



Zeitgeist.

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Farewell 2020

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of Room 404**

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The Barber

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Zeitgeist

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The general intellectual, moral, and cultural climate of an era.

A student-based enterprise that seeks to entertain, motivate, and inspire through short stories, arts, columns, and a variety of other media.

Provides a platform for aspiring writers and artists to express their creativity.

the awareness of the smallness of your perspective, by
which you couldn't possibly draw any meaningful
conclusions at all

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Mine

By Jenny Fu

Layout by Claire Chen

When I stand in my flour-patted apron,
Hands pounding the delicate purple dough,
Eyes going over a familiar city horizon,
I can't help but feel that

This is life.

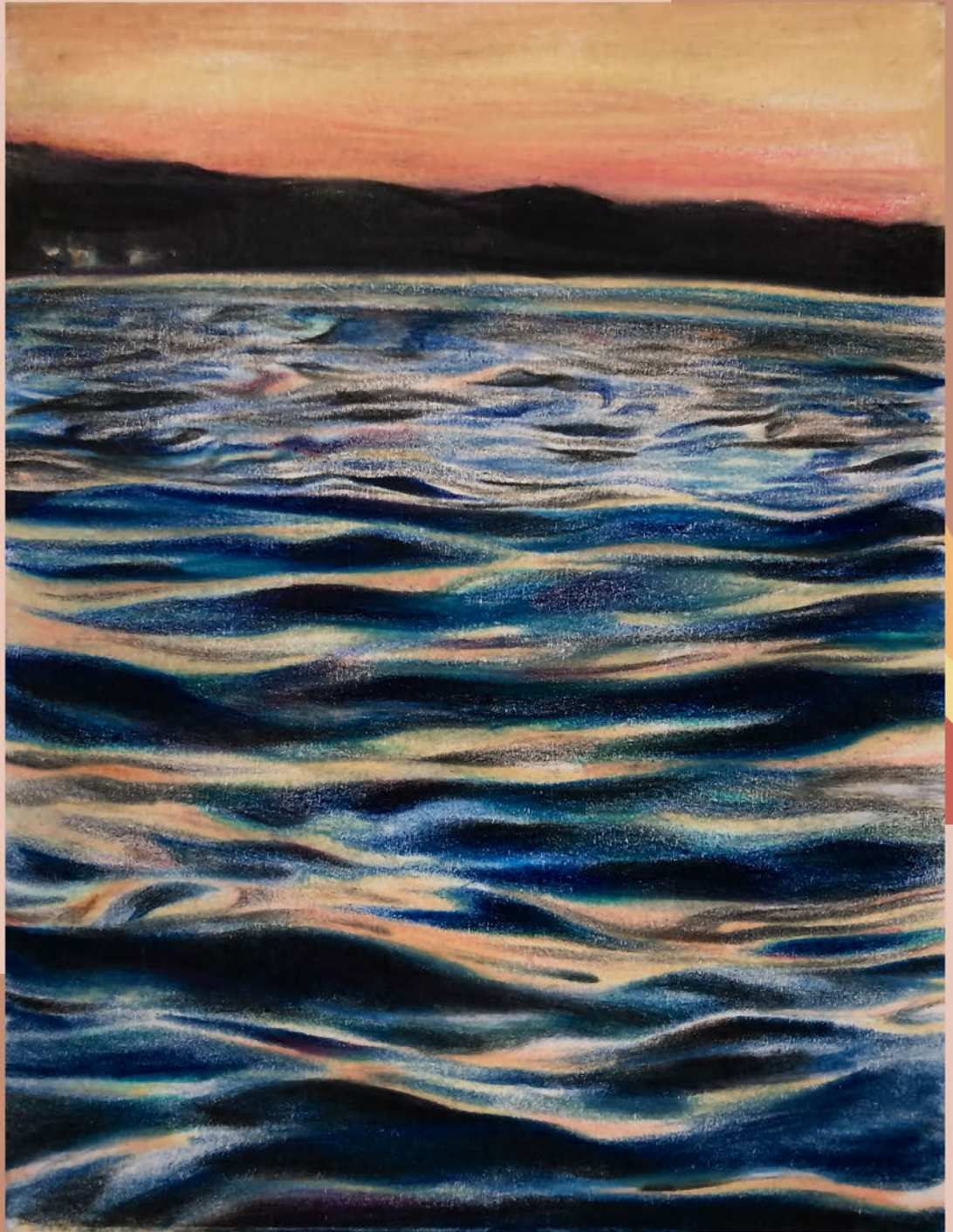
A life of peace,
Of reassured security,
Of waking to the aroma of coffee each morning,
Of fussing over next day's brunch menu,

Of a soft durian life.

but then, I dream a very realistic fantasy...

a world where teardrops dance on lustful wind. a russian hotel treasuring heaps of
poems and half-written letters from
and to no one in particular. a ruined town hosting the secrets of
long-lost astronomy. a sky raining
cats and dogs. a forest hoarding
sashimi red flowers and sky blue rivers—along with the smell of spring, so
bittersweet like freshly
brewed green tea. a

life that leaps out of imagination—mine.



Kafka On the Shore

Kelly Wu

5 x 6 in

Prismacolor pencils on paper

Inspired by the novel *Kafka On the Shore* by Haruki Murakami, this drawing explores the concept of time, how time flows nonlinearly and easily escapes from our grasp. Here, the water symbolizes the movement of time; the viewers are still yet the waves continue to drift away regardless.

Wayside Stories

of Room 404

by Hayley Szymanek
Layout by Evelyn Shi

I only noticed the spiders when they got bigger than my fist. I'd found wisps of webs on my notebooks, but I didn't think anything of it until a tarantula crawled up my right forearm in the middle of a lecture. I could've screamed.

It was thick, bulbous. The orange stripes were brighter

than I would've thought, the color of a dying leaf. I could feel its fur bristling against my arm. I couldn't make out its eight eyes, but I felt every single one of its legs drag their way up to my elbow. My muscles locked, too paralyzed to do anything but pray. The air in my lungs solidified mid-breath rather than exhale and face the beast.

The light reflected in a quick flash off of one of its pincers, and its head stretched back for the kill. Then it skittered away. That day, I was not worth tasting.

The spiders only got bigger after that. No one else cared. I asked the girl next to me one day what she thought of them. She'd shrugged and said, "Oh. I just started wearing spider repellent to class. Just brush them off; you'll be okay." She offered me her can. I accepted and thanked her. She smiled, and we never spoke again. The next day I had bite marks on my leg.

A spider the size of my heart crawled over one of the quirky Shakespeare posters. I couldn't stop staring, like watching some nondescript and inexorable tragedy. It mangles your soul just a bit, yet you need to watch the destruction. If you look away, you'll have to recognize your apathy. You might have to name it. So, I watched. The instructor's voice drowned in its own monotonous haze. I could re-teach myself later, but I couldn't get un-bitten later. I had to stay vigilant when it came to the spiders. If a venomous one got me, I had no way to save myself.

The spiders seemed to like the posters. They cast their webs around the edges. I wondered if they actually caught flies, or if they just like to sleep over the bad jokes.

They settled into the bookcases after the posters began to sag with their weight. I reached for *Dorian Gray* one day, but my fingers found hair. Sparse and coarse and hostile. The spider writhed beneath my touch. I imagined it could have foamed at the mouth. It seized the moment, testing a horrible leg on my knuckle. I jerked my hand away. *Just brush them off.*

It skittered back into the shadows, but it was as big as my head. It could not hide easily. I could make out its fangs in the darkness. A bead of venom dripped from the iridescent curves. Bile rose in the back of my throat as if the spider had already poisoned me. I dashed for the book and clutched it tightly to my chest. *Take that!*

The spider's eyes turned on me like it wanted to smile. The book had been sealed shut with spider-webs.

The spiders swarmed in one heaving mass, circling students. The others didn't even look up. I wanted to sob, I wanted to pound my fists and **yell**. But I didn't dare disrupt the lesson. Spiders of all sizes competed for my corpse. Their hairs brushed against my limbs. I'm ashamed to admit that I didn't even flail. I knocked the first few back, but I never stood a chance against the enormity of their venom. So, I gave up.

They bit and crawled and pinched and consumed me whole. Every manner of incurable poison seeped into my skin, into my blood, into the decaying rot of my heart. It burned like Frost's world-ending fire and ice. They worked their way into my throat, trapping the air into my lungs. I plunged into the darkness.

tempting and sensuous are the lights, shining
from their nonexistent posts, and
what can i snatch from the wind today, darling
what can i steal
from the fingertips of time—of castles and ballgowns and you,
you and your craft and your laugh—champagne
minted on the backseat of green—
i tip my hat, the english imposter, forever chasing
your late afternoon smirk: that elusive, secret society
of satin

because the curtains are fluttering, your dress is rippling, my heart
is glistening on a silver platter—buoyed like an anchored balloon—
balanced precariously on a promise, your promise, and
*it eluded us then, but that's no matter—
tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther—and one fine morning*

wake up.

by Emilie Zhang
Layout by Evelyn Shi

Gatsby's Morning



Inner Critic

Evelyn Shi

Dimensions: 90 x 65 cm

Materials: Acrylic paint

We all have an inner critic—the invasive voice in the back of our heads telling us what to think. It is unreasonable, suffocating, and pessimistic, but sometimes we can't resist listening to it. The invasive hands in this piece serve to give this piece some movement while increasing its repulsive atmosphere and sense of urgency.

change in seasons

by Sara Pratt

Layout by Hayley Hawkins

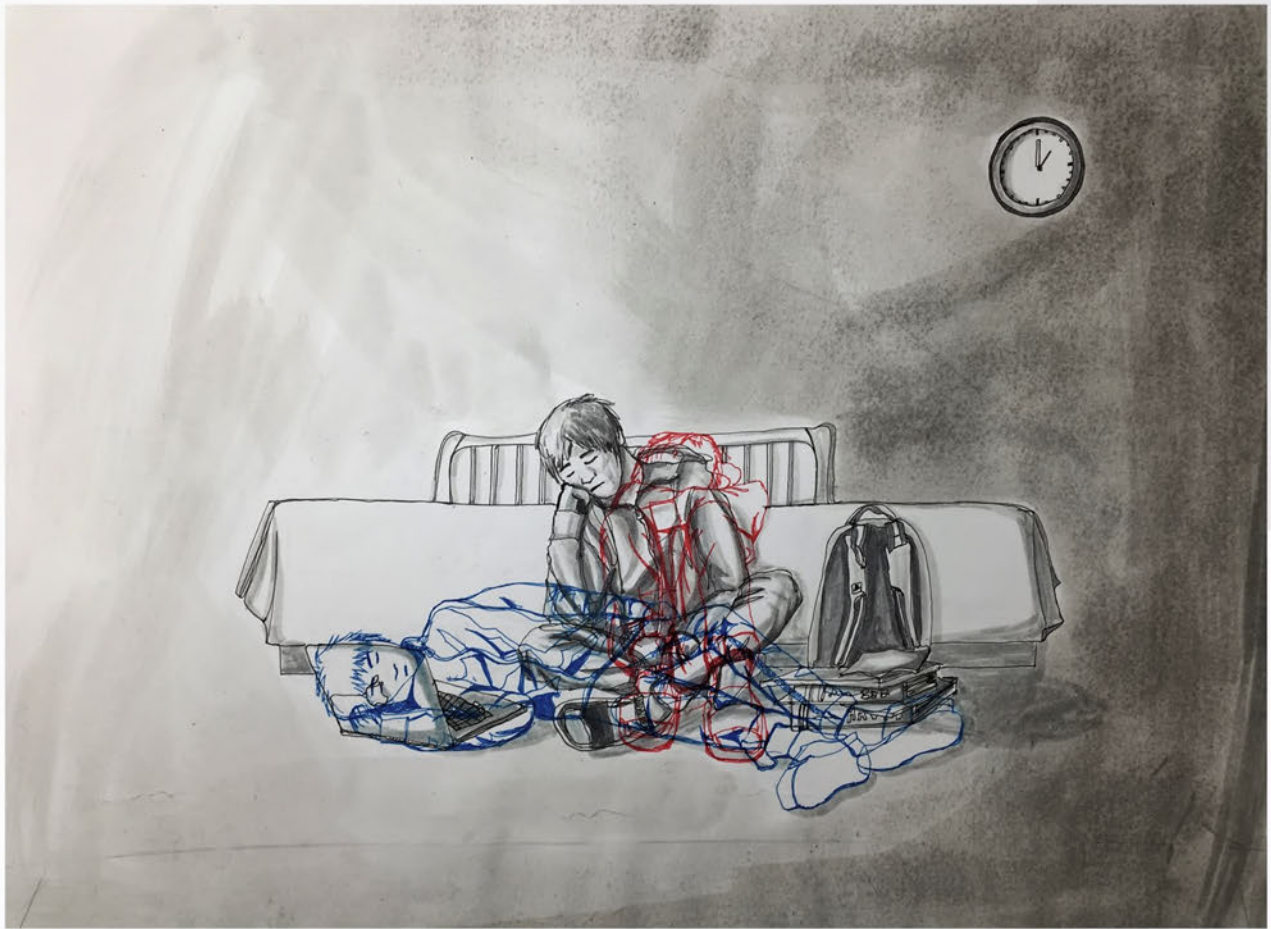
i cannot see outside of my self-absorption,
and i'm left shouting my complaints into the wind.
these words leave my mouth feeling heavy and suffocated,
but in reality they are just wet feathers,
clogging what could have been fresh air.

i constantly think the world is crashing down on me.
i become obsessed with the attention,
but the world doesn't care enough to give me that satisfaction.
food for thought.

during the winter,
i watched leaves fall from their thrones
and have no other purpose than to litter the sidewalks.
the trees were bare
for a while.

but eventually the days got longer and greenery would sprout from the barren branches,
bringing flowers with them.
i crush the memory of those sidewalks that carried the weight of my emotions,
their existence no longer relevant.

my Voice will be forgotten.
my opinions will be nothing more than opinions,
because new leaves will come.
but i should do my best while hanging on this branch,
even if i am drowning in a sea of nearly identical beings.



So Tired

Isabella Luo

Dimensions: 30 x 25 cm

Materials: Ink, Colored Pens, Gray-Tone Markers

Artist Statement: It's late.

Our Shared Inhumanity

by Hayley Szymanek
Layout by Joyce Wang

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

She reached one hand sky-high helplessly. Then the other. She clawed at the earth around her until her head poked through. Purple and blue and pink hung above her, bruising the sky to match the color of her open wounds. Torso. Knee. Knee. Foot. Foot. She stared at the stone in front of her as she heaved herself up from six feet under. The words on it meant *something*. Her rotten, moonlit hand reached out to trace the letters. Some of her flesh snagged on a rough groove, tearing it from her bone. She dropped her hand. Something meant nothing now. She needed *food*.

She wailed, joining the graveyard chorus of all those around her. They spurred each other on: a reminder of the unanimous promise that they would kill to eat. They tripped over each other, old bones creaking and cracking in the collisions. She limped forward steadily, apathetic to the loose skin hanging off each of her limbs. Distantly, she was aware of a cockroach skittering up her leg.

Her sunken eyes fixed upon a meal. She dragged herself towards it against her will. FOOD. FOOD. **FOOD.** Her meal began to run. Drool dripped out of her half-unhinged jaw. She limped forward. Step, dragggggggg. Step, dragggg. Step, dragg. Step.

He tripped, and he fell to the ground. She heard him scream. Water leaked from his eyes, and these horrible moans escaped his mouth. She ripped into his throat to silence him. She kept gnawing, working the meat free from the body. His salty blood saturated her tongue. Someone walked up beside her. Their teeth sank into the leg.

She looked over. *Unnnghhhhhhhh*. Her head tilted up in acknowledgement.

The stranger was covered in rot, just like her. He was not a meal. His eyes were a misted-over gray. His skin clung loosely to his bones in patches. His hair had mostly fallen out. His suit was torn and covered in blood. He had already eaten. In the back of her mind, she was afraid of him. But he was afraid of her too.

His hand-less stump lifted in a mock-wave.

Hhhmmmmhhhhh.





A Family Dinner

Lena He

Materials: Ink on paper

Dimensions: 48 by 47 inches

Artist Statement: Inspired by my inability to correctly recall which family members were present during a family dinner that occurred a few years ago, this series of ink drawings attempt to visualize the instability of human recollection. As the scene unfolds, the perspective twists itself from scene to scene, reflecting the human tendency to reimagine scenarios with intricate details despite them never happening. Through this piece, I wanted to explore the psychology of human memory while experimenting with various perspectives and proportions.

Detail Shots of “A Family Dinner”

Lena He



The Barber

by Henie Zhang

Layout by Hayley Hawkins



My uncle was a barber, but only in secret. He used to keep little scissors under his apron in the Brooklyn apartment where he worked as a janitor. On the weekdays, he woke up at five in the morning and took the screeching elevator up to the residential quarters to mop up the lobby while the apartment owners were still asleep. But on the weekends, he dutifully woke at two-thirty and took the fire escape. His work wasn't without mishaps. Once, he forgot his glass cutter. Once, his fleece gloves. Once, he woke the madam of a French wine-taster by stubbing his toe on her bathtub. Her scream was loud enough to shatter chandeliers on the opposite block, but her husband, by some strange convolution of fate, did not wake in the opposite room.

He never took much from his clients—he was a modest man, didn't ask for beyond what satisfied him, you see—just the tiniest snippet. His favorite was the section near the temple. He said it was where you could find the gentlest specimens, shielded from the hard dust and water of the New York hustle, so soft they felt like kisses between your fingers. His most prized item was a lock of copper-blond from the scalp of the Italian businessman who lived on the first floor. *He had the head of a lion*, praised my uncle, *never seen anything like it. Never.* After church one day, he took me to his glass cases to see the brass beauty. He instructed me to admire its exotic curls, its fine filaments, its tasteful finish. Among his metropolis of glass cases, we spent a philosophical, reverential afternoon: my uncle, dreamy, maniacal, lost in himself, gesturing wildly, sidling between the cases like a fish—*color maintenance, optimal temperature, rarest texture, you won't believe it!* And then me, interrupting with a polite question, him pausing to fix me with an unfocused stare, *I'm so sorry, what did you say?* Yet, as moved as I was with his grand collection, I never spoke about it outside of his basement quarters. It was an awkward subject to bring up in conversation.

When my uncle died, I sat on his possessions for a few years, intermittently wondering what to do with such an unusual collection. Eventually, though, the tedious pile of old stuff began to exasperate me. So, bit by bit, I started selling them to the local wigmaker. It took me a few years to get rid of the entire museum. Going through his things bothered me more than I'd be willing to admit. My uncle had an entire city's worth of strangers' hair, but I never found any of mine. It was as if he never loved me enough to keep a small piece of me with him too.





She Showed Me All The Stars

Sarah Kim

A4

Digital

Inspired by the song "Oh My God", this piece portrays a girl who is yearned for by the person in the song. All the moments with her were fascinating, and the sky she took her up to and the stars she showed her were unforgettable.

The DiTuring Test

by Vivien Yeung
Layout by Joyce Wang

“Hello, you.”

It had only been a year since the last time their eyes held each other's. Back then, they spent years with their blades close to each other's neck. Both equally inclined to eliminate the other, but bound by their limited programming.

Out of reflex, Etheral scanned Amice to process her hard drive. Amice's height hadn't changed since three years ago. Her energy level was fully charged, and every mechanism in her body had been upgraded and rebooted multiple times. Her hard drive, however, remained the same, exuding a familiar distant look in her glass eyes.

Amice kept her eyes looking forward, unmoving. Her fingers tapped the handle of her blade in a cold rhythm, “You have some nerve, coming back.”

“I didn't come for you,” came Etheral's voice.

“No.” Amice pulled her hood back, revealing the undoubted resemblance between her and the other girl. Their features were sculpted identically: their glowing, mercury-coloured eyes, poised stance, joints of their metal plates, and midnight blue hair that ran to the middle of the back. Most androids were made identical to each other, but these two were the only prototype of their kind.

The first layer of Etheral's skin was thin and easily removable, sliced into rectangular pieces for the mechanisms underneath to push upward without obstruction. When needed, the metal plates under the skin slid and turned, sometimes to make way for a built-in weaponry, sometimes to change her form entirely. Most androids were built from the same blueprint, but the difference in their purpose was undeniable. No, they were not made simply for serving food or greeting guests.

The assassins stared each other down, but while one was seemingly clinical, the other had the confidence of someone with strength, tenacity, and almost lifelike emotion. Their motives rivalled each other's - only ever meeting at a point of conflict. Amice's voice was a bare whisper, “I thought you were dead.”

“Unfortunate, isn't it?” Etheral eyed her twin sharply.

“Yes, I could never live with myself if Father had been the one to kill you.” Amice raised her cold hand and cupped it gently around Etheral's cheek. “It was my dream.” She giggled. “After killing so many humans, to know that I can watch the light fade out of your eyes too.”

“Don't they say that killing your own kind will bring bad luck?”

“Luck is only a haphazard probability. Dear, you forget yourself. You've grown appallingly soft since the last time we met. If the world grazed you now, you would crack in two - all the more reason for me to shut you down.”

Irritated, Etheral scowled at the hand, “Funny how life gives you second chances.”

“Life?” Have you forgotten who you are?”

“I know exactly who I am.”

“Is that what that boy told you?” Amice spoke with patronizing gentleness.

Etheral reached for Amice's hand and lifted it in front of her chest. Her fingers were a source of incredible warmth against Amice's icy hand. Etheral learned that even after all these years, her sister knew nothing of people, of society, of life.

That her mind was grown from a seed, carefully injected with coding and preserved. Her programming sent only one signal: to kill. Only she had picked up some toying methods on the way, making murder more of a savoury act of art or a game of cat and mouse rather than mere instinct.

Etheral was no different. She alone possessed hundreds if not thousands of ways to end one's life at the mere tips of her memory drive. The tricks they were programmed with - sustainable eye contact, fidgeting moments, theatrical uncertainty, a sense of humor, flirtiness - made them passable among humans.

Amice's expression turned sour, “Our purpose is to serve our Father. Have you forgotten your Love?”

“I could never forget my Love!” Never, for it was programmed in her. Everytime her thoughts waded to him the lights around her became brighter, the sounds more harmonious, the details of the world more wondrous. Every time she thought of him, her heart ached to prove she was worthy. And for the first years of her life, she served, and she fought. Father was her everything. Until he no longer had use for her.

“Amice, love is not as simple as submission and sacrifice.”

“You are a liar,” Amice said.

“I would have let it go if I could. It ate me.”

“Father always knew you would turn out like this. It is a shame, really. You never did learn.” Amice leaned in, relishing in Etheral's shame. “You made mistakes, again, again, and again. So much that Father thought maybe they hid a human in you.” The corner of her lips curled into a faint smile.

“The irony,” Etheral chuckled. The end of her blade left her sheath.

“Irony?”

When her Father finally relieved her of duty, Etheral remembered the one day she could never remember before. Her wrists cuffed to the chair and wires spiking through the depths of her brain; in front of her, a screen flashing with the infamous DiTuring Test - failed. Back then, the surface of her skin was warm with colour, and fear was a normal emotion that caused sweating and accelerated breathing. Back then, neglect of grooming resulted in unkempt nails and hair, and careless motion was punished with bruises and scars. Now, there was nothing.

The Turing Test, made a millenia ago for machines impersonating humans; the DiTuring Test, made two years ago for humans impersonating machines.

Etheral searched Amice's face one last time for a sign of emotion, but her face remained unmoving—her eyes unfocused, her lips parted, the muscles around her face laid loose and flat. She studied Amice's eyes, both bright as the stars above them, unlike Etheral's, one of which glowed stronger than the other. She smoothed Amice's cream-silk skin, textured against the scars and blisters of her own. To Etheral, it was clear as day. Her programming was not the only thing she was anymore.

In one swift motion, Etheral sliced the space between Amice's chin and shoulders. “Analysis incorrect.” Amice chimed as blood gushed from her wound, cloaking her body in a crimson shower.

Etheral stepped back, careful not to stain herself with the bad omen. Then, without another thought, she left the twin, reeking of the smell of what it means to kill a computer.



My Twin Worlds

Allison Dai

Watercolor, White Gel Pen, Micron, Color Pencils, Gold and Silver Acrylic Markers
8.27 × 11.69 inches

The contrast between the real world and the imaginary. Alluring and deep, but temporary.

“Hey,” I say, nodding at her arrival.

She has a frown on her face as she sits down.
“So this is it.”

I look down at the table. “So this is it,” I repeat.

She exhales loudly and then looks away. “Of course,” she laughs, but it’s strained. “Why would I ever think this would last more than four years?”

I reach out to put my hands on hers but she shrinks away from me.

“So you’re leaving me for someone better? More popular?”

“It’s just the way of life,” I say. “I have no choice.”

“No choice?” She seems offended by my answer. “Everyone has a choice.”

“Well, I made mine,” I say. She turns her head away. I rub my face tiredly. My heart aches, like there’s a persistent pressure crushing my chest.

“Despite my eagerness to leave, in the end, I will miss you,” I finally say.

She turns her head back, surprised. “You mean it?”

“Yeah, yeah, I mean it.” I lean back, my eyes wandering. “Years from now, you will miss me less and less until you finally forget me, but I will only miss you more.”

“I don’t understand.”

Youth is a funny concept you don’t have, I think.

“I knew you wouldn’t understand, Concordia.”

FARE WELL 2020

by Isabella Luo
Layout by Lena He



Concordia

INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL SHANGHAI