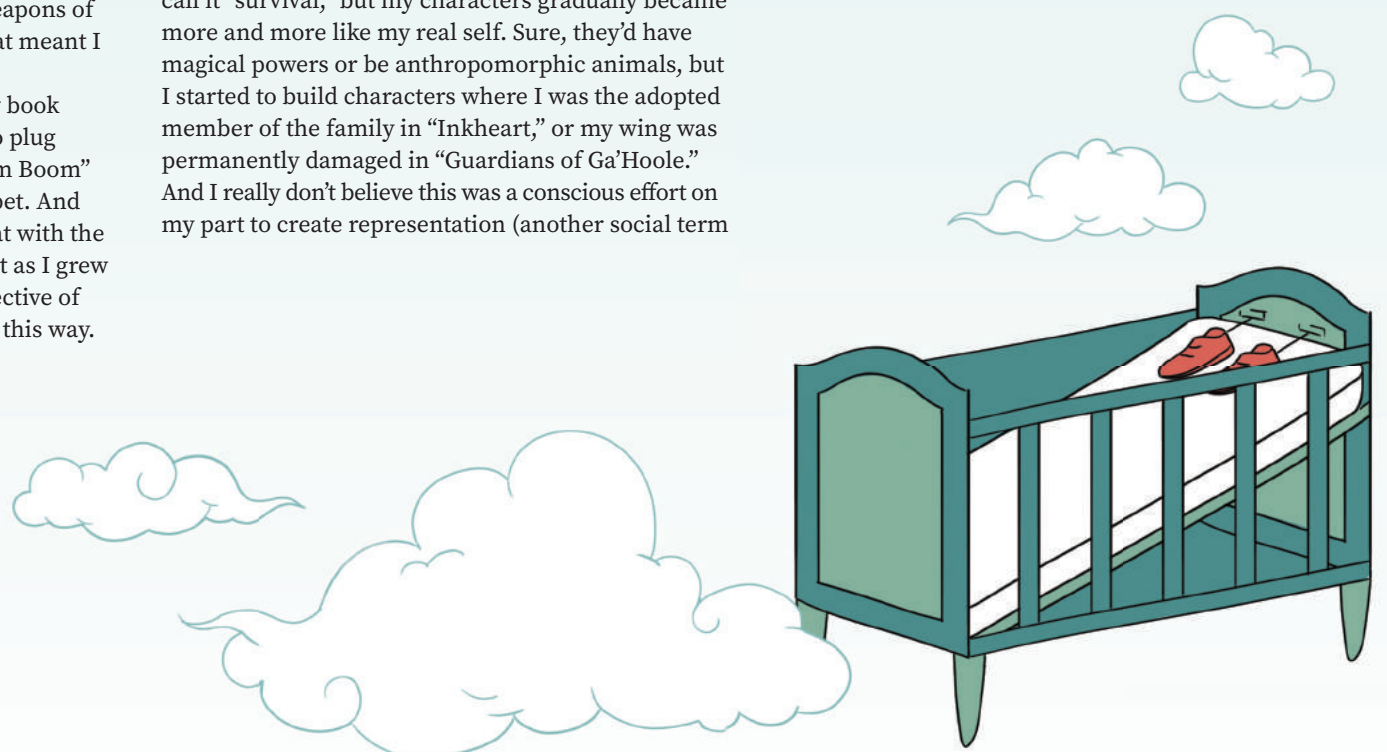
At a certain point, I think I also realized that part of the reason I did this sort of character invention with fantasy novels was because it was a form of identity actualization. The 6-year-old me might have called it “having fun” and literary critic me might call it “escapism” and my artspeak academic brain might call it “survival,” but my characters gradually became more and more like my real self. Sure, they’d have magical powers or be anthropomorphic animals, but I started to build characters where I was the adopted member of the family in “Inkheart,” or my wing was permanently damaged in “Guardians of Ga’Hoole.” And I really don’t believe this was a conscious effort on my part to create representation (another social term

that my younger self wouldn’t have had any concept of) where there was none, but rather a desire to put myself in worlds of magic and adventure.

The desire never went away. Even after I transitioned out of the exercise bed, I still did this. Obviously I did with series that continued on past 2003, like “Harry Potter” or the “Bartimaeus Sequence,” but then I started to branch out and even do this imagination exercise with movies and television shows that I fell in love with. I still do it. Recently, that’s been anime — “My Hero Academia” or “Haikyu!!”

What’s changed between then and now is that, now, I’m the writer of stories in which people may someday see themselves. I’m not strictly writing fantasy novels at the moment — ironically, a lot of my time at SAIC has moved me into the realm of creative nonfiction and memoir, or, in other words, writing about the things that I *didn’t* like thinking about as that kid in the exercise bed — but I have a fantasy series I’m in the midst of planning. I play DnD. I watch a lot of animated series and movies, and I’m finding my sense of humor is definitely fixed in the abnormal.

I guess this is all to say that it’s little wonder I became a writer. The relatively short period of my life spent in that exercise bed became instrumental to how I now view the purpose of storytelling. And I think that’s to find the magic in the mundane. I’m a strange hybrid of a poet, playwright, photographer, and graphic designer, and I find that the stories I’m most interested in telling are the absurdities, both the unhappy and the joyful, that can happen in everyday interactions ... The magic in laughter, companionship, or soaking in the beauty of a picturesque landscape. And then also creating a world that makes these things possible for everyone, and not just yourself. What I think I learned most from reading fantasy and imagining myself in fantasy worlds, is the sense of compassion and justice that can only be found in the type of stories where myth and monster meet, where life is so strange that the everyday moments between fighting for the future of the world are sometimes more satisfying to imagine than the adventure itself, and where escaping the world is sometimes the only way to find your place in it.



Ben Kim Paplham (MFAW 2021) is the Entertainment Editor for F. They are a poetic playwright, a DnD kobold, and the best 3-point shooter in NBA2K21.

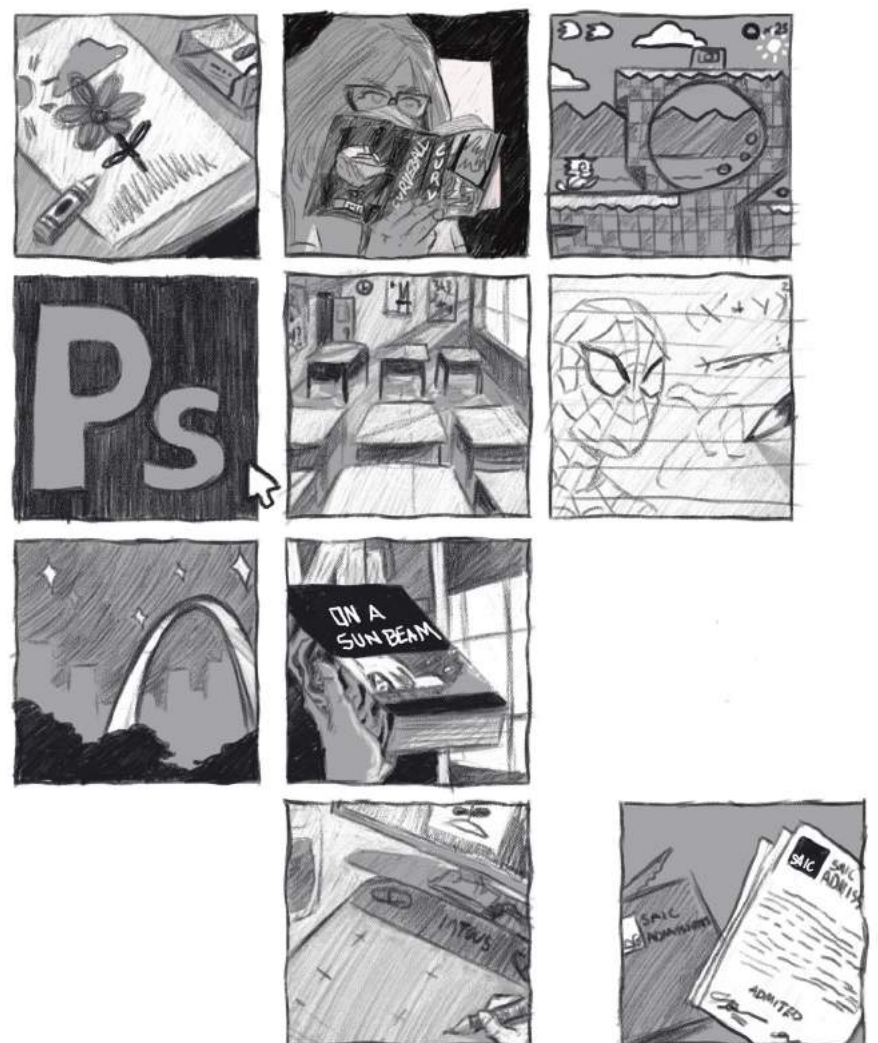
The word "comics" is rendered in a playful, bubbly font. Each letter is a thick, rounded shape with a 3D effect. The colors are: 'c' is red, 'o' is orange, 'm' is yellow, 'i' is light orange with a dot, 'c' is green, and 's' is dark green. Small white stars are scattered on the surface of each letter.



(ABOVE) multilocation: moonlight tea by &z. (Zeinab Ajasa)



(ABOVE) *Bad Parable: So Last Year* by **Teddie Bernard**



MEMORY

(ABOVE) Memory by **Chayse Walker**



(ABOVE) INCONSISTENT: Birthday by **Wayne Degen**

"I really miss movie theaters."
— Sydney Gray (BFA FVNMA 2022)

"Go to restaurants, and eat, and act up. Yup. Maybe go clubbing."
— T'aira Alford (BFA PTDW 2024)

"I always just have this vision of sitting in a really crowded restaurant, and it just seems so foreign now. I'm excited for that kind of like crowded space experience again."
— Timmy Chamblee (BFA Fashion 2024)

"Going back to the Newberry Library or Ryerson. I miss the smell of books, and the texture of books... like smelling books without the mask barrier. Books, and the coffee the reference desk person has wafting through the room."

— Ye-Bhit Hong
(BA ARTH 2022)

"I want to go to Trader Joe's and buy peach moscato. I just wanna go on a picnic and drink a freakin' peach moscato."

— Hanna Field (BFA FVNMA/
Art Therapy 2021)

"Just seeing friends... seeing my family again."
— Larissa Borteh (Adj. Asst. Professor, PTDW)

"I miss going to Mahjong parlors."
— Shannon Lin (BFA FVNMA 2021)

"I can go back to my hometown without having to quarantine for a month in a hotel."
— Getong Wang

WHEN
THIS
IS
OVER

...

what are you
looking
forward to
?

"I honestly don't know. I feel like this is just my life now."
— Nick Turgeon (BFA 2024)

"Really really bad airplane coffee, and the sense of being drowsy while descending into a new city. I cannot wait to feel a stranger's arm on mine, even if they're an unpleasant stranger."
— Brontë Mansfield (Lecturer, NAJ)

"I'm looking forward to the kind of information that comes through from the half of our faces that are covered up. Just the way we emote with our mouths. I'm excited for those things to come back into our lexicon."

— Troy Briggs (Adj. Asst. Professor, CP)

"Being able to drink in public, because I turned 21 in quarantine and I haven't been able to do that yet."
— Dana Langston (BFA FVNMA/PTDW 2021)

"Having a job again. Literally just any job. Income is so sexy. I love having money and not being broke."
— Paul Marx (BFA 2024)