

roots

issue 04 | winter 2025



illuminate literary arts magazine



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special thanks to:

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cover art by Lyra O'Broin
art on pages 1-5 by Violet Arima

published 12.07.25



letter from the editor

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading the fourth issue of *illuminate literary arts magazine*! The theme of this edition, **roots**, celebrates the beauty of our past and the elements that shape who we are today as creative individuals. Our roots, seen and unseen, hold our stories, our strength, and our becoming. They shape how we move through the world. Whether through cherished memories, cultural traditions, or lived experiences, these influences fuel our imagination and take form in the work we create.

Not only do our roots shape how we think and see ourselves, but they also offer us unique perspectives with which to imagine and create a more inclusive world. Especially during a critical time like this, when vital rights are being stripped away, it is more important than ever to preserve our individuality and celebrate our creativity by staying grounded in our roots. This powerful theme is reflected throughout the carefully curated student pieces we are excited to share with you.

As you explore these pages, you will witness the powerful impact of student artists and writers. The cover, featuring a young child gripping luminous roots, illustrates the importance of discovering where we come from and honoring the generations that have shaped us. Like the radiant glow of the intertwined roots, we hope these works illuminate the talent of young creators in our community.

With this in mind, we are incredibly proud to present our largest issue yet, featuring 55 pieces of student work from high schools across our city and beyond, including Alameda High School, Encinal High School, Alameda Science & Technology Institute, St. Joseph Notre Dame High School, and College Preparatory School. This diverse representation of student voices truly reflects the richness of our artistic and literary community.

To everyone who contributed to this issue of *illuminate*, whether as a writer, artist, photographer, or staff member, we are deeply grateful! Your dedication and passion brought this magazine to life. We hope you enjoy reading this special edition of *illuminate*!

Olivia Vu

Editor-in-Chief



“**Roots** are not in landscape or a country, or a people, they are inside you.”

— Isabel Allende
Chilean-American author

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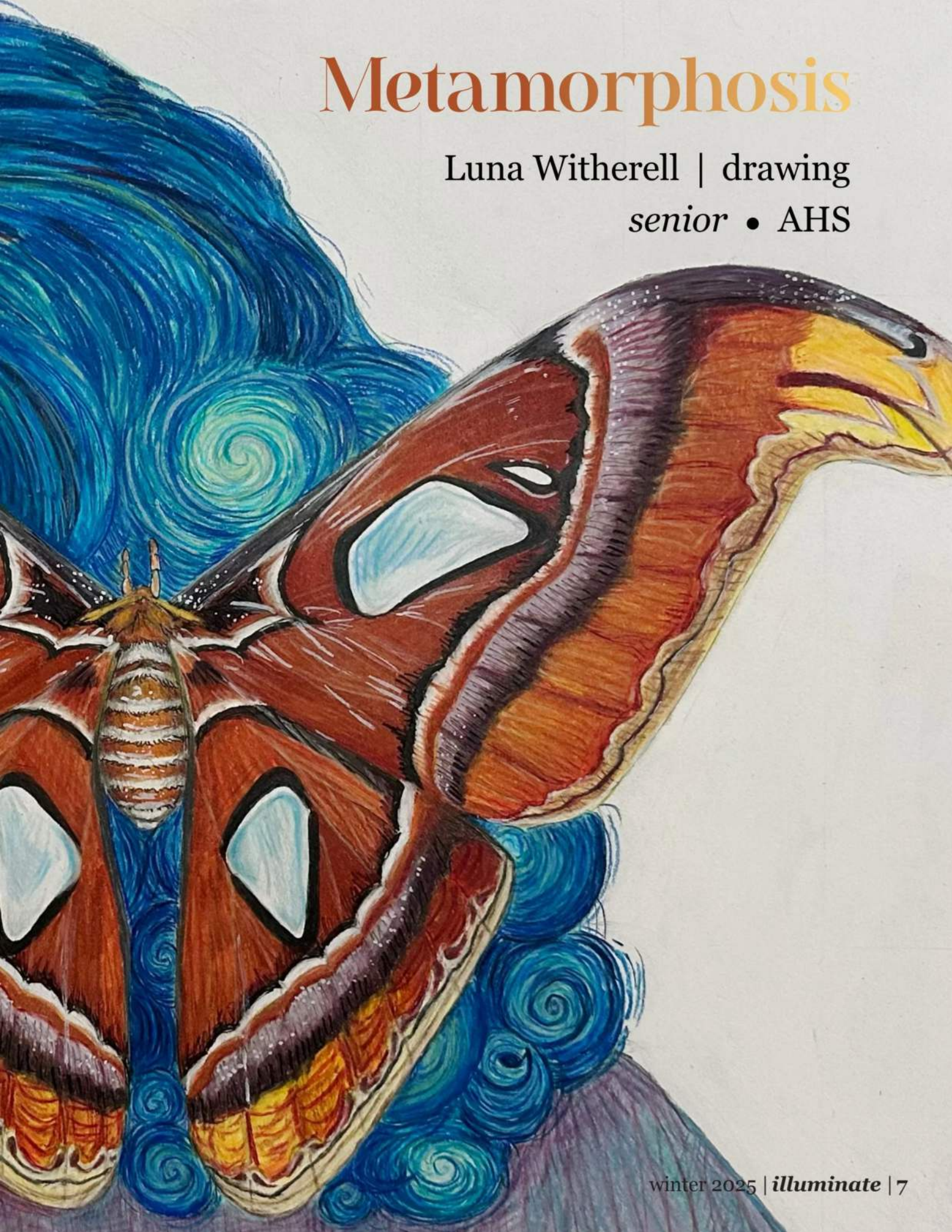
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Metamorphosis

Luna Witherell | drawing
senior • AHS



My Last Day With You

Morgan Takao | poem

junior • AHS

I woke up to the
sound of the TV
playing early in the morning.

It always made me feel
like you were there.
This was normal until one day.

Everything was silent, but I didn't think
of anything different.
I just thought you forgot

to turn on the TV that morning.
But it was worse,
you were just laying there and left the world.

I cherished the day before,
where the TV was playing in the morning.
But the flicker of the TV turning on breaks my heart.



Carrier Pigeons

Anonymous | multimedia art

sophomore • EHS



Afloat

Madelyn Woo | drawing
sophomore • AHS

Mo Li Hua

Genevieve Yuen | prose
junior • AHS

A gentle knock at the door, as footsteps drift in. There is the familiar clank of glass bowl against hollow wooden desk, as she sets down the fresh cut fruit beside my in-progress homework as always.

“Mm,” a wordless acknowledgement and a nod, a silent conversation of a thousand words buried deep within those sounds. I reshift my attention back to the blank math worksheet, now darkened with smudges of gray from the feverous writing and erasing I had done over the past hour. No closer to the answers that taunted me, playing hide-and-seek behind the equations that snarled their hideous teeth.

But there is something new today: a small dish aligned with white flower buds arranged neatly in a circle, releasing a sweet floral aroma that she places delicately next to the fruit bowl. Mo li hua, jasmine flowers, my pó pó, or grandmother explains, her wrinkly, well worn hands picking one up to examine the small bud more closely in the light. “I picked them from your great aunt’s garden,” she says. “They’ll make your room smell nice.”

“Mm,” I say, though I mean to say, “Thank you.”

“Mm,” I reply, though I meant to say, “I love them.”

A silent conversation of a thousand words.

They remained on my desk, the sweet floral scent wafting through the room every time I walked in. Whenever their pure white shade began to brown, or the flowers grew too limp, fresh new ones appeared and were replaced, as if nothing had ever happened. No matter what, I knew I could count on the syrupy sweet scent from the jasmine flowers to cradle me, to be the only semblance of stability within the turbulence of life.

When Two Worlds Collide

Lyra O'Broin | painting

junior • AHS





Greed's Divide

M.W. | poem

junior • AHS

god speaks to me in the deep night
moonlight in my bones
I tell father about my lucid dreams
run away with my lover
stepping a line,
never meeting eye to eye
the freckles on your face are infinite
the mole on the back of your neck
is finitely one
greed is begging for your heart
greed is what keeps us apart
to god I pleaded
only one wish
our line shut off,
gears running with us
god, I pray she will find heaven while the world is in war.
it is greed, always greed.
amen

Bathed in Moonlight

Zoe Liao | digital art

senior • AHS





How We Drew Dragons

Madelyn Falk | poem

junior • AHS

Sunlit Saturday afternoons, open windows
brushing my cheeks with a delicate breeze.
My friend and I, crouched on our knees,
the plush pink carpet soft underneath curled toes,
hair falling into our eyes.
The rhythmic sound of felt tip on paper
Softening fibers with layers of ink,
echoing alone amidst the comforting silence.

Whirls of color in little lines and spirals,
forming delicately into lengthened shapes
of spiraling gray and curling blue,
framed by narrow yellow eyes and flared black nostrils
Markers fall to the floor without a sound,
their usual plastic clatter muffled.
They sit abandoned as we run into the kitchen,
bare feet sliding on tile
Our creations of paper in hand,
streaming in colorful waves behind us.

Bouquet

Helen Wajler | painting

sophomore • SJND





Missing

Cherish Au | digital art
senior • AHS



Schedule

Anonymous | photography

junior • AHS

Pi (π)

Eli Davies | short story

sophomore • AHS

On a cold morning, he awoke, having just been to fantastic yet unmemorable places of the mind. He had slept well. As his consciousness slowly returned, he stood still in space, or rather laid still, as he was still in his bed. The light from his eyes made its way into his mind, and soon he felt the impulse to get up.

The walk to school was one he would remember years later. Every building was etched into his memory: the corner store, the house with the overhanging stairs, the one with the peeling white paint. He had nothing else to do but look at them, and they entered his mind. He loved the buildings, loved the repetitive walk down the same street, on the same day, over and over again. The heavy bag on his shoulders didn't weigh him down.

The way to school was eastward, and the bell rang as he entered the classroom. The class was easy and a little boring. This was always how it was. They were working on circles. Area, radius and circumference. He had already learned these topics before. He thought himself into the space around the sun, but he could not bear to look at its glow. All he could manage to see was the vast darkness surrounding it all. He looked at the Earth. It rotated and orbited, and he could see it move glacially. He patiently watched it travel the full circumference, and it had been a year. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

The next year was much like the last, and the one before, and the one before. There were classes, and there were books, and there were movies. He walked home at the end of the day, and he walked west. Every day, he walked faster. He looked to the heavens, but every second hurt him. He wanted to do more than he was able, and he never felt like what he did was enough. He wished for the future to come, the future where he was more able. And it did come, but slowly, and always the same speed.

He dreamt of a place and a time. He imagined himself growing old with his accomplishments, and sitting by a campfire on a moonless night. He saw the bright light reflected off the work he would do. He would see everything he had made, and he would see that it was good.

He traveled many orbits, and he spun around in circles, never going anywhere. He stood still in space, or rather laid still, as he was still in his bed. He closed his eyes. He remembered the corner store, the house with the overhanging stairs, the one with the peeling white paint. He watched the sun set. And then, on a cold morning, he awoke.





The Secretkeepers

Scarlett Wagner | poem

freshman • AHS

Pinkies locked,
voices low,
while I lie in the grass

They seal their lips
with crimson thread
and then return to class

I ask one question
and they are rabbits
with eager viper tongues

So I'll think twice
before I let
my secrets escape my lungs

For I now know
most secretkeepers
are only there for fun

Multicultural Tapestry of Love

Madelyn Woo | painting

sophomore • AHS



Frozen in Serenity

Madelyn Fairbanks | photography

junior • EHS







Crude Iron

Pascal Aurelius | poem

senior • AHS

Crude instrument,

Rusted soul,

You made no sound

And now never will

Yet gods ourselves graft you;

Not of earthen clay, nor sweet flesh

But metal coil and primordial heat

Spring life in our cranium housed cogs

Nonetheless you make no noise

Ask Prometheus; ask Hephaestus;

And should they laugh,

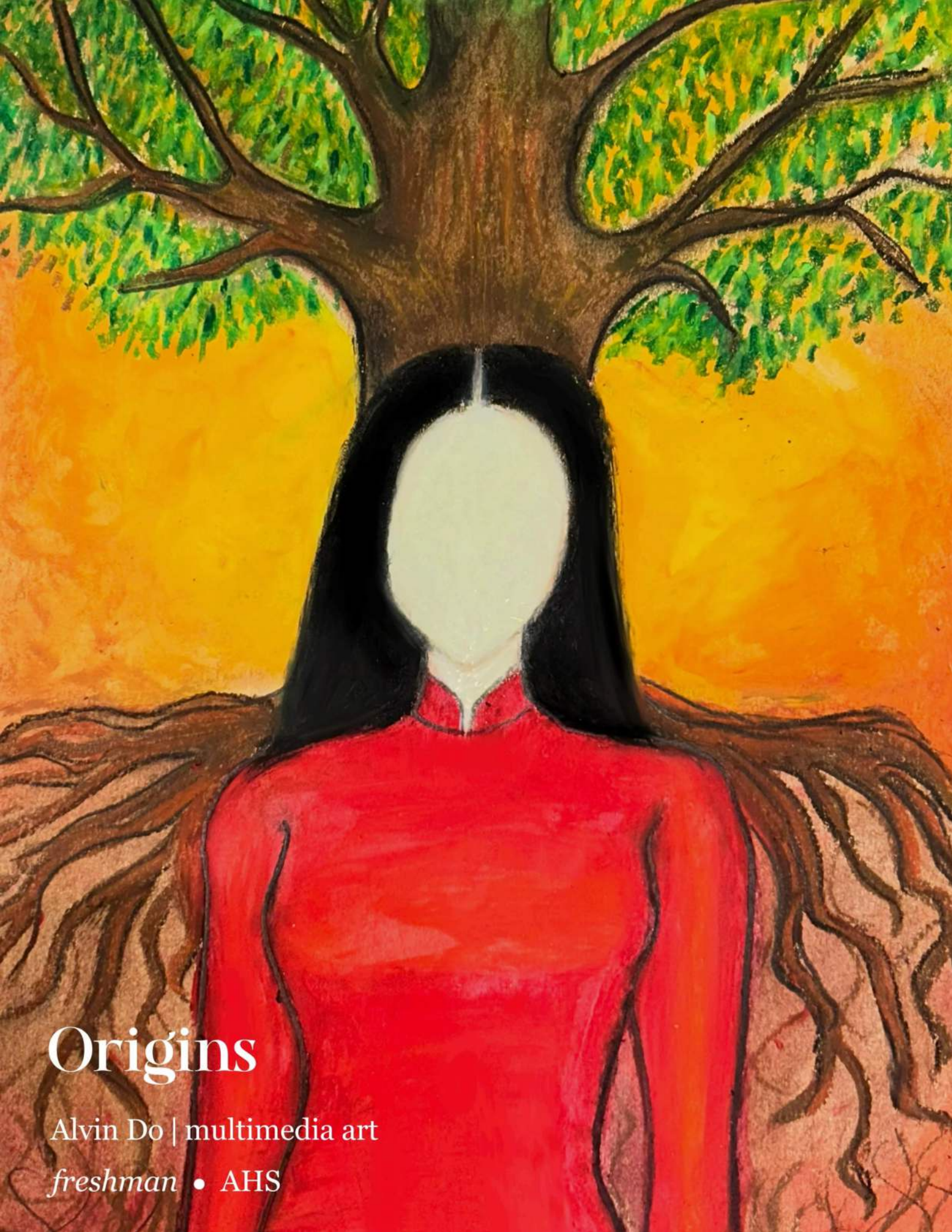
That be the only sound you will ever incur



Metal Drummer

Diego Del Pin | multimedia art

freshman • EHS



Origins

Alvin Do | multimedia art

freshman • AHS

Almond

Virginia Li | short story

sophomore • AHS

I am an Almond compared to Cashews.

Cashews come from the Cashew tree. They grow from the bottom of a Cashew apple, a juicy pear-shaped fruit. An almond is an edible seed that comes from the Almond tree. The layer of brown skin on the Almond is used for protection against microbial contamination, pests, and oxidation.

I am an Almond compared to Cashews.

You can peel the skin off of the Almond to eat, if that's what you want. That's what I used to usually do. I personally think the skin is annoying and too flaky to consume. It gets wedged between the cracks of my teeth, and sometimes even stuck in the back of my throat. It gets itchy. But a Cashew is easier to eat. All you do is pop one, or multiple into your mouth, and you just chew. The Cashew is a smooth nut. Not like Almonds, they're hard.

I am an Almond compared to Cashews.

I started bleaching my skin when I went into middle school. I didn't like how dark or rough-looking my skin was. It didn't help that some of the people surrounding me actually encouraged this unhealthy habit. Although thankfully, nothing major and unfortunate happened to me, it really made me lose a few months of the life I was supposed to enjoy. I stopped playing in the sun, I was scared of any light that touched my skin. I visibly became dull, physically and mentally. My anxiety grew everytime I went to family functions. I hated that a family member that I wasn't close with, would have the audacity to comment on how my skin looked. No matter how much I disguised myself as a Cashew, they knew I was peeling the skin off of my Almond.

I am an Almond compared to Cashews.

Every nut is similar and can be different in their own way.

I've stopped peeling the skin off of the Almonds I eat now.

It's such a hassle for such a small thing.



Waiting in the Water

Madelyn Falk | short story

junior • AHS

My sister and I were once inseparable. We quite literally did everything together, from playing mermaids in the backyard to doing our chores. I can't even recall a memory where she wasn't always with me.

My sister and I were once best friends. Every pain was a shared one; if I fell running around the playground at recess, she'd always be there to cradle my injury and help me limp dramatically to the office. I think our school knew how close we were, because there wasn't a single class we weren't in together. I can't say it wasn't a detriment to our learning, though; every class would be full of giggling as we doodled and brainstormed new ideas for our mermaid princess personas.

My sister and I both loved mermaids. We had a chipping and sun-bleached pool in the backyard. It had been there since the house's construction years ago, and every weekend and summer was spent in its over-chlorinated water. For Christmas, we had gotten our own mermaid tails, and from then we stopped playing on land. If it wasn't for that pool, maybe we would have been playing with ponies or Barbies.

My sister and I wanted to go to the beach. We lived in a landlocked state, and had never gotten to see the tropical waters of our dreams on a vacation. I remember the last thing my sister told me was that someday, she wanted to dive into the crystal clear waters of Hawaii or the Bahamas with her tail on and swim with the sea turtles, clownfish, and manta rays.

Now, I stand at the edge of the water alone, gentle waves rippling over my bare feet. A slight breeze brushes my cheeks, and I smile at the memories that play behind my vision when something dark in the clear blue water catches my eye.

A manta ray, dark and glimmering smooth, glides out just in front of my reach. I don't dare to move a muscle, admiring its sleek form and endless grace as it slowly moves its fins to swim in front of me. Then, just when I had solidified my resolve to wade out further towards it, it was gone.

My sister wasn't here anymore, but I'd like to imagine that she had been inviting me into the water that day to play together like we used to. I'd like to imagine she's still there somehow, waiting for me in the boundless sapphire waters.





Beneath the Surface

Violet Wu | photography

sophomore • SJND



Fig Tree

Zoe Liao | digital art

senior • AHS

Memories

Jacob Rozenek | short story

junior • AHS

There's a place I miss very dearly. It holds a place in my heart that I don't think anything else will ever occupy, and should it fade I worry nothing will come to fill it. It's far from here, far enough to be out of reach, to be confined to my memories. And I think, perhaps, that it's best if it stays like that. I never lived in Los Alamos, the longest I think I ever stayed was somewhere to the realm of a month. In total, I've spent around nine months in New Mexico my entire life and yet it feels like home more than anything else. My last visit was in the summer of 2023 and I knew that was to be my last. But that summer felt no different than the 13 that came before it, and one could imagine that this whole mess about never coming back was a bad dream, that you'd wake up and still realize there were many summers to go. Full of friends, lazy afternoons and copious amounts of guacamole, it was only at the very end, that I think I truly felt sad at the end of the whole thing. My last memory, and the one I most cherish, is the day we left. As we were pulling out of the driveway, I decided to get one last look at the house. Through the dirty car window, I stared as long as I could, trying to ingrain each fine detail so deep into my mind that I would never forget. I stared and stared, until the house fell away from view as we turned the street corner.

It was my grandmother who lived there, and who I'd visit every summer. She had lived in Los Alamos for some 40-odd years, working as a teacher at the local schools. My grandfather worked at the Lab before he passed away when I was about four. Trips to New Mexico were often shorthanded to "Visiting Grandma" in the summer or "Going to Grandma's House for Christmas" in the winter. The house itself was large, two stories with a sizable backyard. It had the typical pueblo color scheme that those who visit New Mexico quickly get familiarized with, but still had a modern feel. Summers were spent chasing lizards, eating Sonic at the local pond, exploring the outdoors and in the company of friends. Winters were spent eating baked treats, lighting luminarios, catching up with extended family and of course, Christmas morning. Yet even these glorious memories, of which I will treasure till they slip from my mind for the final time, aren't in large part what I would go back for.

I would go back for the quiet moments. The moments when school, troubles, worries all fell away and I was simply driving along a highway in the desert night or sitting on the deck watching lightning flash over the Sangre de Cristo mountains. Those simple, beautiful moments are what I miss the most. Good memories can be tortuous things, remaining us of things that can never be again, joys and pleasures lost to us forever. Yet when I close my eyes and feel the cool night breeze, smell the pine needles and see the Sangre de Cristos alight with heavenly wrath, it is not mourning that I feel. It is contentment. The root that bound me to New Mexico may be old and dry as the desert it connected me to but it is still there. I will never return to that house, to those memories in my lifetime. Of that I am certain. But as long as that root remains, cracked and dry as it is, I will never leave that beautiful place I so cherish.

The Gray Area

Juna Rose Koeberl | prose

junior • AHS

Summer felt more like winter this year. It was like that every year, maybe that was why I left. He had started to call the Bay Area the grey area, it was fitting. The thick layer of fog would roll in from San Francisco and drift over to the little island in the bay. The wind blew with force when you stood at the shore, he was so small that I was afraid he would get blown away. He had never been to California before and it made me a bit disappointed in myself that this was his first impression of the state that had raised me. Yet, the wind was peaceful to me, it always had been, and it was like meeting an old friend again. I was brought back to the memories of those years. I no longer felt like a mother, I felt like a teenager again, walking my dog by the water and driving for the first time in a little blue Prius.

He wrapped his fingers around my finger, his skin was warm, he was always warm. He was only two years old, he could barely stand in the violent wind, but he laughed as the wind blew through his hair. He jumped up and down as the waves met the shore, it was like he was trying to play with them. He waved to them as they came to us, and then he started to cry as they pulled back into the ocean.

I picked him up in my arms, rubbed his back, and calmed him with a song. "I like carrots, potatoes, *I still hate tomatoes.* Mangos and Tangos, eating and neating."

I've become a lot more open about myself, I no longer care as much as I had before. I could sing a song that made no sense in public without a care. I was singing to my child, he did not care what strangers thought of that. He reminded me how much the small moments mattered. I had left partly because of that too, the small moments were better in a place that changed with me, not a place that had no seasons. I looked at the waves as he buried his face into my chest.

They came up to us with urgency, and pulled back with no feeling at all. Back and forth, in and out, home and gone. It was like a dog running up to you, but then darting off once you smile. I held him tightly as tears started to form in my eyes. It was time to leave, the shoreline that I had spent hours on years ago only brought me to tears now. *The Harbor Bay ferry still comes and goes from Shoreline Park.* I hate boats, Leonard does too. The time away from where I had grown up brought this strange feeling I still cannot name. I turned around and walked with him in my arms to the car. It was pretty there, but that was all. I no longer felt connected to this place, it hurt to think about. It hurt to know that I was no longer connected to a part of my life that was once so important to me.

When I was a teenage girl, I would walk here and think about my future. I wanted it so badly, I just wanted to be older. I thought that I knew everything, but I was wrong. I knew nothing, but I felt everything. Children think adults know everything, and teenagers spend every day preparing to be adults. As a teenager, I jumped in head first, I overthought every moment, I was searching for something, but I could not find it here.

I sat him down in his car seat that faced the rear of the car. He could not see much of the world outside of the window since he was small.

However, I always had the sun roof uncovered so he could see the sky. I buckled him in, gave him a kiss, shut the door and got in the driver's seat. The first time I drove in that parking lot I was sixteen and scared. I got on the road and I headed north, he was sleeping the whole ride home. Eight long hours pass and I know more than I did when I was 16. I understand that in order to do great things, I needed great change.

The leaves are starting to turn a soft orange like the edges of a pie, the rain softly falls as I pull into the driveway. It is a windless night and *everything is constantly in motion.* Now, in a state where the seasons can sing their songs to mother earth as she smiles at her children, I turn off the car's engine. There was no ocean where we lived.

A Sweet Dream

Penelope Falk | multimedia art

freshman • AHS





Reflections

Nicole Mei | multimedia art
sophomore • ASTI

A Beast Beneath

Genevieve Yuen | short story

junior • AHS

The beast's eyes glistened against the midnight blue waters that surrounded it, spanning a hundred million miles. Its eyes like small crystal orbs, incandescent under the light of the moon. Its breath rose and fell in unison with the muffled crashing of the waves above the surface. Its heartbeat thrummed, intertwined and eternally synchronized with the ocean, as if it were one cyclic entity. The ocean hummed mournfully, secrets only its inhabitants could understand. And for a moment, he could too.

He could see the reflection of himself within those glossy, crystal eyes. He could hear the lull of the deep sea with every heartbeat, every breath. Drawing him deep within its mysterious abyss, answers the questions that awaited just beneath. Deeper, always deeper.

And yet.

He could feel the weight of my body underneath the pressures of the deep blue; the way his chest grew tight, as if it were a rope pulled taut. He could feel the way his eyes stung as he strained to peer into the beast's eyes, searching for answers he knew were not his.

The beast blinked slowly.

He forced my body to push upwards, as the corners of his vision blurred. Heaviness settled into my arms and legs as he resisted against the ocean's alluring pull, the waters growing lighter as the surface grew closer. For a second, he thought of turning back, but he continued his ascension, his body yearning for air.

Behind him, he left a world of answers never unfurled—where a beast waits patiently, forever guarding the secrets of the depths.



Hush hush
Quiet grey wolf
Save your speech,
We hold court
You there, boy
See me and weep

The great king of the plastic castle
Holds games and rhymes
You are new here, no?
Let us see, let us see
What games you get play
Let's ask the king!
Hold court, hold court!
Let's ask the king!

Ah we see, third year and young
A game we shall play
Let's determine your worth
Maybe you have place
In the great king's court

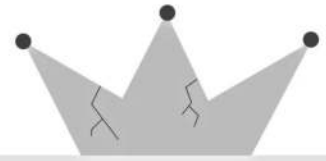
You are a man
A man made of rocks
Close your eyes
And try to find us

The Ram

Lacy Brooke | drawing
junior • AHS

Court of the Plastic Castle

Pascal Aurelius | poem
senior • AHS



We'll kick and prod
What fun, what fun
So it goes, whistle blows
How sad, quite sad
You couldn't find us

Hold court, hold court
We have decided
You have ascended
To jester, delighted

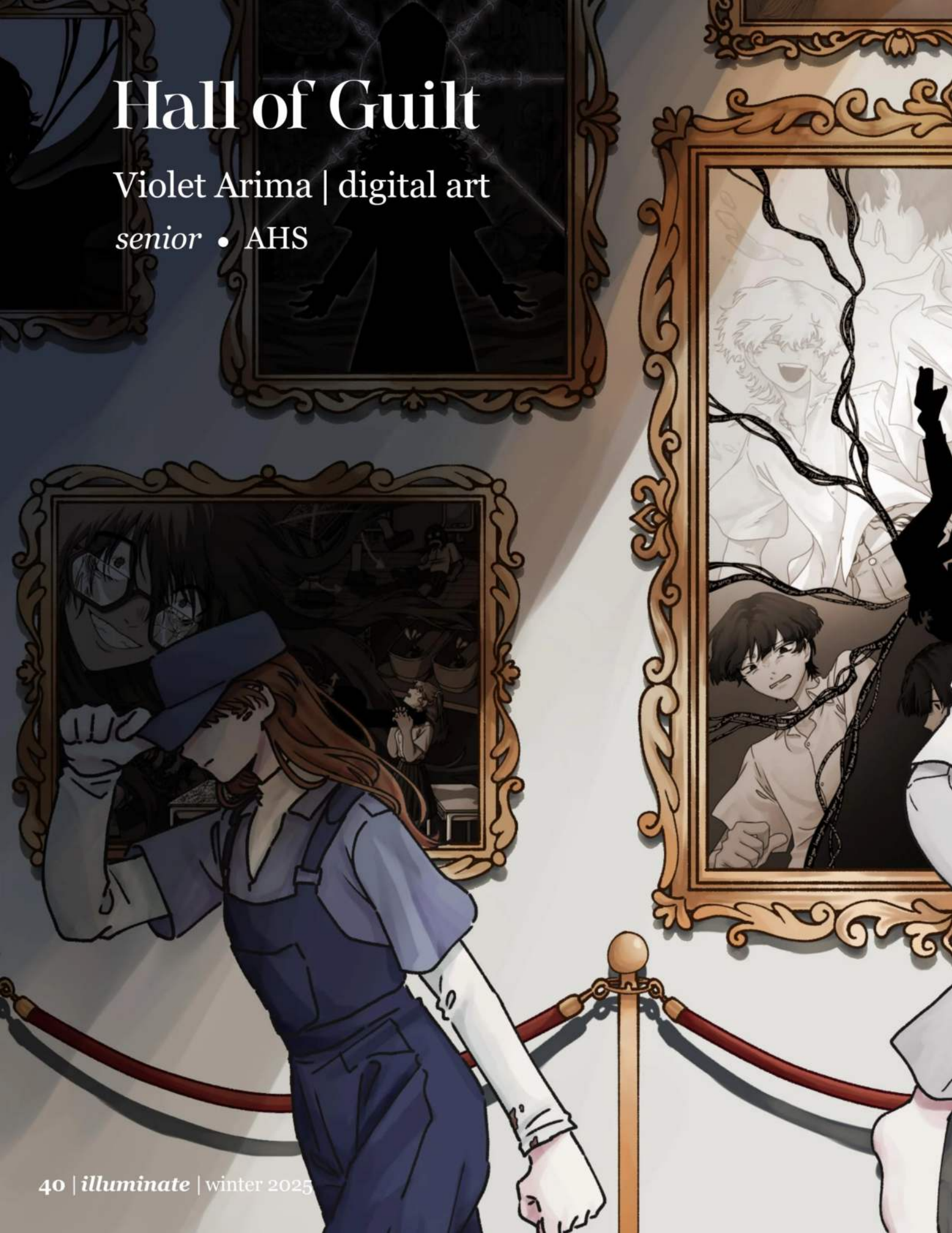
You'll wail and cry
Then we'll cast you
Onto the pavement

The king doesn't want
Any complaining
For his rule is solid
Until break is over.

Hall of Guilt

Violet Arima | digital art

senior • AHS







연꽃

The Lotus

Sophia Lau | drawing

junior • AHS

Descent

Miako Nguyen | prose

junior • AHS

The last thing she sees is one of Saigon's many narrow neighborhoods, rich with vibrant aromas and the song of her native tongue. She barely manages to let out a yelp as she feels roots wrap around her ankles before pulling her abruptly into the ground.

They drag her downward, neither violent nor quick. Regardless of the roots' tenderness, she cries out, struggling frantically against their unyielding pull. Tears sting her eyes while rock stings her fingers as they struggle desperately to find leverage. She screams until her throat is hoarse and dry.

The deeper the roots pull her, the slower they do so. Her breaths slow in turn. Soon, too tired to resist, she settles into a drowsy, meditative state. The sensation of rough sediment around her proves to be calming. Pleasant, even.

As she descends, her thoughts, much like the earth, envelop her.

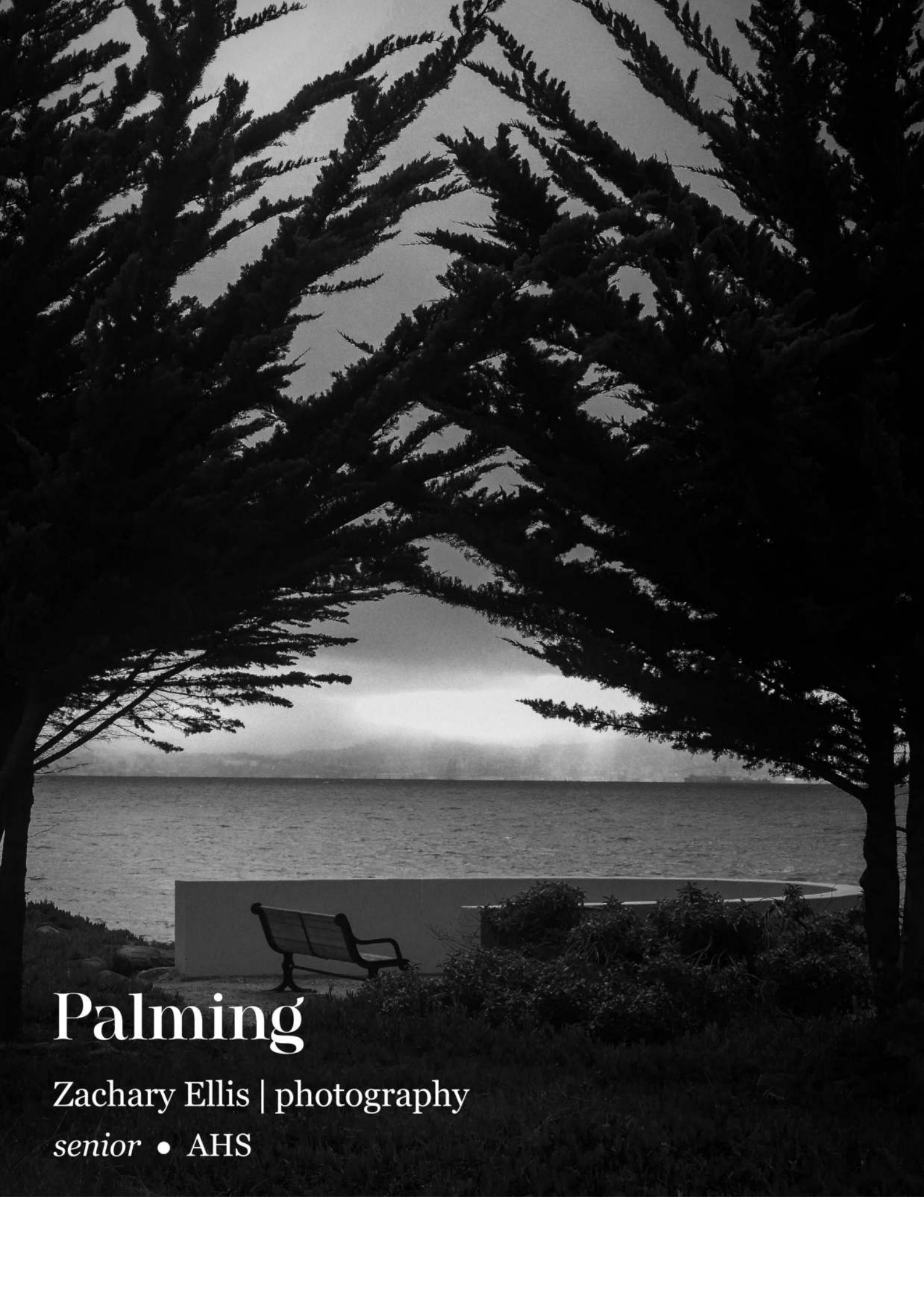
She misses the surface.

Does she?

The clear air allowed her to breathe quickly; the paved terrain allowed her to move quickly; the world seemed to propel her forward, always urging her to hurry and to push and to go. So she kept moving, fighting for time and happiness though she was unsure whether she may ever get to enjoy it.

But what she has always cherished on the surface seems to follow her into these depths: the rocks smell so faintly of ever-familiar aromas; the sound of the rock becomes the quintessential melody of Saigon.

As she allows herself to move through the earth, she feels her roots cradle her like a mother to her child.



Palming

Zachary Ellis | photography

senior • AHS

Longing

Jacob Rozenek | prose

junior • AHS

He stares out at the ocean. He's missed the smell of salt, the sound of waves, the feel of the breeze. It's been far too long since he's been back, but he now leads a busy life. He remembers when, back in his youth, there was hardly a day he wasn't straining to get out on the ocean. Surfboard, kayak, boat, it didn't matter. The feeling of being surrounded and embraced by such a massive and beautiful thing, existing not as a human but as a creature of the sea, was incredible. Yet, it became more and more tiring to resist the deafening call of society, to remove oneself from nature and live above such a primitive existence. Surfing became school meetings, boating became bus rides, kayaking became kitchen maintenance. He made those around him happy, lived a successful life by all accounts, but there was never a moment when a hollow feeling didn't pierce his heart. The sea had left a hole in his heart that could never be filled, no matter how far he ran. So, when nature finally caught up with him, death in tow, he vowed he would not leave the world with a hollow heart. There, at the shoreline, he spent his final moments gazing at what he had so foolishly lost. And as the world darkened around him, he could feel a glorious light fill his punctured soul.

Meteorology

Max Kim | photography

freshman • AHS



16 Years; Alaskan Roots

Teagan Williams | poem

junior • EHS

Alaska

I feel as if I'm betraying you.

I've moved away from you,

From my home.

From my Alaska.

The Alaskan flag

Flies high...

In my mind.

People here don't know,

How great Alaska is.

People here have stereotypes

But I know what it is

To be Native Alaskan.

To be born and raised...

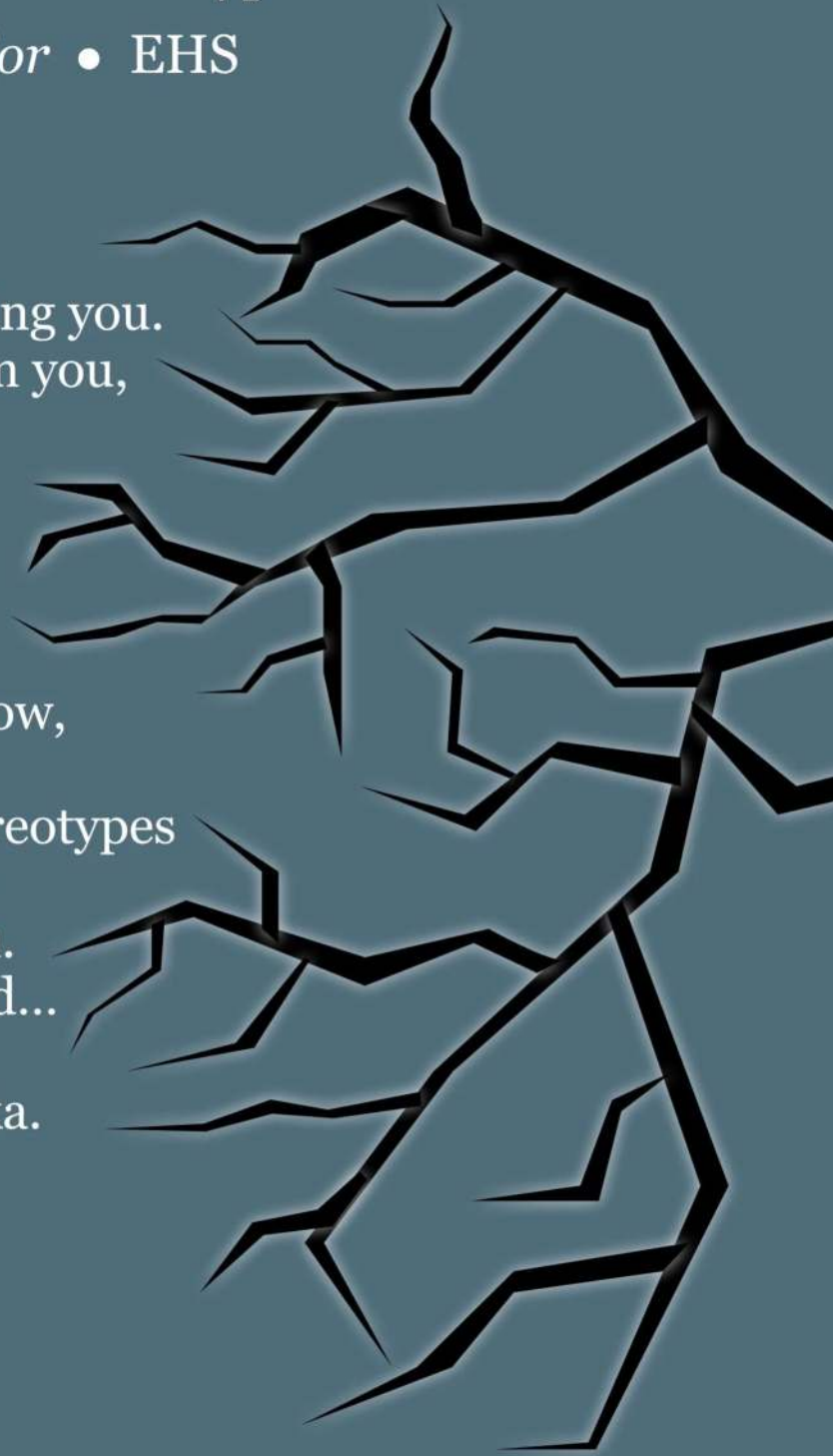
In Alaska.

My roots are in Alaska.

Alaska is my roots.

I love Alaska

Alaska is my home.



The Fall

Elsy Fennell | drawing

junior • AHS



9 days

I have fallen for 9 days.

I know that because I have seen 9 rotations of the glowing orb in the space above me.

Aside from the air and constant sound of wind, that orb is the only other object in this space.

I have grown attached to it.

I cannot remember why I have fallen, I just know that I am.

The stagnant air turned pummeling wind eats at my back.

If one were to gaze upon it they may see red and sweltered skin from its tempestuous ordeal.

My stomach has recessed, so much so that my ribcage has plateaued above it.

Yet I do not feel hungry, the gnawing in my torso had stopped the third day.

I do not know if I am thirsty, I have lost feeling in my throat.

Humans can survive 3 days without water.

Perhaps I am not human. I do not know what I am.

The orb has begun to descend, perhaps it's falling too.

It's taking shape, great wings sprout from its sides, a beak and talons too. It is an owl.

It spreads its wings to stop its descent and outstretches its claws towards me.

Ah, absolve me creature, bring me to God.

I do not know how long I have been in the clutches of the owl. There is no orb to speak to.

Each great flap of its wings veils my face and reaches us higher.

It is taking me back to its nest.

I should think. It is going to eat me.

I should hope. Again, the wind eats at my raw back.

Again, I am falling. The owl has dropped me.

Intentionally or mistakenly, I don't know.

This feeling is familiar, like it has dropped me before.

Perhaps this is my damnation.

A Sisyphean falling into nothingness.

Or perhaps, it is that owl's torture.

And I am the boulder.

Or just a barn mouse.

The owl has returned to its orb, circling above me.

The cycle starts again.

And I am cursed to forget.

Damnation

Pascal Aurelius | poem

senior • AHS



Often Times I Wish I Were Made of Clay

Lily Anderson | multimedia art

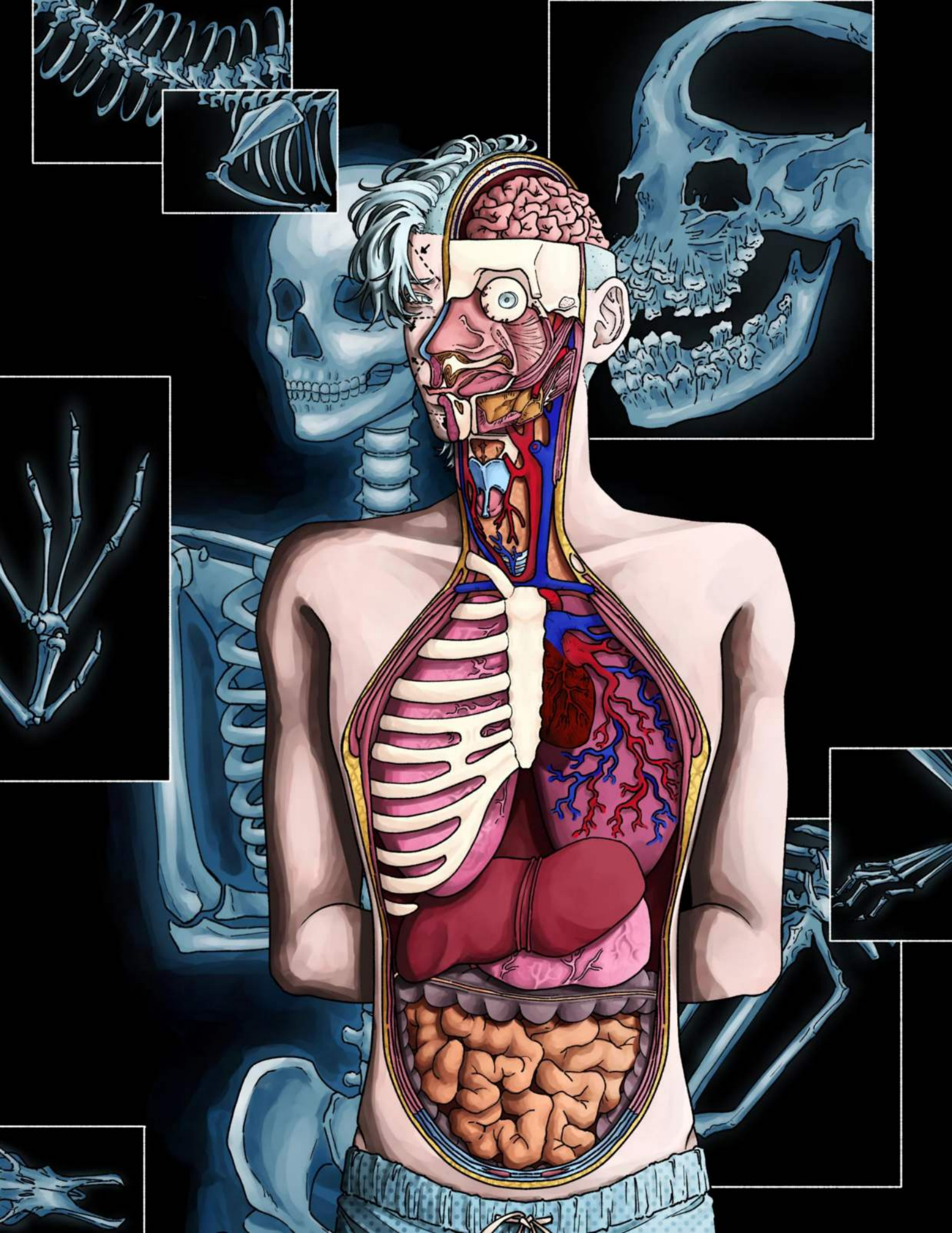
sophomore • AHS

From the Riverbed

Jacob Rozenek | prose

junior • AHS

Is there no greater pride than seeing something that existed only within your mind take physical presence in reality? In each of our minds lay a vast multitude of stories, worlds and characters. For so many of these, they will only ever exist in the shapeless, everchanging form of thought. But then there are the ideas that seem different. They are too much, they are not content to exist in such a shapeless and impermanent form. These restless, grand ideas do not all translate to reality the same way. Some are content to exist as words on a page, others drawings on a canvas. It is only the grandest of ideas that demand physical form, to be themselves and only themselves. Perhaps that is why Prometheus, or Khmun, or Aruru sought to shape humanity out of clay. Using a material so intrinsically linked to the hands of the maker, each perfection and mistake flows into the final product and the story of its creation becomes as important as the idea that brought it into existence. An imperfect creature, molding an imperfect material, hoping to bring into existence a perfect idea. It is a fool's errand. What does come to existence, however, is something human. Lopsided, imperfect, but in the end, more beautiful than any idea.

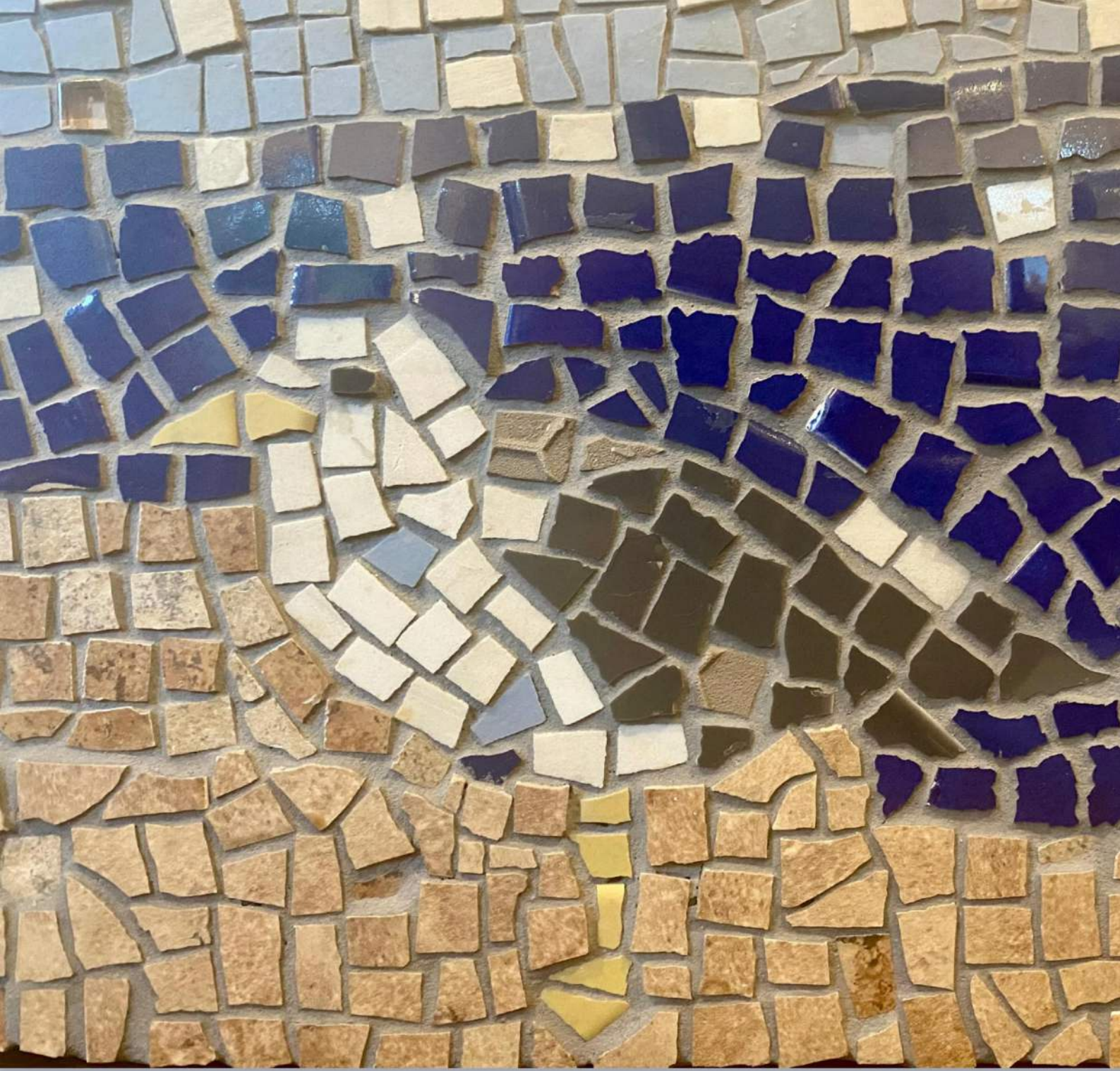




Anatomization

Violet Arima | digital art

senior • AHS



Cinque Terre

Max Kim | multimedia art
freshman • AHS





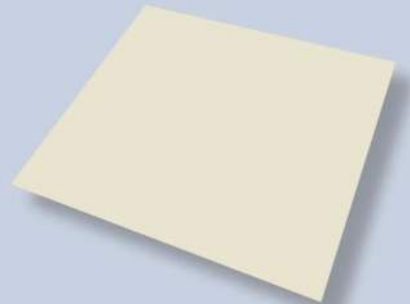
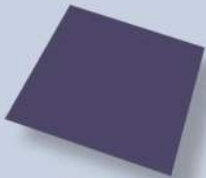
Bay Sailors' Sonnet

Pascal Aurelius | poem

senior • AHS



Oh mighty sail, catch the salted wind flee,
Across murken green; sing adventure yonder.
“Whose vermilion barque?” said sailors ponder
Five sails, a bay vessel in no ocean should be.
Ah, pray tell, and tell only to me;
Do thou on the ocean earn feelings of wonder?
Or fear capsizes when the sky cracks and thunders?
Oh brilliant crimson vessel, take my soul as levy;
Across the young sea, to the elder gold arch,
A destination so grand, let old King Arthur envy.
Throw your sword to the lake, and start the death march
To the gold gate, untouched by Avalonian apples.
For in this great bay, even sinners seek chapel.



Growing Pains

Everyone always asks

Why?

My stomach hurts. I don't know.

There isn't a good reason. How do I explain when

I'm lying on my bedroom floor,

the tranquil brown fibers do not consume me.

Do not swallow me into their sweet embrace.

My bones split down the middle

And weave connections

Down into the carpet-soil

Expanding out

Impossibly large beneath me.

I cannot move.

I am bound here.

Amelia Kirk | poem

sophomore • AHS



Cycles

Violet Hasten | painting

junior • CPS

I try to scream but only the sad wind song escapes me
from my wooden diaphragm.

Like the trees when they realized no one was coming to save them.

My stomach hurts.

Inside me a great pulsating ball of twine wound
tight and loose at the same time with talons
of fire clawing and gripping my intestines.

Fighting for control.

And then it erupts from my middle.

It's deep brown and growing.

Taller still, a million canyons hug its sides.

Jagged, twigs with dirty nails and unkempt bark shoot out its head.

The branch hair, it sprouts molding and shaping and forming a great crown.

A mahogany tiara whose glittering leaves begin to grow.

The greens so new and pure like a baby's first laugh.

They flounder over their branch stubs, quickly a foliage too great.

For its own spindling arms. A spectacle indeed.

The baby's laugh and life fill the space with a special kind of warmth.

The kind only experienced when you're sitting at the dining room table
in front of the window at that just barely perfect time in the morning
when the sun's soft yellow glow is still, new, and perfect.

The leaves then become the sun. Soft yellow turning amber;
then the harsh and unforgiving bronze of afternoon.

The leaves spike and yell and throw fits,
their rage and pain rattling the tree until it can no longer bear it.

That's when the screaming stops.

When the leaves crumple crunch brown and fall stubbornly.

And the crown returns without its jewels.

And the sounds of my room come back.

And the wide mahogany sinks back into my stomach.

And my veins return to my body.

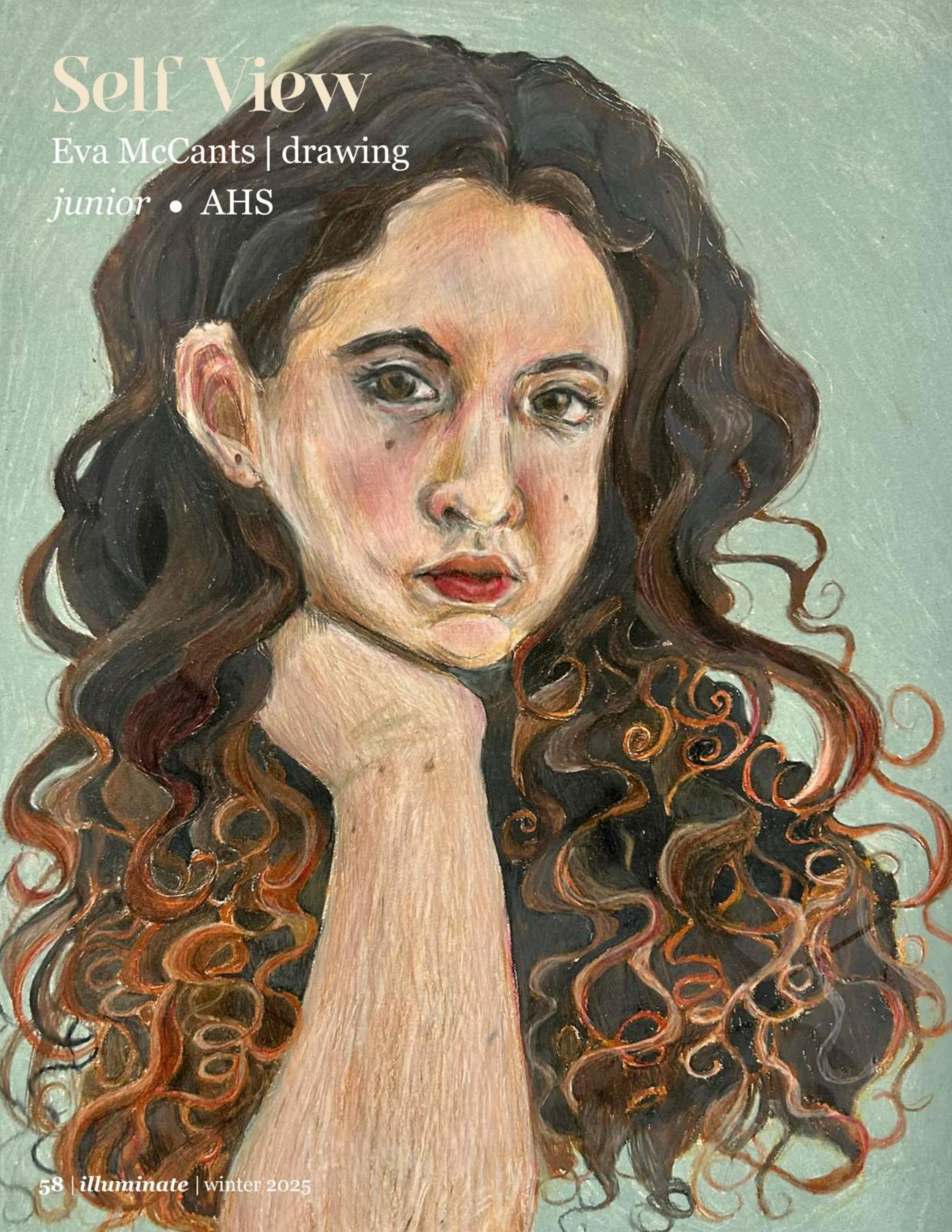
And my bones mend.

And my scream is now loud and clear with triumph.

Self View

Eva McCants | drawing

junior • AHS





In Blue

Lyra O'Broin | drawing

junior • AHS



Burning Herb

Liam Xie | poem

junior • EHS

A spark ignites within

Placing the symbol for wisdom

Health and immortality

Balance and harmony

While an earth-like aroma flies by



An airy smoke follows behind

Coming off as strong as a storm

Yet as time passes

The fire grows small

Lighting a soft pathway

Of constant green scenery

Sage

A herb that burns with a passion

Dancing as Spring Blooms and the Dragon Soars

Annaliese Tan | digital art

freshman • AHS



The Forgotten Fire

Victoria Diaz | poem

junior • AHS

Lost heroes are kindling
Made from tall, strong trees
That have been through many storms
Many natural disasters
And many strong winds
Yet still stand towering above all.

They are chopped down and burned
To make a fire that they know will never warm them
But they know it will warm others.
People will remember the fire, as long as it's still burning
But once the flames go out, it's forgotten.
No one thanks the kindling that started it
And all that remains are the ashes.

The last smoking ember gets drowned by water
And the ashes get covered by a mantle of dirt.
Feet trod upon it, not knowing what's under them:
Yet this trampling only helps the ashes mingle with the dirt
Strengthening the soil
For other plants to thrive on.

Over the years, many flowers have planted their roots there
But they all get picked carelessly, without any thought
Of their origin.

Nothing is left except for a single red rose,
The first one in this small, dark patch,
That has just recently bloomed.

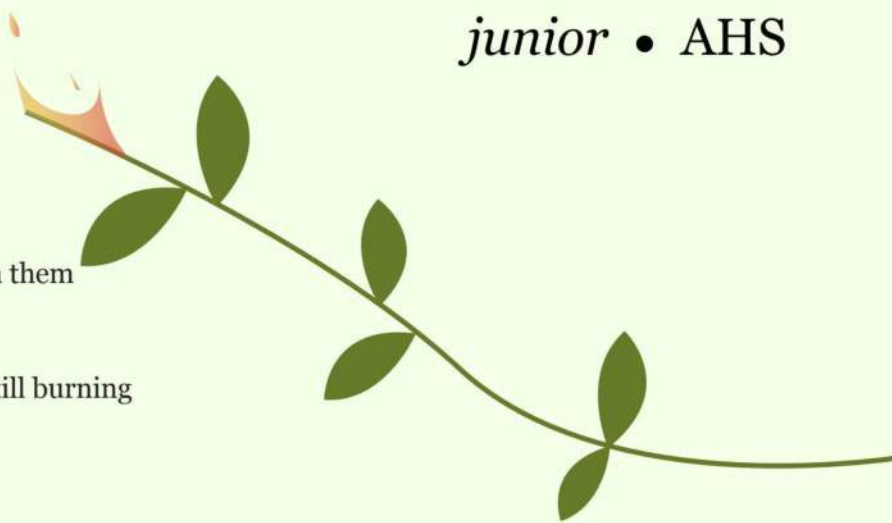
A weary traveler walks up to the patch
And notices the ashes first, then the rose,
Still remembering the dancing flames,
So similar to the rose's bright red blossom.

The rose is then picked, the roots still clinging to the ashes
Not brushed away as they usually are:
The traveler's hands cradle
The Heroes, the Ashes and their Child, the Rose.

A Golden Hue

Ziyao Yuan | photography

senior • ASTI



San Sebastian



Saint-Jean-de-Luz

Madrid



*These photos were taken during Luc's s trip to Spain
and France during the summer of 2025.*



Barcelona



Mallorca

A European Journey

Luc Trinh | photography

junior • AHS



2025

Summer 2025

Jada Greathouse | painting

junior • AHS

You, the Clouds, and I

Madelyn Falk | poem

junior • AHS

I laugh as the two of us spin together,
trees and sandy sneakers blending in a swirl of nostalgia
In our own little world of fiction we've created
Isolated by peeling green chain link fences
and the border of soft white sand under sneakers.

My feet swing over miniature sand dunes
My face wobbles in the lake.
Your smile beams back at me, eyes squinting together
Face upturned toward the unending blue sky
Dotted with sparse tufts of white cotton
Laid out like an ever changing craft project
Its maker never satisfied.

Fingers woven together, our backs hit the sand
Accompanied by the flutter of laughter
And a warning of sand down our shirts.
Right now, I take solace in the warmth of your hand in mine.

The clouds, like you, smile back at me
And light up the sky with their radiance.
The clouds, like you, once loomed heavy with sorrow and anger
But today, they seem alright.

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about

illuminate literary arts magazine is a platform devoted to empowering student voices through the publication of youth-based literature and art. Students are encouraged to submit a variety of mediums from poetry to drawings, and our editorial board will select submissions to be published in our magazine. In our ever-changing world, many struggle to find the right space to express themselves and feel connected. However, this magazine is dedicated to changing that, by shining a light on those eager to be seen and heard, one publication at a time.

when & where?

illuminate staff meet every other Monday in room A107 at AHS, so stop by if you're interested!

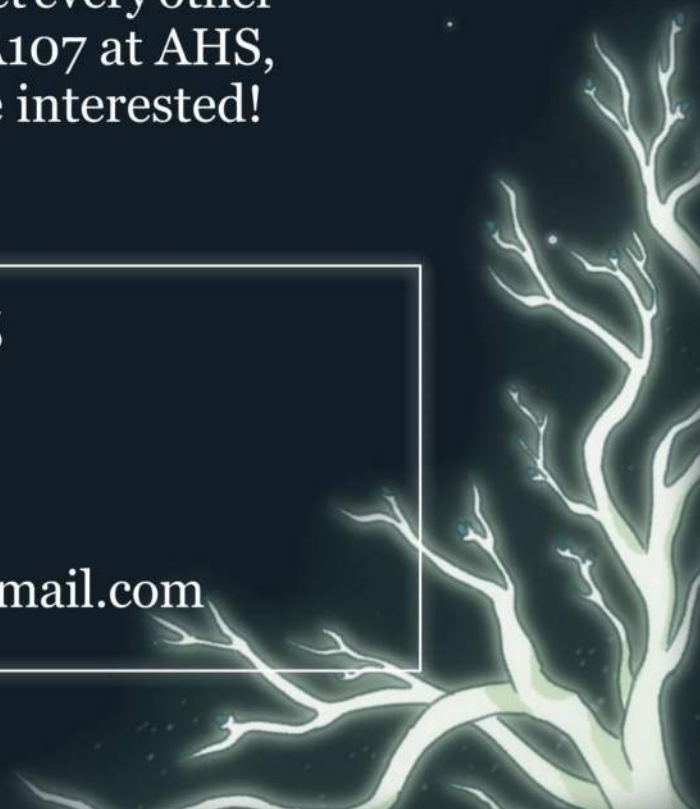
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literary arts magazine