

fnewsmagazine

The School of the Art Institute of Chicago arts, culture, and politics

may 2021

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Anti-Racism
Committee

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the MCA

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Wikipedia'

fold to see hidden message

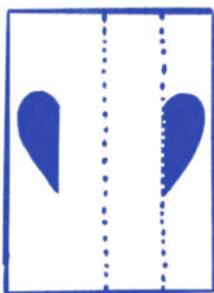
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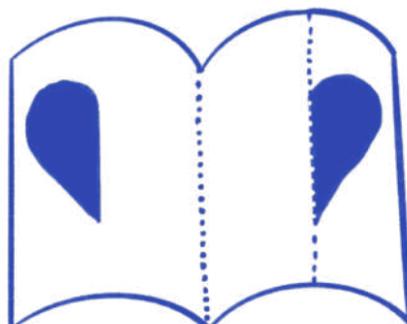
The F News team would like to dedicate this issue to our Asian and Asian American brothers, sisters, and siblings.

How To Enjoy This Issue

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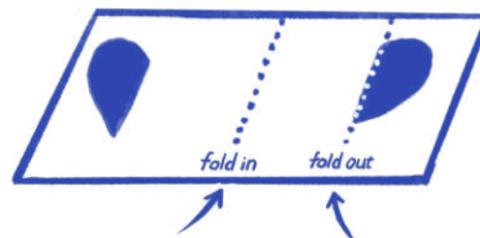


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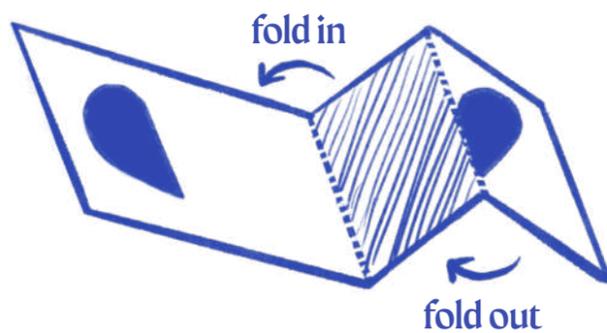


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3 Commence folding ritual



4 Reveal hidden message!



fnewsmagazine

F Newsmagazine is a journal of arts, culture, and politics, edited and designed by students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The print edition is published monthly, and articles are published weekly on our website, fnewsmagazine.com.



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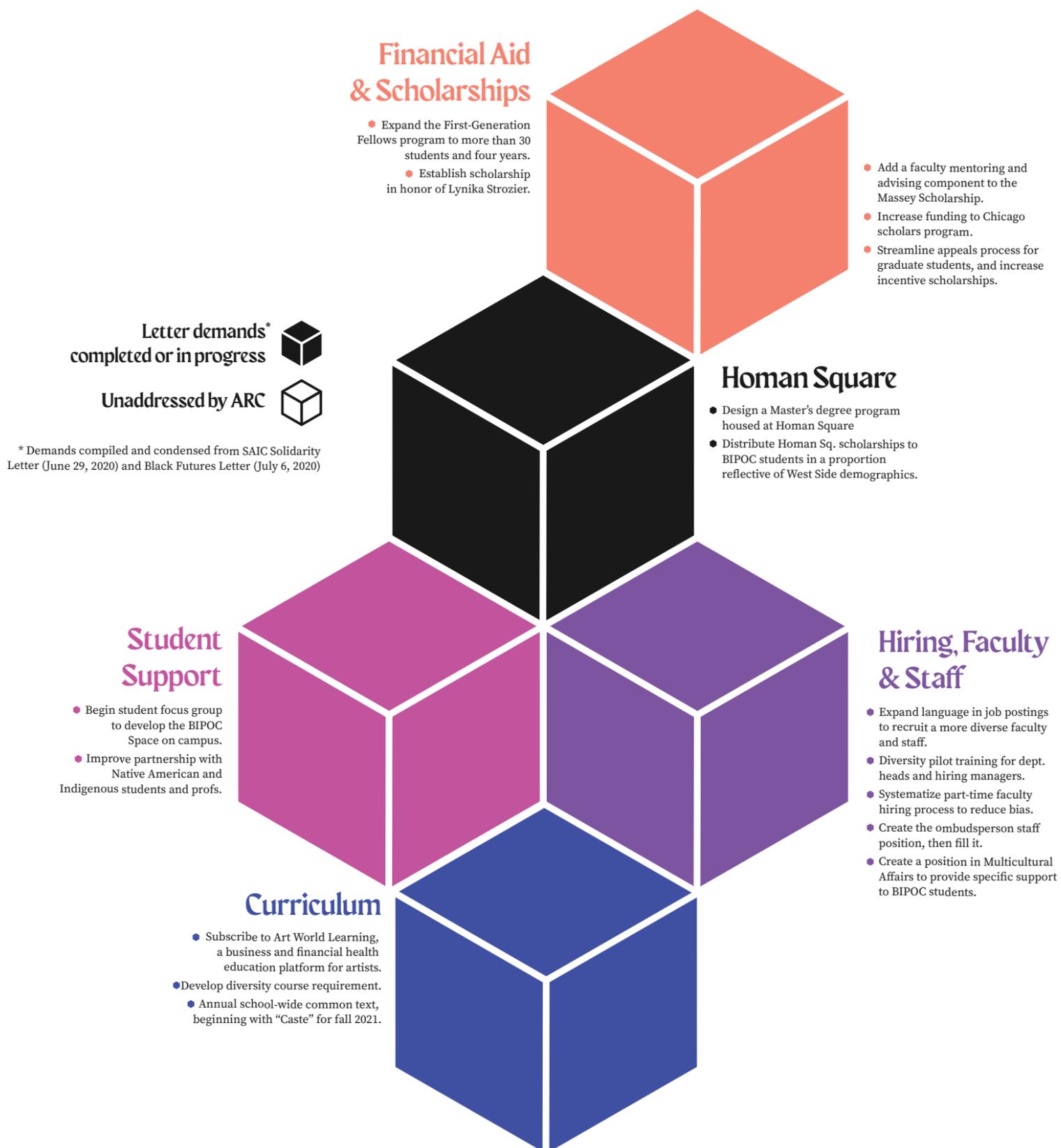
Sincerely,

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Talking the Talk, or Walking the Walk? SAIC's Anti-Racism Action Plan

One year after widespread petitions and discontent, SAIC has assembled its Anti-Racism Committee and released its first round of action items. Is institutional change finally on its way?

by Nestor Kok & Leo Smith

The 2020 Black Lives Matter surge of activism and nationwide protests launched an upheaval in colleges and institutions across the country. In Chicago, where four out of every five victims of police shootings are Black, the reckonings about racism reached the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), which saw its own internal upheaval. Advocacy groups SAIC Solidarity and SAIC Black Futures formed and published letters which left a lasting impact on the campus.

The letters echoed calls on social media for a more decolonized curriculum, a more diverse staff, the renaming of the Columbus Building, improved financial aid for students of color, plus an ombudsperson, and an affinity space for BIPOC students. “We were asking for a school that could imagine itself as truly in solidarity with Black people in Chicago,” said Anna Martine Whitehead, Assistant Professor, Contemporary Practices, and Black Futures member, speaking to F this April.

SAIC’s immediate responses included donations, scholarships, and the establishment of the Anti-Racism Committee (ARC), with numerous subcommittees for items like curriculum, hiring, and the BIPOC space. This spring, almost a year later, the ARC released its first round of action items.

Many who spoke to F agreed that these changes would not be underway without the efforts of SAIC Solidarity and Black Futures. Delinda Collier and Jefferson Pinder, co-chairs of the ARC, told F that they began the first committee meeting by going through the Black Futures letter point by point, along with President Elissa Tenny and Provost Martin Berger. They created subcommittees for each demand they said they were able to pursue.

The committee, which has numerous subcommittees and over 80 people total, released its first round of recommendations this spring. Some of them match up with the original demands, such as diversifying hiring and SAIC’s curriculum. But

other matters, such as staff and faculty pay, working conditions, mental health, and SAIC’s high tuition — issues that are intimately tied to race and class — remain unaddressed by the committee.

Curriculum

ARC recommends a campus-wide diversity course requirement, the specifics of which are not yet determined. Defining a wide-ranging, effective, “anti-racist curriculum” is a long and complex process, Jacob Ristau (Adjunct Associate Professor, Visual Communication) of the curriculum subcommittee told F. “Bucked up underneath this definition must be metrics,” he said. “What can you hold a ruler against to measure that you did or didn’t do it?”

Thus far, the most concrete action item regarding an anti-racist curriculum is the introduction of a shared text for students to read and discuss in Fall 2021 — “Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents” by Isabel Wilkerson. Meanwhile the diversity curriculum requirement, once settled on, will have to pass through the Senate Curriculum Committee for approval, and may possibly be re-worked multiple times before implementation. According to Collier, ARC co-chair and Interim Graduate Dean, “The ARC is not a top-down, ‘we tell you what to do’ thing,” — it merely makes recommendations.

Curriculum changes on the departmental level have been quicker, and those who spoke to F from Contemporary Practices (CP) and the Art History department were optimistic. Jenny Lee (Assistant Professor, Art History, Theory, and Criticism) was part of her department’s ad-hoc anti-racism committee in spring 2020, and said some of the curriculum changes they recommended are already being put into effect this year. Similarly, CP leadership, which met with SAIC Solidarity over the summer, created a set of readings and viewings for this year’s incoming class.

CP also worked with the Chicago Freedom School to host a series of workshops. Whitehead was proud of the speed of the implementation. “We know our students, and we know our faculty.”

Diverse Hiring

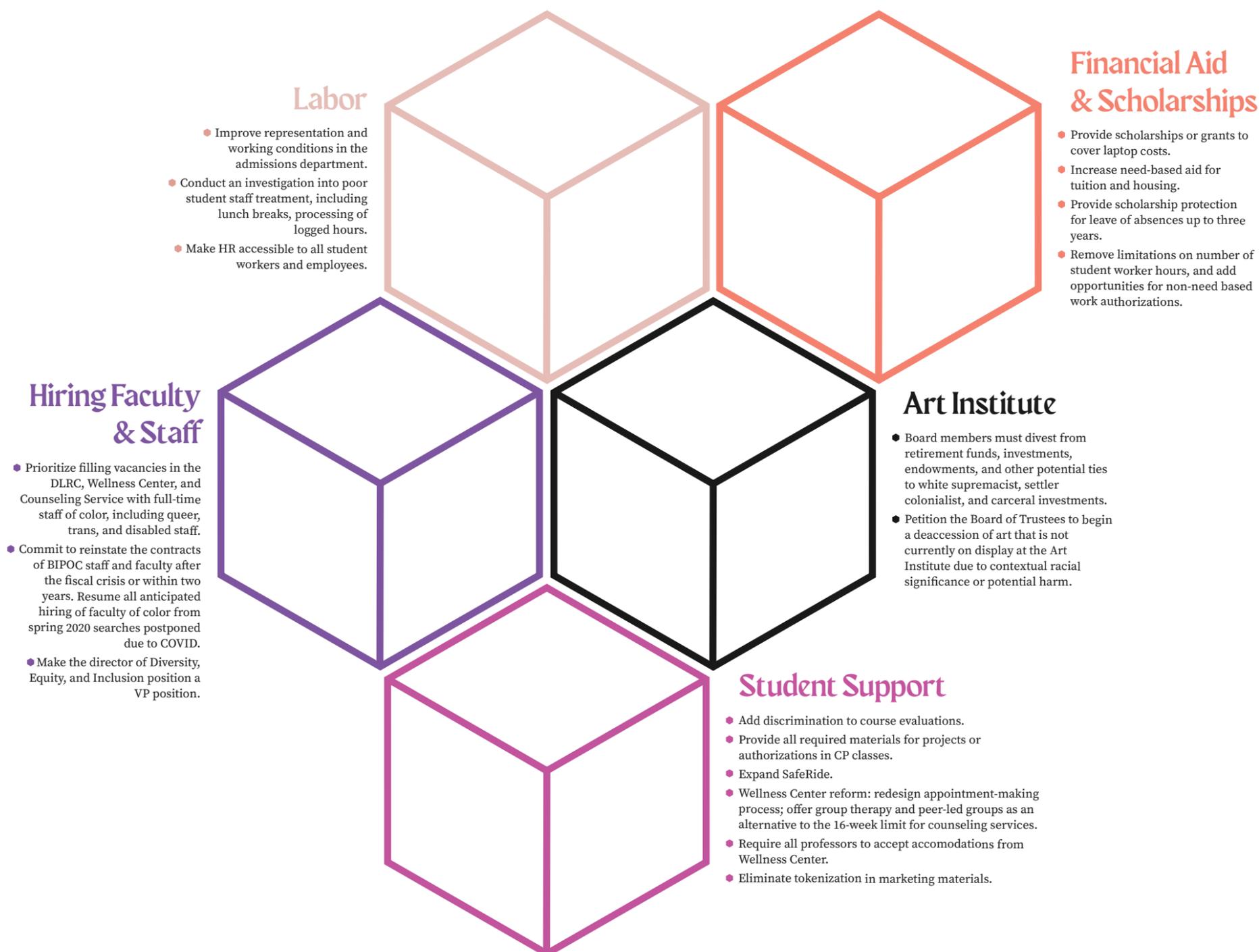
In its letter, SAIC Solidarity expressed that the mostly-white faculty makes it harder for students of color to see themselves having a future as an artist. As of 2019, according to Department of Education statistics, 75 percent of faculty members at SAIC were white, while 6 percent were Black; the remainder is made up of Latinx, Asian, and Native American faculty members. This is a more diverse faculty than the other prominent AICAD art schools, but still out of proportion with Chicago’s population, which is about 33 percent white, 29 percent Black, 27 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent Asian.

To change this, the ARC’s hiring subcommittee recommends “expanded language” in hiring materials, including a statement of values about diversity.

However, due to this year’s enrollment drop caused by COVID and the recession, SAIC is currently under an indefinite hiring freeze on full-time, tenured, and permanent staff positions.

Part-time faculty are still being hired on a short-term basis as usual, but this poses other diversity problems. In the past, SAIC has hired based on networks — a “who you know” system, as explained by Pinder, ARC co-chair and Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This naturally perpetuates existing racial biases, and does not necessarily expand the SAIC community. One of the ARC’s hiring recommendations is to create a database, so that the part-time hiring process is more systematized, and hopefully less biased.

However, the role of a part-time professor is an inherently insecure position. Even if a given



department becomes “more diverse” for the length of that professor’s contract, they are not part of the community in the same permanent way. And those part-time faculty of color should not be responsible for solving all our problems, said Lee: “Bringing on faculty of color does not mean that they have to shoulder an impossible task.”

Another position the ARC is helping create is an ombudsperson, something requested by both SAIC Solidarity and Black Futures. An ombudsperson is a staff member who mediates conflicts, and whose areas of expertise include restorative justice mediation, race, gender, and sexual identity, and accommodations and accessibility issues. The ombudsperson operates confidentially, and independently of ordinary staff structures.

Despite the schoolwide hiring freeze, the Office of the President has pledged to prioritize hiring for this position. Current plans will have the position filled by fall 2022.

BIPOC Space

One of the requests made by SAIC Solidarity and Black Futures was a “dedicated space on campus” for BIPOC students. Whitehead, a member of the BIPOC space subcommittee, had a similar space in her undergrad, the Nyumburu Cultural Center at University of Maryland: “It just felt like a place to breathe, and feel like you didn’t have to do the same kind of performance that you have to do in the rest of your day.”

Though this space is on the ARC Action Items, not much more has been finalized regarding the details. Next steps, Collier told F, will be to assemble a student focus group. Some potential uses for the space might include: more focused critiques, a shared studio space, and a place to organize. Said Whitehead, “We can’t really plan this space without students. It needs to be a student-led space.”

“At the end of the day, if what people are asking for is really a dismantling and a re-imagining of the institution as a whole, a committee inside the institution that reports back to the leadership of the institution can never do that.”

Native American Students

The plan for Native American students comes first in the “Support” section of the ARC action items, and is one of the most thorough in the document. It outlines a three-year plan that includes staff representation, land acknowledgement, and commitment of resources (in year three). Among the many items in last summer’s letters were requests that the name of the technically nameless but so-called “Columbus Drive Building” be changed. After offering the Native American Students Association (NASA) a chance to choose the new name, President Tenny retracted the offer and announced it would be changed to simply “280” until the rights could be sold for fundraising. This upset many students.

The ARC action item comes with a note: “In endorsing this long-term process, President Tenny acknowledges mishandling and regrets harm caused when announcing an approach to naming facilities prior to engaging directly with the Native American Student Association’s proposal regarding the 280 Building.” NASA could not be reached for comment,



The “Three Fires Building” was the building name change that the Native American Students Association put forward last year, after the Council of Three Fires, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi, who lived in this area before European colonization. This chalk protest art appeared outside the building on April 7, 2021. Photo by Jensen Teng.

but in April, the second week of the ARC webinars, a piece of chalk protest art cropped up outside the building in question. The “Three Fires Building” was the building name change that NASA put forward last year, after the Council of Three Fires, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi, who lived in this area before European colonization.

Homan Square

Another issue that was raised by both the Black Futures letter and the SAIC Solidarity Letter was the sidelining of SAIC’s Homan Square campus in North Lawndale through institutional bias and administrative disengagement. Both letters indicated that SAIC’s downtown campus consistently remained the centre of institutional attention, relegating Homan Square to a satellite campus. This, they wrote, was emblematic of SAIC’s detachment from Chicago’s Black community.

To rectify this, the ARC has proposed several systematic changes to the Homan Square program, the largest of which is the creation of a new Master of Arts degree program there. The proposed program will likely center around Community Engagement. The ARC has also suggested that this degree program offer North Lawndale students tangible benefits, such as internship sites and scholarship seats for people of colour “reflective of Chicago’s West Side neighbourhood demographics.”

Money, Money, Money

Like all American universities, SAIC’s budget is tight; fall 2020 saw an enrollment drop of 19 percent. Institution budget relies on tuition for 49.75 percent of its revenue. This diminished class will impact the revenue and thus the budget for the next four years.

The subcommittee for Tuition Equity and Finances has focused mostly on graduate students so far, and increasing funding for incoming grads, as well as “streamlining” the appeals process for admissions. (The appeals process is a complex process by which students apply for funding and scholarships to reduce the cost of tuition.) The hope is to attract a graduate student population that is “more representative of our city — of the nation,” said Craig Downs (BFA Video 1995), Executive Director of Media and Instructional Resources, and tuition subcommittee member.

Aside from changes to a few scholarships, the committee has yet to tackle changes to funding and financial aid for undergraduates.

The Follow-Through

Though SAIC Solidarity is no longer active, it is well remembered by the student body. In April, at the end

of the annual student leadership celebration on Zoom, one student unmuted himself to give an unscheduled shoutout to SAIC Solidarity. “Shoutouts to all the Black students and the Latinx students, and to the Asian students, we’re with you. The solidarity is what’s gonna keep us together at the end of the day.”

That student, David Flores (BFA 2023), worked in the Admissions office last summer and was among those who signed the original letter, and knew the SAIC Solidarity team well. He was disappointed in SAIC leadership for not acknowledging their contributions at the leadership dinner. “Those are the people who was pressing you to do all this little stuff, the people who are gonna go to Elissa’s face and say you can do better for your students. That’s a student leader if I’ve seen one.”

When asked about the biggest obstacles facing the ARC, Collier replied: “Money.” The hiring freeze prevents hiring any new permanent staff or full-time professors. Part-time hires, while they may be more diverse, will still be financially insecure. High tuition and the job insecurity of the part-time staff will continue to shape SAIC’s demographics no matter what.

A 2020 study published in the American Journal of Political Science found that union membership reduces racist attitudes, as “white union members have lower racial resentment and greater support for policies that benefit African Americans.” SAIC Solidarity, an attempt at collective action, was immediately curbed by the July layoffs, which laid off many admissions staff members who had played an important role in the group; the group fizzled when the remaining students were driven to exhaustion by endless hours of meetings.

SAIC’s main engine of anti-racist action is now a committee that reports directly to the president. As Anna Martine Whitehead told F, “At the end of the day, if what people are asking for is really a dismantling and a re-imagining of the institution as a whole, a committee inside the institution that reports back to the leadership of the institution can never do that.”

Craig Downs is more optimistic about the committee’s potential. Because of its size and structure, it is embedded in every part of SAIC. “The structure of it is to continue the conversation with other departments of the school,” he said. Changes will take longer to implement, but when they are implemented, they will be permanent, and structurally embedded.

“I hope it sustains. I feel like we’ve got a better chance of it sustaining now than ever before,” said Downs, an SAIC alum who has worked here since 1997. “I’ve been around SAIC a long time. I’ve seen the bad stuff happen! But I feel good about our moment.”

When Ignorance Hinders Critique

Why aren't Asian students getting the feedback they need in critique at SAIC?

by **Leo Smith**

You spend weeks working on a piece for your graduate critique, ideating, developing, and preparing it for the critique panel. Then the day finally comes for your presentation ... and the professors don't get it. Your presentation ends, they ask a couple questions, and then the room falls silent.

During her first year graduate critique, Anna Cai (MFA VCD 2022) presented a project about language and translation. "It was about glitching — combining the five most popularly spoken non-English languages in Chicago, and taking them typographically and dissecting them, and then putting them back together to create this new system of glitchy hieroglyphs that, like, you can't really tell what it says, but it's clear that it's some kind of language."

When one of her white professors responded, they said: "I think you need to translate this into English, because people like me in your audience won't understand it."

This comment told Anna that the professor hadn't understood her work. "That's kind of the point. I want you to feel what it's like not to know what's going on, not to have the full picture."

When they said it, "there was this abrupt pause in the critique," and Anna had to decide whether to pursue that issue, or focus on the work. She decided not to pursue it. "But it was just like a moment where I was like, 'Am I going to have to be making these decisions for every critique I have?'"

Asian students often find themselves making this calculation, as do other students of color. Asian students shared stories of awkward silences, off-topic conversations, or non-sequiturs based on vague

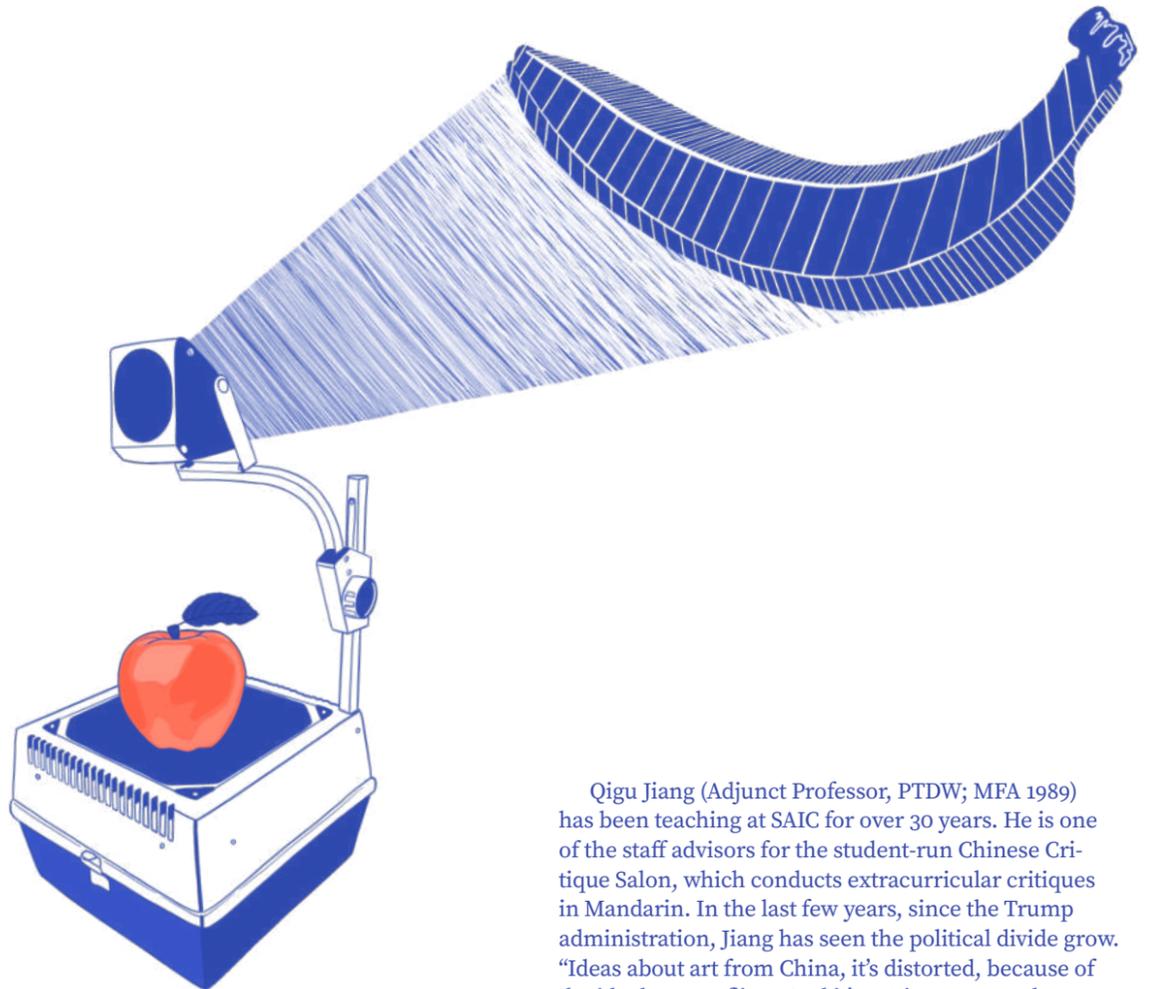
"When I finish critiques, I'm almost always left with this feeling that this is not my audience. I wish I had a critique panel of professors who have had experiences like mine."

knowledge of their culture. With hate crimes against Asians on the rise, alongside geopolitical tensions between the U.S. and China, insidious forms of ignorance arise in the classroom. The critique, a core part of an SAIC education, falls short for these students.

Cindy Cai (BFA PTDW/FVMNA 2022) says she often sees critiques for Asian students' art veer off-topic because the American students don't feel comfortable engaging with the actual content. "They just avoid questioning the specific stuff about the culture." Instead, they reroute and comment on other, more surface-level things, "which are not that helpful."

Jenny Lee (Assistant Professor, Art History, Theory, and Criticism) said that some of her Asian students receive overly generalized feedback. One student told her that, during critique, their professor and classmates recommended they talk more about Confucianism in their work.

"And I said, 'Did you mention Confucianism in your presentation? Is there anything about that in the work, because I don't see it.' And the student said 'No...'"



Greg Bae (Lecturer, PTDW; MFA 2012) teaches painting now, but 10 years ago, he was an MFA student at SAIC. He recalls once being told by a professor that he was "inscrutable" — "Mind you, I was the only Asian student in the class."

Bae said the comment stuck with him, leaving him feeling oddly vulnerable. Should he make more personal work? What if that wasn't what he really wanted to do? "If you've had other-ing experiences your whole life, it takes trust and courage to be forward about subjectivity or identity. Especially to white people that can influence your art. You don't want to pigeonhole yourself, which makes it frustrating to talk about yourself as a racialized person; and that's exhausting to navigate if you don't have support."

While he was a masters student, Bae was also a frequent target of racist street harassment on the way to class. He said the transition from an experience like that, to walking into class and immediately being expected to shift gears into critique mode, was difficult and sometimes painful.

"When you're in the classroom, there's this tacit agreement that the rest of the world just shuts off," he said. "That might be comfortable to some people, but I don't know if that's responsible."

These days, Bae is still sometimes harassed on his way to teach. In his own class, he tries to make space to acknowledge such issues — a space that he didn't find when he was a student.

For international Asian students like Cindy, the biggest barrier to understanding is the difference in the education systems. "Here, it's really discussion-based. You're encouraged to speak up. But in Asia that's almost discouraged."

American teachers mistake this reticence for non-engagement. "I see a lot of professors not understanding that," said Cindy. "And instead of encouraging them, I see them trying to force it out of students."

Qigu Jiang (Adjunct Professor, PTDW; MFA 1989) has been teaching at SAIC for over 30 years. He is one of the staff advisors for the student-run Chinese Critique Salon, which conducts extracurricular critiques in Mandarin. In the last few years, since the Trump administration, Jiang has seen the political divide grow. "Ideas about art from China, it's distorted, because of the ideology conflicts. And it's getting more and more severe, the misunderstanding."

American professors have either preconceived notions about Chinese politics, or they're ignorant; Isabella (BA 2020), a Chinese student, once showed a TikTok video of Chinese students dancing in a class discussion, and a professor offhandedly called it 'propaganda.'

These stereotypes about Chinese gender politics and customs come to light in critique too. In a fashion class, Isabella saw another Chinese student present a project on feminism, in which the "traditional" Chinese woman had no rights. "This was the kind of narrative that was welcomed by the teacher," said Isabella.

Feedback informs the type of work we continue to make. If critique doesn't give us anything new to think about, or if our audience doesn't seem interested, we don't know where to go next.

"When I finish critiques, I'm almost always left with this feeling that this is not my audience," said Anna. "I wish I had a critique panel of professors who have had experiences like mine."

Cindy says that more professor intervention would improve critiques: "Sometimes I see teachers do nothing during critique, and I think they have a responsibility to chime in and change the topic if it's too off-topic. Or if it's silent, they start something, or if people start an argument, you stop it, and say, 'Let's focus on the work.'"

She also suggested, to make giving critique easier for international students, giving students a few minutes to write down their thoughts first. And, if the professor wants to single out a quieter student for contribution, it's in how they ask: "They should ask an easier question than just 'What do you think?' They should ask about a specific element."

Anna noted the broader anti-racist gestures the school is making, but said, "What irks me is that I feel like oftentimes, institutions think in these broad strokes. But sometimes, it's just about how you treat people every day, and these small interactions. That makes a huge difference."

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我拒绝为任何人
简化我的作品

I P E E H I G S E E T J O S Q J M P Q I I E V U M W U M P Q K S E Q P R A N W O N E

fold to see translation

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Corrupted Data, Corrupt System

Questioning the accuracy of police gang databases.

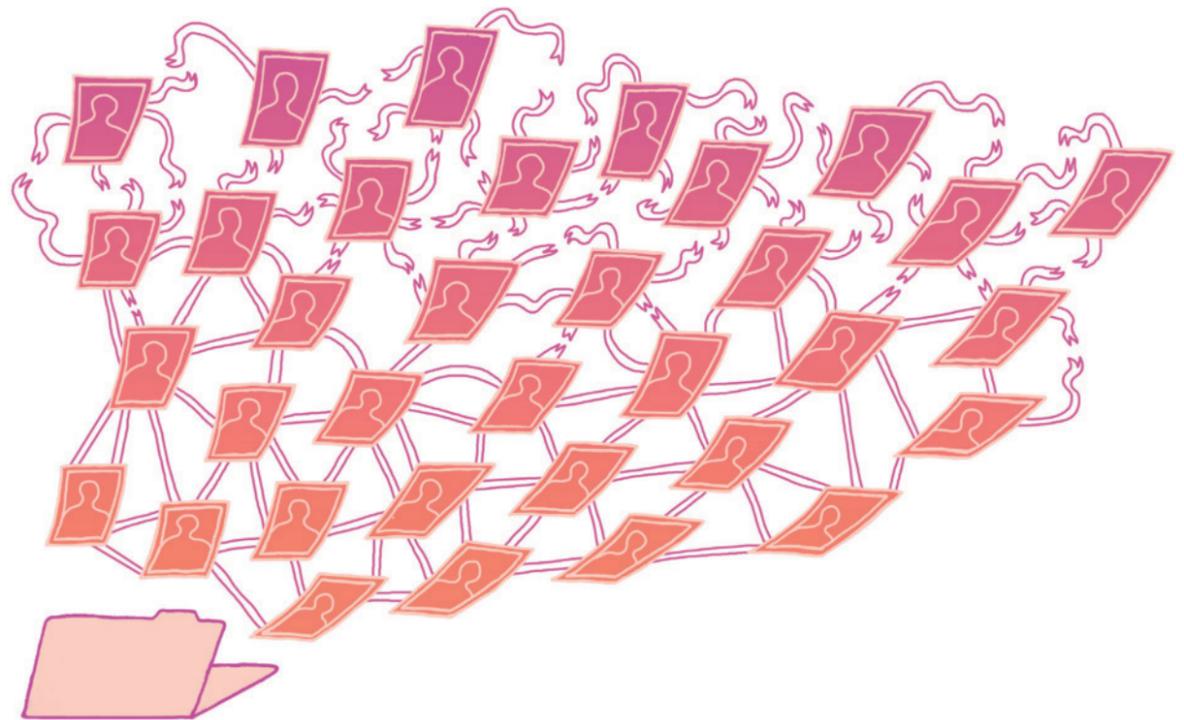
by Olivia Canny

When Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers fill out a gang arrest card, they're asked to record a title for the individual's occupation. "SCUM BAG." "BUM." "CRIMINAL." "BLACK." "DORK." "TURD." — these were among the titles hosted in the department's gang database until as recently as 2019. It took a 157-page review from the city's taxpayer-funded top watchdog, Chicago's Office of the Inspector General (OIG), for CPD to make a public commitment to amend its data entry practices and start development on a new database that would strive for accuracy and transparency. The OIG's 2021 follow-up report, however, reveals that CPD is falling "critically short."

Even before OIG's initial investigation, there was the #EraseTheDatabase campaign, which, back in 2017, combined the efforts of several community groups — Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100), Mijente, Organized Communities Against Deportation (OCAD), Blocks Together, among others — and then coincided with the arrest of Wilmer Catalan-Ramirez, an immigrant whose erroneous listing in CPD's gang database brought deportation officers to his door. At the time, Chicago's purported status as a "sanctuary city," which offers protection for illegal immigrants facing federal deportation, was under scrutiny for a handful of murky exceptions to its Welcoming City Ordinance, including gang designation. #EraseTheDatabase tapped into the heat of the moment, but maintained traction in an effort to dismantle a more insidious structure within the law enforcement system — policing driven by data.

By the beginning of 2018, sociology professors and graduate students at University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) entered a partnership with #EraseTheDatabase to publish research on CPD's gang database. This was before OIG conducted a full audit of the system, and very little about the database was publicly available. The group collected as much information as they could through interviews, Freedom of Information Act requests, and archival research; they found countless inaccuracies, extreme disproportion in the number of Black and Latinx individuals in the database, algorithms that lumped these individuals into imprecise crime prediction brackets, and a host of other problems. Though some of the information doesn't hold entirely accurate now, it was enough to push the OIG to pursue its own review, published the following year.

Of the 134,242 individuals that OIG found designated as gang members in CPD's database, 95 percent were Black or Latinx. Over 15,000 didn't have any reason



recorded as evidence of their gang designation. CPD had no process for notifying individuals of their entry into the database, nor did it provide any options for people to contest or appeal their listing.

In response to the review, CPD's main commitment was simply to build a new database with a different name and a more organized appeals process; the Criminal Enterprise Information System (CEIS) was originally slated to be complete by September 2021. However, now OIG has found that CPD is so far behind that even top-level members of the department were unable to speak to how the database is taking shape. Officers have had continued access to remnants of the existing information system, which is still riddled with inaccuracies.

"[The data] becomes a feedback loop, justifying these as the places and the people that require further surveillance and more intense forms of policing."

But would a new, more accurate database really make a difference? Andy Clarno, a UIC Sociology professor who lead the group that partnered with #EraseTheDatabase, is skeptical. He remembers when CPD came out with the initial proposal for its new database: "It was clear that they were setting out to address the most blatant violations of constitutional protections" — the bare minimum of due process, giving people the opportunity to know if their name was in the database and then challenge it. He adds that, though minimal, this is something that would have had a real impact for a lot of people. But it doesn't address what he identifies as the underlying issue, which is the way that predictive policing, driven by data, promotes racialized surveillance and criminalizes BIPOC.

"One thing that data-driven policing does is it provides some sort of a mathematical justification for continuing the things that they've been doing all along, to continue to target the same populations and the same neighborhoods," Clarno tells F. "It makes it seem like it's scientific or objective or just being driven by the data. But the data is produced through everyday encounters on the street."

And to supplement the data produced during what CPD called "investigatory stops," Clarno cites the 35,000 surveillance cameras that officers have access to, their monitoring of social media, the ShotSpotter gunshot detection system.

"It becomes a feedback loop that then justifies that these are the places and these are the people that require further surveillance and more intense forms of policing," he says.

It's not just Chicago, though. In July 2020, California cut off the Los Angeles Police Department's access to a statewide database of gang identifications that were largely inaccurate. The New York Police Department uses a series of in-house algorithms to predict different types of crime, but with secretive data documentation practices and a repeated pattern of denying public information requests, as with the case of the Brennan Center v. NYPD in 2018, it's impossible to know how that information is being used.

Kristian Lum is a statistician who, in 2016, co-authored a study titled "To predict and serve?" which tested the algorithms that police use to make predictions about where crimes will occur in the future, and who will commit them. She tells F that these algorithms are often marketed as "race-neutral" because they're based on data that is simply a record of time and place.

"Policing practices themselves become encoded in data," Lum says. "When that data gets plugged into the algorithm, the algorithm just learns the pattern in that data, but it doesn't learn context."

The context being the systemic criminalization of BIPOC throughout history.

For Lum, the inherent problems in police data and algorithms are a reflection of the past — a broken system that technological evolution will not fix.



Bladder Bursting, Union Busting

While Amazon drivers pee in bottles, their supervisors scare them away from taking a stand.

by Elena Smentkowski

Amazon is yet again under fire following the revelation that delivery employees frequently urinate and defecate in bottles and plastic bags while on the job, raising concerns about the working conditions within the megacorporation. With the recent defeat of a pivotal unionization effort among Amazon workers in Alabama, the company's response to the scandal and accusations of voter intimidation have provoked outcry from the general public, union leaders, and politicians alike.

On March 24, Amazon's Senior Vice President of Worldwide Operations and Customer Service Dave Clark published a tweet challenging Senator Bernie Sanders ahead of the politician's visit to Alabama to advocate for an upcoming unionization vote. Clark stated that he often refers to Amazon as the "Bernie Sanders of employers," but that this saying isn't totally fair because, according to him, Amazon has actually created progressive change in the workplace (referring to the company's \$15 minimum wage), while Sanders has not.

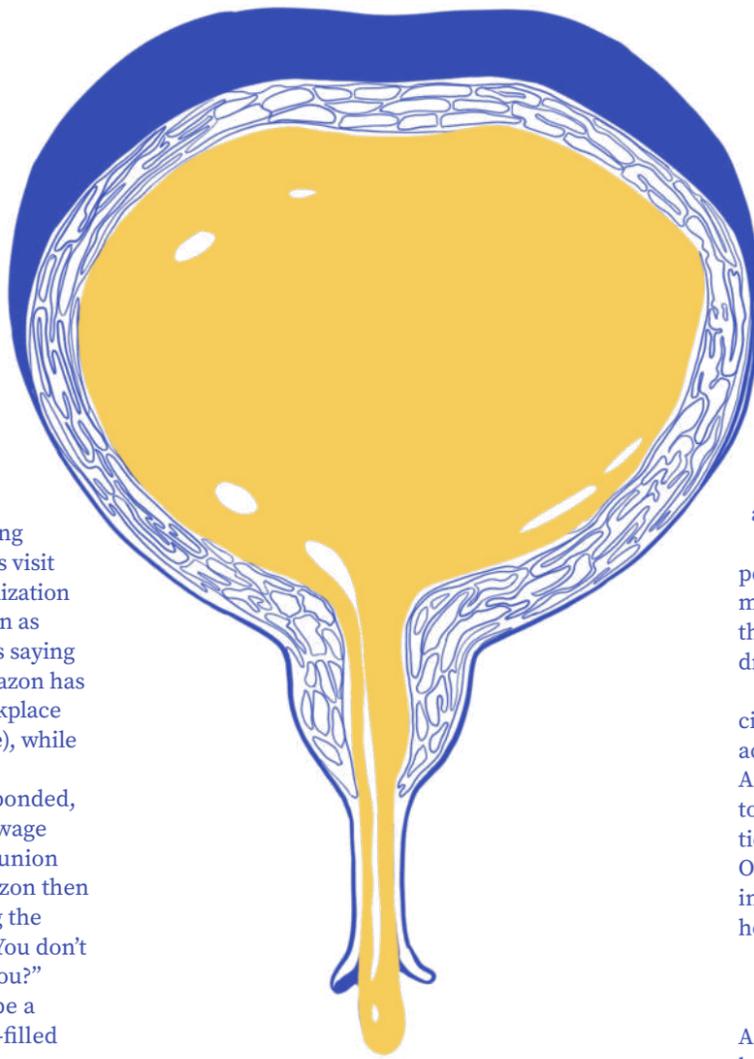
Wisconsin Representative Mark Pocan responded, saying that the conglomerate's \$15 minimum wage is rendered meaningless when the company "union busts and makes workers pee in bottles." Amazon then published a thread of sarcastic tweets denying the allegations made by Pocan. One tweet read, "You don't really believe the peeing in bottles thing, do you?"

Amazon's response was swiftly proven to be a lie, as its employees shared pictures of urine-filled bottles on social media, claiming it's a necessary measure to save time while working. Many female drivers own a "she-wee" (a device which allows them to urinate while standing up) which they say is often vital in order to keep one's job.

Amazon then issued a statement in which they appeared to suggest that the practice of not allowing their workers time for bathroom breaks is common among other companies, seemingly excusing their malpractice as an industry standard. They pledged to address the problem by penalizing workers, stating that anyone peeing in bottles on the job would face termination if caught.

This PR disaster, dubbed "peegate," emerged just days before workers at an Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, Alabama were set to cast their votes in one of the most important unionization attempts in the company's history. The Bessemer plant employs nearly 6,000 workers, and as such, the vote presented a huge threat to Amazon with potentially massive gains for workers, as it was the first attempt in the company's history to unionize a plant of such size.

Workers would have gained the ability to negotiate contracts with Amazon as part of the Resale, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU), giving them stronger backing and greater power in the workplace, independent from Amazon. Despite endorsement from the likes of President Biden and Senator Sanders, as well as the outrage garnered from "peegate," Amazon officially prevailed on April 9, with a landslide 70 percent vote against unionizing. The results of the vote came as a shock in the wake of the recent scandals, as well as the many controversies that



"You don't really believe the peeing in bottles thing, do you?"



had plagued the company previously. With Amazon's mistreatment of their workers exposed publicly for the world to see time and time again, there is good reason to question just how genuine this rejection of unionization by Alabama workers truly is.

Since the election, Amazon has faced accusations of intimidating and pressuring workers at the Bessemer warehouse.

"There is no question about Amazon's illegal harassment and intimidation to protect its inhumane working conditions," says Ruth Needleman, former union organizer, director of labor studies at Indiana University Northwest, and a professor at SAIC.

"In this Alabama election, Amazon spent more per day on union busters than on safety. They held meetings with workers threatening them and warning that they could — as they have done in previous union drives — just shut the plant and fire everyone."

RWDSU has filed objections to the Alabama vote, citing what they call "egregious and blatantly illegal actions" to prevent the vote from passing. They claim Amazon forced workers at the Bessemer warehouse to attend lectures wherein they were fed misinformation and pressured into voting in the company's favor. Other actions of intimidation through surveillance, including the installation of a ballot box on the warehouse grounds, have been cited by the union.

* * *

As evidence of Amazon's working conditions and breaches of workers' rights escalate, one can't help but wonder why workers vote against unionization. It's not uncommon for laborers to be persuaded that unions don't provide anything more than what the company itself provides. Amazon has brazenly pushed this rhetoric by boasting about their \$15 minimum wage, publicly lashing out at politicians and existing unions with the narrative that they, as a company, provide the kind of benefits that political figures only talk about providing.

Some arguments contend that unions are prone to corruption, are costly to workers, and contribute to a divisive workplace environment. But in reality, workers in unions fare significantly better in the workplace than their non-union affiliated coworkers. Workers belonging to unions are more likely to get higher pay, better paid sick leave, and more time off, because they themselves are able to negotiate and approve these benefits; the task of doing so is not simply left to a company higher-up.

Megacorporations like Amazon exist to generate profit. Much as they may say that workers' well-being is their top priority, this language only serves to improve the company's image. There is no profit to be made in a union. By design, unions serve no purpose beyond the protection of workers' rights.

Amazon's confrontational and defensive tweets display animosity towards the politicians seeking to break up the corporation and improve the well-being of its workers. Their deflective response only succeeded in shifting the blame for the urine bottle scandal off the back of the company, and onto that of the individual worker — an individualized solution to an issue of systemic proportions.

Chicago Protests Asian Hate

In response to a wave of violence against Asians and Asian Americans in mid-March, Chicagoans rallied throughout the city.

by **Zhonghao Gui**



Hundreds of mourners, including children, gathered to pray and light candles in remembrance of the eight victims.



On March 27, hundreds rallied in a march that began in Grant Park and ended in Chinatown Square, where community leaders and public officials gave speeches and pledged their solidarity to to combat Asian hate on a broad scale.



Signs displayed at a gathering in Horner Park on March 26 display the names of the two non-Asian victims who were killed by a gunman in Atlanta on March 16.

On March 20, hundreds of protesters gathered for the “Stop Asian Hate” march in Logan Square, rallying against a recent spike in hate crimes targeting the Asian and Asian American community.



They called for recognition of the lives of Asians of all different backgrounds; one protester carried a sign that reads “Asian Lives Matter” in English, Japanese, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish, and other languages.



fold on the

fold in



dotted lines

fold out

Best! Letters from Asian Americans at SAIC

Paper Monument's new anthology release is
 "Best! Letters from Asian Americans in The Arts."
 SAIC community members pen their own letters.

Introduction by **Monica Gong**

"Our initial question — 'Was it just us?' — was answered with a resounding 'No,'" write Christopher K. Ho and Daisy Nam, editors of "Best! Letters from Asian Americans in the Arts." The anthology, released by Paper Monument on April 13, presents a space for Asian Americans in the arts to take control of their own narratives through letter writing, a medium chosen to "attempt to set the record straight."

The term "Asian American" was radical in its inception, but is now criticized for presenting Asian people as a monolith. Anti-Asian ideology, created by systemic suppression, erasure, and watering-down of Asian American identities, has depoliticized the term and upholds the stereotype of Asian docility. Recent months have placed Asian Americans in an unexpected hypervisibility, creating a unique opportunity for Asian American discourse to become rattled with critical nuance. In 73 letters, the anthology attempts exactly this, bringing the ethos of the term "Asian American" closer to its origins as "the first inter-ethnic pan-Asian American self-defining political lexicon." Here at SAIC, six Asian American artists, writers, educators, and scholars have come together to continue this work, using this anthology as a guide. Our letters follow.



Monica Gong | BAVCS '23

Dear Meelo,

Do you know you're Chinese? Pugs were one of the first dogs to be domesticated in 400 B.C., and most historians attribute your species to China. Favored by royalty, pugs were spoiled with food and play living under the protection of the emperor's finest guards.

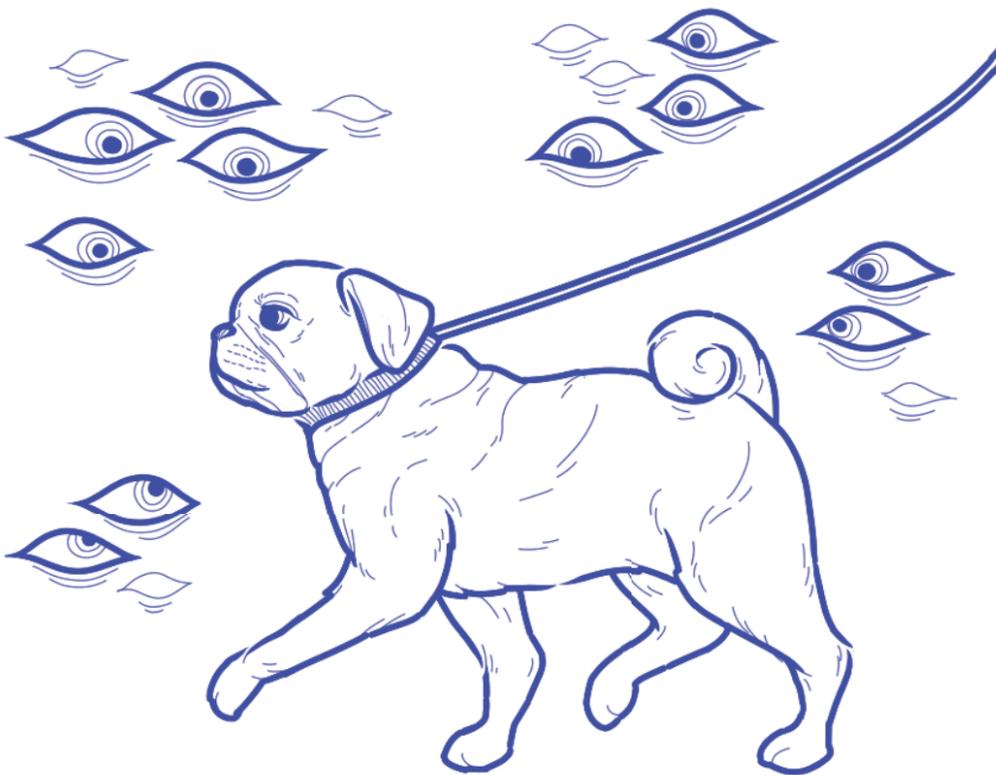
From China, your ancestors made their way to Japan and Russia, before spreading their presence throughout Europe. Queen Victoria, whom I am partially named after, favored a pug during the height of the British Empire. It was at the beginning of her reign in which Britain acquired Hong Kong, where your Po Po lived under imperial sovereignty. Somehow our families found their way to America where we made our home in Chicago.

Pugs are supposed to be people-pleasers: docile, loving, and adaptable. This is true in a sense, considering your penchant for following me around the house, paws pressing into the back of my leg as you beg for attention. Despite this, your royal proclivity shows in every step. You strut across every room, sidewalk, and park with your tail held high, proudly asserting your nobility. When denied, you nip fingers and hop into laps until you find your needs satisfied. We're at the dog park now, after you rushed me through my morning coffee, surrounded by people who pretend not to see us. With quiet determination, you prance around greeting each individual with a sniff and a lick, demanding special attention from each of your subjects.

Is it true that dogs resemble their owners? I've noticed lately that people tend to describe us in similar ways. "He's cute for a pug," remarked a white lady whose dog you were playing with today. Blasphemous insult! Or perhaps ... obtuse fetish? Unsubtle eyes track us down the street, because we look and act differently from how they expect us to.

Whiteness believes itself the authority because it was barbaric enough to loot half the world and enslave the other. Now guilty for their sins, they call us special when we express our pain as if that could make up for centuries of careful manipulation! They have left us in contradictory ruin. Our lives are filled with fractured identities and a history full of holes. Now that we have found each other, I hope we can begin to mend it and create our peaceful utopia, together.

*Love you forever,
 Monica a.k.a. Mom*



Monica Gong (BAVCS 2023) is an amateur student, professional shitposter, and lover of all things Internet. You can find her and her puppy, Meelo, on any dating app if you look hard enough.



Adam Mac | BFAW '21

N,

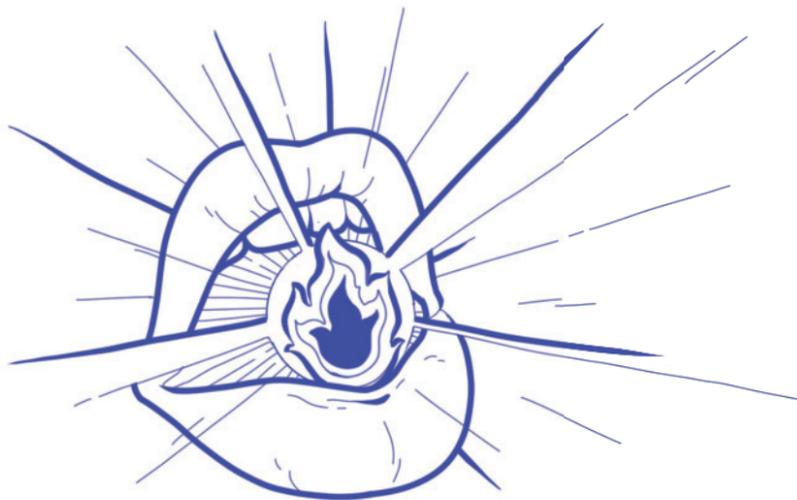
You once told me that I was the loudest person you knew — that you could probably hear my voice from anywhere in the world, even heaven. I would have laughed, but there was something sharp in your tone that made my hands shake. Honestly, you said, sometimes I wish you'd be quiet. There's nothing wrong with silence every once in a while.

In those years, I lived in a silent house. I rode back and forth from school in a silent car, ate dinner at a silent table, and did my homework silently in bed. My parents were passive in nature — a side effect of both war-torn trauma and the expectations that came with being Asian in America — but something about my voice made them nervous. They thought that my words might one day anger the wrong person. So outside of class I had no tongue; only a flame between my teeth, and a hand over my mouth.

I don't remember what I said to you back then, or anything else about the conversation. All I know is after that exchange, I never lowered my voice for anyone again. Two summers ago, an acquaintance talked about wanting to commit Chinese genocide and I yelled at him for 20 minutes. I thought of you then, and how you would have hated everything about that moment. I wonder if you would have let it slide. I wonder if you would have told me to be quiet.

It's clear to me now that my audacity causes you pain. Perhaps I am a reminder of all the things you lose to complacency, and that scares you — to know that I would tear out the throat of any fool who tried to make me submit, my words kindling, my tongue wildfire. You hide behind your silence as if it will protect you from the things that want to kill us, but here is the truth: no amount of muted cowardice will remove the target from your back. I thank God every day that I am not you — that I am not afraid to burn if it means I will be heard.

— A



Steven Hou | BFAW '23

Monotropa,

How are you Not-Green? You are a One-Flower, but are you Real-Flower? You Have-No-Chlorophyll but you *uniflora*. You white-all-over. You must be a new-name. New-flower? You See-Through-Flower. You Ghost-Flower. You Like-The-Darkness-Flower. How you grow-in-the-shade? You Parasite-The-Others. You Steal-From Working-Trees. You Leech-From-Fungi. You are not an Independent-Flower like Other-Flower. So you Greedy-Flower? You Not-Nice-Flower. Not like Real-Flower like Grow-In-The-Sun-Flower. That is a Symbiotic-Flower. You melt-when-touched. Like Icy-Flower. You Sensitive-Flower. You keep-to-yourself. You Quiet-Flower. You Hide-Away-Flower. You hard-to-find. You Like-The-Dark-And-Damp-Spots. You like the Seductress-Flower. How are you a Pick-Me-Up-Flower? You Exotic-Flower. How you a Get-Picked-Up-By-The-Roots-And-All? You are Medicinal-Property-Flower. You Nervine-Flower. How you take-off-the-edge. You must be a Wonder-Flower. You are Spiritual-Flower, Out-Of-This-World-Flower. You are a Prized-Possession-Flower.

Observations from All-Those-Who-Classify-Flowers



Ān Kassel | BFA '21

dear going-to-the-lake,

to a place I can hear most clearly (the things I missed thinking about the most)

the people who accompany me here by my side and in thought occupy my mind peacefully and are precious.

to a panoramic sky that makes everything else peripheral unimportant. I miss no one here and don't feel like forgetting anyone either!

sometimes it's better to remember how you feel about someone than to actually be with them. I can name the people who occupy that sensation. they are people who continue to fade temporally, gradually, there's no rush.

I'm still thinking about the sky that opened up like a gateway to my left. maybe I actually did fly into it and I put too much consideration into physical movement. we met at the same place as before, before it all started, and it somehow felt more the same than different. is this what it means to come full circle, to return and feel not too different but know and be so much more? to return to later_

it's difficult figuring out how I may not (personally) be looking for gender affirmation being non-binary. not the word for what I need since this doesn't have to do with other people (in the same way) for the first time. I feel deeply grateful to have people around me who don't make me feel like I need to focus on that.

I'm going to love differently from now on. I think this is the way it was supposed to be for me. I can relax now. it's nice to remember there's people I can't imagine (yet) in this lifetime.

If I ever have to leave this lake behind, I'm sure that I'll dream of it.

Suman Chhabra | SAIC Faculty and Alum

Dear Human,

Apple repeatedly autocorrects my name to Human. Or Woman / Shame / Susan / Sham. I keep a list of the multitude of ways my name is rearranged. It is rearranged in mouths that assess close enough is enough to indicate: you. Perhaps pronouncing my name is secondary and there are no right syllables that will represent my humanity. But a name does indicate, hello arrangement of cells, hello fellow living being.

Human when you think of Asian Americans our cells are fogged away. Mechanisms are expected in their place. When you step closer to us, you swear you hear a metronome. Asian Americans as proceeding steadily without variance, our bodies not flowing with blood but clicking onward. And yet, onward is the only path when conscious of one's survival. This onward has been skewed, that we are unrelentlessly trying to take from you, it has been used to fortify the reasons why we are forced to explain ourselves human.

After much of life explaining I will other myself in each cell and these cells will feel Shame / Sham when they should feel wonder at the various ways in which they can all live. Human, our cells seal themselves off, or try to, from danger. And yet, we are murdered continuously, as recently as April 15, and our cells cascade onto the earth. Onto the earth, into the earth, we, too, are of the earth.

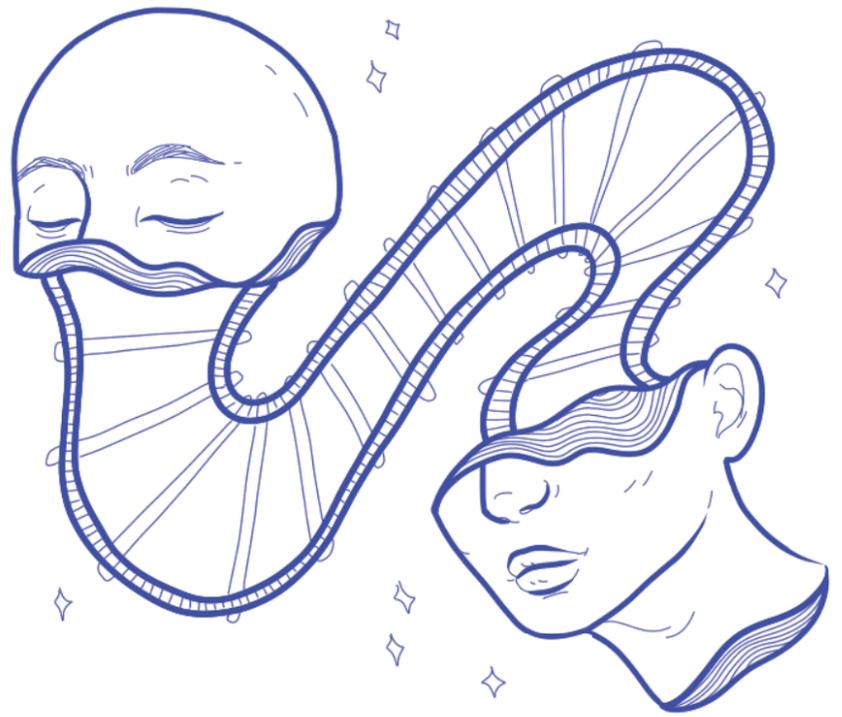
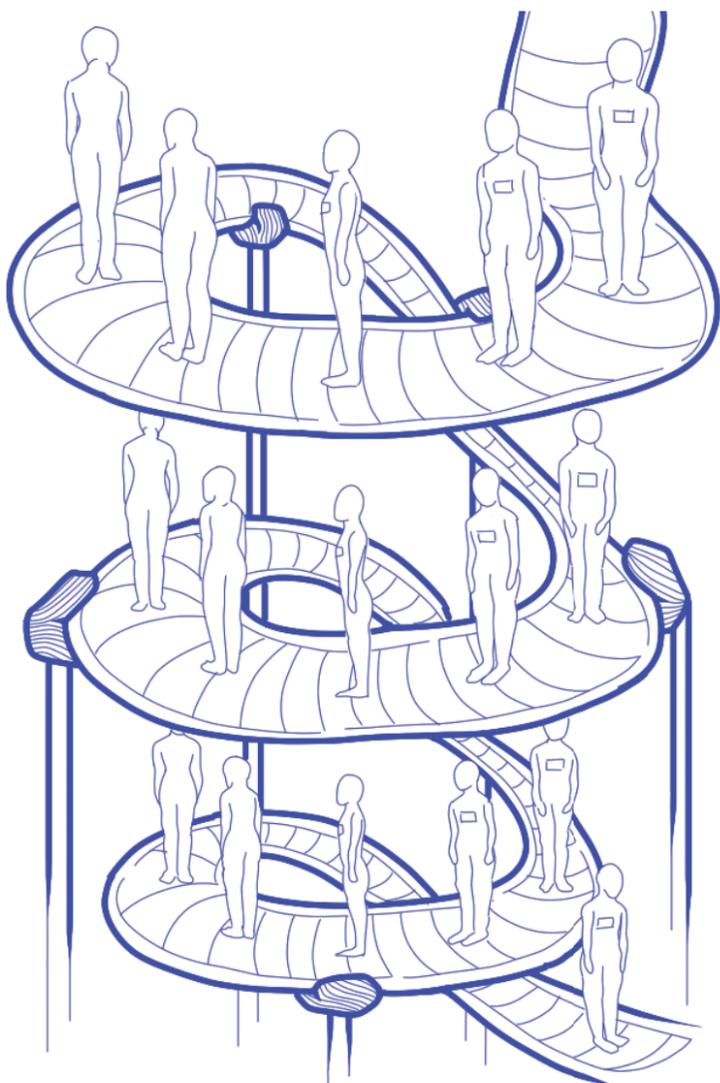
Human is the iteration that we are all in.

"So can I live?"

To be human is dismissed as one who is bound to fail. To say these words is an easy step around necessary self-assessment. Rather, rearrange yourself to act not with barreling dehumanization but with grace and recognize us as dear human.

Suman

Riz Ahmed's "Can I Live"



Ben Kim Paplham (Birth Name: Dong Chul Kim) | MFAW '21

Dear Dong Chul:

I thought about writing a letter to your birth parents, but I wasn't sure what to say. I think the typical questions are ones that I already know the answers to, and while I may never understand the cultural attitudes towards disability in South Korea during the 1990s, I can say, with some certainty, that having more in America — more money, more opportunity, more social ladders — just means there are more ways for people to be excluded, or to do that much unto others.

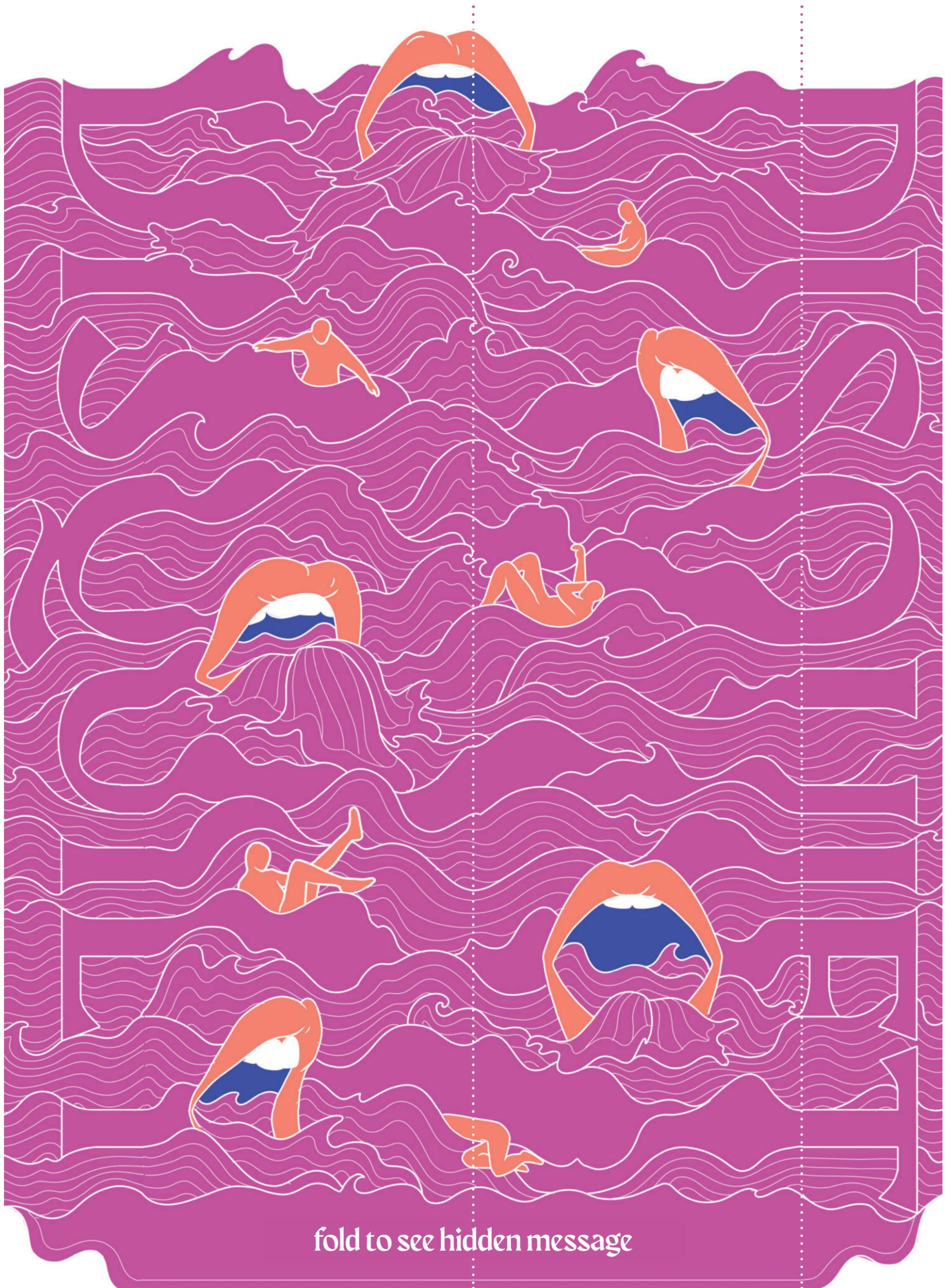
But I think you understand. Or at least have compassion for the pain in sending your kid away with the knowledge you may never see them again, and I also think you've grown enough by now to realize that asking yourself or asking them, whether that decision, in this case, turned out for the better or worse — is only asking someone to rationalize the impossible.

I heard that you recently found the letter your birth parents sent with the rest of your adoption papers. The photographs as well. The photograph of the couple in traditional Korean wedding garments, an old Kodak photo dated May 10, 1994, 13 months and seven days before you would be born, and the letter from your birth father that is presumably translated because there is an additional letter written in Korean that you cannot read — yet — and there is somewhere in it that says that he hopes that you, Dong Chul Kim, grow up with "a healthy personality without any sense of alienation or identification problem."

And I guess if I was you, my question to your birth parents would be what it feels like to be Korean. Which is a strange thing to ask to actual Koreans from South Korea, but it is my understanding that once your name was changed to "Ben" there was a part of you that ceased to exist if only because your birth name is not legally recognized in America. And I'm wondering, too, that if your birth parents would have been aware of the history of racism against Koreans in America, if they could have looked into the future and seen Atlanta on March 16, 2021, if suddenly their hope in this country would have been far less than the fear for you staying there.

And I guess what I'm really saying is that if you do end up seeing them again, in this life or another, if you could ask them if an increased awareness of race-based hatred would have changed their mind back then, back in 1997, and if they say yes, if you could tell them that even so, could they make the same decision again, because somebody needs to keep the hope alive.

*With all my heart,
Ben Kim Paplham*



fold to see hidden message

fold in

fold out

'The Long Dream' is a Long Nightmare for the MCA

The museum's clash with its employees continues, as the artists join the workers.

by J. Livy Li

'The Long Dream' opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (MCA) on Nov. 7 as one of its first major shows since the pandemic started. And it's a stunner, a huge production with over 70 Chicago-based artists at varying stages in their career, from emerging artists including several recent SAIC graduates, to established heavy-hitters like William Pope.L and Dawoud Bey.

"Artists help us see our world more clearly," the MCA website reads. "What aspects, which might have gone ignored in the past, can they help us see now?" The show is billed as a way for local artists to "imagine a more equitable and interconnected world [...] against the backdrop of a global pandemic and a renewed reckoning over racial justice and inequality."

At first glance the show seems like a compelling question answered; the MCA giving a platform to a myriad of artists to highlight injustices that hit home for them. A series of five green quilts resembling the American flag hang in one corner of the show. They make up "Tropicalamerican," a riff on patriotism and the canonizing of Americana by Edra Soto, an artist from Puerto Rico, where statehood, citizenship, and voting rights have been issues since the island was effectively colonized. Elsewhere in the show, Tony Lewis's "Plunder" marks the full length of a wall. Inspired by a Ta-Nehisi Coates quote, "Plunder" considers the American history of anti-Blackness.

Even the labels of the show purport to give voice to those historically unheard by art institutions — namely, young people from nonprofits Marwen and 826CHI and civic workers, with whom the MCA partners for their Label Writing Project to "author artwork labels in the gallery." But between all of this, there's a repeated label that feels out of place, reading: "This artwork was removed from the exhibition at the request of the artist."

Now nearing the end of its six-month run, 'The Long Dream' has been embroiled in controversy as artists withdrawn from the show. The contention at hand is the MCA's ongoing disputes with its workers. Many writers (myself included) have already covered the formation of MCAccountable and worker struggles during the earlier stages of the pandemic. The issues at the beginning were regarding COVID-unsafe work conditions. When MCAccountable formed and posted a list of demands to ensure the safety and fair treatment of its staff members, the museum restructured its front-facing department (Visitor Experience, or VE) with a round of layoffs in a

predominantly BIPOC department under the guise of the MCA, a multimillion-dollar institution, being hit hard by the pandemic.

When we talked to her last October, Mercel Curioso, an SAIC student and former VE staffer, told us that "the museum said that they [were] doing this in response to MCAccountable's demands, but cutting 20 people [of a 28-person team] out of a job was not a demand that they were suggesting. They should have warned us before reopening if they were thinking about it, not just as a way of dismantling a unionizing group within the VE department."

And then on Jan. 21, the MCA laid off another 41 employees after nary a meaningful change or response to MCAccountable's demands. Hường Ngo and Hồng Ân Truong, two artists who had appeared in the MCA's "Alien vs. Citizen" show at the beginning of this controversy, cancelled a January performance in solidarity. Many artists of 'The Long Dream' followed with a letter to MCA executives, noting that while "it is an honor to present our work in such a large sweeping group exhibition," the group's "solidarity will not end with the opening or closing of this show, and we hope you understand the long-lasting consequences of the MCA's refusal to respond to the needs of its workers."

The following day, museum director Madeleine Grynsztejn appeared in an article for ArtNews entitled "Madeleine Grynsztejn on Creating a Financially Sustainable Museum," in which she promotes "The Long Dream" and waxes poetic about how the MCA's "external programming has long been lauded for diversity and inclusion." She even spins the museum's response to MCAccountable, saying that they "converted visitor services from part-time to full-time with benefits." In reality, that meant cutting 71 percent of the VE department and making the remaining 8 members full-time, which also rendered the position impossible for the many students who worked part-time as VE staffers.

On March 12, a day after meeting with Grynsztejn, a group of artists from the show released an open letter

stating that 57 artists would be withdrawing their work from 'The Long Dream.' Many other artists are also listed in the letter as supporting the artists above, though not withdrawing their own work. The group brings to light some new details, including "the fact that after advocating for themselves, the vast majority of MCAccountable members have been forced out in retribution," and that the most recent round of layoffs occurred "after the receipt of federal PPP funds and [the] Mellon Foundation Art Museum Futures Fund grant to sustain the operations of the museum through a pandemic."

Aaron Hughes, one of the withdrawing artists, lamented to The Art Newspaper that the circumstances were "really unfortunate because so many of the artists are so honoured to be in a show with each other." Max Guy, another withdrawing artist, says of the show, "My hope is and always was to exhibit my work with a group of respected peers, mentors and formidable artists. I also hoped that someone would write about my art and not about my decision to withdraw it, but the political urgency overshadowed most writing on the art itself. It's really a shame nobody is writing about how 'The Long Dream' is probably the largest survey of contemporary Chicago art in a long time, and instead the museum is being scandalized for its poor employee policies."





“I also hoped that someone would write about my art and not about my decision to withdraw it, but the political urgency overshadowed most writing on the art itself.”

It’s important to note just how many artists in the show, withdrawing or otherwise, are emerging young folks for whom this was undoubtedly a difficult decision, when the privilege and impact of withdrawal is more easily navigated by established artists. Exhibiting at the MCA is, after all, a dream for many young artists in Chicago. Guy noted that “the museum plays an important role in bringing global contemporary art to Chicago, and also presenting Chicago contemporary artists to the rest of the world.” The MCA has shrugged off the burden of taking care of their workers such that young artists now have to shoulder the work despite potential costs to their careers.

So when a museum has chosen to be a villain, what is the responsibility of the individual artist? Some SAIC students and recent alumni respond below:

“The MCA labor incident very much reminds me of what SAIC went through last summer. 2020 was a hard year for all for obvious reasons, but it felt weird for institutions like SAIC and the MCA to take actions that were so disconnected from what the communities directly connected to them were asking for. It was so blatantly performative. If I was an artist showing in ‘The Long Dream,’ I think I would also pull my work out of the show. While that’s definitely a cool thing to show your work in the MCA, I believe that showing support for the people who helped the gallery run and then were unfairly laid off is more important. I don’t want to participate in supporting any institution that doesn’t properly consider its employees, which is a hard statement to make considering I continue to be enrolled at SAIC. But I do feel like such actions for artists are necessary if we believe in active change.”

— *Brigid O’Neil, BFA 2022*

“I am aware of the issues at the MCA and also a proud past union member and steward, so labor issues are something near and dear to me personally. MCA and all museums in general are complicated for me. Unfortunately everything on your CV is dependent upon named places. And most of these named places are fraught with issues. We just all have to pick and choose our battles and what side of history we want to stand on.”

— *Peter McDaniel, BFA 2022*

“I think the artists pulling work from the show were brave in their action against an institution like the MCA. Like everything, the onus is on the artists in the show with the most power and clout to pull their work in support of the workers. Emerging, or even mature artists who are just getting their first piece in a museum show aren’t in as great of a position to use any leverage at all or, I’m sure at least, don’t feel like they are. I don’t know what I would have done if I were in the show, but I know it’s a lot easier to tell everyone to exit in support of the workers from the outside.

And in the same breath, if all of the artists that signed the letter of solidarity had pulled their work from the show it would have been a really powerful show of force against the MCA.”

— *Cassidy Early, MFA Painting 2020*

“As an emerging artist, it is a constant disappointment to see up-and-coming maestros who are the front line workers, the people who define what contemporary art is, consistently being let down by prestigious art institutions. Artwork implies humanity, and there can be no true social progression if the voices of the marginalized are silenced and ignored to favor self-serving actions on behalf of the institutions who are supposed to be the leaders in promoting people-focused initiatives to better the art world and foster a community with integrity.

Why invite BIPOC artists to share their experiences and livelihoods if it’s only to maintain the facade of inclusivity? No slickly-worded email that reads like an anti-racist declaration can truly be anti-racist if those who are in positions of leadership do not actively partake in anti-racist initiatives. It is an egregious response to the current COVID-19 global pandemic, the rights of the now essential workers, the ongoing fight for civil rights in America, and prolongs the privatization and commodification of young artists who are seeking platforms. For far too long have art institutions in America released blanket statements about solidarity, safety, and accountability as their local communities suffer around them. When will the constant regurgitated public relations end?”

— *Ingrid Stimmler, BFA 2021*

Despite everything it may be wrong about, the MCA is correct in that artists can help us see our world more clearly. As for museums? “I think the best a museum can do at the moment is continue to do its work, make its employees and visitors feel valued and respected,” Guy says, “and not brag about how well they’re doing on a global platform, during the largest ongoing health crisis in the world.”

J. Livy Li (BFA 2021) is the interim Arts Editor for F. The F stands for “Apply on Handshake!” She’s probably taking a nap right now.

Journey to The 'Depths of Wikipedia'

An interview with Annie Rauwerda, the person behind one of the weirdest, wildest accounts on Instagram

by Aidan Bryant

POSTS

REELS

IGTV

TAGGED

Depths of Wikipedia is a comedy Instagram account that posts bizarre, and sometimes educational, articles from Wikipedia. After seeing many of my friends and colleagues rave about the account, I reached out to them via email, and interviewed them.

A: Aidan
DoW: Wikipedia



Dick Assman

Occupation	Gas station employee
Known for	Appearances on the <i>Late Show with David Letterman</i>

Bisexual Lighting

☆A

☆

✎

Bisexual lighting is the simultaneous use of pink, purple, and blue lighting to represent bisexual characters. It has been used in nightclubs as well as in studio lighting for film and television.^[1]



A: When did you first start reading Wikipedia and what were you reading at that time? I know for me I was really big into Wikipedia as a kid so that's why I gravitated towards your page.

DoW: I've always loved Wikipedia, and I had some journal entries in second grade where I said, "I wanna learn everything so I can be an expert." It's so exciting that pretty much the whole sum of human knowledge, or at least pretty close to it, is available for free. I did a lot of Wikiracing in middle school and high school. And Wikipedia is 20 years old and I'm 21, so we've kind of grown up together. It's been cool to grow up next to it, to see it get so much bigger and so much better.

A: What is Wikiracing? I've seen you bring it up a few times and I'm not really sure what it is.

DoW: It's the best thing ever, you start at a random page, and you have a destination, something as disparate as possible. You click hyperlinks until you get there; sometimes you get there quickly, sometimes it takes forever.

File: CD reader used as a cup holder.jpg

☆A

☆

✎



A: How did you start the account, and how did you grow it? So many people I know, myself included, are trying to grow accounts right now.

DoW: I started in late April 2020, so I consider it a quarantine project. For the first two months, my followers were mostly friends or people I knew. I followed a lot of random people, and they followed me back. What really set it off was when I posted something about Caroline Calloway where it said her occupation was nothing on Wikipedia, and she posted about it. I reposted the edited article with her occupation, and she posted a bunch of my posts. I went from 1,000 to 5,000 followers overnight, and it's been exponentially growing ever since.

A: Isn't John Mayer following you?

DoW: There's a couple big names. John Mayer, Troye Sivan, Neil Gaiman. Olivia Wilde shared a couple of my posts.

A: What I find really interesting about your page compared to others is that the sense of humor is very curated. How do you choose what you actually post?

Dow: When I started the account, I was sourcing all the articles myself. The process was talking to people, or going on Reddit, or just going through Wikipedia to find interesting articles. There's also a list on Wikipedia called "List of Unusual Articles," it would take forever to get through it. Now it's a totally different story because I get like 50 submissions every day. The majority of submissions I get I've already posted. I'll go through submissions in my free time, and when I find something that fits I'll post it. I have a pretty specific criteria for what to post. A lot of people submit things that are interesting but not relatable. Of course they have to be interesting, but I want them to be relatable.

A: Is there something people submit over and over again that you're never gonna post?

Dow: There's a lot of people that submit things about men that eat metal, like performing body oddity guys, and as someone who grew up with the Guinness Book of World Records, I feel like everyone knows that. The number of times I've been DM-ed "Infinite monkey theorem" and "Hairy ball theorem" — if I got a dollar every time, I could pay rent.

A: Is there a different quality between your text-based posts and your image-based posts?

Dow: I would say that the posts that are about a singular article are meant to be more interesting as a concept, like you should learn something. The image-based ones are more meme adjacent, and meant to be more funny. The image posts are always widely shared, and I always get a big influx of followers after them, because of story posts.

A: You just started Depths of Amazon. Are there any other areas you're looking to move into, or other accounts you wanna make?

Dow: I would love to expand it. Everything moves so fast, so I don't have a big timeline, I just like to let things happen. I'm a college student, and it's been really exciting to have a big reach like this. It's been really fun and I don't want it to stop. I want to keep doing more edit-a-thons. I would love to make a coffee table book, I feel like that's the vibe I'm going for. I would personally buy it, like in another life if someone else made it.

A: You're big into donating to Wikipedia, and that half of your merch sales go to them. Why should we donate to them, and what does the money go to?

Dow: I think helping Wikipedia is so important, and the fact that it has remained so collaborative and constructive is because of the Wikimedia Foundation. It's like a vestige of a bygone era of the Internet. And Wikimedia is doing a lot of side projects, like Wiki Books, and Wikipedia Education. Besides donating, learning to edit Wikipedia is important as well. Between 85 and 90 percent of Wikipedia editors are male, and it's important to bring diverse perspectives to our favorite encyclopedia.

A: Are there any Wikipedia deep dives that you recommend, something you could get lost in for hours?

Dow: There's so many. If you're in the mood to sit down and be all-in, there's so many. I made a list of my favorite Wikipedia lists. I love "Lists of people who have lived at Airports," "Lists of animals displaying homosexual behavior," "List of performers who died on stage," "List of animals with fraudulent degrees." Those are some good deep dives.

Social media can be a place full of people just in it for the clout, and my interview with Depths of Wikipedia was very refreshing. It feels good to know that passion can still get you somewhere in this content-saturated world.

Depths of Wikipedia is run by Annie Rauwerda, and you can contact her with any questions, requests, or bizarre articles at annierau@umich.edu.

On Curation

✖A ☆ ✎

A: Are there ever things you find interesting but don't fit the tone of the account?

Dow: Literally constantly. So many of my submissions are interesting if you're already interested in the topic, but if you're just scrolling, you're not gonna take the time to read through all of it. You have to choose something that's really immediate. As the account has gotten bigger I've had to balance between entertainment and education, and I think I've done a good job of that.

A: This page has a very specific sense of humor. Do you have any influences on your sense of humor?

Dow: That's a question that requires some soul-searching that I don't know if I've done yet. I know that I love to learn, and I love to be a little bit irreverent. I love the encyclopedic aspect of Wikipedia, and the academic language, and when you dress up something that's so frivolous, and stupid, and bizarre, I think it's very funny. For me as a human being, I hate a repeat joke, and with Depths of Wikipedia, I'm very big on making sure the concepts are obscure. Sometimes people suggest things to me that I feel are too common, and I'll never post that. I'd rather not get a joke than have heard a joke before.

A: I understand. I feel like your page is based in the style of irreverent internet humor, but it's evolving upon that.

File: A child sad that his hot dog fell on the ground.jpg

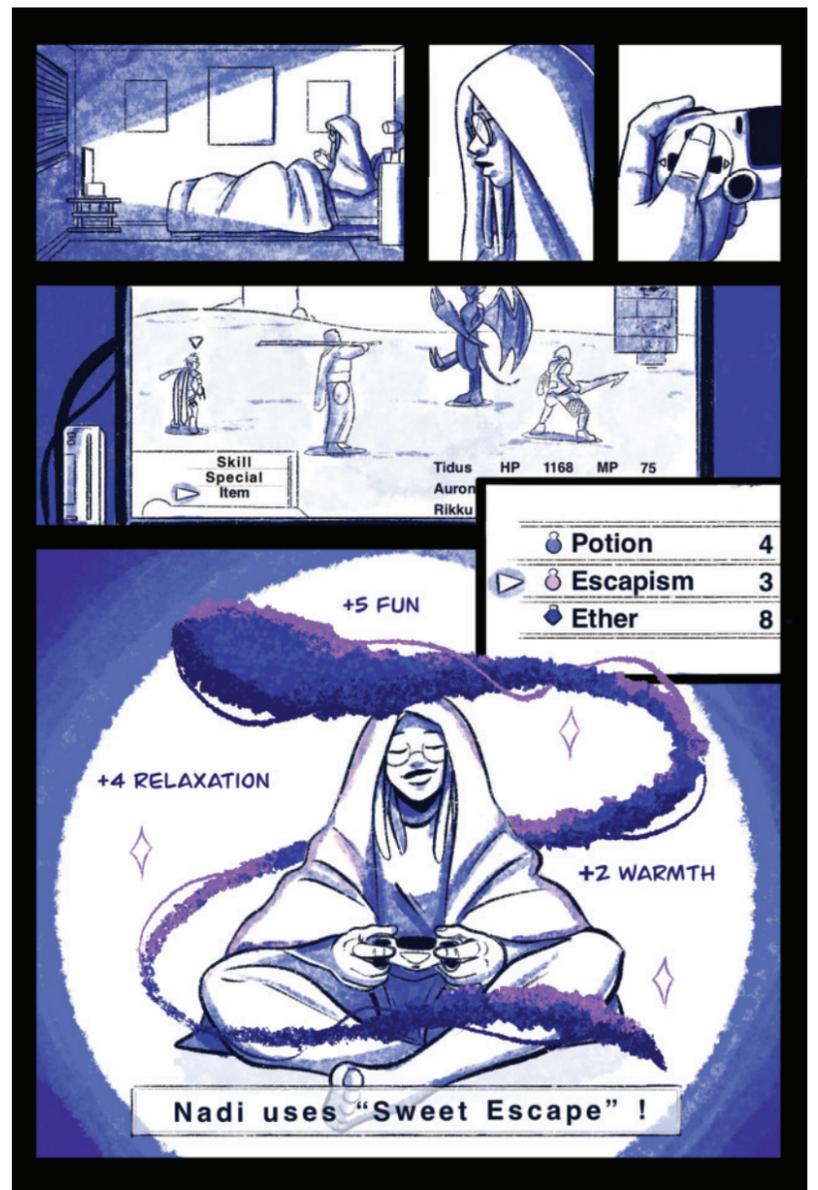
✖A ☆ ✎



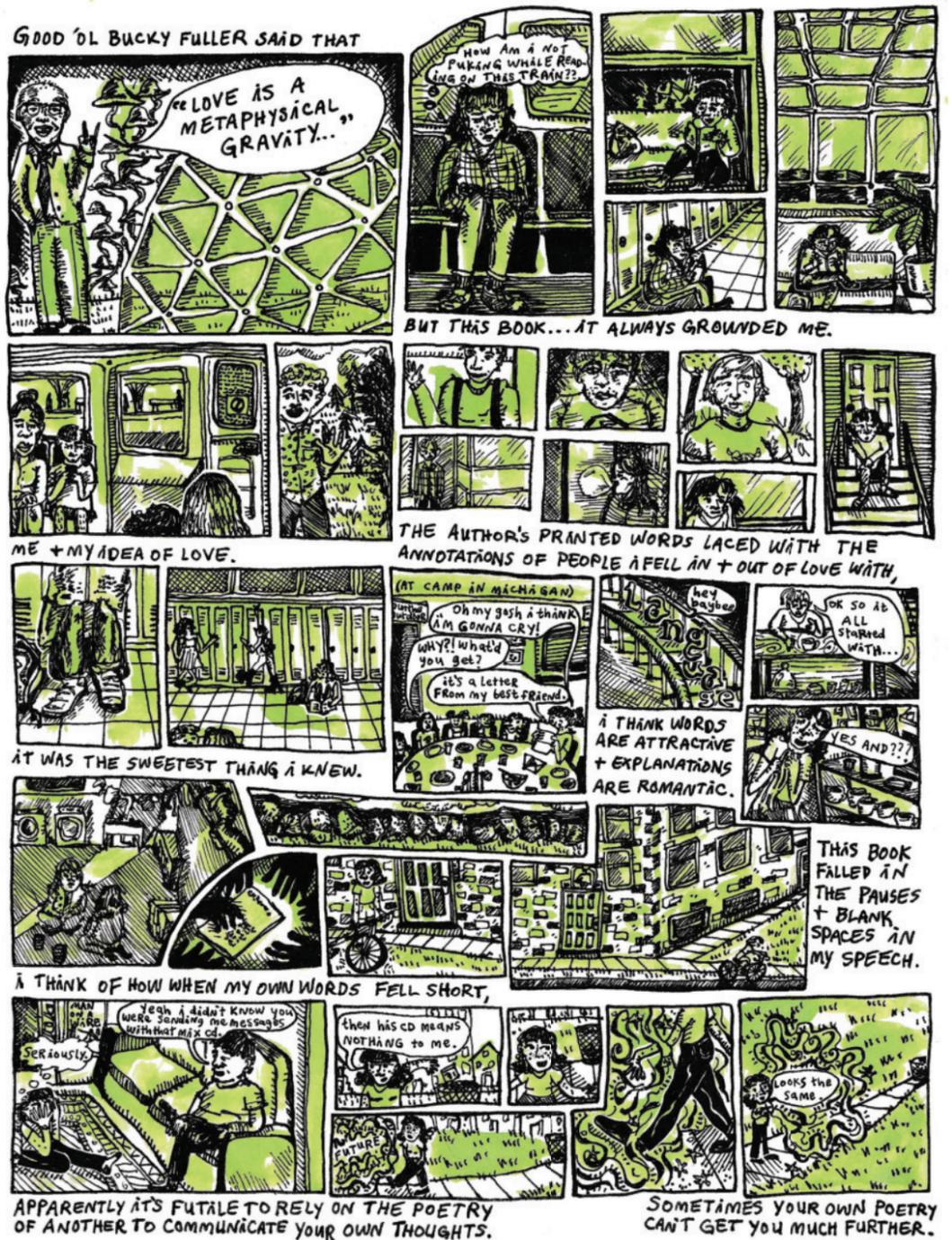
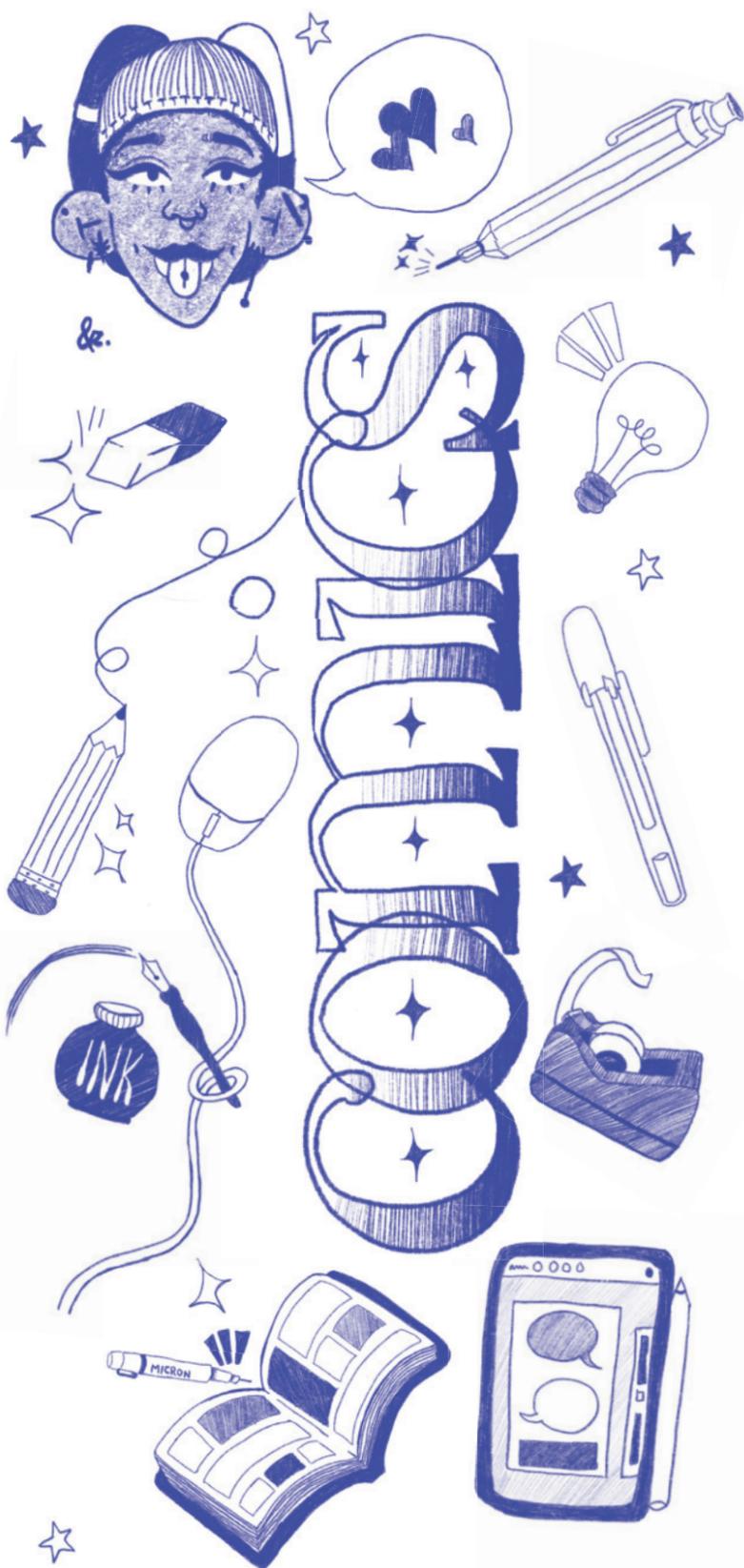
Aidan Bryant (BFA 2022) is a photographer and filmmaker. He credits Wikipedia for teaching him all about random facts that come up at inopportune times.



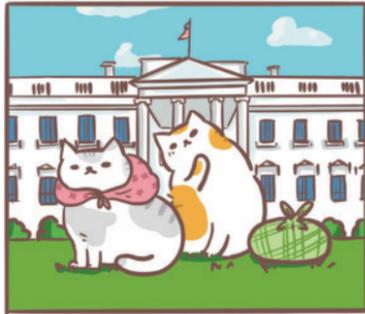
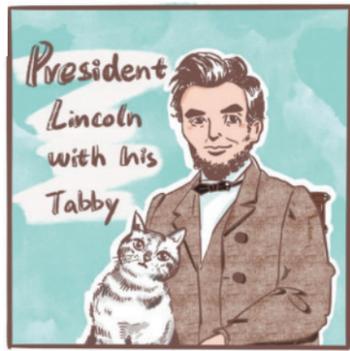
honeymilk: page one by &z. (zeinab ajasa)



My Fantasy by Nadeige Fontaine



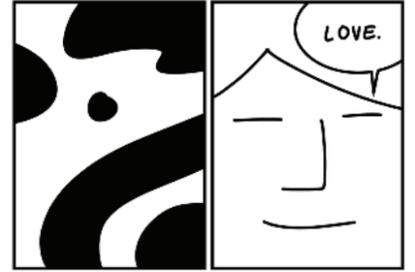
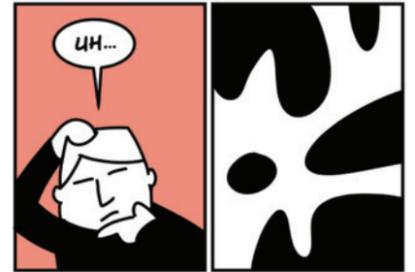
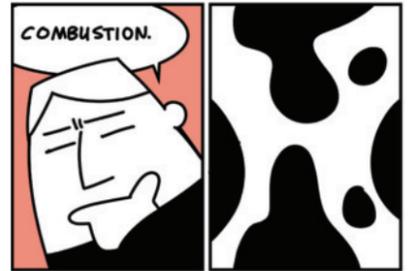
Misplaced: Part 3 by Emma B. Rosengarten



So he took his two cats to the White House.

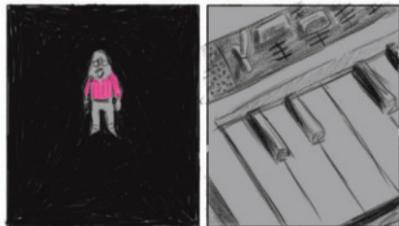


Lincoln With His Tabby by Jessica Zhang



Crap Therapy by Michael Karp

HAVE A BREAK, READ SOME COMICS!



REALITY

Reality by Chayse Walker



Happy Curfew by Teddie Bernard



ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTINE GUZMAN,
AND JADE SHENG

fold out

fold in