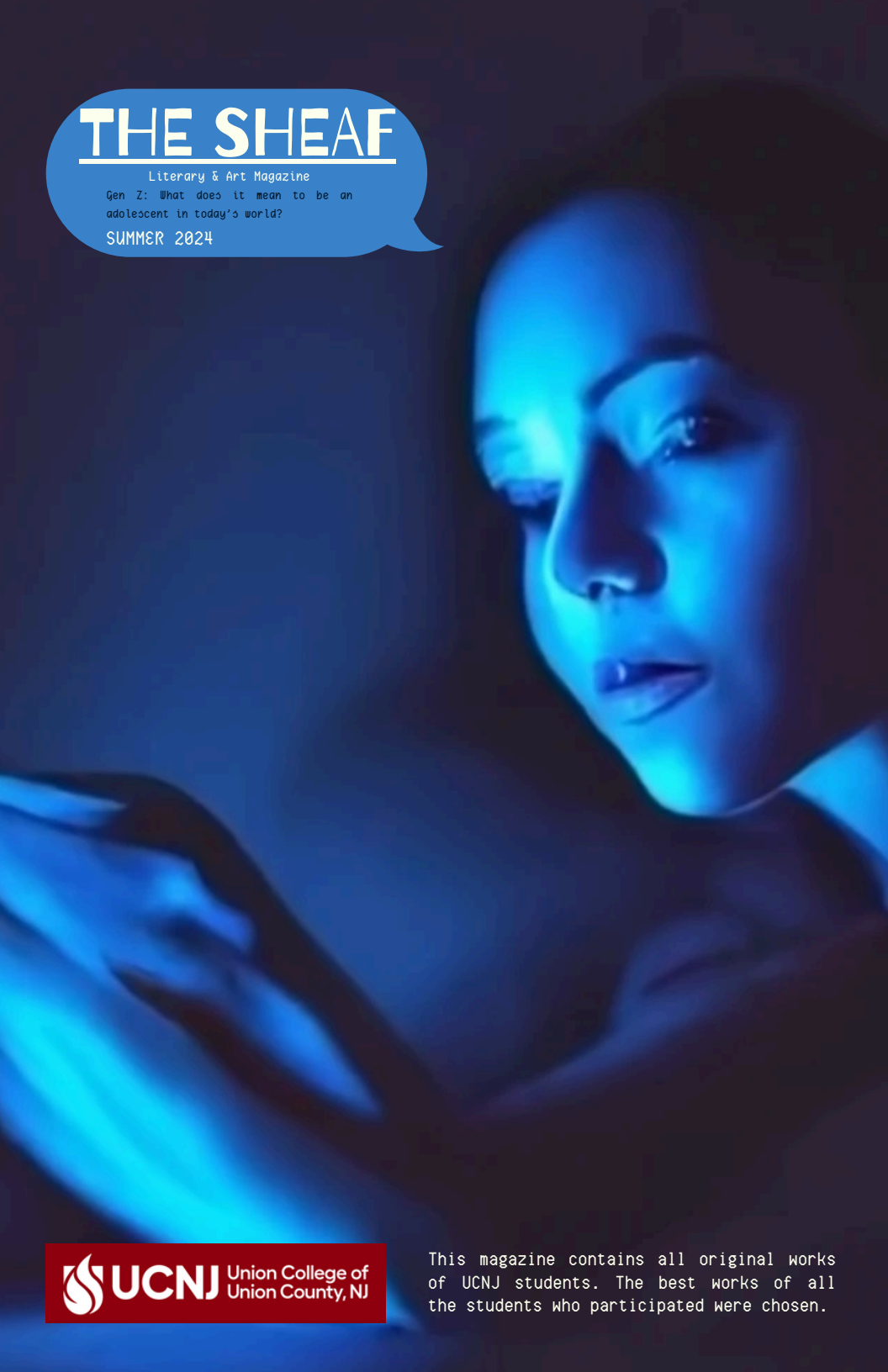


THE SHEAF

Literary & Art Magazine

Gen Z: What does it mean to be an adolescent in today's world?

SUMMER 2024



UCNJ Union College of
Union County, NJ

This magazine contains all original works of UCNJ students. The best works of all the students who participated were chosen.

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Foster Care

By: Sumiyyah Williams

Yells and insults are thrown at the innocent

Stomach ache is for breakfast

Dizzy from slaps

I walk to school with whips on my back and arms

The shivers hug me instead of mommy, my small

sweater is no match for 32 cold weather

I'm weak and happy for school, hatred fills my

backpack replacing notebooks

The last period bell rings, headed back to hell

too soon, back to jail

My cries are silent, tearless; they are on the

inside

The devil's hands rub my inner thighs until I'm

asleep.

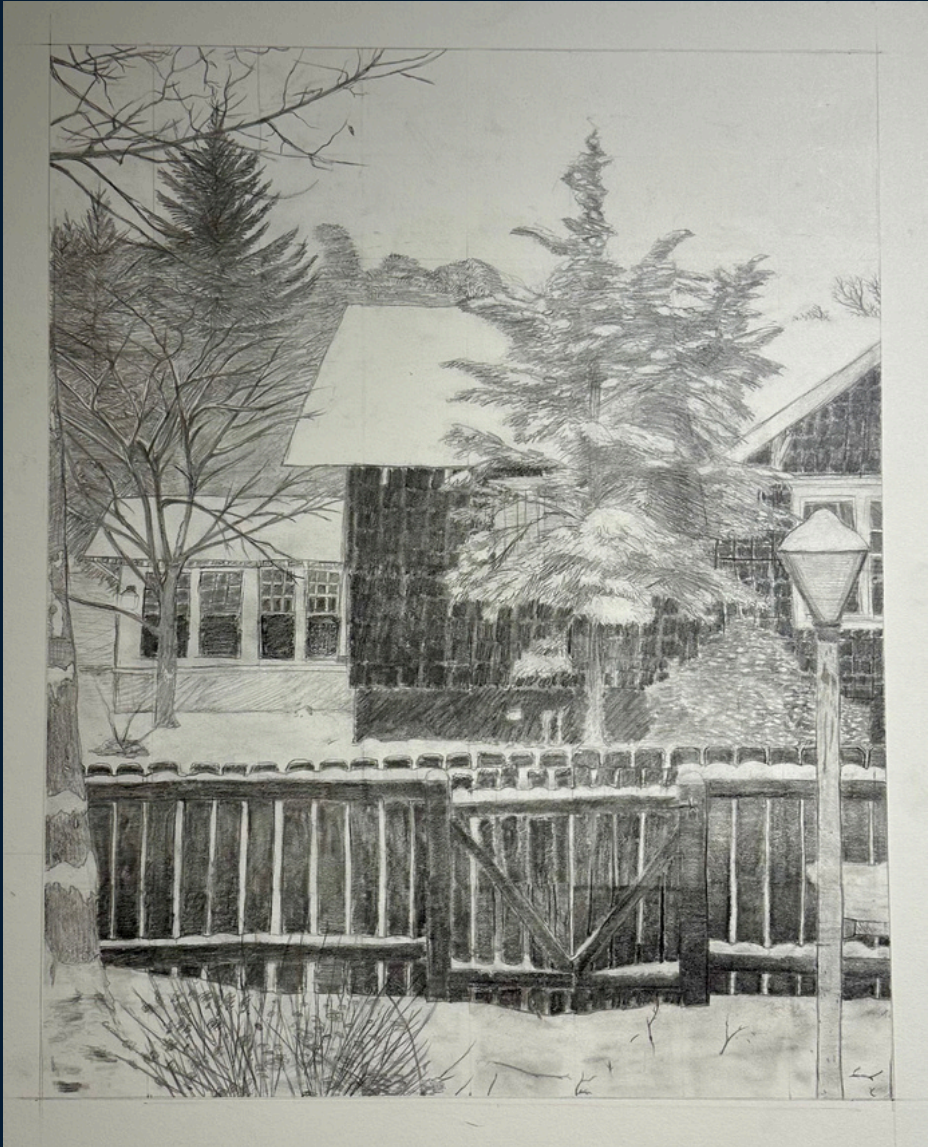


Charcoal Winter Landscape

By: Keian Young

Landscape with House

By: Aubrey Rutledge

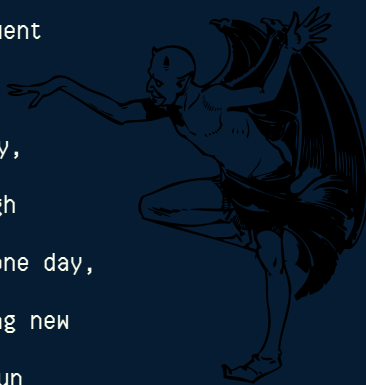




No Escape

By: Malcom Dillard

I was happy,
or at least I tried to be
I always smiled and laughed,
because I knew they were too blind to see
the pain hiding behind my eyes,
the tears i held from running down my face
I always put on a different disguise
because no matter where I went
I was so out of place
the pain was getting heavy,
but i still smiled through
because I believed that maybe one day,
I could leave and be something new
but no matter how far I run
and hide from my past
i seem to always end up
exactly where i started at
so i've finally stopped moving
and accepted my fate
i sat in all of my chaos,
right in front of the devils gate



Compare

By: Lily Corso

All these people on my screen
smiles bright.

No hardships in sight.

What am I doing wrong?

Should life be this hard?

Why don't I look like Her?

Repeat.

Have I ever been that happy?

Repeat.

Why don't I have that many friends?

Repeat.

Is something wrong with me?

Repeat.

Repeat

Repeat.

I can't even look in the mirror

All I see is a girl who has nothing

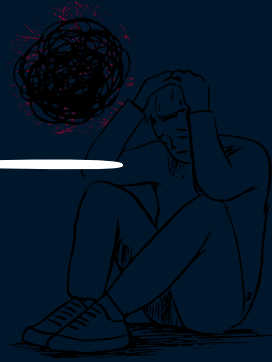
A girl who will never be what she sees

and yet it seems impossible to just

Delete.

Delete.

Delete.



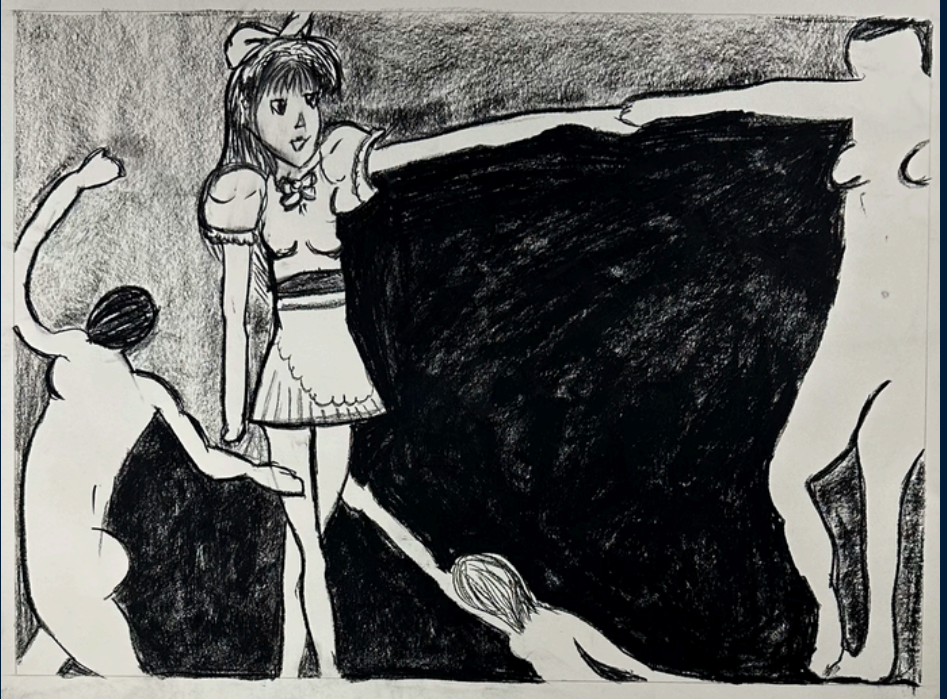
Skull With Body

By: Avery Higinbotham



Animae With Matisse Dance

By: Janine Goschl





Commodity

By: Laura Schubert

From the prepackaged frozen meals you buy in bulk to save a buck.

To the cheap polyester clothes you get from companies that
exploit child labor,

You're a commodity like the products you spend your taxed dollars
on.

Stain your lips red and slap mascara on, using brands that most
definitely cause cancer.

The same brands that own pharmaceuticals to profit even more when
they get you sick, but that's neither here nor there.

At least you'd be pretty.

Almost pretty enough for someone to love.

Make yourself look like the latest fads.

Your body is so last season, consider saving up for whatever
cosmetic procedure is trending.

Fill the void by finding meaning in material objects, buy
yourself a new outfit.

Make yourself look like the herd.

Nearly perfect Barbie's waiting to be chosen.

Sit on the shelf to await for someone to play with you.

There's Rest in Relenting

By: Ngozi Nwachukwu

Even in the midst of the world's attractive melodies

With open ears, I will still choose to tune in to You

How can I continue to allow myself to be swooned

By societies rather countless and insensitive blues

Thank God that I'm older, wiser enough to understand,

that this would be unfair to them-to me

And day by day I'm beginning to see, that by His

grace, I can be set free

Surely, one can try to handle such weight all on

their own

But how much more sorrow can a lone soldier take

Before they eventually let go, relent, seeking

Christ's face

The Mass

By: Jesus Garcia





Multicolor Head

By: Lily Reyes

The Giant Black Hole

By: Malcom Dillard

And in this moment i feel no pain

I'm a giant black hole

walking around through the rain

Swallowing every pure

and radiant thing in sight

Unintentionally breaking it,

Until it loses its light

I'm an emotionless void

wandering around in the dark

There's only emptiness left,

nothing there to start a spark

The silence all around

only worsens the hurt

Like time has suddenly stopped

and I'm sinking deeper into the dirt

But maybe it's for the best

and maybe I deserve the pain

I think that I was always destined

to be a giant black hole

slowly fading in the rain

Apollo

A Dada Poem

By: Eng 218 class, (Spring 2024)

Unbelievable

Frantic Mars

Word Mississippi kitten

Radical bulimic consolation

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

Sleep theater music

Mortgage

House Fronts

By: Heille Figueroa





Portrait with Green Mask

By: Louwana Mejia



Poem 2

By: Ashaky Alice Diaz

You and me are a bonded contract.

Intertwined with this red thread of fate.

Some people think that it's a fact and great.

Others think it's child's play and wait.

You meet and greet

smile and see

if that thread of fate was meant to be.

But later down the road

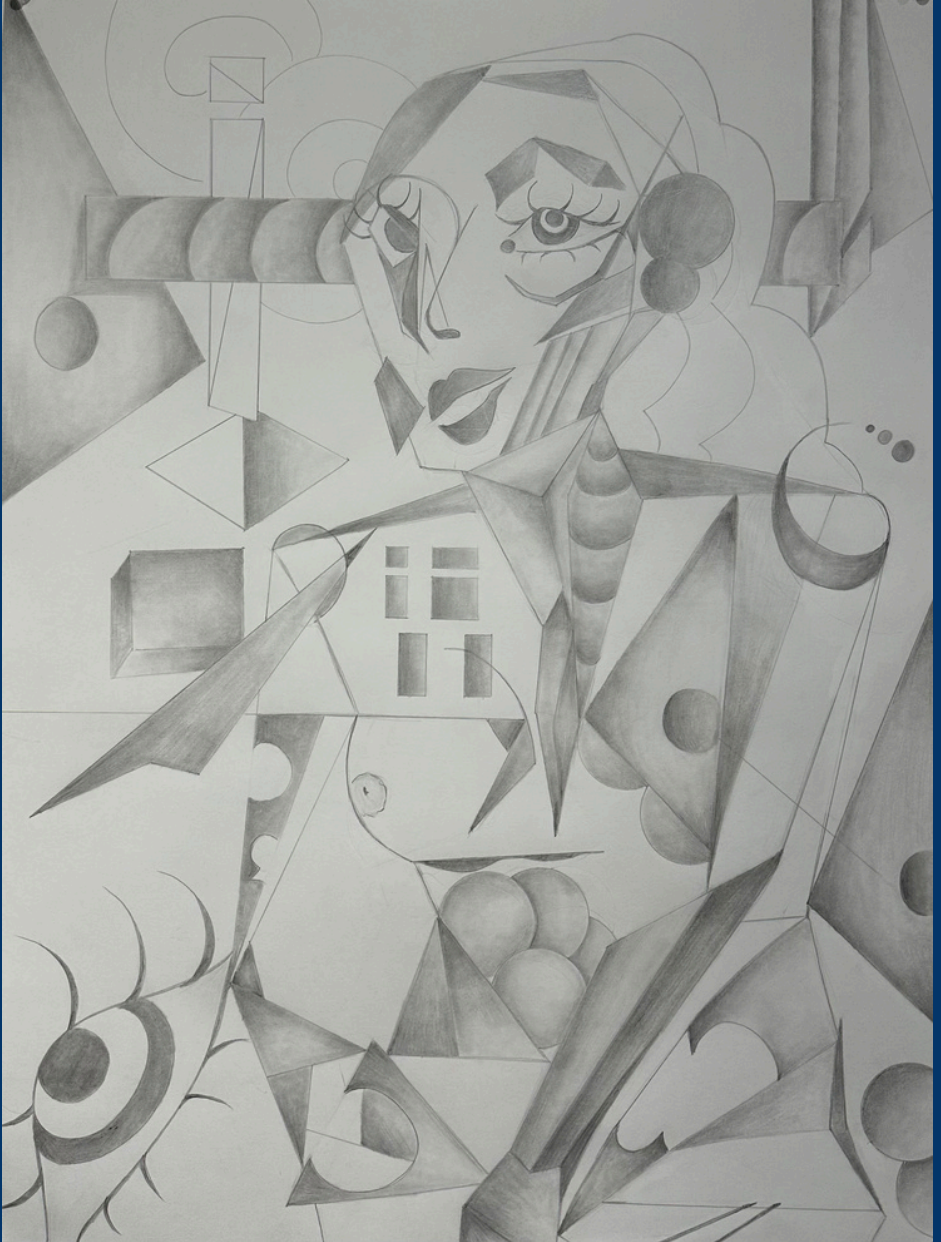
you eventually feel it

that this thread of fate

You have to break it.

Woman Smiling

By: Luna Buitrago





Sex Doll

By: Laura Schubert

Inflate her with your fake displays of affection,
not too much or she'll pop.

She's plastic, hairless and rubbery smooth, a
manifestation of your wildest fantasies.

She hates her body, will you love it tonight?

Afterwards, spoon her then throw her away, like
the disposable object you view her as.

Like the disposable object you treat her as.

If you commit to fooling her that your intentions
come from your heart, she'll be your sex doll
until she can't take it anymore and ultimately
explodes into herself.

But don't shed a tear for her, she's mass produced
to be replaced at your discretion.

Face to Face



By: Ngozi Nwachukwu

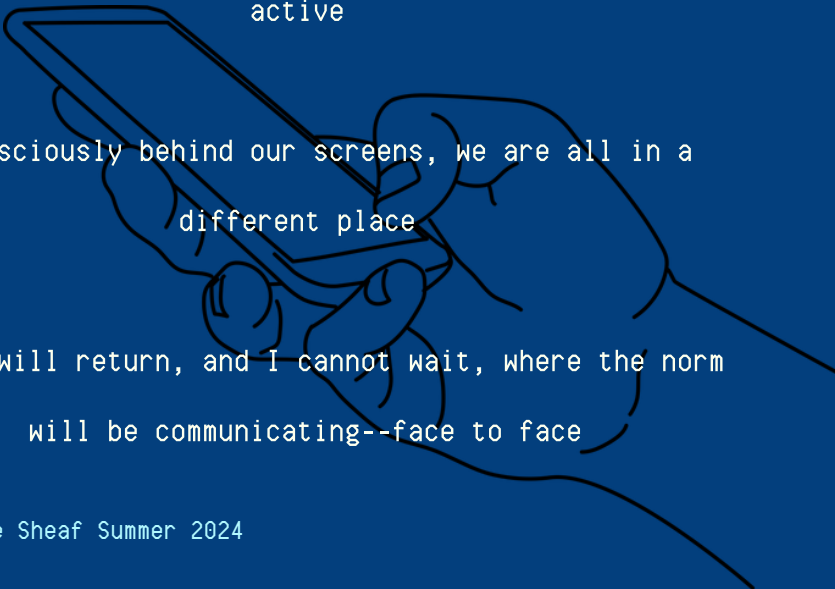
Yearning for fast satisfactions, finding nothing but
mere distractions

Everywhere we turn, there is something new, and it
wins our attention, yet we still pass through

Social media never fails to hold us captive

However to more important matters, we cannot be as
active

Unconsciously behind our screens, we are all in a
different place



A time will return, and I cannot wait, where the norm
will be communicating--face to face



College Portrait

By: Nirmen Atta



Poem 1

By: Ashaky Alice Diaz

The crashing waves brushing against my

bare feet

oh how I wish we could meet.

Born of sand and shore.

Oh how I wish we could be more.

Feeling the sun on my skin

and feeling free when you swim

oh please oh please just let this be

I want to meet him

and he wants to meet me.

Corporate Pie Is Not As Sweet

By: Tyler Hall, Naelys Lopez,

Dayanara Gillett

One Scene Play

(Day opens the door to the bakery to find Lys and Ty already starting on the daily setup. They are all siblings running a family business in a lower middle-class part of the city.)

Day: Good morning! How are you two doing today?

Lys: Great! We're working on our famous family recipe for an apple pie.

Ty: We're making a few extras for the church of course.

Day: I really love that we're able to keep the business growing and still provide for our community.

(They put the pie in the oven, and it looks very messy, but everyone had a hand in making it.)

(The door opens and a man in a suit walks in)

Suit: Good morning! I am a representative of Dunkin Donuts. We have been eager to reach out for a while. We are interested in purchasing your business for a very good price.

Lys: Oh! Why would you want to purchase our business?





Suit: We would like to have a Dunkin Donuts on every corner of this city. You would all be well compensated and not have to worry about running a business anymore.

Day: Do you give back to the community at all?

Suit: No but we make sure our prices are not too high. All of our food gets thrown out at the end of the day.

Ty: We always give away our unsold food at the end of each day for our local church to distribute. We really value our family business and our community.

Suit: That is not how businesses work, it's about what we can sell and what makes the most money. We cannot just give our food to others without making some cash.

Day: It does not matter if we are making the most money, what matters is that we are giving people food to eat.

Suit: We will offer you \$500,000 if you give up your business.

Ty: We appreciate your offer, but we're going to need some time to think about it. Have a nice rest of your day.

(The man in the suit exits)

Day: Guys... that's a lot of money.

Lys: I know, but this business has been in our family for years. I really feel like we are making a difference in our community and still taking care of ourselves. Who cares about the money?

Day: I do!



Ty: I agree that is a large amount of money, but we have everything we need. We might not be living super lavishly but we're good!

Day: You don't want to live behind a white picket fence?

Ty: That is not going to bring us happiness.

Lys: I really do feel fulfilled.

Ty: Me too.

Day: You two are right, I am too.

[Ding! The oven goes off, and the pie is finished baking. Ty pulls the pie out of the oven. He cuts and plates three pieces.]



Day: Wow. The pie came out beautifully.

Lys: It's delicious.

Ty: This is a great reminder that our dream had always been to keep the business running and give back to our community.

Day: I agree. Let's call Suit and let him know we will not be accepting his offer.

Lys: Our family is the most important thing, and we truly make a difference in our community by donating food.

Ty: That's our American Dream.

[End of scene]





City Civilians

By: Ngozi Nwachukwu



Carpe Diem

By: Tariq Salameh

I open my eyes comfortably on my feathered pillow. My feet find themselves on the ground again. I garb myself for the day. The walk to the balcony is complemented by the fresh air. This is completed by the warm sun. I see clear skies. They paint for me an infinite sea of wonder. Breathing in is a relief. I see all the colors of a vibrant rainbow before me.

Under all the luminous colors of the world I remember what my school teacher taught me. In the eighth grade the word of the day was carpe diem. I stand on the balcony until the forenoon remembering that. As I'm daydreaming, I see the gentle current in the distance. Waves on the the ocean illustrate a rhythm. The tide settles and I see birds circle above. The grace of nature is a peaceful song.

My son runs to me and hugs me. I rub his shoulders together and walk with him back into the house. The sun creates an amber hue beneath the drapes that rest upon the glass sliding door. The earthly ambience's ray of sunshine leaks into the home. Our bare feet are warm on the sun-soaked carpet. We sit on cream-colored cushioned chairs that match the fabric on the floor. The aroma of spices reaches our snouts. In our kitchen, the granite is sheathed by the cutting board. We hear the gentle cutlery and a sharp sounding kettle of tea in the house creating a new beat.

"It sounds like your mom's making breakfast." I say.

The charming smile on his face is in stride. I am waiting to hear what he has to say. As I am sitting in the chair and looking in his eyes, I recall those clear skies I saw. It is as if I am back on the balcony looking at all the radiant colors.

"What does carpe diem mean?" He asks me.

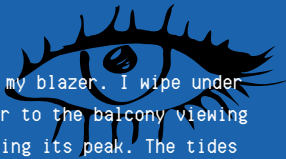
As the aroma balances itself in the house, we exchange smiles. I know exactly where he heard That.

"It looks like you were watching me while I was out there." I said.

I see a sparkle in his eye. The confusion on his face warrants some direction.

"Why are you crying?" He asks me.

"Oh, I'm not crying son. I'm just so happy to be here with you."



I reach for the handkerchief on the outer left side of my blazer. I wipe under the bag of my eyes with my right hand. I open the screen door to the balcony viewing the ocean. We make our way outside and see the sun approaching its peak. The tides push and pull themselves. Birds swoop into the ocean and have their rations for the day. We sit on the balcony furniture. My wife comes out dressed modestly. She is wearing an apron and a headscarf. The gentle winds compliment her mysterious eyes. She brings us a tray containing silverware, platter of scrambled eggs, sausages, hashbrowns and a teapot.

There are two small wooden bowls. One has a lid resting on the tray. Beside the covered timber bowl is an identical one. But it is without a covering. Adjacent to the saucers is a small wooden mallet. I removed the lid on the container to find a handful of veiny green mint. The saturated green contrasts to the log-like balcony floor.

I say, "We usually don't eat this late. Those early birds have got something right. What do you guys think?"

"When are you going to tell me what *carpe diem* means?"

I look at him and we exchange a smile. I trust that his patience will develop into wisdom.

The colors in his eyes bring me back to sitting in the classroom. His confident posture speaks a thousand words to me. He is smarter than he knows.

"I think your teacher in the eighth grade will tell you." I say.

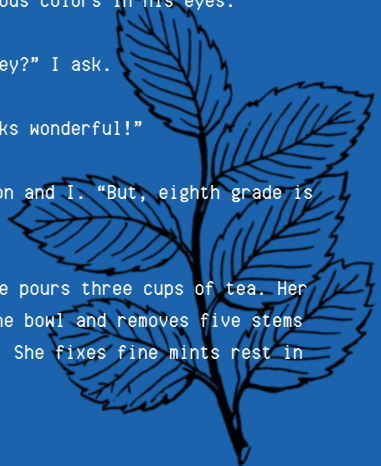
I removed the wooden lid. I place it at a forty-five-degree angle against the bowl. The scent of the fresh veiny mint creates a gloss over our eyes. The aroma of the mints now overtakes the steamy meal that lies before us. This is all under the extravagant colors of the multi-colored arch above our heads. My son looks over to the balcony railing in his seat. He notices the rhythm of the outside world. I think again to myself *carpe diem*. I see those mysterious colors in his eyes.

"Those eyes are something aren't they?" I ask.

Innocently my son says, "This looks wonderful!"

"I saw you on the balcony earlier." She addresses my son and I. "But, eighth grade is still too soon for you."

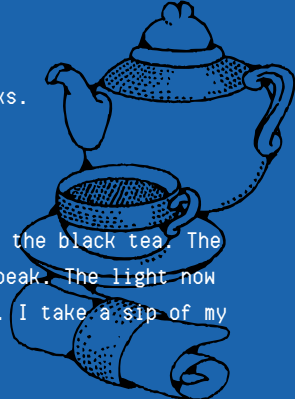
Beneath the silk headscarf is her white blouse. She pours three cups of tea. Her soft hands grab the wooden mallet. She reaches into the bowl and removes five stems of mint. She puts the veiny mints into the empty bowl. She fixes fine mints rest in the once empty bowl.



“Would you like some, Tariq?” She asks.

“Yeah, I’ll take some.”

They are dropped into the glass and diluted into the black tea. The herbs float in the mixture. The sun is nearing its peak. The light now reflects a similar orange hue against the blue ocean. I take a sip of my tea and feel my heart soothed.



The fresh mood calls me to take the first bite. I grab the silverware and cut a piece of sausage. The grease spills out onto the plate and leaves a yellowish residue. I grab a hashbrown with the same fork. These have a crunch upon the first chew. The fluffy potatoes remind me of my feathered pillows. It feels like a dream to me. I ate some scrambled eggs and enjoy the rest of the meal. We eat together as a family.

I find that same innocence at the table that I had in the eighth grade. The adept boy goes to grab a broom and dustpan from inside the house.

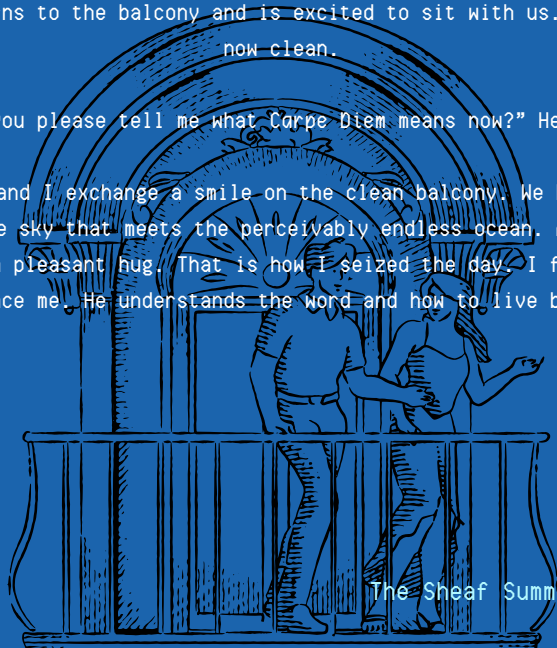
“Should we just tell him what this means before the teachers do?” She asks

I say, “I think he knows a little bit of what that means. Let’s not spoil anything for him.”

He returns to the balcony and is excited to sit with us. The table is now clean.

“Can you please tell me what *Carpe Diem* means now?” He asks.

My wife and I exchange a smile on the clean balcony. We both glance at the ocean-like sky that meets the perceivably endless ocean. After the meal I give him a pleasant hug. That is how I seized the day. I feel his arms embrace me. He understands the word and how to live by it.



Artists Spotlight:



Kid's Stuff

By: Lily Reyes

Rectangles with Bunny Ears

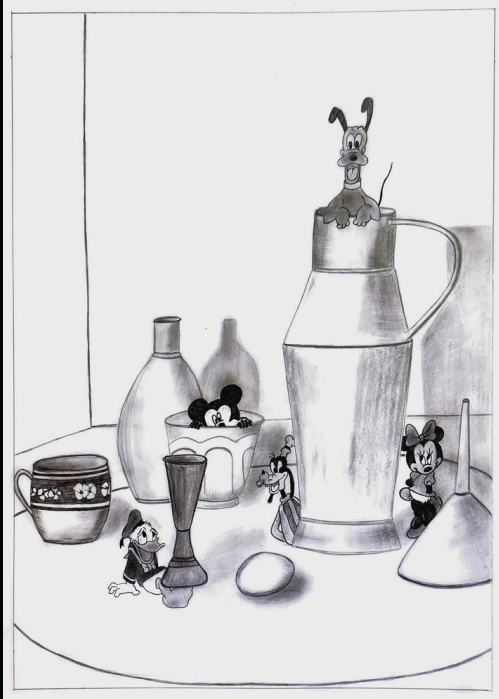
By: Trenise Spruill





Dinosaur

By: Valerie Guzman



Red, White, and Blue Still Life

By: Mordecai Alvarez



Landscape with Castle

By: Gabrielle Mojena



Mountains with Clouds

By: Eunice Vasques



Yellow Spiked Sphere & Head

By: Ann Laurie Andre



Landscape with Clouds

By: Mordecai Alvarez



Dream Deferred

By: Madison Cajeira, David Dominguez, Kelly Wszybski

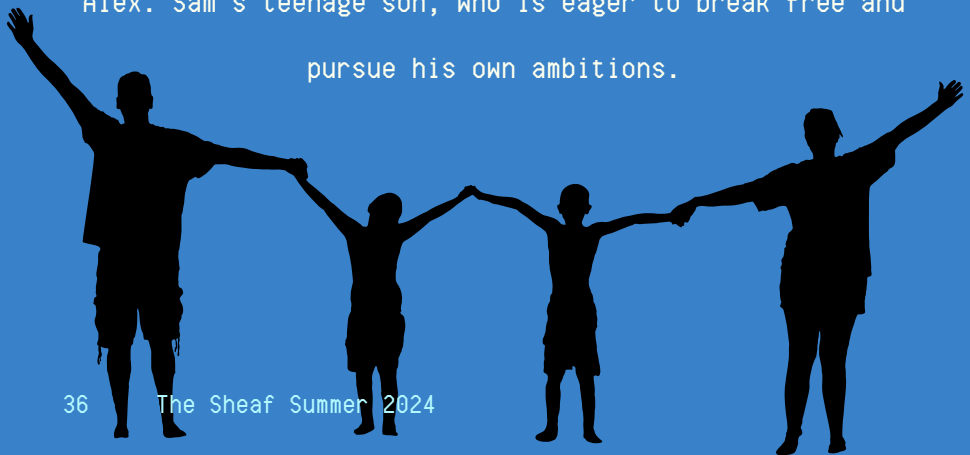
One Scene Play

Characters:

Sam: A middle-aged factory worker who has spent years working away at a job he dislikes, dreaming of a better life for himself and his family.

Maya: Sam's supportive wife, who shares his dreams of a brighter future but worries about the toll that their struggles have taken on their family.

Alex: Sam's teenage son, who is eager to break free and pursue his own ambitions.



Scene: (The living room of a modest suburban home. The room is barely furnished, with worn-out furniture and peeling wallpaper. Sam, clearly frustrated, sits at the kitchen table and starts flipping through a stack of bills. Maya enters, carrying a plate of sandwiches.)



Maya: (setting the tray down) How was work today, Sam?

Sam: Same old, same old. Just another day passing by (sighs). I'm starting to wonder if things will ever change.

Maya: (Placing a hand on his shoulder) Don't lose hope, Sam. We'll get through this together.

(Sam forces a smile and takes a sandwich from the plate. As they eat in silence, Alex bursts into the room with a face of excitement.)

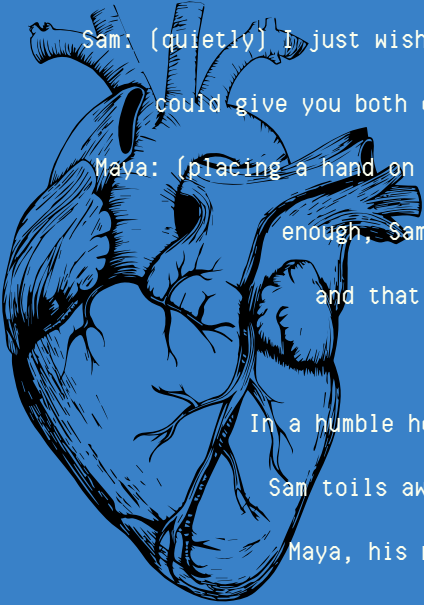
Alex: Mom, Dad, you'll never believe it! I got accepted into the engineering program at State University!

Sam: (eyes widening) That's incredible, son! (turns to Maya) Did you hear that? Our boy's going to college!

Maya: (Tears filling her eyes) Oh, Alex, we're so proud of you!

(Sam and Maya hug Alex, their faces light up with pride and suddenly new hope for the future arises. But as the moment passes, uncertainty crosses Sam's face.)





Sam: (quietly) I just wish things were different. I wish that I
could give you both everything you deserve and more.

Maya: (placing a hand on his cheek) You've given us more than
enough, Sam. We have each other,
and that's all that matters.

In a humble home with dreams deferred,
Sam toils away, his spirit stirred.

Maya, his rock, in love assured,
Their son, Alex, ambition interred.

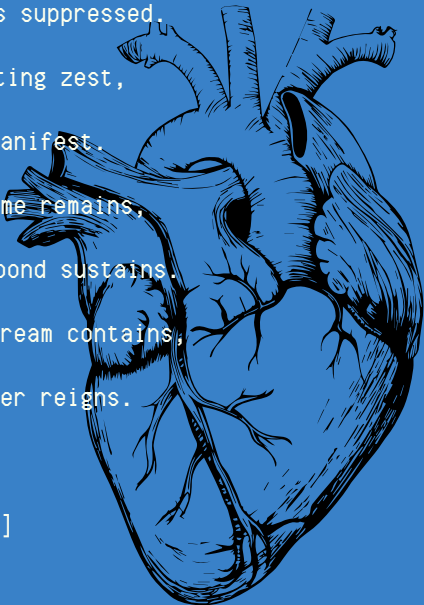
Though worn-out days and bills to flip,
Sam dreams of more, his soul to grip.

Maya's hope, a loving trip,
Alex's news, dreams start to tip.

In their worn-out room, hope's a guest,
Sam's heart aches, dreams suppressed.

Maya's love, a comforting zest,
Alex's joy, dreams manifest.

Dreams deferred, yet home remains,
In love and pride, their bond sustains.
For in their hearts, the dream contains,
A life of love that ever reigns.



[End of scene]

Poem 3

By: Ashaky Alice Diaz

A mother's color is yellow.

A lover's color is red.

A friend's color is blue.

But what color are you? Many colors can mean many things. It all depends on what they bring.

White is pure and that's for sure.

Green is a common color always seen.

Orange is a color of courage that makes your heart be set ablaze.

That's Rengoku's favorite phrase.

Black is a veto color that can make anyone suffer.

So look at yourself and there you will discover, what is your shade of color.

Pursuing the Dream

By: Colette Samuels, Tamika Therlonge, Angie Sanchez

One Scene Play

In search of dreams, we tread the exhausted road,

Where obstacles flow and burdens overload.

Student debts weigh heavy, jobs are hard to find,

Housing costs soar high, leaving dreams confined.

Underemployment looms, wages barely suffice,

As aspirations clash with financial vice.

We strive and toil, yet progress seems slow,

In the shadow of uncertainty, our hopes aglow.

But still, we press on with resilience in our hearts,

Amidst the trials and setbacks, we play our parts.

For the American Dream, though distant it may seem,

Is within reach, fueled by our relentless gleam.

The American dream today encompasses not only material wealth and success

but also

personal fulfillment, social progress, and the pursuit of a more

inclusive and equitable future for

all. The pursuit of the American Dream can be difficult and full of

obstacles for many recent

college graduates. Even with a college degree, these people frequently

encounter a number of

challenges in their quest for financial security and professional

recognition.

Characters:



Tamika- Ambitious and driven, works as a tech entrepreneur.

Angie- Optimistic and idealistic, pursues a career in social activism.

Colette- Practical and resourceful, juggles multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet.



(Scene opens in a local café in NYC during present time. Three friends, Tamika, Angie, and Colette, are seated at a table, sipping coffee and engaging in conversation.)

Tamika: (Excitedly) You won't believe the opportunity I just landed!

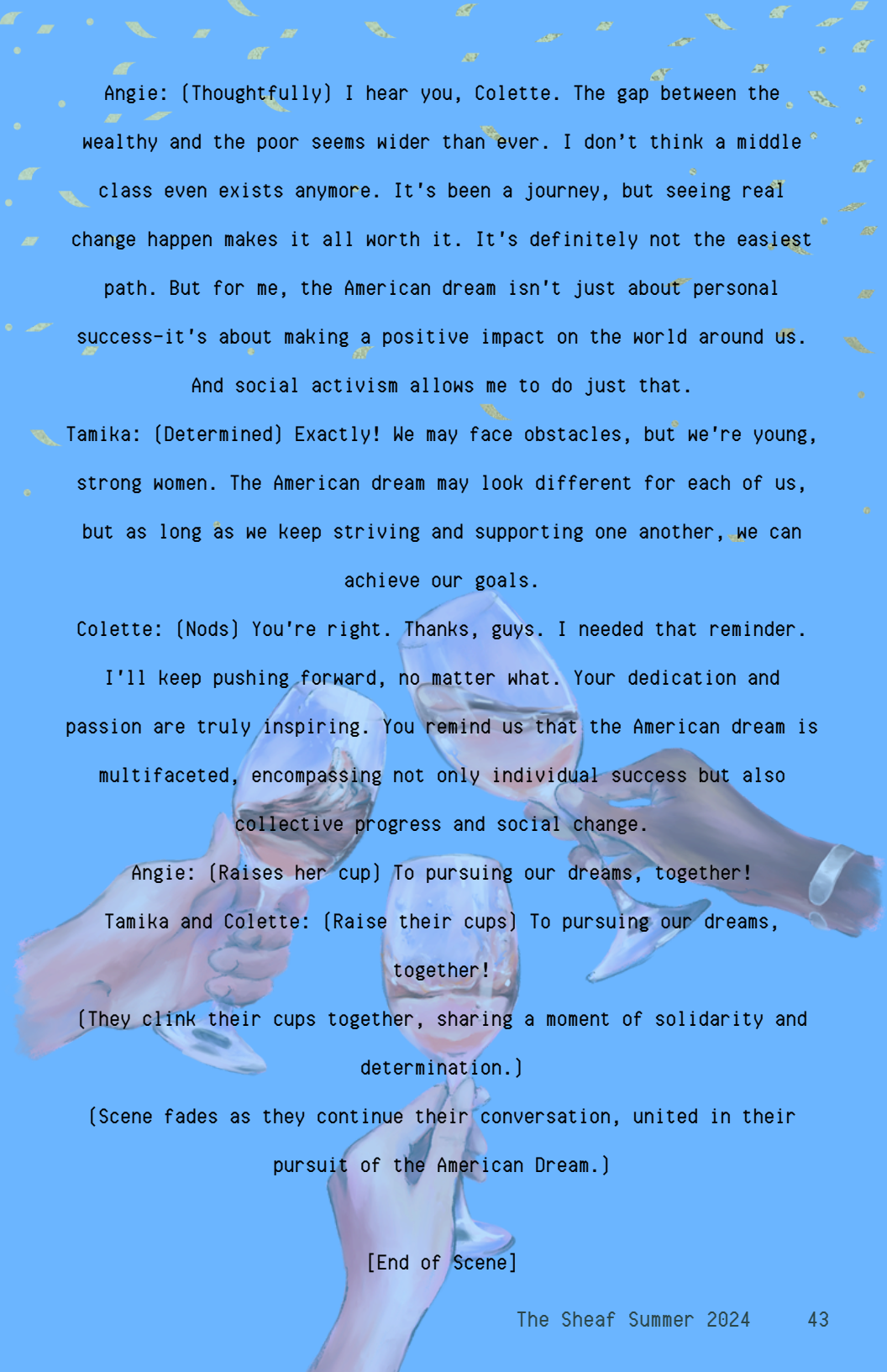
My startup company is finally gaining traction, and I've been invited to pitch to a group of investors next week. Finally!!!... My goal is to start paying off my high monthly loan payments. They are really limiting my financial flexibility and making it difficult to save money, invest in a home, or pursue my other long-term goals.

Angie: (Enthusiastic) That's amazing, Tamika! Your hard work is paying off. I knew your innovative ideas would catch someone's eye.

Colette: (Smiling) Congrats, Tamika! It's inspiring to see you making strides in your career. Meanwhile, I'm still figuring out how to cover rent this month. Even with a college degree, I feel like I am underemployed, I am working in jobs that do not fully utilize my skills, education, or potential.

Tamika: (Concerned) Colette, I'm sorry to hear that. Is everything okay?

Colette: (Sighs) It's just been tough lately. Balancing multiple jobs just to make ends meet is exhausting. Sometimes I wonder if the American dream is even attainable anymore. How's your career in social activism going Angie?



Angie: (Thoughtfully) I hear you, Colette. The gap between the wealthy and the poor seems wider than ever. I don't think a middle class even exists anymore. It's been a journey, but seeing real change happen makes it all worth it. It's definitely not the easiest path. But for me, the American dream isn't just about personal success—it's about making a positive impact on the world around us.

And social activism allows me to do just that.

Tamika: (Determined) Exactly! We may face obstacles, but we're young, strong women. The American dream may look different for each of us, but as long as we keep striving and supporting one another, we can achieve our goals.

Colette: (Nods) You're right. Thanks, guys. I needed that reminder. I'll keep pushing forward, no matter what. Your dedication and passion are truly inspiring. You remind us that the American dream is multifaceted, encompassing not only individual success but also collective progress and social change.

Angie: (Raises her cup) To pursuing our dreams, together!

Tamika and Colette: (Raise their cups) To pursuing our dreams, together!

(They clink their cups together, sharing a moment of solidarity and determination.)

(Scene fades as they continue their conversation, united in their pursuit of the American Dream.)

[End of Scene]



Like a Tree

By: Naelys Lopez

I am more than my body

I am more than my past

I am more than the feelings,
Which, quite frankly, never last

I am like a tree
Profound, determined, and brave

For myself and only myself,

Will I be able to save

The alveoli of my lungs
Like branches of the trees

The air passing through

As if it were the breeze

I am like a tree
People carve their secrets into my chest

My roots are strong and sturdy

Compared to those who are thefts

Even when people cut me down

My foundations still remain

Grounded into the earth

Still able to sustain

The world tries to bring us trees down

With new buildings in demand

Yet through every harsh winter and fate

We will still stand



By: Michael Edwards



We appreciate you for reading
this issue of the Sheaf magazine!