ENVELOPE

DASHEW CENTER'S ART AND WRITING MAGAZINE



COVER BY MIHIKA BANERJEE (PHOTOGRAPHER) & GUNINDU ABEYSEKERA (DANCER)

2026 Edition

THIS YEAR'S THEME:
FINDING BELONGING

UCLA Dashew Center

ABOUT ENVELOPE

From the Editorial Team

Dear UCLA Community Members,
This is our eighth edition of **Envelope**, **Dashew Center's Art & Writing Magazine**. When you open Envelope, you find poems, creative fiction, digital art, drawings, paintings, photography, and more. We always intend for this magazine to provide a platform for international students, scholars, and staff, both at UCLA and UCLA Extension, to share their unique perspectives with the extended campus community and beyond.

For this issue, participants were asked to submit art & writing related to the theme "**Finding Belonging**." There are pieces that highlight belonging through artists embracing their intersectional identities, pieces that depict belonging as an ongoing journey, and pieces that reflect on belonging as connection to others, most of all. As you flip through the pages of Envelope, you'll find an explanation from each creator that shares their intentions behind their art.

We hope you enjoy taking in the creative works from this talented community. This year's editorial team included Andrea Giraldo, Caroline Thrailkill, Hillary Thomas, Jamie Hayduk-Jones, Elisiana Tracey, and Jenna Bustamante

CONTENT ADVISORY

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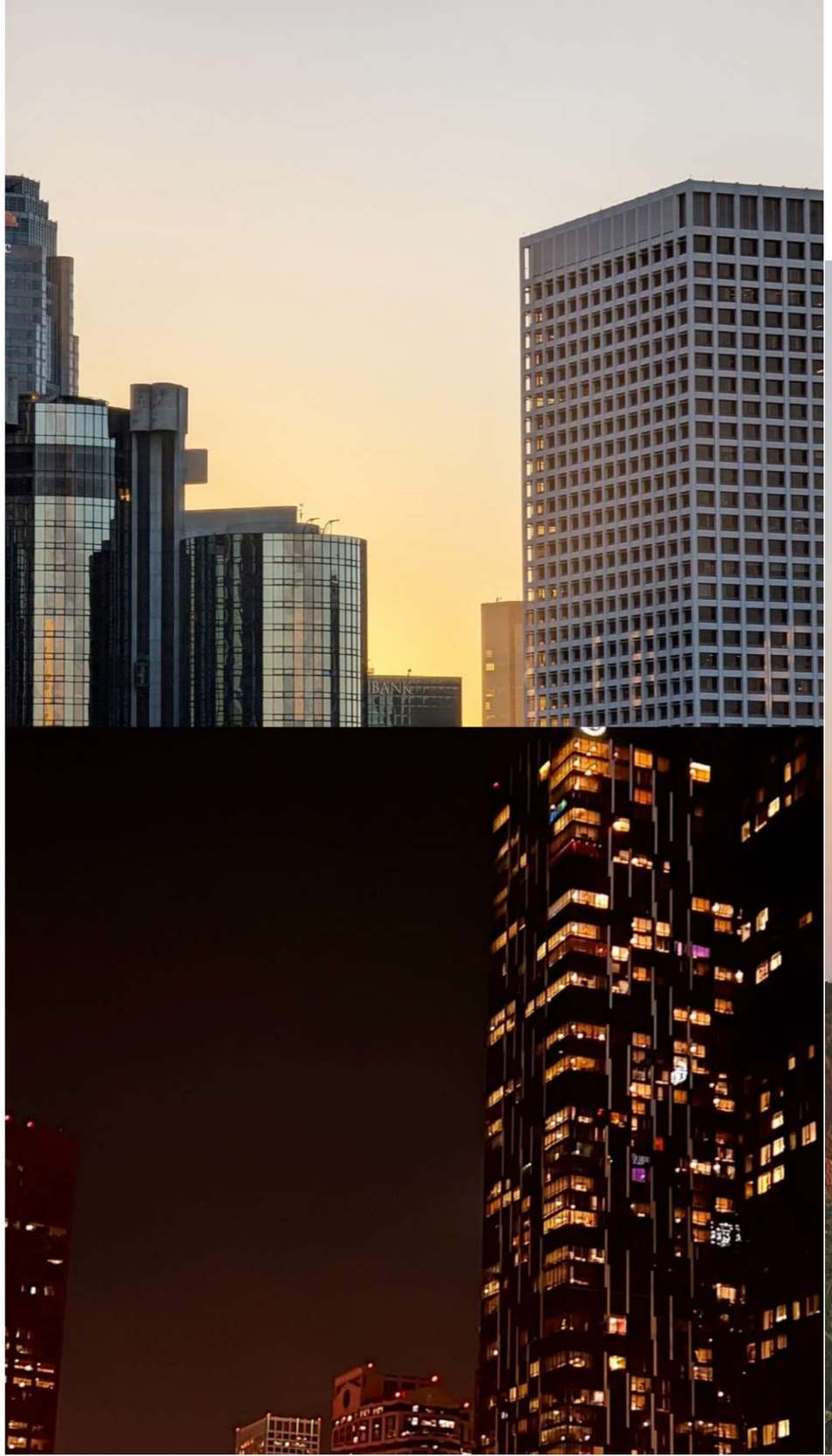
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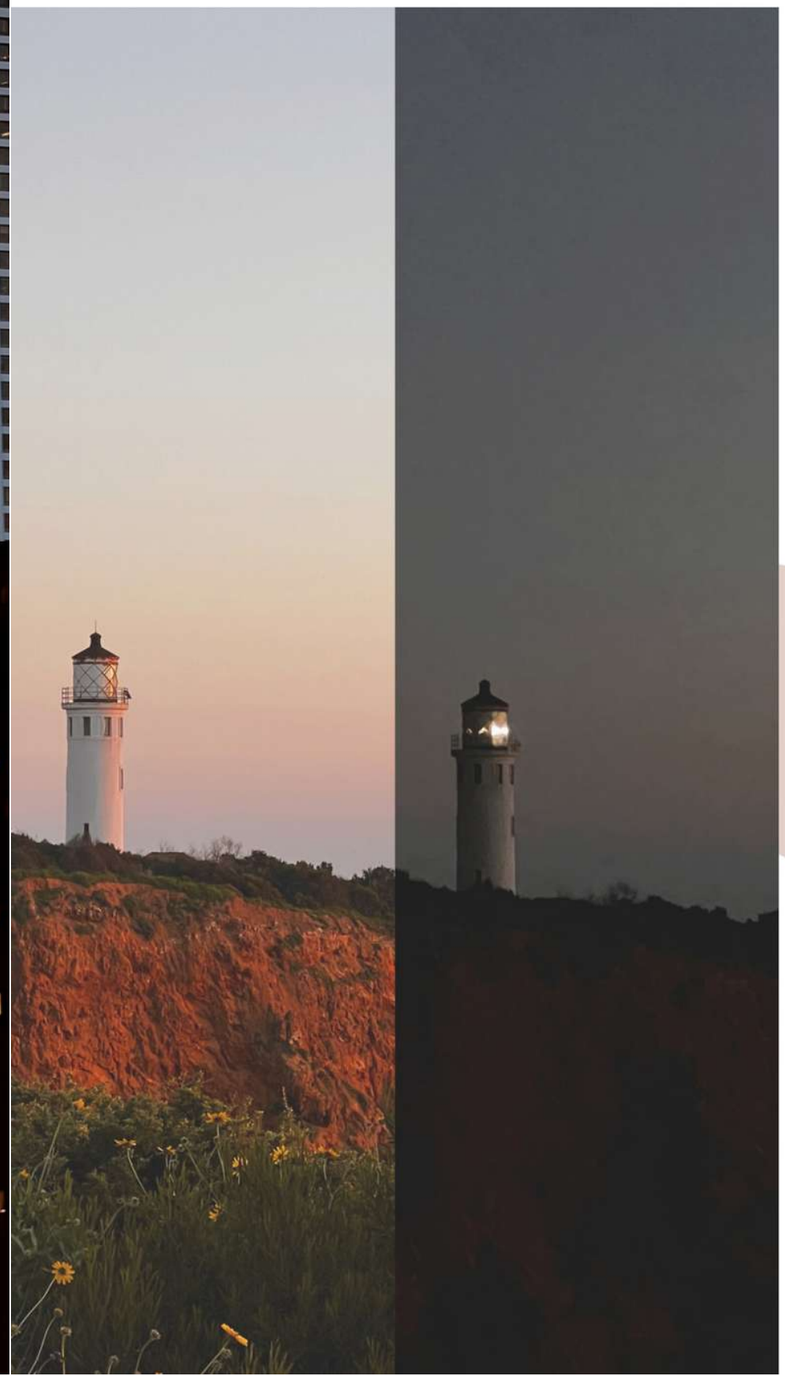
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AT THE EDGE OF LIGHT

BY VARTIKA SHARMA





"At the Edge of Light explores the journey of finding belonging through the space between light and darkness, certainty and uncertainty. The horizon symbolizes both distance and possibility, reflecting the search for a place in the world and within oneself. Rather than portraying belonging as a destination, the artwork suggests that it is found in moments of self-acceptance and growth. At its core, the artwork captures the realization that belonging is not about where we are, but about feeling at home within our own evolving horizon."

SAME WATER

BY JENNA COLE



“In the tidepools, all types of life belong and depend on one another. This piece explores the tiny pieces of life that create a beautifully balanced ecosystem tucked into the protected shoreline.”

DO I HAVE TO BELONG

BY MADIHA CHOWDHURY

A version of me that only exists in London. It took sometime to become that version when seventeen year old me left Dhaka with my mother for my university. She stayed with me for a month. My first dorm was International Hall, a hall with almost 1500 students from all over the world and from different university colleges in London. The quaint atmosphere, small bookstores, cobble street, hue of the lamps, smell of the old books lingering in Coram street and the Georgian architecture just made me start belonging there in a way even my home Dhaka could not do it. I discovered myself in a way that I could be happy, I felt sad, I cried for the first few months and every trip to Dhaka would be very sad when I was leaving it, but somewhere down the line, London just helped me start looking forward to it. I loved being on my own in London, that was unusual to me, someone who couldn't function without a community.

“Moved to LA from London. Struggling to find a version of me that belongs to LA. In a dilemma of letting go of who I was in London. Struggling through the journey of again trying to see if I belong after going through that journey for a decade and eventually seeing progress. My piece revolves around the journey of my belonging to LA amidst UCLA community. Trying to get my surroundings to help me as much as possible.”



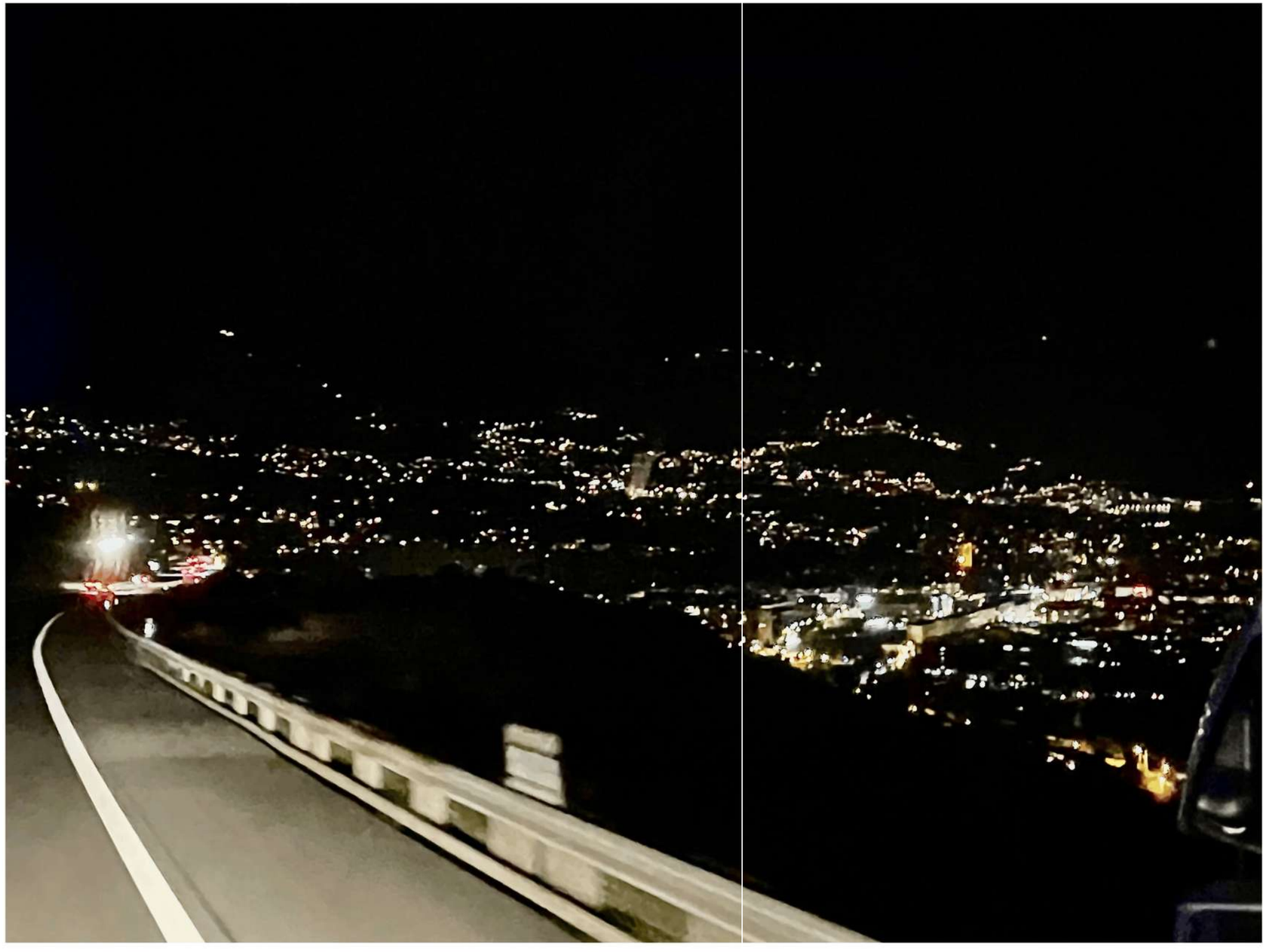
I enjoyed holding a coffee cup and roaming around the streets of Bloomsbury or taking a train to countryside just thinking how centuries ago, mostly 16th century came to my mind, someone was walking down this street of London.

I did not think this was weird or an unusual thing to like or something I will miss when I was not able to do it anymore. After a decade of achieving this sense of belonging and comfort, I moved to LA. Still looking to belong here. The black lamps on the streets of Westwood and mainly around UCLA campus, the pret a manger that just opened when I came in to LA in 2024 and the Bloomsbury WC1 poster in the Japanese restaurant in Broxton Avenue felt familiar yet so different. As if it was hinting something. As if it was there for me only. Pret a manger closed permanently after 2 years. I still keep on looking for connections with London to belong here. I do not know what defines belonging, but this feeling was there when I moved to London before. I just did not realize when it went away to look for belonging. I am a post doc, and it is not easy to make new friends here unlike in London. I enjoy and look forward to walking home from my work to my apartment in Westwood. I am kind of doubting whether I will again start belonging to London now if I go back so I guess that's a start you could say or progress to my journey of belonging.



CITY OF LIGHTS

BY YUNYI QIAN



“The city glows with countless lights, yet not one of them belongs to me. Finding belonging is a journey rather than a destination. Yet it is precisely because I do not belong to any one place at the present that I have the freedom to choose where I belong, and I am still on that path. With each step forward, I move closer to find my own light.”

PATH TO BELONGING

BY YUNYI QIAN

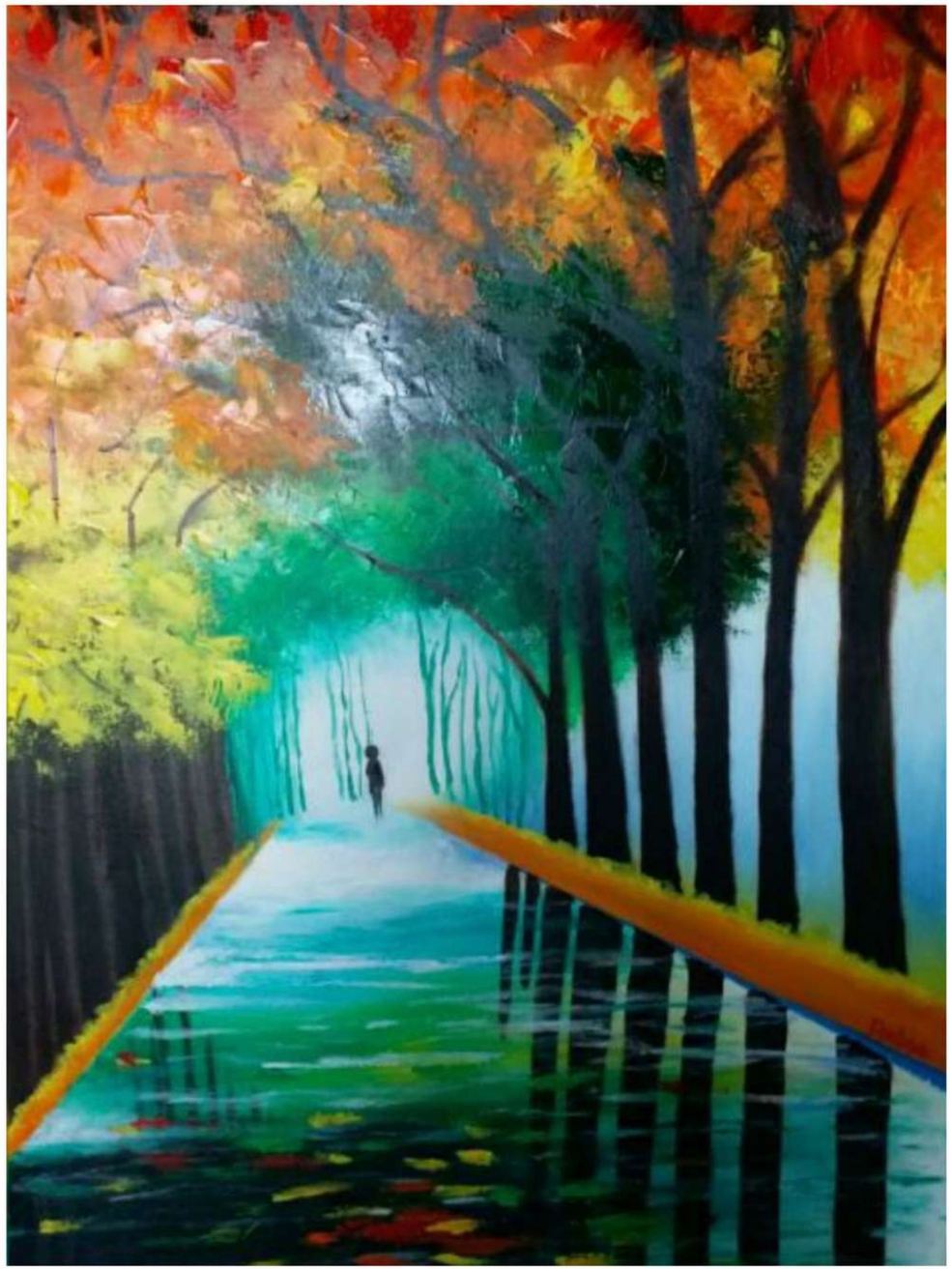
> “I belong nowhere, yet I have the freedom to choose where I belong. I am on the path.”



WALK UNTIL IT FEELS LIKE MINE

BY SREEDEEKSHITA GORUGANTU VENKATA

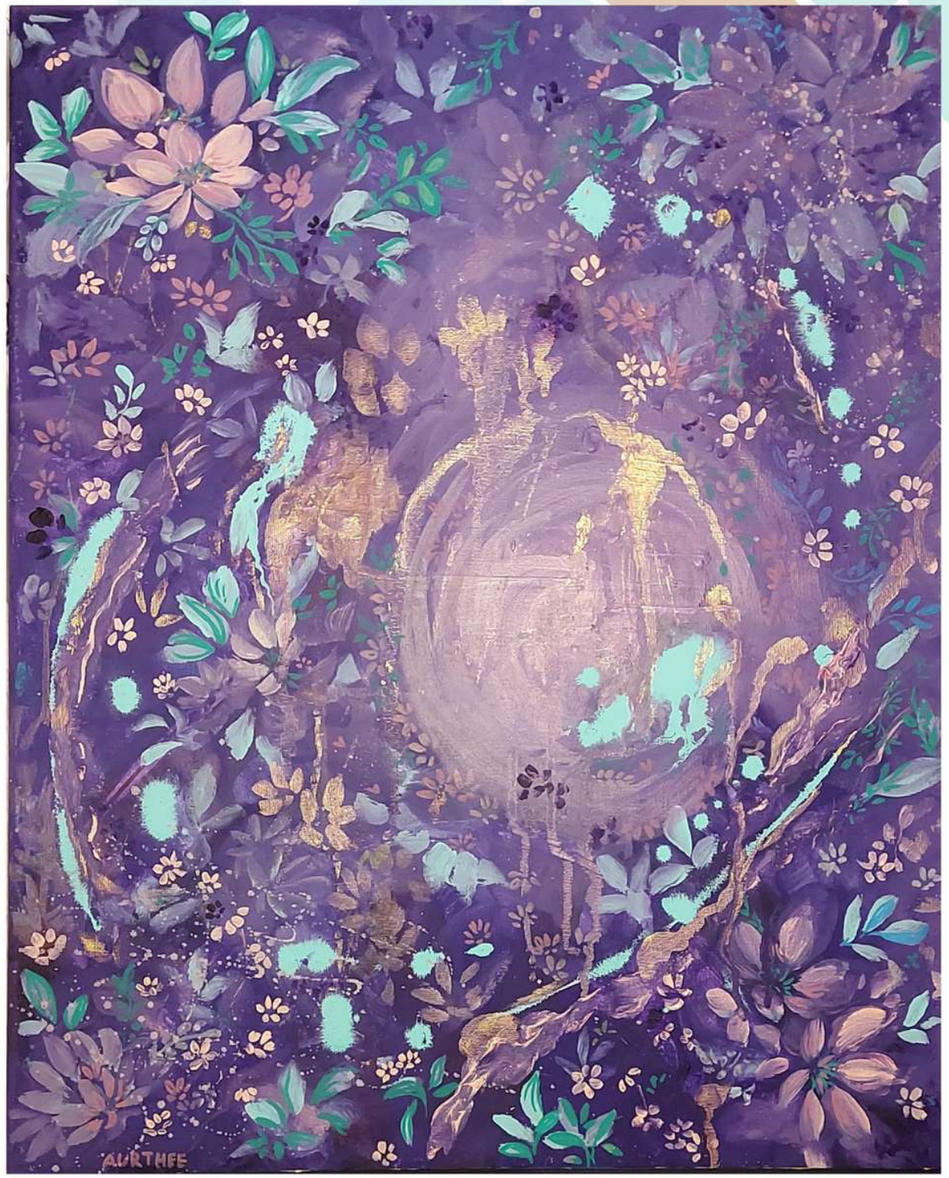
“This piece reflects my belief that belonging is something we move toward, not something that arrives on its own. The figure walks through an unfamiliar landscape, where colors shift and blend, suggesting uncertainty but also possibility. There is no clear destination or defined end point. I wanted to express that connection requires stepping out, moving through spaces that may not immediately feel like yours, and allowing yourself to grow within them— represented through the growing trees.”



ESCAPISM

BY ANIKA TABASSUM

“I painted this late one night during winter holidays in 2025. I have not been home in over 3 years, and it was my first holiday completely by myself. The silence became suffocating and I just decided to pick up my brushes. No thoughts about composition or color pallette. I imagined a magical portal in a mystical forest that will transport me to a simpler and happier time. This became one of my favorite paintings I have ever created.”



SWIM

BY XIANGZI (ZORA) XU



“Swim is a piece that explores the feeling of drifting between memory, emotion, and identity. Inspired by moments of isolation and quiet reflection, the work captures the sensation of moving through uncertainty while still searching for light and direction beneath the surface.”

DETECTIVE OTTER

BY XIANGZI (ZORA) XU

“Detective Otter is an original character I created during a time when I felt uncertain about my future, yet deeply passionate about art. Because of that, he has always been on a journey of exploration and moving forward.”

“Even though I’ve changed a lot since creating him, Detective Otter has remained a reflection of my curiosity, persistence, and desire to keep searching for meaning through creativity. Through every version of him, he continues to represent growth, resilience, and the comfort of continuing onward even without having all the answers.”



LISTEN TO YOUR HEART

BY CONRAD HABERLAND



> Listen to Your Heart reflects the loneliness and wonder of arriving in Los Angeles and searching for belonging.

PARALLEL PATHS

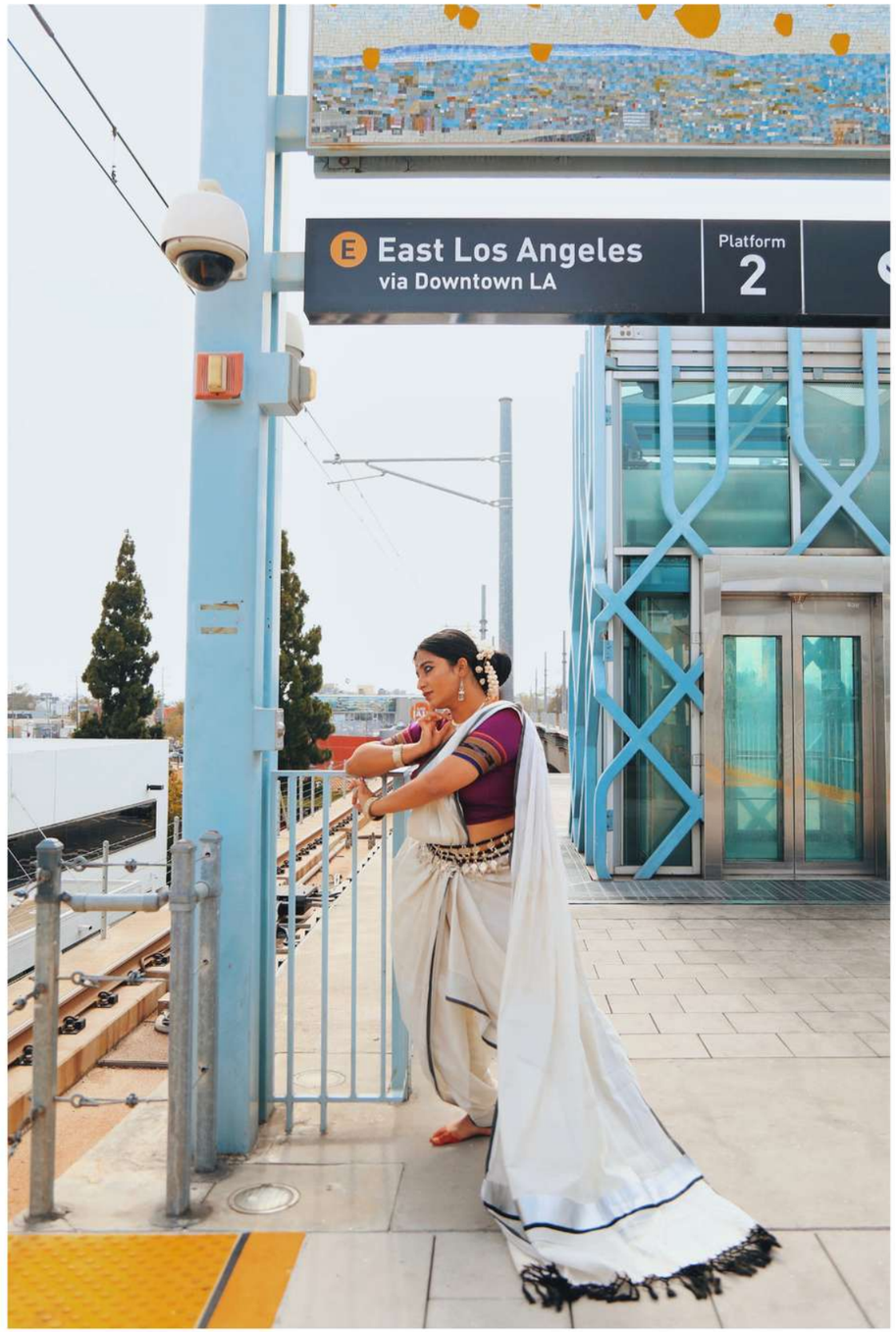
BY RAQIB AHMAD DAR



"Finding belonging is often found in the people who walk beside us. This piece captures two individuals moving across the Santa monica beach, their forms blurred and overlapping. This visual representation symbolizes how our individual stories merge with the community we find at new places and spaces. To me belonging isn't about being perfectly 'clear' or fitting in instantly; it's about the movement and the shared rhythm of navigating a new culture and solidarity together. The ocean serves as a reminder of the distance we have traveled and the new horizons we are now exploring."

ALL ABOARD

BY MIHIKA BANERJEE & GUNINDU ABEYSEKERA



"All Aboard, An Odissi dancer journeys to Los Angeles to pursue research, her anklets ferrying stories from Kolkata into the hard, humming rails of a new metro-polity. From the east of the East to the far west of West, she meets a Sri Lankan-American friend/photographer, who imagines diaspora as an ever-lengthening itinerary—forever departing, forever arriving, in transit. Together, they frame a city where the choreography of everyday commuters brushes against mudras of another coastline. Belonging appears as fragrant, fugitive hybridity—(un)settling at each junction."

GUEST

BY FARIN LAU

Her makeup wipes are still
on my shelf.
Relics of a version of me
that believed in return.

My heart is over the seas—
far enough to sound deliberate
when I say it out loud.

The metro comes and goes
like it always has.
Same stops.
Same announcements.
Same faces committed
to not looking.

No one sees me.
Which feels tragic
until I remember
the city's policy.

This is my home
and I walk through it
like a guest
who memorized the furniture,
who justifies staying.

Familiarity feels suspicious now.
Strangeness feels earned—
like distance was a discipline
I finally learned.

I stand on the platform
holding my coat
for no reason.

I don't know where to put it.

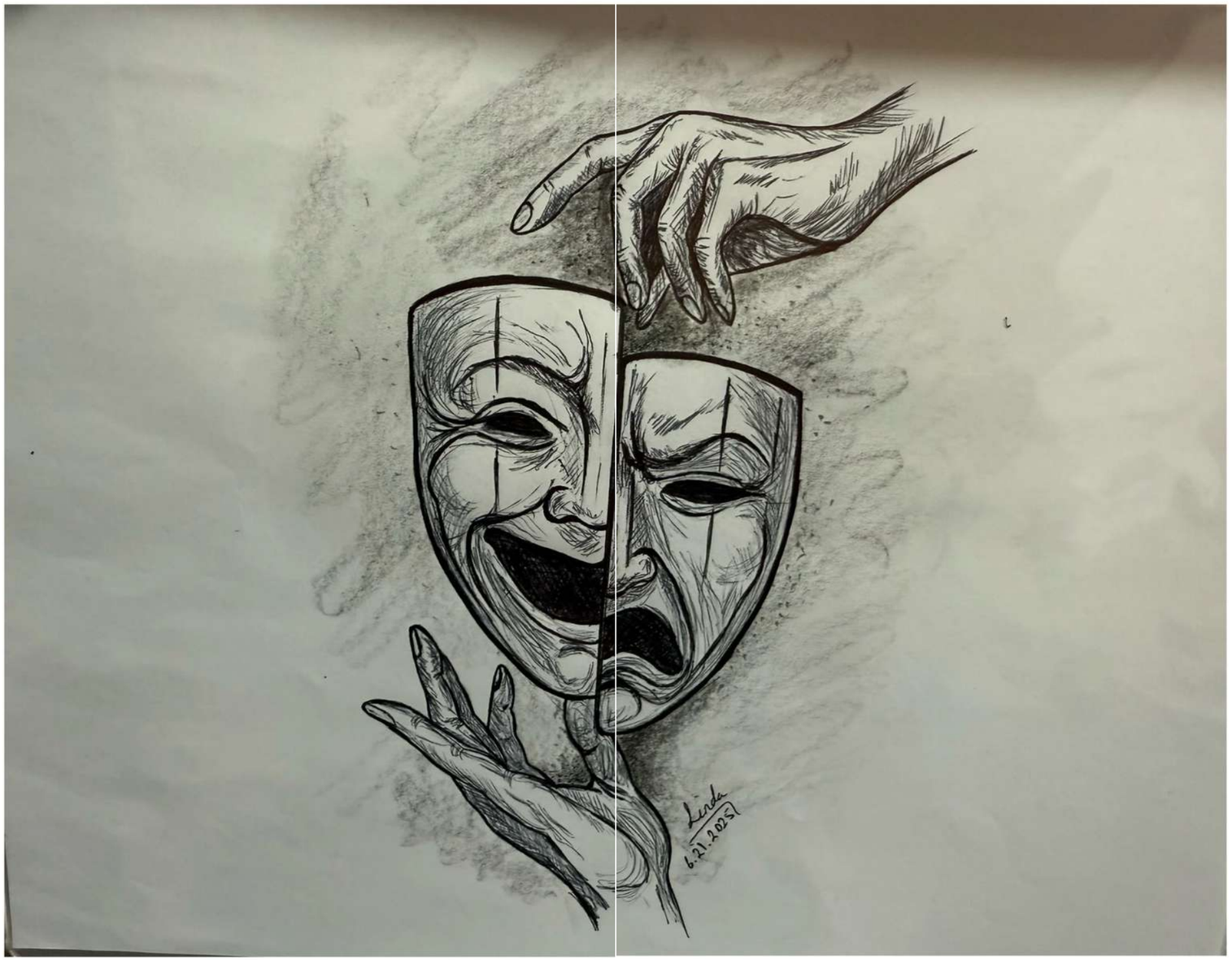
So I keep carrying it
like proof
I might leave.

"Guest" was written during a visit to Berlin, the city where I grew up, while I was on exchange at UCLA. Returning home, I experienced a sense of disorientation, everything felt familiar, yet no longer entirely mine. At the same time, my life in Los Angeles had begun to feel like a second home, shaped by the people I met and the sense of belonging they created. The visit also felt like a preview of what it will mean to return after the exchange: reconnecting with family and familiarity, while knowing I will have to leave behind people and a place that have become just as meaningful. The poem reflects on belonging not as something fixed, but as something that moves between people, memory, and the places we learn to call home."

IMMIGRATION

BY ZAHRA LINDA NEMATOLLAHI

“There is a loneliness that has no name; the feeling of standing in two worlds simultaneously, belonging completely to neither. Last year, while my country was at war, I was sitting in a classroom thousands of miles away, trying to continue my life as if everything were normal. In between lectures, I would check the news, hoping for any sign that my family was safe. Over time, I learned to live with two versions of myself: the calm, focused student people saw, and the one quietly carrying fear and uncertainty inside.”



“Immigration was born from that fracture. Two hands, one from the world I left, one from the world I arrived in, reach toward each other, but do not meet. Between them, a theatrical mask, severed in half. The version we show to survive, and the one that holds everything we cannot express. The dark space in the center is not emptiness; it is the distance between who we were and who we are becoming. The lines are intentionally unsettled, almost restless. Nothing here is fully at peace, because that is what this experience feels like. Immigration does not end at the border; It lives in the hands that hold the broken pieces together, every single day, hoping they still add up to something whole.”

SANTA MONICA REVERSE-AUBADE

BY JERRY XIONG

at 18, there are no endings: one body closes
and another opens. the seagulls are as reckless
as the wind, ripping through the dead air like
fists. just this once, i'll play make-believe and
pretend i had planned this all along -
trashy grocery store cake & all.

the nearest temple is a ferris wheel on the pier
but there's nothing left to surrender.
it's an on/off kind of faith, this wanting.

at the right angle, everything is an anachronism,
which can make me a liar, or a prophet:
whatever makes me more american.

california is made of these things:
clay, adrenaline, teeth that cry for
more words to bite. its blurry edges,

they know no bounds, but at least then
they make room. here, i am always hungry,
always searching: i subjugate languages,

i reach down throats, i look and look and look:
this is a survival act.
i flower through all this violence, despite. in

spite. does that make me american?
there's sand under our nails now. the tide
comes back like a stranger, but these days,

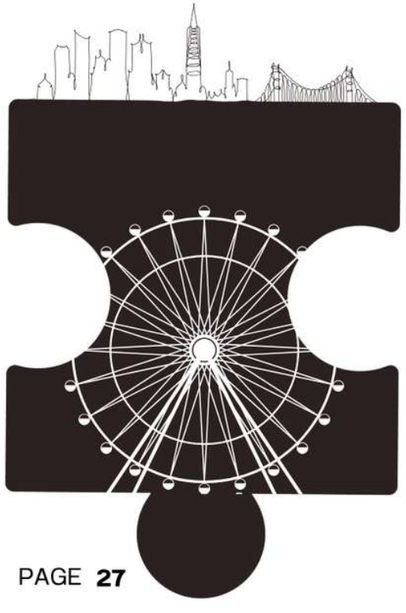
anything could be a shoulder.
by night, stars turn out to be planes and the
boardwalk slants in the past tense: underneath,

we make a mess of our hands on the rocks
and everything is new yet your apologies
are the most romantic things i could hear:

even now, i'm trying not to watch it all through
a window, across a field, squinting, as if
i miraged myself a future.

but the smudge of frosting on your cheek.
but our shadows overlapping in the LED light.
but the shore emptying itself like breathing.

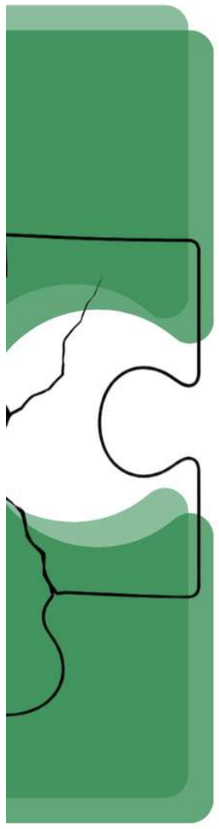
tonight, i believe in ghosts.



"This poem reflects my experience of assimilating to American culture and navigating the meaning of "home". Finding belonging is not always a linear process; it's tied to uncertainty and flux before stability. It grapples with performance versus authenticity, questioning the boundary of "familiar" and "foreign". In writing this, I am also interrogating myself: Is it impossible to settle, or am I just refusing to? What kinds of spaces am I carving out for myself? Why do I need to carve them in the first place?"

THE 67% CHOP

BY OLUWADAMILOLA SALAMI



I come from a culture where the boundaries between street lanes, and between what government officials should and shouldn't do, do not exist. Traffic lights and seatbelts are suggestive, and the safety of the citizens is put most at risk by those whose job it is to protect them.

Nigeria is a land of paradoxes. People who want to do better but do not know how. People who know how, but do not want to return home. People who want to return home, but do not know how. An endless cycle of guilt and blame.

I am one of the ones who got away. Peeled from the African soil at the age 11 to learn from Western textbooks, adopt Western ideals and think in Western ways, the most authentic thing about me is my 7-syllable, 13-letter, hard-to-swallow name. *O-loo-wah-dah-mee-loh-lah*. And even at that, I'll usually just go by *Da-mi*: a 67% chop is a cheap price to pay for your comfort (and mine).

They were not lying when they said America is the land of opportunity. Opportunity to forget, to erase, to abandon. Assimilation is easy when you notice how quickly it stops the too-long stares and too-wide smiles. America loves diversity, but nothing *too* different, *too* novel – her fragile ego can't handle that.

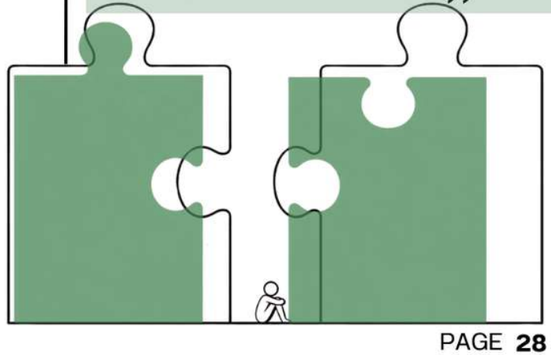
In this place, my culture is over-glorified. My hair is always "beautiful" and my languages, ever "rich". Everything about my way of life is "so cool!" and you think it's "niceee" that I got to travel back during the break. Even in your admiration, in your over-enthusiastic exclamation, there is an othering. I am forever suspended in a display case of romanticism and exoticism. You don't really seek to understand me, just to be proximate. You are satisfied enough with the idea of me. I am an interesting thought to roll over in your mind.

I never thought much about my race before I came here – but now, I know that oppression sells. I have learned to brandish this skin, and what it means here, for deans and employers and those who guard the doors to Success. Americans like it when you fit into the boxes they have made for you: POC, minority, Black/African American.

I am too globalized for Nigerians, and yet not Black enough for America. I am pulled taut between two cultures, trapped in the abyss of the in-between. Given the way I look, talk, walk, it may be more appropriate to appropriate American culture, and just wear my Nigerian-ness as a badge instead – an excuse to qualify my opinions with "As a Black woman..." and punctuate my application essays with "Growing up in Lagos...", even if these are merely perfunctory.

I have perfected the American art of oversimplifying the complex, of euphemizing the grave, and of self-deprecating to evade the awkward. Since I am a chameleon now, brushed and blended in by paints I have forgotten how to scrub, perhaps I am a hypocrite – for critiquing the culture that made me.

"This piece was written for a creative non-fiction class, in response to the prompt "critique (y)our culture." In it, Dami explores the idea of fragmented cultural identities, and the contradictions that come with being suspended between multiple geographies, both in place and in thought. As a Nigerian now racialized as 'Black' within the United States, she has had to navigate the ways her skin and her foreignness have othered her while reckoning with how palatable discord is rewarded and how "oppression sells". She is a compliant revolutionary, a Black woman who is not too angry and a Nigerian immigrant who is just assimilated enough."



ALMOST HOME

BY EMMA MALIAR

“This is a collage piece made using papers collected during my summer trip back to my hometown of Alicante, Spain. It brings together different scraps of memories that would otherwise be thrown away: a local aquatic sports flyer, a napkin from an empanada place, a sandwich wrapper, and a passport photo.”

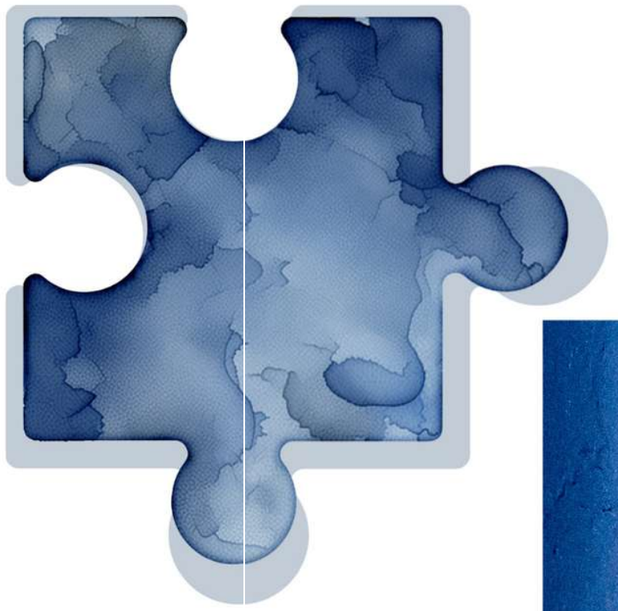
“Beyond their face value, each paper has a backstory: the sandwich wrapper is from my parent's favorite spot as students who came to Spain escaping Ukraine in the 1990s, while the Argentinian empanada napkin hints that others in the town have also made it into home. The girl in the passport photo has never looked Spanish: her friends call her "medio guiri", or half tourist, and so she will never feel quite at home. She can only ever be almost Spanish, yet she tries to collect fragments to feel a little closer to home.”



MISTY BLUES

BY LYNNA SI



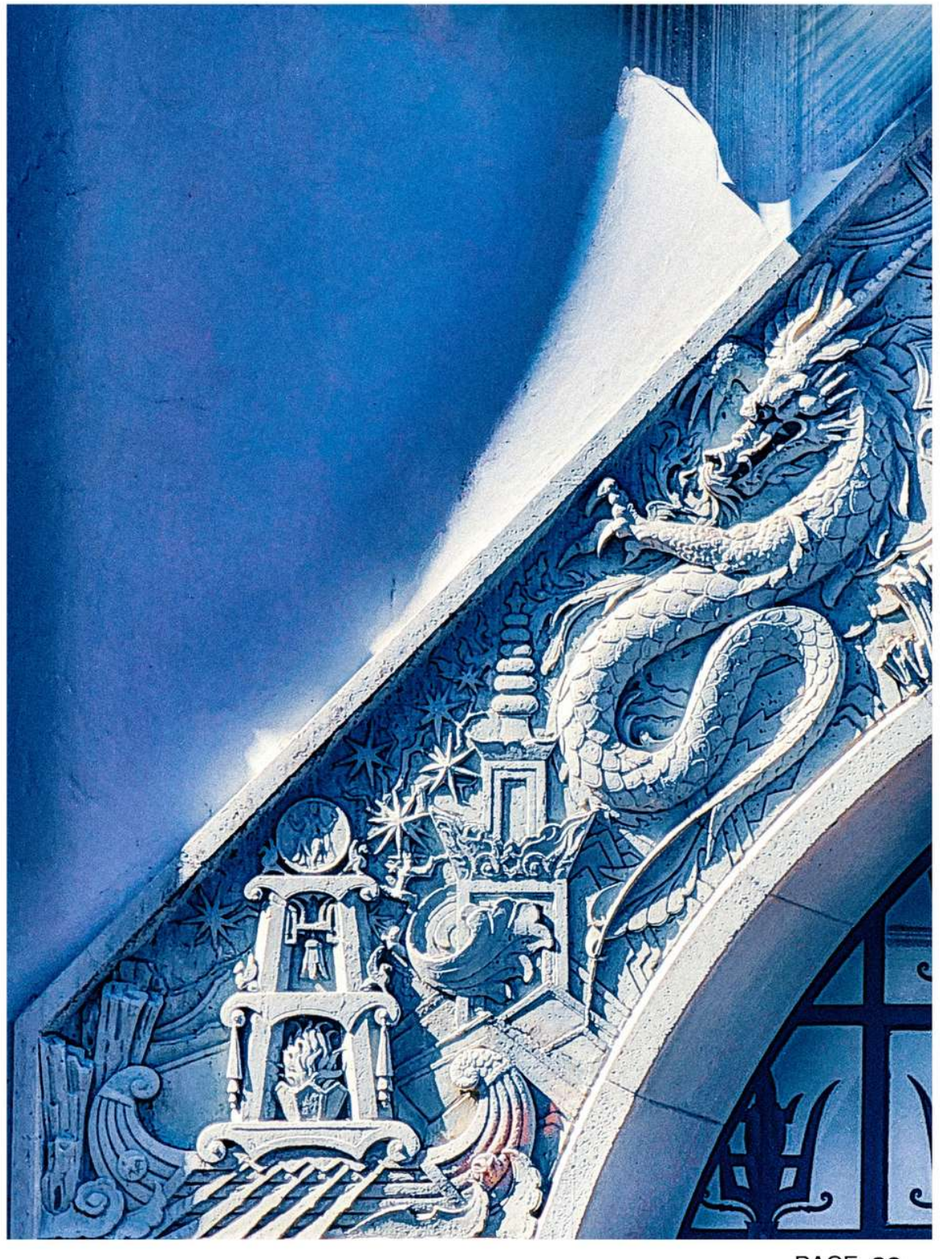


“ The nature in Canada is remarkable. I really enjoy the winter mornings, when mists surround the trees in a mystical hue and the cold temperature imbues a natural blue hue on everything. A similar west coast - where greens blossoms in different shades without a touch of white - is seen in the State, where we share both a border, a coast, different yet inherently the same. As a Canadian living in the United States, I do not have to choose between two homes. The similarities in the landscape make space for both identities to coexist. ”

HERITAGE OF A BLUE DRAGON

BY LYNNA SI

“ As a Chinese Canadian studying in UCLA, belonging has always been complicated. For me, this art represents the Chinese and American side of my identity. The wall sculpture is a part of the TCL Chinese theatre located in Hollywood, with the blue representing the blue and white porcelain from China. ”



WE ALL GO BACK

BY ELISA ANTONIETTA DANIELE



“Made in LA during my first visit, this collage layers my Manhattan Beach photos with my drawings and my mother's architectural sketches from the '80s. About the in-between, past and present overlapping, like places do — the one you come from and the one you choose.”

MUD

BY CLAIRE LI

There's mud on the floor
we walked across
the night I met your father

It came from my boots
I found in my mother's closet
marking her old home
and the places she's been

I sat across from you
and listened to your childhood stories
with mud seeping into
my white linen dress

I never noticed it
and didn't try to hide it,
until it became a stain
on your kitchen chair

"Mud is an exploration of memory, inheritance, and the search for belonging within relationships. Through the description of a seemingly quiet moment, the poem examines how the heritage we carry with pride can sometimes feel like a "stain" when we enter unfamiliar spaces."

DEFINED

BY NEIL PAL

i write my name
but is it mine

given by my blood
before they even knew me

do i live up to my name
to my first or to my last

do i belong in this lineage
my people
their past

what defines the man i should be
I define the man I am

where is the man i could be
am i everything that I can

"This poem explores 'Finding Belonging' by questioning the significance of an inherited name. The weight of a last name connects one to their blood before them. The weight of a first name must be defined by the one who bears it. Names bridge the gap between the past and one's future, allowing one to define how they belong."

NAME EMBEDDED

BY IRENE HO

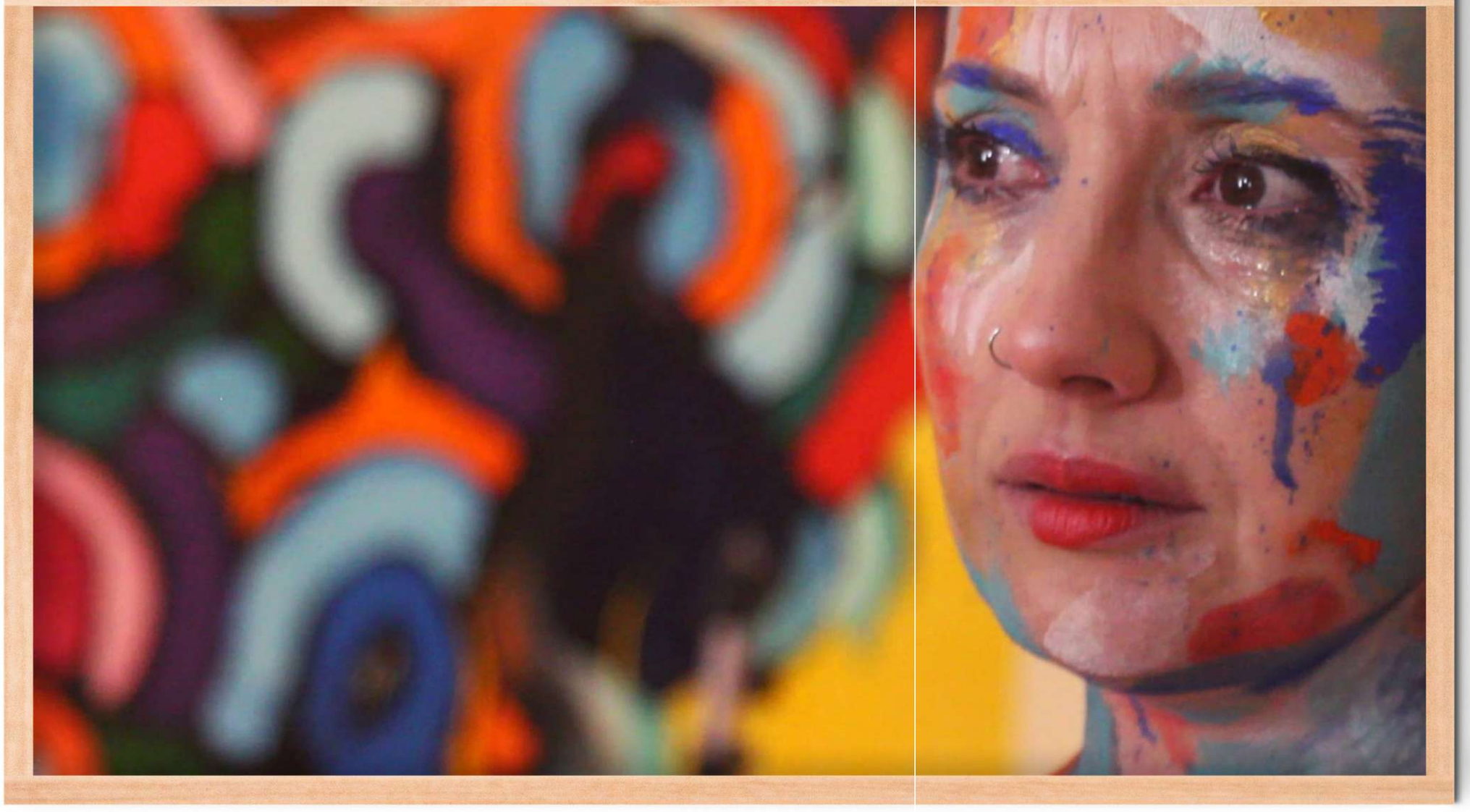


"This painting explores "Finding Belonging" through the fading tradition of facial tattooing among Taiwan's Indigenous Atayal people. Once powerful markers of identity, community, and cultural lineage, the tattoos are rendered using automatist dripping techniques and an earthy brown palette, evoking both intimacy and loss. The work reflects the tension between ancestral belonging and modern disconnection, suggesting how cultural identity can erode yet persist in fragments. The piece becomes a meditation on reclaiming belonging in the face of historical erasure and contemporary change."

WOMAN

BY ANAUENE DIAS SOARES

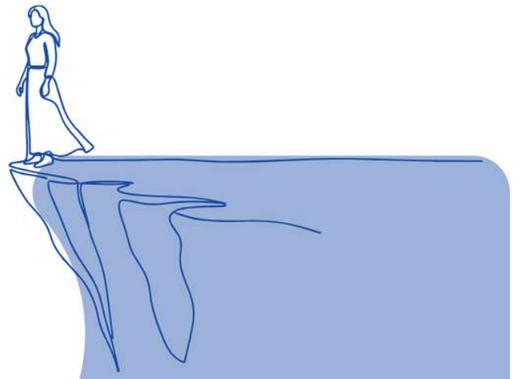
BODY PAINTING BY LOUISE HELENE



“This artwork engages with contemporary questions surrounding the role and representation of women in the history of art, traditionally constructed through the male gaze. For centuries, female bodies were portrayed by men as objects of contemplation, desire, or idealization, often silencing women’s own subjectivity and lived experiences. In contrast, this image proposes a representation guided by the woman herself, even when mediated through the lens of a male photographer or created through self-portraiture. The focus shifts away from performing femininity for the viewer and toward expressing identity, vulnerability, and the woman’s autonomy over her own image. In this way, the artwork reclaims a new form of female presence in art: no longer passive or idealized, but conscious, emotional, and self-authored. In rejecting idealization, the artwork redefines belonging as an act of self-definition, visibility, and autonomy.”

“PENDING – A POEM ABOUT A FOREIGN STUDENT WAITING ON THE AMERICAN DREAM

BY HRISHIKA SHARMA



The waiting
Is endless
Mind
Senseless
Feelings
Numbness
Questions
Answerless?
My understanding
Is a cloud of thoughts,
An expression too misunderstood —
I am trying
to find
Something to hold-on-to
Something I know
But all I see is —
A question mark.
Pending...
Is my life
—Like a buffering circle—
Searching for hope
For ...
Some-
thing
Some-
one
I don’t know.

The
Uncertainty
is relentless!
I don’t want to lash out..
To feel scared
(And vulnerable)
To feel o r d i n a r y
Like I am drowning in seas of never-haves;
Never-beens
Or worst of all:
Used-tos
I ask myself as I look up above:
“What does the future hold?”
— Pending...

WHO I AM

BY HRISHIKA SHARMA

I am often asked to describe myself
To define myself
To be myself
But in these moments of self-reflection
and contemplation,
of loud inner silences,
I find not one but many versions of me
For how can simple adjectives embody the cosmic chaos that is to be human.
I see a classical dancer and an avid traveler
A tennis player and a Tennyson aficionado
A chai purist and a matcha convert
A film fanatic and a bottom line realist
A Godot enthusiast and an “Office” devotee
A homesick wanderer and a restless homebody
Belonging everywhere and nowhere at once.
Choosing to bridge my identity with ands instead of ors
In all these contradictions
I am slowly creating “myself”



“My poems explore belonging as an act of self- construction rather than a destination. In my identity poem, I embrace contradiction, finding wholeness in the "ands" rather than the "ors." In "Pending," I inhabit the confusion of an international student waiting for her college decisions to start a life on her own terms in the States. Together, they trace the question of what it means to feel at home in yourself.”

PSYCHOANALYSIS IN PROSE AND VERSE

BY LEONARDO GROHMANN BUZZINI

That thing called Psychoanalysis.

The one that moves me to think— to think and feel; to think, to feel, and to sublimate.

It is not just thinking, but thinking that feels. Not just feeling, but feeling that transforms.

It asks that we build from fragments—from perceptions, from noise, from discomfort—leveraging subjectivity to grasp the metaphors within our fantasies, so that we may freely associate them.

It reveals something difficult to name, something that resists being fully expressed. It allows for a non-linear way of thinking that defies strict rationality, adding to the biological and the material another layer of reality: that of the unconscious, shaped by abstract and overlapping concepts, guided by a counterintuitive logic.

It dialogues with the scientific method but is not restricted by it. It invites us to explore the frontiers of knowledge, drawing upon what we have discovered and applied so far, without becoming paralyzed by the unknown or the uncomfortable. It reframes time and space, suggesting that the charge of the drives of past traumas drifts into a timeless unconscious; pressed by repression, it merges with present experience across overlapping planes—remaining active, chaotic, and seeking expression.

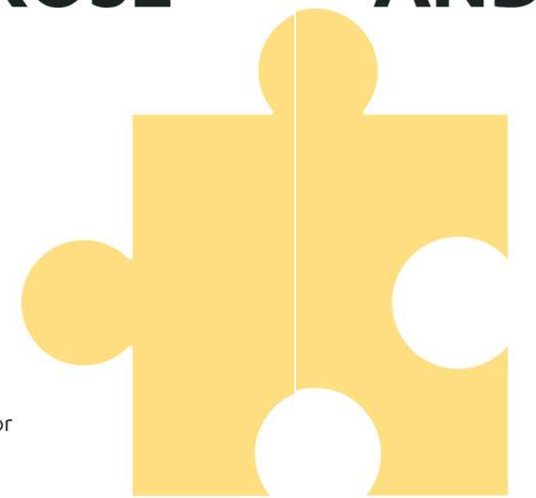
It appears, figuratively, as a bridge between known, observable realities and others that are ignored or misinterpreted. It lays bare the need for absolute existential humility—casting light upon our shadows, provoking shame while revealing the most primitive, repugnant, and incoherent aspects of our nature.

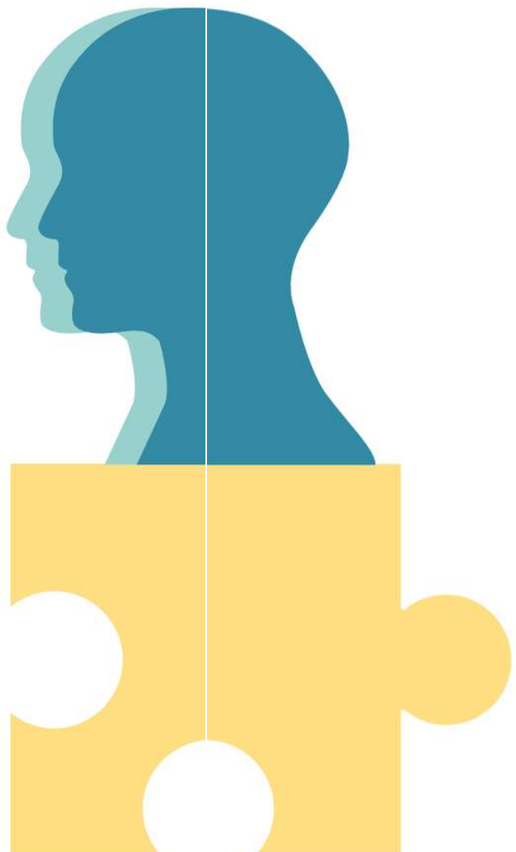
It offers the individual the possibility of stepping outside one's frame of reference and being received as someone unique—whose history and choices are irreplicable. In this space, care becomes art, interpretation, and perspective. It does not emerge only from observable patterns; it brings forth the ultimate singularity of lived experience and pain—those that encapsulate the self and shape its behavior.

It exalts the power of the word and the value of listening as a process through which facts and perceptions are expressed and freely associated. It allows what is shared among us to coexist with what remains uniquely our own, resistant to interpretation.

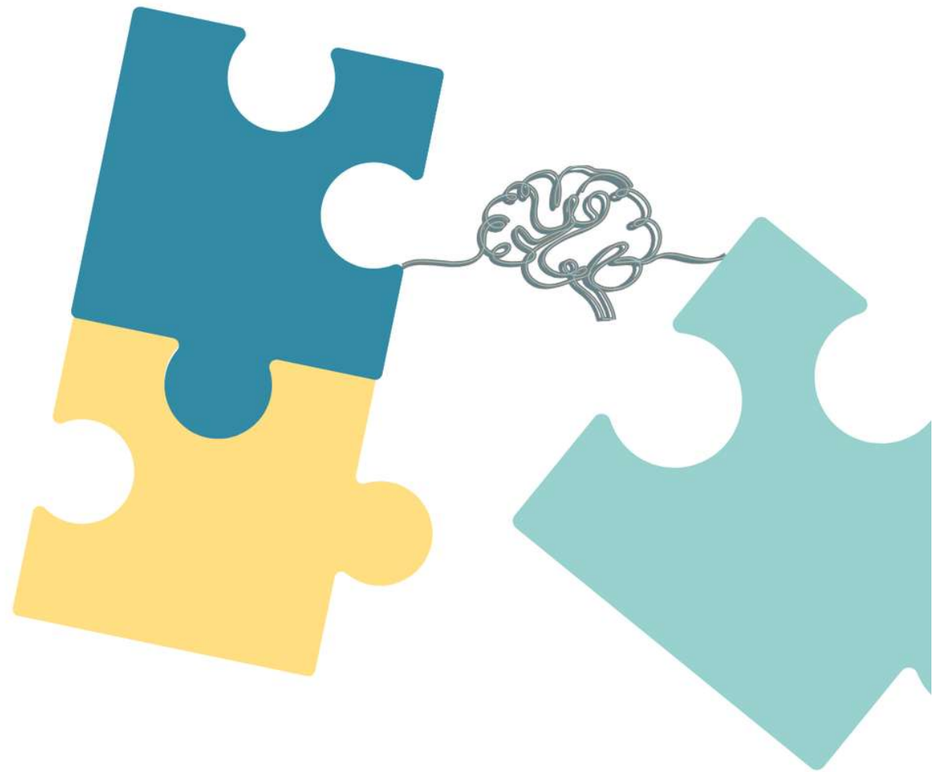
It transposes to our inner constitution the concept of a pulsating infinity—of life and death—echoing the very nature of the universe that surrounds us. It calls for the courage to sustain one's gaze before the painful and the unknown; to work, arduously and persistently, along a path of repair and growth, even when intertwined with doubt and imperfection.

It—this thing called Psychoanalysis—read, digested, and interpreted through its many layers: a free, unfinished, ever-evolving piece of writing, in prose and verse.





> “This piece challenges the conventional notion of belonging as a purely social or geographical alignment, arguing instead that true belonging in the outer world is conditioned by finding a home within oneself. Through a blend of prose and verse, it explores how navigating the unknown spaces of the unconscious, integrating our inner 'lights and shadows,' allows us to piece together the puzzle of identity. By bringing these hidden dimensions into consciousness, the work reflects on the courage required to move beyond external conformity, step into a singular and genuine voice, and find ultimate belonging within the architecture of one's own history, body, and mind.”



THE INTROVERTED WORLD

BY ALISA CUI



“The Introverted World depicts a calm and magical realm through watercolor. As introverts, we are mushrooms growing quietly in the night; we are sea anemones swaying rhythmically beneath the ocean. We are grounded, reaching out to the world through delicate hyphae, seeking belongings within stillness and silence.”



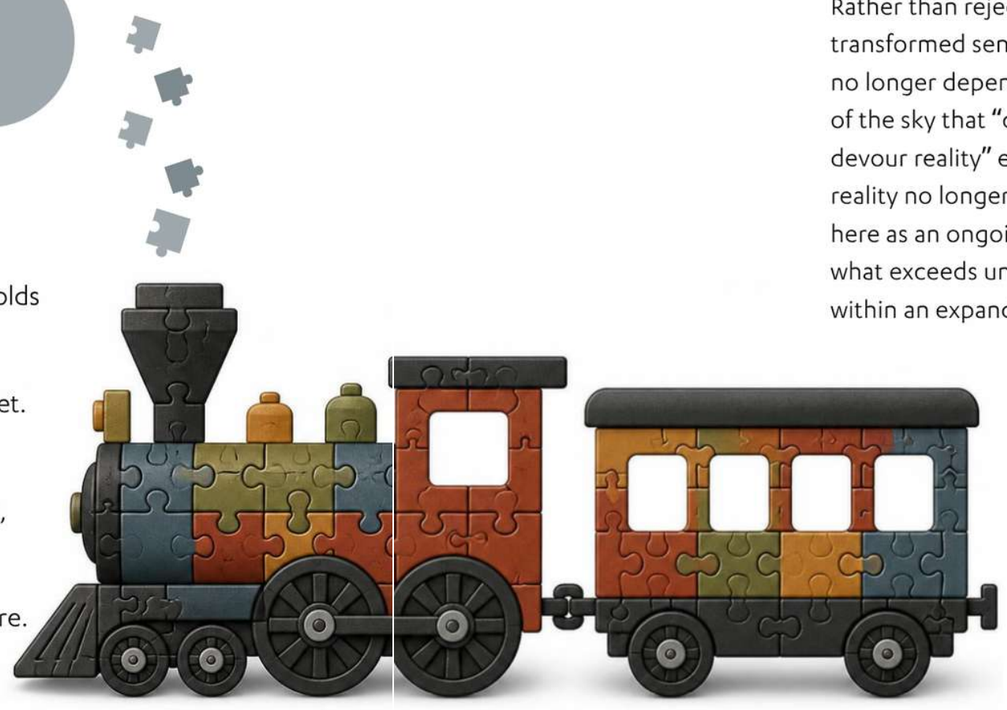
PRAYER FROM THE PLATFORM

A prayer because I miss you.
Seeing modern towers standing,
filling an invisible cavity
in existence, for what reason,
I cannot tell
except to note that
a swarm of people must
work-live in them,
for what reason, again
I cannot tell very well either.

A prayer sent out
to the big pocket in this
light, hot, night sky,
because I miss you.
Honestly, old man, I dreamt of you
last night, and you were standing up
in the tub.
I had to ask you to lay
back down inside the tub,
asking "is it still warm enough?"

All day, until now
I'd thought it was
a dream just come
out of myself.
But standing on the platform,
looking out at the giant towers
that are, despite it all, reasonless,
I'm very tempted to think
the dream didn't
just originate with me.

Who knows what that
pocket of sky could do?
Right now, effortlessly, it holds
all these city monuments
as if they're bread in a basket.
But it could just as well
turn into the mouth of God,
and devour reality so
that it wasn't even ever there.
And it probably should.



LORENZO SIMON TOMESCU

“This poem explores belonging not as stability but as something actively reconfigured through loss. Framed as a direct, apostrophic address —“A prayer because I miss you”—the speaker does not simply mourn a father, but sustains a relationship with him, speaking into absence while confronting a world that no longer feels anchored. “Modern towers” rise, “filling an invisible cavity / in existence,” and even the purposes of collective life—“a swarm of people must / work-live in them... / I cannot tell”—remain obscure. In this groundless landscape, longing exceeds explanation and reason proves insufficient.

Yet within this destabilization, the poem enacts belonging through the act of address itself. The dream of the father—“standing up / in the tub”—becomes an intimate, unresolved site of relation extending into the vast “pocket” of the “light, hot, night sky.” The speaker begins to inhabit a space where connection is no longer confined to the internal —“the dream didn’t / just originate with me.” At the same time, biblical imagery and metaphors of containment reimagine the world as capable of holding both grief and presence: the sky “effortlessly... holds / all these city monuments / as if they’re bread in a basket.”

Rather than rejecting the world, the speaker participates in a transformed sense of it, where grief opens a way of belonging that is no longer dependent on certainty or fixed structures. Even the vision of the sky that “could just as well / turn into the mouth of God, / and devour reality” expresses not pure negation, but a desire to inhabit a reality no longer governed by the limits of reason. Belonging emerges here as an ongoing, lived relation—to the dead, to the world, and to what exceeds understanding—a fragile but persistent way of dwelling within an expanded, enigmatic reality.”

WHEN LAND SPEAKS

BY OKE IROEGBU

I acknowledge that this reflection takes place on the ancestral and unceded homelands of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and the broader Ohlone peoples of the San Francisco Bay Area. I offer this acknowledgment with respect for their ancestors, elders, and current community members, and with an awareness of my responsibility as a guest to listen, learn, and act in ways that honor Indigenous sovereignty and ongoing relationships with this place.

It was a chilly January morning when I started writing from my apartment in Los Angeles, far from the warmth and openness of Blue Oak Nature Reserve. Still, that land stayed with me—not just as a memory but as a presence. To me, land doesn't disappear once we leave; it continues to shape how we think, feel, and remember. At Blue Oak Reserve, I began to see land as a living entity—a space of more-than-human relationships, layered histories, and quiet lessons.

When I arrived, the encounter began through the body. The heat pressed against my skin, dust rose with every step, and the openness of the terrain provided little shelter. The land demanded attentiveness and humility rather than comfort. Oak trees stood scattered across the landscape, offering only fragments of shade. Sitting beneath trees was my thing; I felt both relief and learning. Their presence suggested that relationships with land are not about convenience but about respect.



Wildlife made the reserve feel immediately vibrant and responsive. Near the entrance, cattle moved slowly across the grasslands, reminding me of layered histories of ranching on Indigenous land. Elsewhere, mountain lions, coyotes, bobcats, snakes, woodpeckers, condors, eagles, hummingbirds, quails, rodents, and deer shaped the landscape through their movement and presence. Some animals appeared only briefly; others remained known only through traces and sounds. Together, they reminded me that this place is shared and that humans are just one part of a larger community of life.

"In this reflection, I share my experience at Blue Oak Nature Reserve, viewing the land as a living, relational presence rather than a passive landscape. I start by acknowledging the reserve as the ancestral home of the Muwekma Ohlone people, whose ongoing relationship with the land influenced my perception of myself as a guest rather than an outsider. Through sensing heat, distance, grasses, oak trees, animals, and water, I learned that the land communicates through sensation, movement, and attention. Encounters with birds, deer, rodents, and nocturnal creatures showed that the reserve is a shared environment shaped by many forms of life, not just a neutral research space. This reflection explores how listening to the land as a relational being fosters responsibility, humility, and a deeper understanding of Indigenous histories that continue to influence the place."

Water revealed itself gradually. After climbing a hill, I found a small lake alive with bullfrogs, salamanders, and dragonflies. The water was quiet but full of movement. In many Indigenous traditions, water is understood as a living relative. Here, it signaled persistence and continuity even where life isn't immediately visible. The land also called for careful movement. Thorny grasses clung to my clothes, and at midnight, I listened to coyotes and owls beyond the treeline near my tent. Moving through this terrain required attention and respect. These encounters felt less like obstacles and more like lessons about how learning takes place through direct engagement with a place.

Being on Muwekma Ohlone land shaped all these experiences. I was constantly aware that I was walking on ancestral territory cared for long before conservation boundaries were established. Even where colonial histories have changed relationships with this place, the more-than-human world still holds memory. What Blue Oak Reserve ultimately conveyed to me—through heat, distance, wildlife, plants, water, and silence—was both a reminder and an invitation: listen carefully, move respectfully, and recognize that land is not a passive setting but a living presence that continues to speak.





NATURE'S NETWORK



“During my visit to the Bunan tribe's "Forest Museum" in the high mountains of Taitung, Taiwan, I witnessed their famous 'Walking Trees", with thick aerial branches that continuously grow and replace withered native branches. Believing in the language of animacy, Bunan people extend personhood pronouns beyond humans, including animals and inanimate entities like water and trees. Depicting human eyes peering through the natural veil, I aim to present a striking visual with elements of surrealism, symbolically merging nature with human features.”

BY IRENE HO

MIGRATION

BY JENNA COLE



> The migrating species find belonging in their universal migration from North to South. Not only do these groups find the place they belong to thrive in warm weather, but they also live in a state of belonging within their herd, pod, flock, or kaleidoscope, these species belong, even when far from home.

FISHES & SWAN

BY ALISA CUI

“Fishes and Swan are oil paintings that depict a dynamic scene in a pond. Loose brushstrokes generate a sense of movement, bringing vitality to the water and creatures. Here, the noise of society dissolves into the simple essence of existence—life, waves, and water. No matter which continent I step on, it is within the body of Mother Nature and where I belong.”



THE FEELING OF FALL

BY OKE IROEGBU

Tree leaves fall, they dance and twist as they travel down,
I sit watching them, revering in their antics and tantrums
At least, they have got clarity on where they would fall
Where I sit, admiring Fall’s usual drama and conundrum.

Bluish-white clouds painted across the horizontal canvas;
One is shaped like the humpback whale in her element
Another, a bow, like Odysseus’s, was convening his army,
Anyhow, hills rise and fall, and they rise to meet the pretty clouds.

Spring water rush in haste towards unknown lands
On their way, they feed thirsty banks and the earth beyond
Wiggle-dancing crabs, a frog choir, and a gang of raccoons wait for night
While I sit and watch tree leaves fall, dancing and twisting as they travel down.

Tree leaves, brown, yellow, gold, some green, show a mix of feelings,
The setting sun, throwing her shade upon the fleeing day
Quacking ducks, calling out to sunset, form an echelon in the skies,
The wind, the herald of great things to come, welcomes the great Fall!

Light brown eyes, red lips, on the face of a smiling stranger,
The feel of sea water on my feet on a lazy Sunday noon at the beach,
All this beauty with sun rays and warmth, cast up the orderly skies,
So, I fall in love with Fall and all the beauty and love it brings with it.

“The poem captures the beauty and motion of autumn by vividly describing falling leaves, moving clouds, flowing water, and lively animals, portraying nature as lively and expressive. The imagery links seasonal change with feelings of awe, imagination, and emotion, merging landscape with memory and sentiment. In the end, it celebrates fall as a time of transformation and gentle happiness that encourages observation, appreciation, and a deeper connection to nature.”



RADIO DEMOCRACY



BY CONRAD HABERLAND

“Radio Democracy is inspired by friends that I met while working in restaurants. The painting blends stories of memory, survival, identity and the universal need to connect with other human beings.”

UNDER THE SAME LIGHT

BY SREEDEEKSHITA GORUGANTU VENKATA



"This piece brings together multiple figures who appear separated—by space, by color, by their own individual worlds. Each exists at a distance, occupying a different atmosphere, yet they are all held within the same frame, under the same light. The distance between them is geographic, not emotional.

Music becomes a thread in this work— not as performance, but as a form of recognition. It represents the small, often overlooked ways connection can form. It can emerge through shared expression, through something as simple and human as sound. This work suggests that even in isolation, we are never entirely alone; there are others, just beyond our immediate reach, who are closer to us than we realize."

GROWING UP BRUIN

BY BENJAMIN PAUL



"This story is about my experience growing up with my younger brother in UCLA graduate student housing for 12 years. While there, we were surrounded by children from all over the world and the experience gave me a strong sense of belonging - to UCLA, to Los Angeles, and the global community."



MY SAFE PLACE

BY CAROLINE THRAILKILL



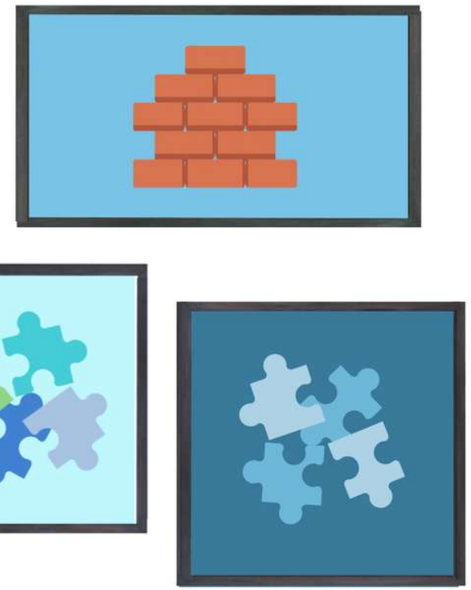
“

Finding Belonging is something we are all strive for, it doesn't matter what season of life you are in, belonging brings the feeling security we crave. This photo was taken in south Redondo Beach in 2023 right before I left California for Colorado with my husband. It represents the only place in the entire world where I feel true sense of belonging. This exact place was my home for over ten years, where I build my adult life, and where I felt complete more than ever. I am so grateful for what the U.S. brought me and this special place where I will always feel like I belong.

”

I DIDN’T FIND BELONGING, I BUILT IT

BY RISE KUROHA



“This piece explores belonging as something built, not found. As an international student, I moved from observing spaces to shaping Arts Party, creating a shared experience—and realizing I belonged within what I helped create.”

When I first arrived in Los Angeles, I thought belonging was something that would settle in over time—quietly, almost without notice.

Instead, it felt distant. Like moving through spaces already in motion, where everything seemed to belong to someone else.

At the museum where I worked, I watched people gather. They moved in clusters, paused in front of artworks, lingered in conversation. There was a rhythm to it—something shared, but not immediately accessible.

I stayed at the edge of
it, observing.

Over time, I began to pay closer attention—not to the artworks themselves, but to the conditions around them. What made people stop. What made them stay. What made a space feel alive.

That attention
became a way in.

Through Arts Party, I started shaping small parts of that experience—fragments of communication, moments of anticipation, signals that something was about to happen. The work was subtle at first. Then it accumulated.

On the night of the event, the museum shifted. It was louder, more crowded, less contained. The same rooms felt altered—not physically, but in how they held people.

Moving through it, I realized the distance I had
felt before was gone.

Not because I had found a place to belong, but because I had participated in making one.

A GLIMPSE OF HAPPINESS

BY SRINATH NAIK AJMEERA



“‘A Glimpse of Happiness” captures a fleeting moment of connection between adulthood and childhood wonder. While driving home after a busy day at work, amidst a light drizzle, a vivid rainbow appeared just as home came into sight. In that quiet instant, everything seemed to slow down. The rainbow felt like a gentle reminder that no matter how busy life becomes, we remain deeply connected to the natural world around us. Moments like these awaken a childlike sense of wonder and bring a feeling of comfort, peace, and belonging.”

ARTIST & AUTHOR'S BIOS

Alisa Cui | China p 45–46, 55

My life after fourth grade has never been settled. With my roots deeply planted in China, my wings have carried me to cities across the globe for over ten years. With frequent changes in cultural environments, I long for a sense of belonging, constantly seeking ways to attach.



Anauene Dias Soares | Brazil p 39–40

Brazilian visual artist Anauene Dias Soares explores belonging, female representation, and identity through expressive portraits and self-portraits. Her work challenges the male gaze, reclaiming women's image through autonomy and self-authorship.



Anika Tabassum | Bangladesh p 14

I am a 5th PhD student in the ECE dept.



Benjamin Paul | United States p 60

Benjamin Paul is the Director of Communications at the UCLA Division of Physical Sciences. He is an LA native and lifelong Bruin who grew up in UCLA graduate student housing.



Caroline Thrailkill | Brazil p 61

Caroline Thrailkill is the Marketing and Communications for the Dashew Center. I worked in International Education for over 8 years now, and I am so passionate about what this community brings to the U.S. and all over the world.



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ARTIST & AUTHOR'S BIOS

Claire Li | Canada p 35

Claire Li is a second-year student studying computational biology originally from Calgary, Alberta. She enjoys spending time outdoors with her family and going on long runs with her friends. In addition to writing poetry, Claire is passionate about health equity and cancer research.



Conrad Haberland | United States p 19–20, 57–58

My name is Conrad Haberland. I was born in the Netherlands. Dutch Indonesian. I work in oil watercolor ands pen and ink.



Elisa Antonietta Daniele | Italy p 33–34

I am an early modern art historian with a passion for the performing arts and illustration. After completing my PhD in Italy, I was first welcomed to UCLA as an Ahmanson–Getty Postdoctoral Fellow. In 2022, I returned to UCLA as Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow at the Department of Art History.



Emma Maliar | Spain p 29–30

Hello, my name is Emma Maliar and I am a 3rd year Computational Biology major at UCLA. My parents are Ukrainian, but I was born in a seaside town in Spain. My hobbies include body boarding in the waves, painting, learning languages, and creating flower arrangements.



Farin Lau | Germany p 24

My name is Farin Lau. I am an American Studies student from Berlin, currently studying at UCLA in the American Literature and Culture program. I call Berlin home, though living between places has made that idea less fixed. I write to understand the spaces between people, memory, and belonging.



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ARTIST & AUTHOR'S BIOS

Gunindu Abeysekera | Sri Lanka/United States p 23

Gunindu "Guni" Abeysekera is a Sri Lankan-American scholar and filmmaker. As a PhD candidate in Culture and Performance at the University of California, Los Angeles, his dissertation analyzes colonial and nationalist visual representations of Sri Lanka's Kandyan dance.



Hrishika Sharma | South Africa p 41–42

Hrishika is a recent UCLA graduate in Business Economics with a minor in Film. Born in India and having lived across eight countries, growing up largely in Africa, she brings a genuinely global perspective to everything she creates. Writing, for her, is a way of making sense of a life lived between worlds.



Irene Ho | Taiwan p 37–38, 51–52

I am a Taiwanese artist and designer currently studying Fine Arts at UCLA. My creative practice spans drawing, painting, photography, film, and ceramics, reflecting my interest in how different mediums can communicate emotion, memory, and narrative. I am drawn to experimentation and enjoy exploring the relationship between traditional techniques and contemporary design.



Jenna Cole | United States p 07, 53–54

I am a first-year student at UCLA who enjoys painting, crafting, and working at a pottery studio when I am home. I create bright, whimsical artwork inspired by nature to celebrate the beautiful world.



Jerry Xiong | Canada p 27

Jerry Xiong is a student at UCLA from Vancouver, Canada. When not writing, or thinking of writing, he's studying linguistics, sleeping, or eating enough food to feed a small family.



ARTIST & AUTHOR'S BIOS

Leonardo Grohmann Buzzini | Brazil p 43-44

A UCLA Extension alumnus and business consultant, Leonardo Grohmann Buzzini spent years leading strategic teams. Now on sabbatical, he explores the space between structured logic and the fluid, poetic nature of the unconscious.



Lorenzo Simon Tomescu | Canada p 47-48

Lorenzo is a PhD student at NTNU in Taiwan. In fall, he will join UCLA as a Visiting Graduate Researcher (VGR) in Literature and Culture Studies. His dissertation examines violence as aesthetic in Cormac McCarthy's American West fiction. He has published on Girard's scapegoat theory, linking psychoanalysis, existentialism, and mythology, and taught literature at Coquitlam College (Canada).



Lynna Si | Canada p 31–32

My name is Lynna and I am a neuroscience major from Canada. In my free time, I enjoy photography and crocheting. I really like taking photos of ordinary things from different perspectives as well as street and landscape photography.



Madiha Chowdhury | Bangladesh p 08

I am a post doctoral Scholar in UCLA. I am originally from Bangladesh. I spent my university years in UK. After 14 years moved to LA in UCLA. I enjoy staring at nature and absorbing from it so the UCLA green areas are a perfect spot for it.
When I get time to do that at the same time a sense of melancholy of leaving London and what I have actually left back at home sometimes takes over. Now I often think of going back to london.



Mihika Banerjee | India p 23

Mihika Banerjee (she/her) is a trained Indian classical dancer (Bharatnatyam and Odissi) and has performed extensively in her home country, India, as well as at international events in Thailand and the United States. Currently, Mihika is a doctoral candidate in the Department of World Arts and Cultures/Dance at the University of California, Los Angeles, and her dissertation is an interdisciplinary study of dance festivals at World Heritage Sites in postcolonial India.



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ARTIST & AUTHOR'S BIOS

Neil Pal | India p 36



Neil Pal is a UCLA Computer Science & Linguistics student. A TEDxUCLA member, his writing explores heritage, self-identity, and the weight of history. Beyond the pen, he runs a wedding performance business and gives back to his community.

Oke Iroegbu | Nigeria p 49–50, 56



My name is Oke, and I am a Nigerian PhD student at WACD. My hobbies include reading, hiking, and drawing.

Oluwadamilola Salami | Nigeria p 28



Dami Salami is a lover of words: from fiction to poetry to academic essay, writing, for her, is a vessel for self-discovery, growth and connection. She graduated from UCLA in 2025 with a degree in International Development and minors in Professional Writing and Education.

Raqib Ahmad Dar | Kashmir p 21–22



I am Phd second year Ethnomusicology. I am interested in visual/sound-scapes and how they shape our social and political identity.

Rise Kuroha | Japan p 62



Rise Kuroha is a Los Angeles based digital marketing student at UCLA Extension working at the intersection of social media and cultural programming. Her work focuses on building audience experiences through content, community, and live events.

Sreedeekshita Gorugantu Venkata | India p 13, 59



Sreedeekshita is a fourth-year data theory student and entrepreneurship minor who spends most of her time in Boelter Library training both neural networks and her caffeine tolerance. When she's not working with data, she's probably on the pickleball court, painting, strumming her guitar or watching Modern Family.

ARTIST & AUTHOR'S BIOS

Srinath Naik Ajmeera | India p 63-64



Hello! I am a UCLA Alumni, currently working in the Bay Area. Most of my time goes into tech work, I also find time for outdoor games and photography every now and then.

Vartika Sharma| India p 05-06



I am a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Integrative Biology and Physiology at UCLA, exploring questions at the intersection of biology and aging. Originally from India, I spend my quiet hours reading, sketching, and occasionally writing about science and life.

Xiangzi (Zora) Xu | China p 15–18



Xiangzi/Zora Xu is an illustrator and animator currently based in Los Angeles. Her work explores personal and emotional narratives through tactile visuals and often blends hand-drawn textures with digital animation. She holds a BFA in Illustration from California College of the Arts and is currently pursuing her MFA in Animation at UCLA. Zora is an award-winning artist and filmmaker, whose recent works have been recognized by several international film festivals. Her short films have been selected by the San Diego Asian Film Festival, Lift-Off Filmmaker Sessions (UK), Short Shot Fest (Argentina), FECEA Student Film Festival (Brazil), and more. In 2025, she received the Student Honor Award from the Los Angeles Advertising Club. Zora also designed the official Josie Bruin mascot artwork for UCLA Women's Basketball 2024–2025 season.

Yunyi Qian | China p 09–12



Yunyi (Daisy) Qian, enjoys traveling and capturing moments through photography. Her work is inspired by landscapes, vibrant colors, and distinct atmospheres.

Zahra Linda Nematollahi | Iran p 25–26



A researcher currently based in Los Angeles. Her work is shaped by experiences of migration, resilience, and living between cultures, often exploring the emotional weight carried beneath outward strength. Through writing and visual expression, she reflects on identity, memory, and the unseen realities behind everyday life.

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