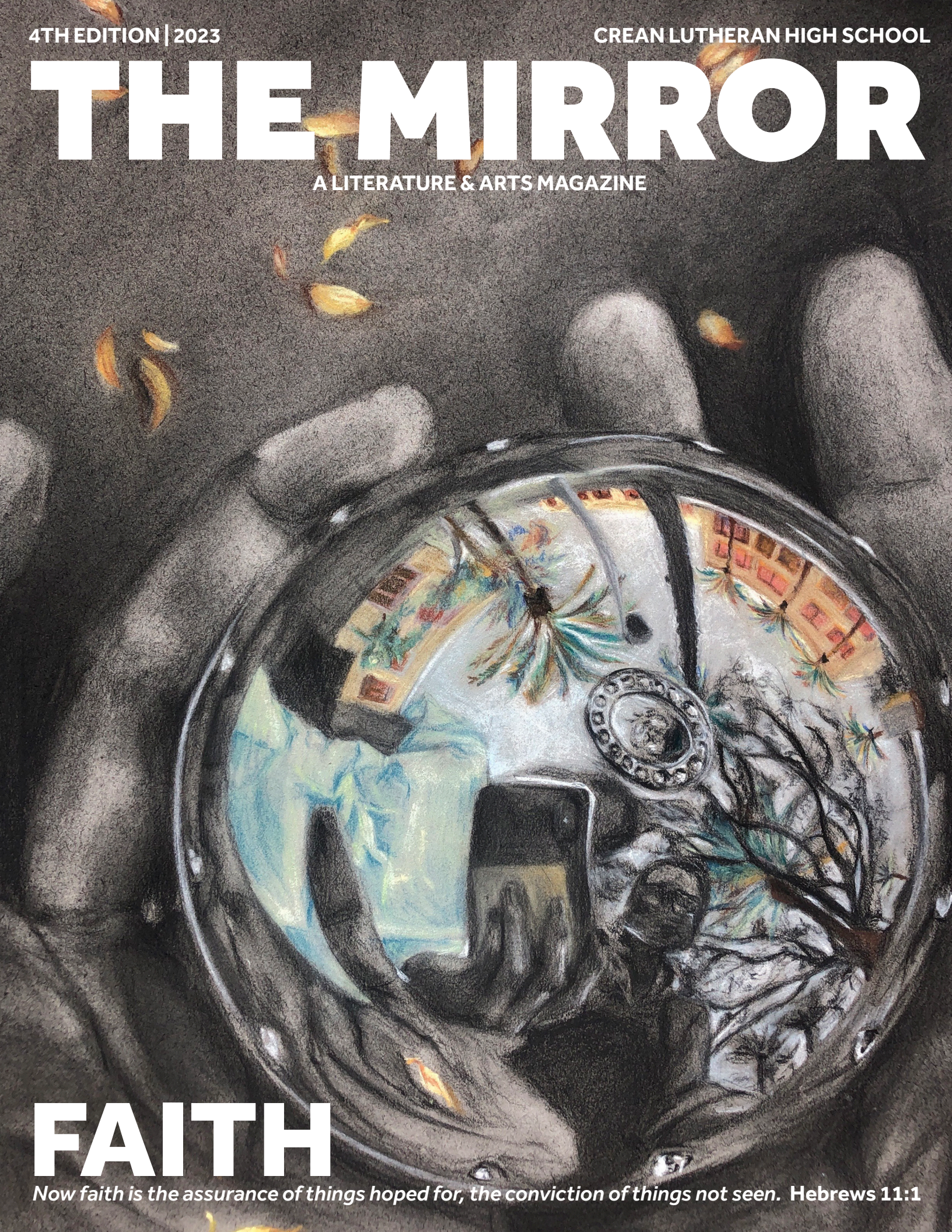


4TH EDITION | 2023

CREAN LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL

# THE MIRROR

A LITERATURE & ARTS MAGAZINE



# FAITH

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Hebrews 11:1*





# THE MIRROR

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

*Sola gratia. Sola fide. Solus Christus. Sola Scriptura. Soli Deo Gloria.*

The five solas (from the Latin sola for “alone”) provide a brief summary of Christian doctrine. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone according to Scripture alone for the glory of God alone. Hallelujah and Amen! And yet, while affirming the truth of the solas, faith does not always come easily.

One of the most difficult aspects of faith is that “now we see in a mirror dimly” and only “know in part” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Yes, faith is the “assurance of things hoped for” and “the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1), and “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28), but sometimes we struggle to understand when, where, or how God is working this side of heaven.

Our student submissions offer multiple Christian faith perspectives, beginning with the cover artwork *Holding the Moment*. Artist Tiantian Yu explains that her work portrays the “emotional limitations of a confined reflection” (i.e. seeing dimly and knowing in part) “in contrast with the realistic leaves” (i.e. face to face and knowing fully). She encourages the viewer to “stay positive and faithful” because “there is always a delightful moment that makes stranger conditions more memorable and valuable.” In other words, faith allows us to see that God is working all things together for our good.

The title page film photograph *Leave Your Hopes and Burdens Here on the Cross* depicts a tangible demonstration of faith: believers hanging prayers on a cross. The essay *Cycle of Waste* discusses finding perfection in God through faith rather than personal perfectionism. Additional examples of faith are described in the Student Editors note. And many more examples of faith, hope, and love are found within these pages. May Volume 4 of *The Mirror* inspire you to deeper FAITH until the day we see Him face to face.

In Christ,  
Glen Worthington

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Front Cover: *Holding the Moment* by Tiantian Yu ('23)

Back Cover: “A” *Building* by Yuruo Yin ('23)

Title Page: *Leave Your Hopes and Burdens Here on the Cross* by Sierra Foster ('24)

## SPECIAL THANKS TO

Crean Lutheran Art and English Departments

EunChu Kim, Vice Principal of Academics

<b>THE MIRROR</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>FROM THE EDITOR</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>LIGHT OF THE WORLD</b> by Chloe Robinson	<b>4</b>
<b>INTANGIBLE</b> by Elise Cho	<b>5</b>
<b>LIVING CITY</b> by Qixuan Huang	<b>6-7</b>
<b>PINEAPPLE PIZZA</b> by Kanoa Loo	<b>6-7</b>
<b>SEIZE HOLD OF THE LIGHT</b> by Xiaochan Zhang	<b>8</b>
<b>SATURDAY MORNING</b> by Nathan Kuo	<b>9</b>
<b>BRIGHT FUTURE, ENDLESS SCARE</b> by Yingzhi Ma	<b>10</b>
<b>HUG DURING THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC</b> by Youran Zhao	<b>11</b>
<b>ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED?</b> by Ethan Cheng	<b>12-13</b>
<b>ALBERT</b> by Jiaying Liu	<b>13</b>
<b>THE WORLD</b> by Muen Zhou	<b>14</b>
<b>REFLECTION OF MYSELF</b> by Mieyi Wei	<b>15</b>
<b>LIVING IN LIGHT</b> by Bofei Liao	<b>16</b>
<b>BREATH</b> by Jessie Lang	<b>17</b>
<b>AUTUMN BREEZE</b> by Liana Caiozzo	<b>18-19</b>
<b>SEEK</b> by Sean Cheng	<b>20</b>
<b>WAKEUP CALL</b> by Paul Schulteis	<b>21</b>
<b>CYCLE OF WASTE</b> by Lina Kim	<b>22</b>
<b>REFLECTIONS</b> by Katherine Johnson	<b>23</b>
<b>THE CREATOR CONNECTION</b> by Kate Kurimay	<b>24-25</b>
<b>FAITH</b> by Emily Kim	<b>26</b>
<b>GRAND PRISMATIC</b> by Sierra Foster	<b>26-27</b>
<b>FEELS OF FALL</b> by Amelia Gould-Lindberg	<b>28</b>
<b>BETWEEN THOSE WHITE LINES</b> by Colin Currier	<b>29</b>
<b>HOME</b> by Matthias Bruggeman	<b>30</b>
<b>DATE NIGHT</b> by Alexis Lee	<b>31</b>
<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b> by Olivia Jin	<b>32</b>
<b>I AM PURPLE</b> by Justine Choi	<b>33</b>
<b>A PIANO AND A DESK, AND WINDOWS IN THE WALLS</b>	
by Julianne Kam	<b>34</b>
<b>MOVING OUT</b> by Lilly Hurrt	<b>35</b>
<b>GHOST COSTUME</b> by Jasmine Zhang	<b>36</b>
<b>TO BE ALIVE</b> by Heejae Lee	<b>37</b>
<b>LITTLE SISTER</b> by Eleni Leventis	<b>38-39</b>
<b>PSALM 18:2</b> by William Koning	<b>39</b>

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THE SILVER CHILD</b> by Charlotte Brant	<b>40-41</b>
<b>CALMNESS</b> by Tae Eun Kim	<b>42</b>
<b>GOODBYE, MY DARLING</b> by Abbie Larson	<b>43</b>
<b>PROCRASTINATION</b> by Michael Sipes	<b>44-45</b>
<b>BLUE TIME</b> by Xiangchi Lan	<b>45</b>
<b>THE MIDAS TOUCH</b> by Lauren Backstrom	<b>46-47</b>
<b>WAKE UP</b> by Yifan Wang	<b>47</b>
<b>CALM WAVEEEE</b> by Justine Choi	<b>48</b>
<b>FROM THE STUDENT EDITORS</b> by Julie Tai	<b>48</b>



## **INTANGIBLE** *ELISE CHO '22*

i have been told  
    that faith  
    is intangible,  
unseen, but should it be present,  
    everyone knows  
    what it should feel like  
everyone,  
    parents, teachers, youth pastors,  
has told me  
    that through faith,  
        freely given by God,  
            on no merit on my own,  
    intangible though it is,  
i have received eternal life,  
    incomprehensible though it may seem,  
with the Father in heaven,  
    a place impossible to imagine  
and so i have told myself  
    that for many years  
        until now  
now i am older  
    and perhaps more tired, more burdened  
that faith seems, feels,  
    almost nonexistent  
i cannot sense it in the same way  
    as i once did,  
    when my eyes were brighter, when my heart felt lighter in my chest  
but  
    i have been told  
that faith,  
    intangible as it may seem,  
    is ever-present  
i need only rest in the knowledge  
    and grace  
of the Father and heaven,  
of the saving grace  
    of the Lamb that was sacrificed  
for the sake of sin,  
    my sin included.

Everybody has a special city in their hearts. It might be the city they live in at the moment, it might be the city they left, or it might be the city they want to one day call home. The city I yearn for is one whose memory I have carefully preserved – my hometown, Zhengzhou. Each time I wandered in the summer night, the wave of muggy air would rush up and envelop me like an impenetrable wall. A cacophony of shouting children resounded through the darkness. Toddlers ran and played, buzzing around like swarming bees, their laughter and giggles filling the air with careless joy. Their grandparents would squat around in a circle or sit on plastic stools, slowly fanning themselves with a folded flyer and catching up on the latest gossip. *Whose kid remarried? Whose kid was accepted to a top college?* The loudness of the nighttime was indicative of the city's never-ending busyness. Nothing about my city resembled the dull and impassive silence that lay over the streets of suburbs in America. Instead, Zhengzhou was a city beaming with life, glowing with light, and beating with vitality.

The narrow streets were even more crowded at midnight. Honking cars and conversing people filled every corner of the streets. Automobiles crawled around the roadways, with the sound of car horns, police whistles, and drivers' yellings blending into one another, forming a symphony of discord. The neon signs and glaring lights shone brightly on the small, grimy roadside shops as they tried to outcompete each other. Various people waved flyers and recited similar advertising lines to only receive the people's indifference. But their presence never failed to convince me of humanity's resiliency. Everywhere that meets the eye were bald men with hairy arms pushing food carts, repeatedly bleating, "FIVE CANDIED HAWTHORN FOR THREE DOLLARS, FIVE CANDIED..." The young children would suddenly stumble to a stop as they spotted a snack store and eagerly dragged their parents toward it, crying if the reluctant parents denied a visit. Even inebriated men brawling in front of a nightclub were a part of my vivid memories of the city, the pounding rhythm that thrummed through the veins of the metropolis.



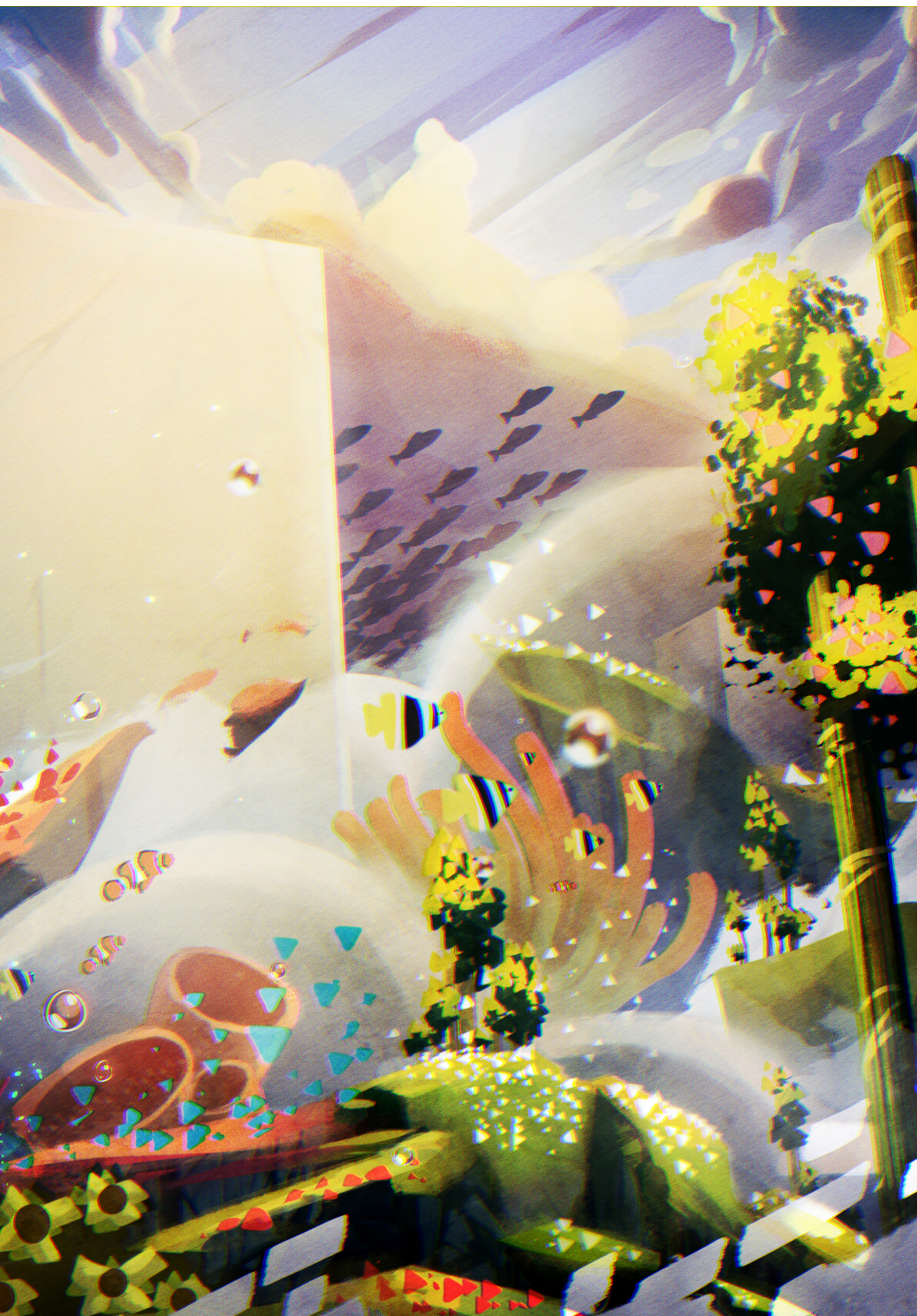
The pulse pounded in the clusters of young, spirited women going out for a night of fun, in the frail but fulfilled seniors gathering for a lively game of mahjong, and even in the middle-aged couples who threatened to divorce each other in the streets.

In the street markets, both men and women, usually with large and coarse hands, squatted by colorful mats and watched attentively over their fresh fruits and vegetables. Flies and bugs were quickly swatted away as the traders spotted their presence with the eyes of an eagle. Noisy, heated arguments often broke out as they bargained over the

price, the winning side coming out with a glowing face so gleefully triumphant that they might as well have just won the lottery. Some guffawed over a good joke with camaraderie, others bickered endlessly, often resorting to harsh imprecations. All the while, the chubby children whined as they tried to keep up with their parents through the maze of people, impatiently waiting for the promise of a trip to the snack store.

Even down by the lakesides, a ruckus followed families as they clattered noisily under the drooping willows, the parents pushing the empty baby carriers when a child insisted on being carried in their arms. Some bolder children ventured down to the shore and splashed rowdily in the water like a flock of ducks flapping their wings. There were shouts of warnings from angry parents followed by cries of rebellious boys. A melancholy melody often reverberated through the oppressive air, a familiar song played by an elder on the flute, accompanied by softer whistles as passer-bys picked up the tune.

Year after year has gone by, but each time I return to this city where I was raised, everything remains exactly the same as the scenes of my youth. Generations may grow up and grow old, but there will always be toddlers running around, crowds of young men and women hurrying from place to place, and retired seniors gathering together and gossiping under a shade. The world has changed and even fallen apart, as some may say, but this city has never strayed from its patterns, traditions, and vitality. Its spirit will always be kept alive.



## PINEAPPLE PIZZA

KANOA LOO '22, DIGITAL PAINTING

# SEIZE HOLD OF THE LIGHT

XIAOCHAN ZHANG '25, CHARCOAL ON TONED PAPER



## SATURDAY MORNING NATHAN KUO '24

While I had made every effort to move on from the past, part of me (or rather, all of me) was unable to leave it behind. After four years of seemingly infinite schoolwork, I had inevitably discarded my dream of a future full of peace and calm and began to recall the days when grades, work quality, and career opportunities were simply things to think about later on. Unfortunately for me, over the course of a few years, *later* had become *now*, and I found myself treasuring every moment of free time like a family heirloom. Eventually, I decided that the only way for me to move forward was to go back to where it all began, if only just for a little while.

And so, on this sunny Saturday morning, I stood at the gate of my old community, utterly mesmerized by how similar everything looked.

Making my way through the silver pedestrian gate was like traveling back in time. I gazed upwards at the assortment of lush trees that surrounded the sidewalk, some of them budding with lush pink flowers that proudly shot upwards like sunflowers in a grassy field. After I made my way through the grand entrance, I looked to my right and saw a familiar street packed with quaint little homes. They were like an assortment of books on a library bookshelf; each home had its own unique design that would make you wonder what it was like on the inside. When I had finished attending to a short, fleeting thought of my own previous home, I stopped to sit down on an iron butterfly-shaped bench located at the side of a grassy park. Looking upwards at the mountain of houses, trees, and roads that stood looming before me, I began to recall a feeling of envy that I once felt when I was younger. I had always dreamed of living up there, where the homes seemed to tower down over the world like a kingdom in the sky. Looking back, however, I should have been more content with the little home that I had. If I had known that I would spend so much time longing to return there, I would have made the most of every moment at that place.

A gang of bicycles pedaled past me, stirring me from my thoughts. I stood up and continued along the path, stopping occasionally to observe some of the stonework that was hidden along the trail. Somewhere in the distance, just past the bushes that hid me from the concrete road nearby, I spotted a large stone frog that had been placed on the edge of the trail. Looking into its eyes was like reuniting with an old friend. I would come to this very location every day and chat with my frog friend about what to ask for when Christmas came around, and my conspiracy about how the local ice cream truck was definitely ripping people off. I observed a few cracks and some green moss beginning to make its way down the sides of the sculpture, but the cracks and moss made it seem as though the sculpture had been there since the beginning of time. Suddenly, a stray thought came flying at me like a fastball. I stopped for a second, suddenly remembering something very important to me. I took a few steps back, knowing that if I went any further, I might never be able to leave this place that I held so dear. I stood there for a moment, debating whether or not I should turn back. However, I made up my mind to keep going. Why had I even come here in the first place?

I was a few steps away from the heart of my nostalgia. In front of me stood an old playground, whose colorful structures and smooth white sand were as inviting as ever. It was shocking to see it so devoid of laughter and life. I felt a panging sensation, sort of like the kind you get after seeing your family again after a long time. How childish I was, getting so emotional about a place meant for little kids.

I walked over to a swingset, which had become rusty over time. Sitting down alone, I kicked off and began to swing. Biting my lip in bitterness, I started to wonder why the world seemed so much more colorful when I was younger. Had I become a completely different person over the course of just a few years? Or had I been dreaming during my first fourteen years of living? I began to swing faster and faster, hoping that the sudden increase in motion would spirit me away somehow. When my legs finally ached from exhaustion, I stopped swinging and covered my face with my hands. While I was engulfed in a wave of melancholy, a little bluebird landed at my side and began to sing, as if to ensure me that everything would be okay.

## **BRIGHT FUTURE, ENDLESS SCARE** YINGZHI MA '23

**C**rossing countries far and wide  
**O**rders for families to stay inside  
**R**ising numbers stir fear in the air  
**O**n the way to becoming an endless scare  
**N**obody roams the streets nor land  
**A**lthough we digitally connect hand in hand  
**V**olunteers pack and sort food for the needy  
**I**nfluencing the world to not be greedy  
**R**acing against time, we fight  
**U**ntil this whole conundrum takes flight  
**S**o, in the end, our future becomes bright

*I created this poem in April 2020 to reflect the surge of COVID-19 as people and businesses were on lockdown. The main message of my poem is for everyone to stick together with brotherhood and charity.*



## HUG DURING THE COVID-19 EPIDEMIC

YOURAN ZHAO '23, PENCIL AND CHARCOAL

# ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED?

ETHAN CHENG '24

The end of the battered hallway gave way to a wide expanse of sand and stone. The field was encircled by an endless series of arches upon arches, supported by a string of concrete columns and rows, and left bare under an open sky.

This was the gladiator's entrance.

With a deep breath, I stepped through the hallway, past the archaic arch, and into the arena. I thrust my arms out and hefted up my chest, roaring with pride. I was Russell Crowe, the Spaniard, the Gladiator, with an audience exploding into thunderous applause at my arrival.

Or I was, until my mom called me over to take family photos.

Shortly after, I went right back into my reenactment. I unsheathed my invisible sword, craned my neck up, and surveyed the stands while imagining a sea of people above me, gazing down at my every movement. Alas, all that stood before me was rubble. Like an unfinished puzzle, the stands were but uneven slabs of concrete, incomplete and obsolete. A thicket of moss and grass budded over the tops of the ancient stones. And yet, the rubble seemed to root itself into the ground, sturdy and persistent, patiently aging for two thousand years. "I am here," it seemed to say, "and I am here to stay."

In the middle of the arena was a wide, rectangular underground, carved open for the tourists to see. I gazed down into the space below. Down under were more of the same caramel-brown slabs of stone and concrete. They were structured into dividers and walls that sprouted from the sunken floor and extended up to the surface in a maze-like pattern, as if to mimic the Labyrinth. These were the many rooms, passages, and cages under the arena that hosted the gladiators and the beasts. I imagined myself down there, sitting in one of the rooms, housed in by thick walls, hearing the muffled roars of audiences above me as I sharpened my sword for the final battle.

Our tour guide pointed to an elevated platform and explained in her thick Italian accent that the platform was the Emperor's Box. The platform was shielded with a thick stone wall. Behind it were two arches stretching up to 23 feet, similar to the ones that fenced around the entire amphitheater. I pointed my sword at this Emperor's Box and instantly I could envision all the excessive, pompous, Roman ornaments. Then, Joaquin Phoenix appeared, clothed as Emperor Commodus, staring back at me while being fed peeled grapes. I spewed some *Gladiator* dialogue at him and spat at him with disgust. He jutted out his thumb at me, the ancient Roman gesture for "kill." Our silent battle of stares would have continued if it were not for the tour guide, who led us out of the arena.

We were then taken up the stairs to the higher levels of the grand amphitheater. As we walked along the halls circling the arena, I ran my fingers across the ragged surfaces of the concrete, making out faded Latin inscriptions etched over the entrances of the crescent arches. Out under the arches were primitive shapes of stone, as if taking the form of a Play-Doh molded by a child. However, upon closer inspection, I could make out foot pedestals and even the beginnings of ankles and legs. I could easily imagine the statues that once stood there, towering over all that walked by, guarding the ancient arches they stood under. Two hundred tall marble-white sculptures, robed in Roman togas, equipped with their own unique belongings.

Finally, we made it to the highest level. Stepping out yet again into the open air, I absorbed the view below me. Intricate patterns of clay-yellow and lime-green danced around the arena, decorated with engravings and the occasional Latin. I could see tourists down on the open floor, standing where gladiators once stood. Suddenly, each of the tourists were adorned with armor, and a sword appeared in their hands. They were now gladiators, fighting for their lives, but more importantly, their honor. I shouted and hollered, along with the rest of my Roman peers. Stainless marble replaced the rubble. Swords clashed with swords and shields with shields. Gold chariots stormed by, leaving a cloud of dirt and dust in their midst. Beasts growled and clawed, their fangs shining under the bright sun. SHING. A



slice echoed, and a body fell. A silence swept the stands. Then, the entire amphitheater shook with roars of approval. The emperor stood up, and gave his gesture. The body was struck with a final blow.

I opened my eyes. The Romans disappeared. The Emperor was gone, and the gladiators reverted back to tourists. The pearly-white marble around me vanished, replacing itself with cold stone.

This was the Colosseum. Laid in ruins, stripped bare of all its glory.

All that is left is what we imagine.

# THE WORLD

MUEN ZHOU '23, WATERCOLOR AND GOUACHE



## REFLECTION OF MYSELF

*MIEYI WEI '24*

When I look into the mirror  
I see a budding person  
So full of passion and vigor  
Who will shun none

When I see myself  
I see traces of the Divine  
And no one else  
For everything is Thine

When I happen to see me  
I think of only Him  
A divine spark bestowed on me  
Allows me to glorify Him

Who knew a mirror could be beautiful  
It shows one made in His image  
And makes the Christian heart full  
Indeed, it overflows the edge

When I look into the mirror  
I see the work of Divine Providence  
not just merely a young girl  
I hope to see Him hence

# LIVING IN LIGHT

BOFEI LIAO '23

*I forget when or how I came here, but I remember it was she who got me out of there.*

I huddled in my dark, confined basement, alone for years. Because it was the only room I knew, I accepted it, grew accustomed to it, and lived with it. I lived in the room for so long that I embraced the darkness, inscribing whatever was in the room in my heart, thinking that through the words on the walls (*fight to survive ... it's a dog-eat-dog world*), I could find that beam of light in which a successful and fulfilled life dwells. So I abided in and worshiped these survival principles, fearing if I did not, I would tumble and fall into a bottomless pit from which there would be no salvation. Gradually, I let fear become the main value in my life. It shaped who I was: a timid boy making cautious tiptoeing steps out into the world—afraid of every squeak from dark corners.

As those of you who live more in the light would expect, no matter how hard I tried to find that beam, I was always hitting walls, stumbling on pebbles, and crashing to the ground with a scratched face and bleeding wounds. I could not find light, and because of this repeated failure, I blamed myself for not committing enough to the journey. *Did I do something I'm not supposed to do? Why am I always making wrong decisions?* Anger at myself mounted like a pile of unbearable boulders; then, Despair made up my mind. I complained that life was unfair, that everything was stacked against me. I lived with a stormcloud raining down upon my head, telling the story of my inability to obtain my own fulfillment.

And then she told me that my values were the problem: that I was seeking my own fulfillment, and it is only in lifting up others that I could lift myself. This, she said, was the irony of life—that all happiness, all success, comes from making others happy and successful—as long as those others appreciate our efforts and either pay it back so we can give again or pay it forward to multiply our gift to others.

*Hah!* I didn't believe her. All my life, I had known there were limited resources in this world, and that if I didn't fight to protect my piece of it, someone else would steal it.

*No*, she said. *As long as we have problems in this world, we will need people to solve them, and from solving these problems, you will find joy and abundance. And I don't think we're running out of problems anytime soon.*

It was a thunder stroke I chose not to hear. But a light switched on somewhere in my basement. It was my father's words, telling me when I was a little boy that when you build a business or a life, it is not about making money, but rather, about giving someone a job and a "leg up" in life. I had been too young to heed him back then, but when she repeated his words, I remembered his, and they struck gold in my heart this time.

I looked up and saw her shining before me. Her hand reached out for mine. I grasped it, feeling its warmth, and yet, something in me wrestled against it, for how could she turn all my darkness into light?

Yet, still she held my hand, speaking to me with confidence and grace, and as she spoke, some of her energy floated into my veins, giving me the courage to creep up my basement stairs and follow her up onto the first floor of my house, then out the front door into the light.

There, a lush expanse of green met my sight, and under the warm sunshine's caress, I inhaled the sweet scent of grass.

*Come*, she said, and we ran laughing into the horizon, where in the sky it read, "Fear not, for you were born of stars and were meant to be one. Go now, and shine so the world basks in light."



“What is your plan today?”

“I think I’m going to go on a walk in the forest, and then just relax.”

“While you’re out there, could you look for some mushrooms for me?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“And don’t forget to do your homework, okay Farryn?”

“Okay, Mom.”

“I’ll be home by lunch, okay? I love you.”

“Yeah okay, Mom,” I hung up the phone, and looked at the time: 9:46 AM. I sighed, put my phone in my pocket, and started walking out the door.

It was a Sunday morning in autumn, the air crisp and cool. I love the fall, the way the leaves turn shades of yellow and orange, the feel of air as everything prepares for winter. I love wearing shorts and T-shirts, and wearing a jacket, and feeling the wind through my hair. I have always loved going on walks in the fall, especially since I live right by a forest.

I walked out my back door, leaving it behind me. There was a big open field before the forest tapered into the view. I walked toward it, trying to leave all my worries of school and family behind me.

I didn’t have a great relationship with my mother, but at the same time, didn’t really care to. We would fight all the time, with her mostly telling me that it was my fault her husband left her. I would usually yell back, “Then why don’t you just get rid of me!” and she would shout back something about legal reasons.

Yeah, let the law stop you from throwing your child out of the house but not from inflicting emotional abuse on me. Just thinking about it made me tear up.

Honestly, pretending I didn’t care was easier than admitting how much I wanted my mother to love me the way she used to, but the forest was my happy place. Those were just thoughts, and as I made it to the entrance of the forest, I tried to let them slip into nothingness.

There wasn’t a path, but I’d been here so many times that I had made my own mental map to follow. I walked past the bushes and trees, brushing my hand along each one, feeling the rough texture of the bark under my fingertips. I let the sounds of birds chirping, and twigs breaking beneath my feet, fill my body. I watched as golden leaves floated to the ground, the remaining leaves dancing in the wind. Sometimes, I would stop to glance at a squirrel scurrying from tree to tree.

I walked for a few minutes until I came upon a patch of mushrooms growing next to some bushes. There were a whole cluster of mushrooms in this area, the trees and mushrooms working together in perfect harmony. They would give each other nutrients, caring and looking after each other. These particular mushrooms were shiitake mushrooms. Perfect. I stared down at the mushrooms, internally debating whether I should even pick them. Teach my mother a lesson and all, but I didn’t feel like getting yelled at.

I’d had enough of that.

So I bent to pick them up when all of a sudden, the world made a sudden jerk. I lurched forward, throwing my foot out to catch myself, but the world kept shaking, and I fell forward onto my face.

Ow, I thought, *what the*—I tried to stand, but the world was trembling so violently that I couldn’t even sit up. I panicked, my heartbeat jerking to the rhythm of the shaking. The forest was blurry around me, my sense of direction gone. I tried to crawl to cover under something, not yet realizing my mistake.

I crawled toward blurry images of brown and green, hoping any sort of cover would protect me. I heard cracking and breaking around me, like hearing lightning before it rains. I heard the sounds of branches crashing around me, birds squeaking and chirping anxiously in protest. I felt twigs and leaves falling on me, thumping on my back. It was enough to spike a new sense of fear into me. I decided the safest thing for me to do was to cower where I was and throw my arms over my neck.

The shaking seemed to last forever, and I wondered if it would ever stop. Luckily, it did. It slowly tapered out, the shaking easing as if being soothed, slowly calming down and going to sleep. When the shaking stopped, I waited several seconds to make sure it was safe. That the world was really still again. I took my hands off my neck and tried to stand. I felt dizzy and lightheaded, looking to see how far I moved from where I was.

But I couldn't move.

I looked behind me, and saw that a giant tree had fallen over my legs, the pain finally setting in. I tried to break free from it, but I couldn't. I was stuck. My arms were free, so I meddled with my jacket to grab my phone out of the pocket and call for help, but it wasn't there. I searched my other pocket, but couldn't find it. It must've fallen out of my jacket in the chaos. I tried to see if it was somewhere near me so I could grab it, but I realized it must be behind me.

I was becoming irrational, "Mom!" I screamed, "Mom! Help!" My screams became more like sobs, yelling and crying and begging. I tried to pull myself free from the tree but to no avail.

"Stupid tree! Why won't you move!" I tried hitting it, but I couldn't turn around to try and even roll it off my legs. I felt it start to weigh down on me, the tree heavy over my small body.

I tried to calm down. I tried breathing, *Deep breath in. Hold. One. Two. Three. Deep breath out.* Tears welled up in my eyes. "Would someone, anyone, please. Help me."

I began to think about what my mother would do when she found out I was missing. Would she be relieved?

A small part of me wished that she would just forget about me, and some other person would find me, and I'd go live with someone else; but the other part of me called out to my mother, just begging for her to come find me, to care about me. That she would immediately apologize, and fawn over me.

I knew that those were just empty thoughts, but that didn't stop me from thinking them.

I sighed. What was I supposed to do? Just sit here and contemplate life?

Suddenly, I heard someone shouting.

"Farryn! Farryn, are you okay?" The voice was hysterical, coming from somewhere nearby.

"Mom? I'm over here!"

"Farryn!" She came bursting through the trees, tears streaming down her face, still out of breath from running.

"Mom! You came for me!"

She saw me, and immediately ran toward me, trying to roll the tree off me. Everytime she would try to move the tree though, it would hurt.

"Don't worry Wyn, it'll be okay," my mother said, grabbing her phone out of her pocket to call 9-1-1. She started explaining the situation, while I stared at her blankly, still in shock. I couldn't believe she was actually here.

She hung up the phone and sat down next to me, picking up my hand and holding it to her chest. "I'm sorry darling, I'm sorry. Help is on the way. It'll be okay. I promise." She seemed to be talking to herself as much as me, "I was so upset and I shouldn't have taken my anger out on you—"

"I'm sorry too Mom—" I coughed, the tree slowly crushing me to death.

"You'll get out of this Wyn. It'll be okay."

"Okay."

There was a long pause, the sound of our tears echoing through the forest. My mother was here. She was holding my hand and crying and she was here!

"Why are you here, Mom?" I asked.

"I couldn't lose you too. When your father left, I couldn't handle it. I took my anger out on you, and I'm sorry."

"I forgive you Mom. I'm sorry too. I'm sorry for being rude to you, and getting angry at you."

"I love you, Wyn."

I smiled. Even if I didn't make it. Even if the tree crushed my bones and I died here, I would have my mother. I hadn't lost her after all.

"I love you too."



## SEEK

SEAN CHENG '22, PHOTOGRAPHY

Gameday! My mind had been gone the entire fourth period. Funny how slow the clock can move when you don't want to be where you are at. Mrs. Elsbury seemed to drone on and on and on. Sigh. I still can't seem to understand why adults tell us that we will "use this later in life" when I never see my parents use any of this junk. I mean polynomials? Why should I bother paying attention to them at all?

Time drifted and blurred until the tweeting of whistles and roar of the crowd filled my ears. The seats were packed with the traditional gold and red of the Lions. I strapped up my red Jordans and headed out for layup lines. During this time I usually just stick with the program and rebound all the wild dunks Jayden tries, since being the second-string shooting guard I never get any playing time. I am pretty sure I am just on the team to fill the bench up so Coach Klieben feels better about himself. All he cares about is Jayden, Jayden, Jayden.

Jayden is our superstar who always seems to have the ball in his hands. He picks on me for being shorter and less athletic. As usual, he taunted me with his favorite pregame quip.

"Wake up Kaden, the game is about to start. Oh wait, you would actually warm more of the bench if you were laying down."

As the game progressed, it was a tight match. Jayden was carrying the team point for point, but the opposition would not quit. With 15 seconds left, Jayden dribbled the ball up the court when he suddenly clutched his left calf. He collapsed to the floor, and I stared in disbelief at the scene before me until I snapped my head to a voice screaming.

"Wake-up Kaden; get in here!" Klieben said.

I rose to my feet and joined the huddle.

"Alright, I think our best shot is to pick on number 12 because he has been guarding Jayden the whole game. That means ... oh boy ... Kaden ..."

"I've got this coach," I said.

Klieben looked up to the sky with a pained expression muttering under his breath and waved us onto the court.

Tweet! The ball was in my hands and the clock counted down. I called for an isolation and took my sweaty defender one-on-one. I could tell he was tired yet cocky, knowing that he was playing against a feeble backup. I shook this off and began to dribble to my right. I had a plan in mind. As the clock counted down from 10, I drove to my right. I was easily cut off and reset my dribble up top. I knew this was my one chance, and I couldn't let this kid stop me.

The crowd was buzzing and coach Klieben looked like he wanted to disappear. I locked eyes with my defender as the clock hit 5 seconds. I drove to the right again and my defender once again slid to cut me off. However instead of charging ahead I planted, stepped back, and took the shot as the final second ticked off the clock. The ball sailed in a graceful arc as the buzzer sounded ... and straight through the net!

The crowd erupted. I felt like the hero, being the one to save the game instead of Jayden. Everyone was full of joy, but over the ruckus I could hear one particular feminine voice, calling to me. Kaden! Kaden! Kaden! Was that Mrs. Elsbury? She hated sports, so I had no clue what she was doing here. My eyes went blurry and I heard haunting words.

"Wake up Kaden!" she said.

My vision cleared to a bunch of cell phones and an angry Mrs. Elsbury in my face with polynomials in the background. I couldn't believe that was all just my imagination. What a wakeup call.

## CYCLE OF WASTE *LINA KIM '23*

I am a perfectionist. I refuse to accept anything less than the standard of what is considered to be flawless. From any large project to the smallest minor detail, everything needs to be perfect for life to flow smoothly. Like food to the body, so is my daily intake of checking that every assignment, every appointment, and every agreement is checked off in a timely order, so that not even a second of my time goes to waste. To be the epitome of perfection is a necessity.

Oh to be perfect! Doesn't it sound nice? In theory, it does. A perfect diet. The perfect grades. The perfect paper. But, at what cost? And, is it worth the value? As long as I can remember, I have been a perfectionist: yes, even when I was very young. It has been both a blessing and a curse—the double edged sword I have been wielding ever since I learned how to pick it up.

Perfection comes with staying up until four in the morning. There are dragons to slay: papers to edit, exams to study, artworks to paint, college admissions essays to write. Perfection knows this, and knows I won't settle for any less despite the heaviness with which I yield my power in its name. I forgo the normal teenage social engagements, Netflix binges, amusement parks, parties, trading those activities in for time to perfect the pillars of my life. The one thing I can always assure is that no matter the circumstance, I always get things done. I become someone that is always dependable to produce excellent results. Even for a piece of homework that is only worth five points, I will somehow end up spending hours on it, fearful that failure will creep up on me at any moment. I write detailed, complex nonsense to make up for anything I may have missed as not a single crumb of faultlessness should be left to plague my foundation of perfection.

No, perfectionists don't stop at academics; instead, we demand perfection in every aspect of our lives, even the seemingly recreational ones. One such example in my life is baking, an activity I truly enjoy, that is, once everyone leaves the kitchen. I refuse to bake with a crowded kitchen for the potential detriment it might cause the baking process, not that it ever has, or likely every will—but that is the life of a perfectionist: solving pretend problems before they become real ones. Moreover, even in art, I refuse to use the premade colors that are curated to match the original image that I need to paint. Even if it means to take an extra few minutes, I focus all of my energy into mixing tens of colors all together to create the perfect shade. Was it really necessary? No, but perhaps it was my way of satisfying myself knowing that I was going above and beyond, adding to my delusion that someone is bound to notice my additional work.

However, it seems that perfectionism is unattainable. It is an unfortunate reality of cycling through a new imperfection to deconstruct and fixate all my energy into. Life quickly becomes unenjoyable as I nitpick at every failure. No, I am not a perfectionist. I am only a knockoff product, one that is not even close to the original, as I attempt to embody the one thing I am not: perfection. However, I have come to a state of self-awareness and contentment, something that even perfection cannot comprehend. At the end of the day, I know what I am and what I am not. I am someone who always gives forth my best effort. I persist through the struggles that come my way no matter how big or small. I might not be perfect, I might not even be all that great, but I am human and I am loved. I am a child of God. Yes, I am perfect in His eyes.



## REFLECTIONS

KATHERINE JOHNSON '23, MIXED MEDIA

THE CREATOR CONNECTION

KATE KURIMAY '22, MIXED MEDIA





## **FAITH** *EMILY KIM '22*

At ocean's edge there stood a cliff  
Where walked there, Faith and I  
To see how far that we could go;  
The lengths that we would fly

I told Faith to keep me close  
And keep me close she did  
That when we tipped off o'er the edge  
We went down hand in hand

As we fell, I turned to Faith and told her to let go  
To see if she would still obey  
With death laid down below

She let me go as I desired  
And love her, yes, I did  
But without Faith I fell and fell  
Alone, without a friend





# **GRAND PRISMATIC**

SIERRA FOSTER '24, PHOTOGRAPHY

# FEELS OF FALL

AMELIA GOULD-LINDBERG '24, PHOTOGRAPHY



## **BETWEEN THOSE WHITE LINES** *COLIN CURRIER '24*

Grass. Such a simple, common plant, yet so diverse. It can be seen almost anywhere we go in our everyday lives, but in each place it is used in a completely different way. Anywhere from a plain old lawn in someone's front yard all the way to being the playing ground of a game watched by millions. Whether real or fake, green or brown, grass is everywhere. However, when that grass is between these white lines, 360 feet in length and 160 feet in width, with little hashes going all the way down, it's a whole other story.

Between those white lines lies an escape. An escape from the real world. No worries. No anxiety. Only football. Some may think it's dangerous. Some may think it's stupid. But I know what I have experienced. A feeling of complete clarity washes over me as I step out onto that field. The springy turf hugs my cleats with every stride and little pellets go flying into the air. I begin to envision what I'm going to do in the next play. I can feel the adrenaline coursing through my veins almost as if I have super powers. In this moment, I feel like I can do anything. Like I could run through a wall. Like I could put every ounce of energy in my body into slamming the running back straight into the turf. Like I could face the world and deflect every obstacle it threw my way. Standing between those white lines is like standing inside a forcefield that deflects everything negative this world may throw at me.

Between those white lines lies years and years of countless, nostalgic memories, each one of them near and dear to my heart. When I first started as just a little 5 year-old, I may not have known much when stepping onto the field, but I knew one thing, run the ball to the endzone, I sure did that. Time after time, play after play, I would grab the ball from the quarterback and just run. My eyes shifting from one defender to the next. My cleats digging into the soft, patchy grass. The little colored flags hung from my hips and followed me wherever I went, just out of reach of the little hands grabbing at them. Eventually I would find myself running alongside the little white sideline with all the other players running behind me. A feeling of pure happiness and satisfaction would wash over me as I stepped into the touchdown. No other feeling in the world is better. The referee throws his hands in the air, the parents and fans go crazy, and I celebrate with my teammates. Something so small as just running down a field with a ball and into an endzone was the most life changing thing for me as a small child. So life changing that I would work day after day, week after week, year after year, putting 100% effort into getting better at a sport that I loved.

Between those white lines lies a family, a community of friends that will always have my back. We are teammates. We are soldiers. All 11 of us against anyone who may oppose us. On and off the field. The same brother-like mentality we carry when between those white lines, we also carry in any situation. At school. At home. In the classroom. Out anywhere in public. We will always have each other's back and no one ever gets left behind. Everytime we step onto that field, we are reminded that we are all in this together. We are all fighting the same fight. We are all brothers in Christ. We are all students. We are all teenagers. We are all high school football players and we are all family.

Between those white lines lies just a plain old field that has been used year after year to play the game of football, but to me, it's more than just a field.

## HOME *MATTHIAS BRUGGEMAN '23*

The black box theatre is a world within itself. At first glance, it is stage and set, furniture and paint, and nothing more. Audience and actor are divided simply by a line drawn by the lights, a supposition of stage. Both parties exist as one being, telling a story together, sharing both laughter and silence. But a black box is more than the lights and the audience; it is the part of the room the audience never gets to see, the world behind the sets.

Backstage, the story ceases to exist. It is a place without the lights and their warmth, without the characters and their story. Prop tables and loose ends of sets line the walls. Muffled echos of the tale onstage are barely audible and unimportant backstage. Here whole worlds live and die. Gimicks become memories and give birth to comradery. Space is made for silent laughter and encouraging remarks. Celebrations exist in group hugs and highfives. It is in this imperfect place that actors truly live.

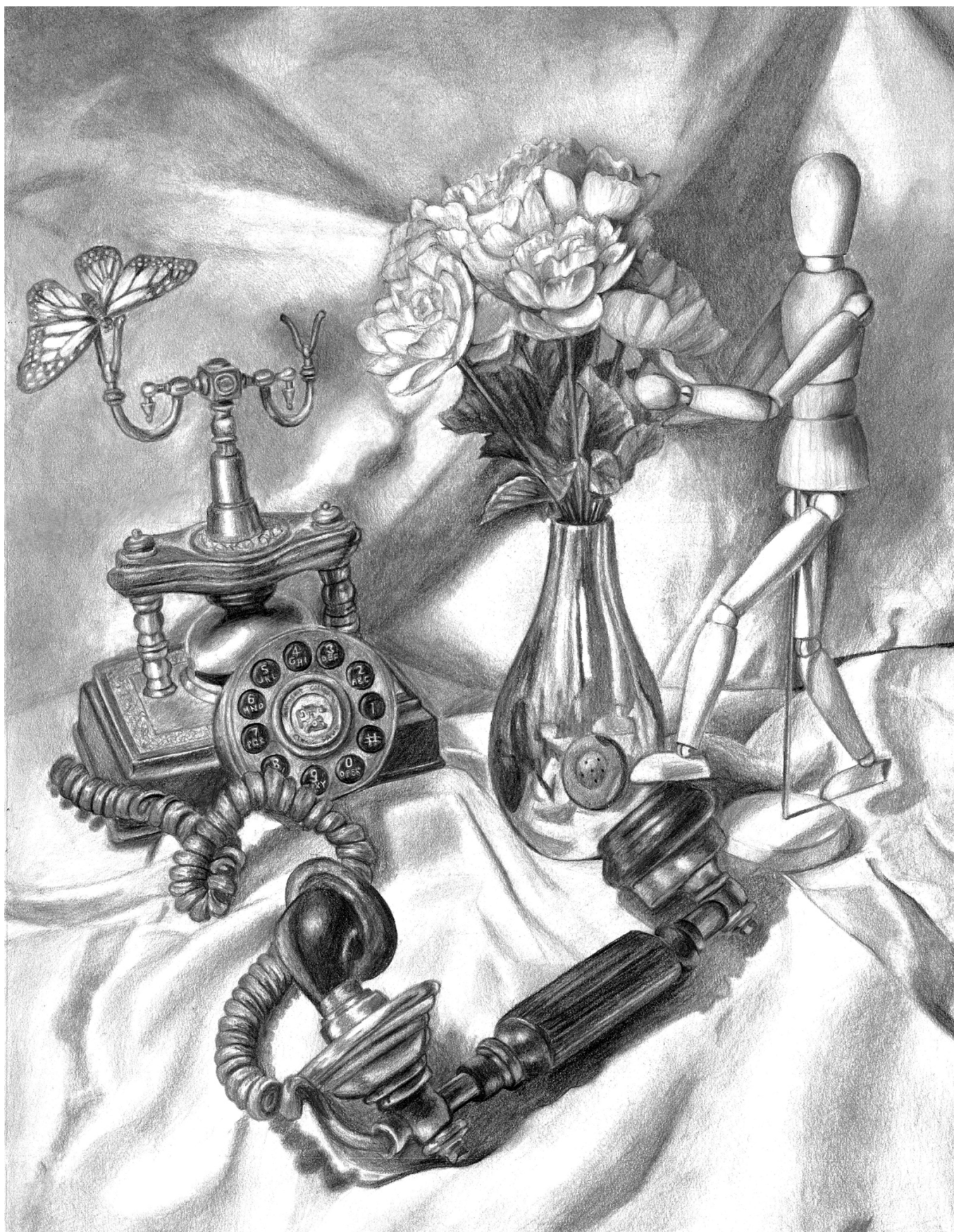
Onstage is a world for the listener. There the characters take the reins. The moment an actor's heel clicks against the wood of the stage, they disappear. The warmth of the lights washes over them, and once that washing is complete, another takes up their stride. It is an aerial view memory, like a drone hovering above; they will not remember from their own eyes because those eyes are not theirs, not under the lights. They submit their person to the story and the character, to funny-fitting costumes and planned spontaneous movements. They exist as another until their retreat backstage.

They step back through the curtains, a washing of cool fabric, and become themselves again, only hearing the story and ignoring it. Breathing in the cold and calm of the dead space in the theatre, an actor is free to be him or herself, among their fellows, in the most imperfect place that is all theirs. The audience never gets to see the story backstage because it belongs in the players' hands. It is their respite. It is a world for the player.

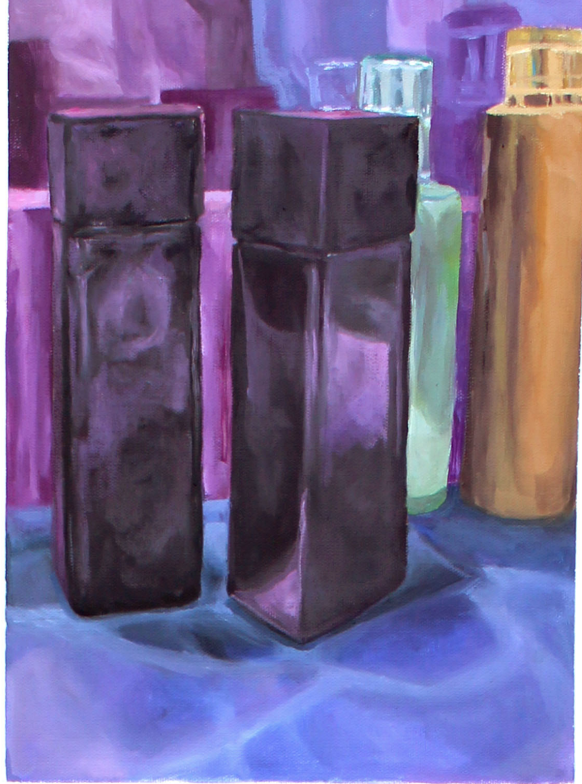
The blackbox is more than simply that which the audience sees and hears: the warm lights, painted sets, and funny-fitting costumes. It is more than the stories and the characters that live there. It is backstage. It is the dark that holds no narrative except the one created by the people who reside in it—the place an actor is hidden from laughter and silence, from costumes and sets and lights, from the characters who steal their body. Backstage is their vital safe haven, the place no one remembers except those who cannot live without it.

And indeed they cannot. Those who have lived here, in the backstage, know that it is easily forgotten but not easily got. The narrative a cast creates backstage is a living thing like a lung that expands and contracts. Inhale. Exhale. It brings life to the story onstage, and yet it is incredibly fragile. Its tender tissue wears quickly. A few months go by and a cast has disbanded. They are still a family but the kind that is never all together. It is hard not to miss that family, but another will come along sooner or later.

The black box theatre is a world within itself. It is so much more than simply stage and set, furniture and paint. It is every story that lives within its walls. The black box theatre is home.



**DATE NIGHT**  
ALEXIS LEE '25, GRAPHITE PENCIL



# I AM PURPLE

JUSTINE CHOI '23

I am purple. It's my favorite color. It's made up of a mixture of two significant colors like I am. I'm a mix of warm red and passion, with shades of cooler blues, the depressive moods. Purple is not just one substance but a melting pot of many personalities. If I'm energetic, I can be fuchsia one day and magenta the next. Sometimes I'm lilac when I'm shy. I'm periwinkle when I can't quite get the balance right, and I feel a bit too blue. The bottom line is I'm lavender, which grows once a year. I need sunlight and warmth, and much like lavender itself, I don't do well in humidity. However, I can be a whole spectrum of hues in a day.

I was purple. People told me when I was younger that I was weird for loving purple because I was purple. People would look at me sideways, thinking that there was something different about me. I told my elementary school teacher about being purple, and she told me about a myth that people who liked the color purple go crazy later in life. She told me that I should change my favorite color, and she told the other kids to keep an eye on me. Some of them would actually put some distance between themselves and me. On the other hand, they were right too, because as a person who is purple, I didn't want to associate with someone as mean and boring as all that. I wasn't about to change who I was to suit them or anyone else. As I grew older, I realized how younger people have hard times admitting what their actual favorite colors are for fear of being ostracized.

I am too purple. People and I have always looked at me a little differently. Ever since I was born, I've had dark purple circles under my eyes, which gives me a perpetually tired look. This is annoying for a couple of reasons, one being that I feel fine most of the time; I can be fully rested, and yet still, I look like I've played video games for four nights in a row. The other is that people treat me like I am always in my blue period. They'll take things easy on me or offer to do things for me when I'm perfectly capable. There are sometimes when I am actually tired. This is when it gets worse. My whole under-eye area, what I call my cheeks, turns purple. I am so purple. So much so that it's just visible on my face.

I wear purple. For the past two years, we have had to wear grey, navy, and white, and since purple was not on the list of approved colors, I have had to hide my purple. I had to save my purple for the weekends, but because I had to save it, I made an occasion out of it. People who know me can pick me out of a crowd because of it. My favorite article is a purple pullover hoodie. It's two and a half years old, well-worn, and oversized. It's a protective layer of my comfort zone, and I get to disappear inside of it.

I share purple. I take it as a sign of progress that people my age are beginning to understand the real meaning of purple. They are gradually coming around to purple, and I know because I ask them. I still believe that the question "What is your favorite color?" does not become any less crucial as we get older. Whenever a birthday comes around, I want to buy people something that they will love, so I ask them what their favorite color is, to which a lot of them will reply, "purple." Every time I hear this from anyone, I refer back to my friends and the elementary teacher and confirm I won the lifelong competition. I do my best not to look to the pride of purple.

I create purple. Artists each have their own style. I really like to work with purple but it's very difficult to work with. As you study, if you try to paint with purple, it doesn't come through as vividly. Each color of paint works differently. Other paints, like blues and yellows, get a lot more use because of their utility: blues for shadows, yellows for highlights. Purple is a mix of warm and cool colors, so it doesn't pop as clearly as the others. Furthermore, purple is difficult to show clear detail with. Thus, it often looks amateurish. It's so thin that you often see the canvas through it. Every art teacher I've ever had has tried to talk me out of using it because it's a high-risk paint choice. However, I still use it. In my dictionary, "Art" is a different way of expressing "you." So I do whatever I want, like purple.

I am purple. Only purple can symbolize me.

# A PIANO AND A DESK, AND WINDOWS IN THE WALLS

JULIANNE KAM '24

There's a room with a piano and a desk in it, and windows in the walls.

Take a look at the piano. It's black, obviously, and since there's not enough space in the room for a grand piano, an upright one occupies the corner instead. Careful polishing keeps the ebony mirror bright. Lift up the fallboard and look at the keys. Observe the flecks of black paint that dust the pearly keys like fallen soot, the second-lowest B key that always sticks halfway down. Test the gleaming pedals and listen to the faint, faraway echoes of long-played tones. Open up the lid—don't let it fall against the back!—and peer at the shining metal wires, the dozens of soft hammers poised to strike them. Play a note and watch one fall. The sound leans sharp, but nobody notices anymore. In the evening light, the sun paints the wall with reflections from the keys. Phantom fingers, well-trained after years of mimicking another's movements, perform soundless sonatas for Nobody—you, if you can position yourself just right. Try not to shift side-to-side on the bench as you do so. It'll gripe at your weight with indignant creaks.

Stand up and turn to the desk on your right. The shelf beside it doesn't seem to be serving its purpose: its contents spill out over the desk, constantly pushing back against the incessant tidying campaign. The few items it manages to confine are crammed together without rhyme or reason: hand sanitizer rooms beside last year's homework, and a flock of tiny origami cranes (folded during freshman year's biology lectures and history presentations) encroaches on the stationery's territory. The battered bins that fill the rest of the shelf are finally succumbing to years of abuse. Tales of frustrated kicks and frantic tugs are written in their peeling panels and fraying edges. As for the desk itself? The same sunlight that works magic through the west window cheekily spotlights the eraser shavings scattered across the "white" desk. Papers are strewn about, probably bystanders in a frenzied search for some important document. The chair is pushed back, and its black cushion dangles from the edge as if deciding whether to heed gravity's call. You might assume that a mischievous cat had endeavored to cause as much chaos as possible. (There is no cat in the room. There has never been a cat in the room.)

Mystical magic and homely havoc.

So different, they might as well belong to separate worlds.

So familiar, this room with the piano and the desk in it, and windows in the walls.



**MOVING OUT**  
LILLY HURRT '23, ACRYLIC



## **GHOST COSTUME**

JASMINE ZHANG '22, PHOTOGRAPHY

## TO BE ALIVE *HEEJAE LEE '24*

I stretch my legs. I shake them alive. I hop on my toes from one end of the line to another, the warmth spreading to my ankles and my feet. When I feel ready, I open the front door and am met with a rush of fall. The air is sharp, and it fills my lungs with a nostalgic breath of autumns long gone. As I devour the delicious air, gasping for more like a fish out of water, I am reminded that this fall is also soon to be gone, as it always goes. I start with a slow jog. As I move down the street that I have called my home for the past 11 years, my head brushes on the crimsoned sweet gum leaves in my neighbor's yard, as I forgetfully do every day—regardless of the seasons. Some leaves float to my feet from our short skirmish, as though letting out a deep sigh, and my feet crunch on them in rebellion to their melancholic silence.

As I hit the pavement of the trail beyond my house, I pick up speed. I don't know where I'm going. It doesn't matter. I'm running. I will be going somewhere. I will end up somewhere, maybe some place new. Maybe I'll forget how to come back. Maybe I'll be scared. Maybe I'll get too tired along the way. But it doesn't matter. The air whips past me, pulling me back and challenging me to stay still. I spread my arms beside me and open my hands, trying to catch the air as it slips between my fingers. It tickles.

My feet slam into the ground as I run as fast as I can, the impact of each step reverberating through my legs and my spine and my body. It hurts, in a way that I have gotten used to but won't ever get tired of. A vast smile spreads across my face, an uncontrollable response to this tender agony. I am laughing. I want to yell, to announce my joy, and let it be known by the world. I run up the hills, kicking up clouds of dirt as I go. I can see everything. The hills burning gold. The geese streaking across the sky. The sky painfully blue. Every house and shopping complex and my old school and the cars and my friends and everything and everyone I left behind. I can see clearly from up the hill.

My eyes blur as the images burn into my mind, the blood surging to my head. Have I run so high up that the air has thinned? I don't want to run anymore. My feet hurt. The air feels dry and my lungs feel like they'll explode. I forgot to warm up my shoulders! I want to give up. I don't know if I have the strength to keep running. I sit behind some larrea bushes and cry, just to cry. I let it out, a warm late-late-summer squall that soaks the dust beneath me.

The sticks and rocks and seeds I'm sitting on are starting to hurt. There's no point in crying. I get up. I dust the dirt off. It's time to go back home. I run back down the side of that stupid hill.

I remind myself that it's ok. I'm doing well. I shouldn't look down that hill and feel sad. The seasons change, after all. All I need are my two feet to run on. I run and run and run. I run as fast as my heart will take me.

I am running. I am breathing. I am shouting. I am struggling. I am laughing. I am singing. I am flourishing. So, I am alive.

It's a beautiful day to be alive.

"It's. My. Turn!" Paisley stomped her foot and scrunched her face into the meanest scowl an eight-year-old could muster.

"No," her older brother tried to explain calmly, "You've been playing all day and only want the swing because I want it. It's my turn now."

She had stayed home that day because of a doctor's appointment in the morning while he still went to school. She realized her brother would not relent his place on the swing and decided to switch to Plan B. Charlie really should have seen this coming, considering this is what his sister always does when she doesn't get her way.

"MOOOOM!" The child's screeching caused Charlie to cringe. He thought she sounded like the banshee in a horror movie he wasn't supposed to watch but saw anyway. The grey dress and twin braids she was sporting certainly matched, although both he and his sister had brown hair and eyes, not black hair and white eyes like the girl in the movie. Paisley was also a bit tidier than the movie girl, though he couldn't say the same for himself as his jeans and striped long sleeves had gotten dirty during school that day.

Sometime between his sister starting to scream bloody murder and him pondering if it was possible to exorcize her as they did to the girl in the movie, their mother made an appearance. He assumed it would be the same old song, "Don't cry hun, you can play on the swing in a minute, let your brother have it for a little while, he only just got home from school," followed by a full-on temper tantrum and his mother giving in because that was seemingly the only way to get Paisley to stop screaming. To his surprise, that didn't happen this time. Charlie wondered if the self-help and parenting books that were slowly taking over the coffee table in the living room were actually having an effect on his parents. His mother said, "I have had enough. You are coming inside with me now."

His sister was still screaming, of course, but this didn't stop their mom from hoisting her up into her arms, not unlike she would a bag of potting soil, and marching into the house with Paisley wiggling like a worm.

The yard wasn't as quiet as he hoped it would be because her vocal cords were powerful enough to rattle the old thin windows and penetrate the brick walls of their small house. Mom called the house rustic; he thought it was shabby. The boy heaved a sigh too heavy for someone so young. It wasn't always this way he thought. He used to love spending time with his sister when she was younger. Sure she was sick in bed most of the time, but they found a way to have fun, even when they had to move because the bills piled up too high. Charlie wanted to love his sister but her actions and the actions of his parents made it hard sometimes, most times. The resentment was getting hard to push away. Mom always said patience was his best virtue, being able to handle his sister with kindness. It was meant to be a compliment but he never felt like it was something to be proud of.

At this point in his life, his sister's tantrums were more like white noise to him, so drowning her out in order to enjoy the swing wasn't particularly hard. Due to his lack of attention to the events happening inside the house, he didn't notice how his sister's screaming was replaced with his mother yelling, "Paisley! Paisley Anne, put those down NOW!"

Charlie finally took notice. It turns out his peace was interrupted because Paisley decided she would steal a pair of kitchen scissors and run full force at the swing, the very same swing he was sitting on. Fight or flight kicked in, but unfortunately, running doesn't really work when sitting on a swing, so in his panic, he ended up landing flat on his back in the dirt instead.

Paisley, determined to ruin everyone's afternoon since she couldn't get her way and was not used to actually being told no, decided it was a good idea to use the stolen pair of scissors and cut the ropes of the swing.

In shock and covered in dirt, Charlie continued to watch his sister's attempt to cut the ropes and his mom trying to pry Paisley away. This was not how he wanted this afternoon to go, but at the very least he would have a cool story to tell to his friends at school tomorrow.



I took a deep breath and filled my lungs with stale air. *It's staler than the air at college*, I thought before exhaling. *Well there's no stopping now*, as I grabbed my bags from the cab's trunk. I dreaded my yearly visits to see my sister Iris but, even more so than that, I dreaded her response to me skipping them. "Yeah," I whispered to myself, "I'd much rather save myself from repeating that mistake." Checking my phone for the address, I started walking towards my sister's house. With every footfall on the way to Iris's place I whispered to myself about how I haven't seen her in a year and she could have changed and this time could be better. In the back of my mind a voice kept telling me that it would be the same as any other visit. My throat started to feel dry and I tugged at my collar to stop it from choking me. *Breathe*, I thought to myself. *You're not even at her house yet, don't have an anxiety attack in the middle of the street just thinking about being at* – and then I saw it – "Her house," I sighed, shakily. As I walked up the stairs to the front door the overwhelming anxiety in my stomach churned. "Please, if there is a God up there let this be okay," I prayed as my hand reached for the door knock. *Gong Gong Gong*, it sounded like a death bell on the iron door. I quickly blinked away the tears forming in my eyes and plastered on a smile before the door swung in to reveal Iris.

"Juno!" Her voice rang, holding the 'O' for as long as humanly possible.

"Iris, it's been so long!" I said as she came in for a hug. As her arms trapped me to herself I squeezed a little hoping she couldn't feel me shake.

"Here, let me take your bags, we have so much to talk about!" She said, taking the leather cases from my hands. I followed her into the house. Everything was placed at certain angles that made them look like artifacts in a museum. In fact, everything in her house made you feel like you were in a museum, one that you didn't belong at.

"Make yourself at home! I'll put your bags up in your room!"

"I'll do that myself," I said, trying to sound authoritative. The last time she just wanted to put my bags away she shuffled through them and still denies it to this day. But nevertheless she insisted and skipped upstairs. My stomach gave a lurch as I heard the click of a door shutting in place. I let myself rest on the gray sofa in the next room over as I took inventory of everything important I had packed in my bag for later reference. Before I could finish the list in my head, my sister's head popped around the corner.

"So how was college?" She asked, eyes wide as she took a seat uncomfortably close to me. "Is it okay if I sit next to you?"

"Well I could use a litt–," I started.

"Thanks," she interjected, scooching closer. I plastered on a smile trying to hide my discomfort. *I guess if it makes her happy*, I thought to myself.

"Well college went ... okay," I told her, racking my head for stories I could tell her without her finding fault in me like she managed to do so well.

"I got good grades. All A's and B's," I told her. *She should be happy with that right?* Wrong.

"A's and B's? What did you get a B in?" She asked me with tinges of judgment in her voice.

"Oh just English and Theology, but you know I've always been bad at that," I said to her nervously. Here it comes. I cried silently to myself.

"Oh well if you're okay with just being average I guess. I would have tried to be my best self, but we're different. You're not me," she giggled again, this time with false sweetness dripping off her tongue. The anxiety in my stomach churned and changed as my jaw clenched in its faux smile. *I do try, I've tried since I was a teenager, and you still ignore my improvement and tell me I'm just average.*

"You're right, I've never been as academic as you," I lied to her. I heard her stories from when she was in college. They usually ended in her barfing up all the beer she drank and skipping class the next day. But of course that never ruined her golden child title. My ears became a reddish tint, and I could feel the anxiety churning in my stomach, pushing itself up to my chest.

"What's it like being independent?" she asked.

"It's not a dream but it feels nice," I told her.

"I'm glad you like it. I was so worried that you wouldn't be prepared for that much independence, you never were that independent. Of course I don't blame that on you, you are the baby so naturally mom babied you a lot as a teen," she said, concerned but with the same false sweetness. *Babied?* I thought to myself, *Mom and Dad barely look away from their own lives enough to parent me, let alone baby me. Besides, it's not like you were so helpful making me independent.*

"Well I don't know if I'd say that, I did a lot to be independent as a teen and I had to work really hard to get there," I said to her, snapping slightly.

"Oh of course you did! But it was only after my help and suggestions that you even started being so independent," Iris said with false modesty. *That's it*, the voice from the back of my head told me.

"You're kidding me, right?" I said, this time with true authority. "You didn't help me at all!" Iris looked stunned at my sudden harshness.

"What do you mean I told you every—," she started, but I didn't want to hear it.

"All you did was tell me what to do and how to do it and give me no space, even when I asked for it and disregarded every boundary I ever set!" I yelled, voice getting louder as my feelings became more and more passionate. "You told me how to do everything and I was dumb enough to listen. I tried your way of independence! I figured things out on my own and never asked for help even when I needed it and as a result my life started going downhill."

"I never told you to do that! I just said—"

"I don't care what you think you taught me because all you really taught me was to not ask for help or else you get picked on and laughed at by your own sister. You didn't teach me anything about independence! All you did was tell me what to wear and how to wear it and invade my privacy after asking for space. All you did was push my limits I set for myself after I repeatedly told you not to. All you did was tell me a million things I should be and should do and disregard every boundary I set all while simultaneously saying that I should be more independent and make decisions for myself," and as I yelled it I rose from my chair voice getting louder and more dominant.

"Well maybe I did do that, but you can't deny that mom and dad babied you!" My sister matched my tone and rose with me.

"Our parents didn't do anything for me, Iris! Once you flew the coop they just decided they were done with parenting! I only fit into our mom's life when she has a party! She expects me to cancel shifts at the jobs I signed myself up for alone, so I can pay for my meals, and my car, and my apartment, just to be her doll for a few hours before she tells me how horrible I am compared to you when we get home!" My voice cracked and tears flowed down my face. Wet anger poured out of my mouth as I continued to yell at Iris. About how excited mom was to be her parent and how I ended up getting the backwash because everyone loves the golden child but no one cares about the silver child. "I've been independent for years Iris! Do you want to know why? Because I was the unplanned and unwanted baby and still am after 19 years!" My voice continued to crack like a piece of marble under pressure. Even though I was angry at everything, I still cried because most of all I was angry that I still cared so much after 19 years of being the silver child. My throat felt hot and swollen from all of the yelling and there was a moment of silence between my sister and me.

"Juno I—," my sister said defensively but she stopped before she could make an excuse for herself.

"I'll grab my things. I'm not going to be staying," I admitted to Iris and to myself.

"But, Juno, it would make me so happy—"

"I've been trying to make you happy my whole life. I'm done. Goodbye Iris," I said coldly. I walked upstairs, tears still flowing down my face, and found the room that was supposed to be mine for the weekend. I felt a bittersweet sense of pride as I checked my bags and called a taxi. While walking down the hall with my suitcase in hand I heard my sister sobbing in her room; for a moment I was sad again. I had hurt my sister, possibly beyond forgiveness, and I was proud of myself. *No*, a voice in my head told me, *You're not the one at fault here. She's treated you like this for years and it needed to stop. She wouldn't have listened if you just asked nicely.* I started silently crying in the back of the taxi; because after 19 years of trying to fake a smile for people who never even tried to listen to me I finally got to tell one of them everything that has been bottled up inside.



## CALMNESS

TAEUN KIM '25, COLOR PENCIL

# GOODBYE, MY DARLING

ABBIE LARSON '23

We chuckled that night with forced gaiety, pursuing our usual banter with a determination to ignore the foreboding that was present in all of our hearts. I stubbornly glanced over the stray tears that continued to leak from my mother's eyes as the raucous TV buzzed heartily in the background. He seemed to know what was coming, but took pains to accommodate all of us, smiling through the pain before succumbing to sleep.

My own facade shattered that night once my parents declared bedtime and exited the stage. My voice tried to take on that false cheerfulness that I'd clung to earlier, but my tears made such a feat impossible. My sister and I trudged to bed, guiding him through the dark. Before we went to sleep, he kissed my cheek in a heartrending attempt to console me. But I knew my own pain was nothing to his.

No one slept that night, despite our best attempts. He moved several times, trying to get comfortable, to find relief from the agony I knew cascaded through his bones. When he thought we all were asleep, I could hear him releasing his own cries of misery. My heart shattered at the sound, and I stretched my hand out to him. He sat beside me and closed his eyes, sighing heavily.

That morning arrived both too slowly and too rapidly for all of our liking. He seemed to be in good spirits that morning. Looking at the cozy display in our sunroom, the golden sunrise dripping sunbeams onto the wood floor, you could almost trick yourself into believing it was just another sleepy Saturday morning. I gripped that guise so desperately that I could feel my knuckles cracking.

I'm sorry, my angel, that I could not stay that morning. When the doctor arrived, her cajoling sympathy and the mournful tilt to her face could not allay my own perception of her as a watchful death angel. No matter her cheerful blouse or her gentle hands, I could not stand the sight of her near him. She waited outside dutifully as we said goodbye. I couldn't hold fast to that illusion then, and my entire body started shaking. I had tried and tried and tried and tried and tried to cry, to prepare myself for this moment. But no time, no task, no effort would wash away the shuddering anguish I felt as my heart ripped in two.

To the last, my love, you were every bit the selfless soul of joy that had made us cry with laughter through these 10 years. You put your head close to mine and kissed my face as I whispered my last thoughts to you in this world.

*Thank you.*

*Thank you for coming into our lives and letting us love you.*

*Thank you for comforting me every time I cried.*

*Thank you for being my closest confidante, the keeper of all my secrets.*

*Thank you for bringing laughter into a world that for me fades to more gray day by day.*

*Thank you for all you have given us.*

*I will never, ever forget you.*

And God smiled that day when my angel returned to his arms.

Sweat dripped down my face, and the pain in my hand never ceased as I pushed myself further, enduring the pain. I looked at the time and it was almost midnight, and I had only started my essay half an hour ago. I heard a knock on my door, and it opened.

“What are you still doing, Darwin? You’d better not be playing video games so late in the night. Your little brother is already asleep you know.”

“Not now, mother,” I said. I could not have any interruptions while I was hard at work.

“Ok then, son, just make sure you get some sleep.”

I continued working as the clock kept clicking and ticking. A drop of sweat dripped down my chin and almost landed on my paper, but I caught it with my incredible reflexes. I decided that now was the time to take a nice, cold, shower. I got out in a record time of twenty-four and a half minutes and got back to work. Sweat was no longer dripping, but the pressure was all the same, if not more than it was before the shower. Finally, the first paragraph had been completed and I only had four to go.

While I was making excellent progress on the second paragraph, I felt my eyes getting tired, longing for sleep.

“What are doing?” my stuffed animal, a hybrid between a purple cat and a firetruck, asked me.

“Sorry Bartholomew, I’m quite busy at the moment,” I replied, with all of my attention on my work. Finally, the second paragraph was finished.

“Hey Darv, I think I smell somebody,” said the stuffed animal.

“Uh-huh,” I replied while writing the conclusion to my amazingly crafted third paragraph. I heard a crash from downstairs, which finally woke me up from what must have been a dream. My stuffed animal was laying on my bed, right where I had left him. I checked to make sure, but he was the same inanimate stuffed animal that I remembered. Then, I ran downstairs very quickly to grab a glass of POG juice to not waste any time. I flew down the stairs, landing on the bottom step with a thud, surprising the robbers who had broken into my house. However, I didn’t pay any mind to the intruder, or the valuable items that he or she was taking from us. I had bigger problems.

Not only was I running out of time, but we were out of POG juice! After settling for orange juice, I rushed back upstairs to continue. I was met with intense panic when I sat down to work. I only had one paragraph completed! I quickly concluded that the rest must have been a dream, but I didn’t worry about it, because I had already memorized every word that I wrote in my dream. One paragraph became two, and two became three. I could feel the structure of my right hand completely falling apart as my arm became unable to function and my handwriting became messier. My eyes kept faltering, but I found some tape to keep them open. Light began peering out of the blinds in the windows by my bed, where Bartholomew sat, completely inanimate. Finally, I was on the final paragraph. Soon after I started, I was interrupted by my frenzied mother, who informed me of a break-in, and that she’ll take me to school as soon as everything was settled.

“Ok mother, I’ll come down for breakfast in a bit,” I replied. I don’t quite remember what else she said, but I do remember her saying something about how our entire grand piano had been stolen, despite that there was no way for it to fit through the front door. I shakily wrote the final paragraph, as my eyes painfully endured the strain of the tape holding them open, and the jumbled collection of bones that was once my hand worked out one final sentence. Drenched with sweat, I collapsed. My work was done, and I could finally rest.



## BLUE TIME

XIANGCHI LAN '23, PHOTOGRAPHY

I awoke in the car, on the way to school, along with my younger brother, Alex. My mother had already packed everything for me and was telling me all about the incident with the robber as I sleepily ate some cheese bread for breakfast. She had even packed me some nice, cold orange juice in a container.

“Don’t worry son, everything is going to be fine!” she told me enthusiastically. “The police are already working on the case, and we’ll get through this together.”

“Also, I’m so proud of you for working so hard on that essay you’ve been telling me all about!” my mother added.

“Yeah,” I managed to say, “it was actually pretty easy.”

“Either way, it’s pretty rare for you to work on assignments ahead of time like this Darv.”

“... huh?”

“Didn’t you tell me that it was due tomorrow?”



# **THE MIDAS TOUCH**

LAUREN BACKSTROM '23, PHOTOGRAPHY



## **WAKE UP** *YIFAN WANG '23*

The winter wind tunnels down the Capital Mall  
Its harsh claws scratching at faces and spirits  
As if making a point to chase everyone indoors.  
Only one chooses to remain  
Standing next to the Vietnam War Memorial,  
Before the names carved on the dark stones,  
Standing tall, but fragile like a twig  
The cold surrounds him.

The scars he carries on his back are unimaginable,  
Earned in a war not meant for him, not meant for anyone.  
He fought for his country.  
Saw his friends die;  
Never giving up, even for a lost cause.

This veteran is not the only one who suffered the same fate,  
But many of us couldn't care less.  
To the rest of America  
Their snapchat streaks are more important.  
Instead of helping someone in need,  
In order to give they must receive.  
They see yet they are blind;  
They hear yet they are deaf;  
They are conscious yet oblivious  
To the cries for help from a fellow human being  
Who is suffering from his experiences,  
With no one there to lend a helping hand.

In our daily life,  
There are often things that we cannot see,  
Often things we cannot hear,  
Often things we cannot do,  
Terrible things that happen around us  
And they're not to be ignored.  
Wake up.

# FROM THE STUDENT EDITORS

For the 4th Edition of *The Mirror*, we've collected an array of art and literature submissions from current students as well as alumni that demonstrates the theme of FAITH. From the role of Christ in our daily lives to the importance of mindfulness to defining personal faith, we hope that these pieces will inspire readers to reflect on their relationship with God.

The photograph *Light of the World* shows how God's light can shine on everyone, even those in the darkest places. In contrast, the poem *Intangible* discusses the unseen presence of faith, acknowledging its God-given qualities. The photograph *Psalm 18:2* shows a girl sitting on a rock just as "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer" (Psalm 18:2). God is the rock which we stand on, providing us with eternal support and everlasting strength. Similarly, the poem *Reflection of Myself* reminds us that everyone is created in the image of God, and our reflections in the mirror become reflections of Him.

Faith is an intensely personal and powerful force that can assist us in discovering meaning and purpose in our lives. We hope that this edition of our school magazine inspires you to think about your own views and the role that faith plays in your life.

Julie Tai ('23) and the Student Editorial Board



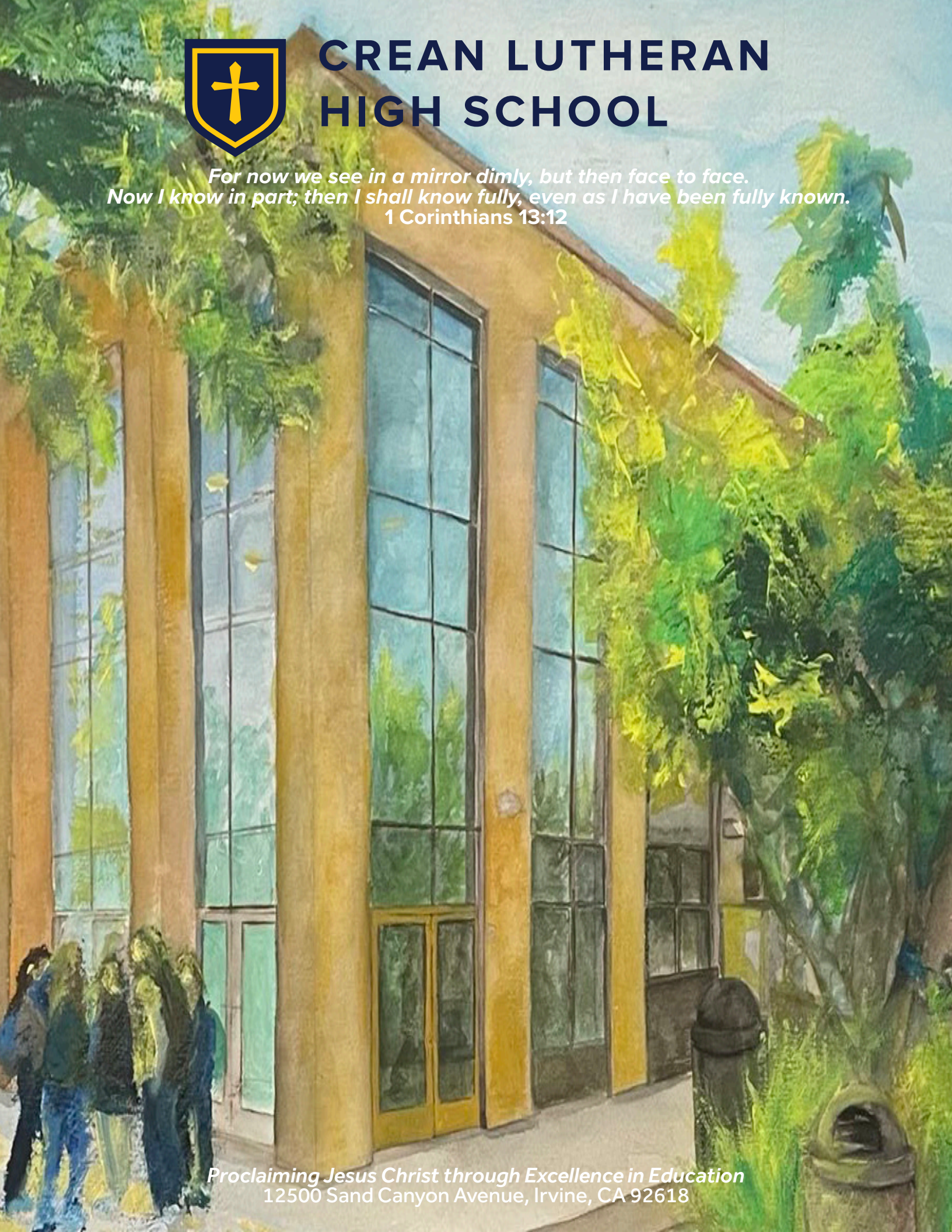
**CALM WAVEEEE**  
JUSTINE CHOI '23, MIXED MEDIA





# CREAN LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL

*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.  
Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.  
1 Corinthians 13:12*



*Proclaiming Jesus Christ through Excellence in Education*  
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