

9A. Artist of the Year—Brittany Jiang

Brittany Jiang | *fall*

Everything and everyone has expiration dates. A lot of people work so hard for things that have no meaning to them nor make them happy, wandering around in the world.

Brittany Jiang | *drowning in hallucination*

We are made up by memories that are broken into a million pieces and put together by people we meet.

Brittany Jiang | *the sun*

People's minds are like the sun shining through darkness.

Brittany Jiang | *truth*

People usually wear their masks throughout the day to hide their true self and their desires. We are not who we really are.

Brittany Jiang | *parents swimming away*

Independence is desired but not voluntarily earned; it's the result of abandonment.

As an artist, I live in this constant fear and periodic void of reaching a limit in the world of art: what will I be if I can't continue to be an artist in the future, if people don't like my art, if I'm out of art to make and have no voice? In September, 2020, I watched a documentary on the former editor-in-chief Franca Sozzani for Italian Vogue, and I got totally blown away by the bravery and the clarity she had as an artist. I remembered she said that the magazines were her artwork: after every issue had published they became history, and the team had to start making new art without looking back. The readers were influenced by her and the way she didn't care about other people's opinions but only doing what she thought was right - she was the first fashion magazine editor to do a whole issue of African Americans. Later, I found Tyler Shield, a fine art photographer who was a professional biker. He always clearly presents his visions in his pictures and seeks for the most realistic or random way to plan and set the picture - everything can be his inspiration, such as one time he found a swan in his backyard and the next 8 hours he did a photoshoot on the swan and a model.

All the artists out there have their concerns and insecurities, too. I'm not alone and all I have to do is work harder and push myself. Art is supposed to be fun and liberating, not demanding and considered as prisons.



Cavities

Belle Grace Wilkinson

I woke up at 4:27 again this morning. I peeked through my blinds to see if any life was awake with me, but they were all still drifting in the void in-between. The window was frosted—the closer I looked, the more the sheets of ice looked like millions of tiny snowflakes. I could make out the microscopic details of every unique flake stuck to my window. The fog from my breath crept up the glass until I could no longer see what was already just darkness, so naturally, I drew two dots and a parabola on the hazy pane. I exhaled room-temperature carbon dioxide onto my ice-cold pointer finger and dazedly grinned at the smiling face I made—a comfort to see protecting me from the blackness of 4:30. I smiled back at him until he faded away.

I don't know what's wrong with me. It's like my energy battery is constantly at full charge. When I open my eyes, I feel like I was never asleep—my dreams dissolve in the millisecond it takes for my eyes to go from seeing nothing but blackness to opening and realizing that the world my unconscious thoughts created is nothing more than a wish: a longing for something different.

I sat up and decided that my day had begun; there was no hope in attempting to fall back to sleep. I shifted sideways and let my bare feet touch the cold wooden floor—goosebumps shooting up my spine. I don't like slippers. They make me feel weak: if I can't handle the morning cold of my bedroom floor, then what could I ever handle? I took a deep breath and tiptoed to the kitchen—my ancient floors creaked like arthritic skeleton. My fall blend coffee beans were already ground, but I went ahead and ground more for a lazy rainy day. Productive. I'm wide awake anyway.

I saw this video of a girl frothing milk in a French press. I don't know how I feel about it, but I tried it anyway. I don't even take milk in my coffee: it hurts my stomach. I only keep it as a treat for the stray cat that lives in my bushes. But, it was 4:39, and I had nothing better to do.

I Wish I Could

Belle Grace Wilkinson

tell her that it gets easier
as I brush back her frizzy curls
behind her small and sinless ear,
that the world will grow kinder,
and that she'll be the heartbreaker
strutting around like she owns the place,
that her sweet tears will fall less,
and her smile will show more,
and the monsters in her closet
are just a bad dream.

tell her it's all just a bad dream,
but I'd just be lying to both of us.

The Waiter

Ainslee Johnson



You know how everyone has something wrong with them? Well, this man's one fault is that nothing seemed to be wrong with him. Absolutely repulsive. Disgustingly sublime. Let me paint you a picture, it isn't a pretty one, but it isn't bad. He walked up to the steps of my porch one foot at a time. He didn't slightly slip on that edge—the concrete ledge that stabs everyone in the back. I couldn't believe it. Many people stumble there; it's entertaining to watch. Now you think I'm a terrible person, don't you? I promise you I'm not. I can just feel the embarrassment sweating from the pores on their foreheads after they fall. It brings back memories of when I fell in the bleachers at a football game.

Everyone noticed it. Their eyes seemed to bulge out of their heads as they peered into every secret chamber in my soul. It was absolutely horrifying. I was like a deer staring into headlights, waiting for the car crash, the laughter. Back to this man, I can't even focus on him. I wanted to see if he was the-laugh-it-off kind of person or the, "I'm sorry, how embarrassing," type of person. He was neither. He was the confidently-smile-as-I-walk-to-pick-up-my-date type of guy. Now, I wasn't completely destroyed by the fact he didn't slip, I am not a terrible person. It was a series of small factors. This wasn't even a major one.

He had brownish green eyes, not particularly striking, and his hair was brown. His jawline was as sharp as a butter knife and a dull one at that. He could have been a nose model if that was a thing. Maybe it is a thing, I

“Sorry, beauty takes time,” I smiled, “you never told me that my lipstick was fading.”

I’m glad I made him feel uncomfortable. He didn’t want to be there and it wasn’t his destiny to be with me. I would never, even if fate forced it, ever go on a date with a man like him again. He was extremely annoying in his efforts to act normal. I’m not normal. Nevertheless, we continued to dine. I refused to take small bites like a woman should. At this point, I feel like I’m more likely to go on a second date with my plate of spaghetti than the man. I don’t hate him. I just resent him. He was halfway done with his salad when he raised his hand to Isaiah. I almost let out a huge gasp.

“What can I do for you?” Isaiah said calmly. So sweet.

“I need more ranch,” he said, so rude. He was like a dirty pirate who could not read or write. He wasn’t the captain of the ship, no, he just scrubbed the deck. He wasn’t even a real pirate.

I grabbed Isaiah’s hand. It was soft and warm and gentle. “Thank you for all your help tonight, you’ve been great.”

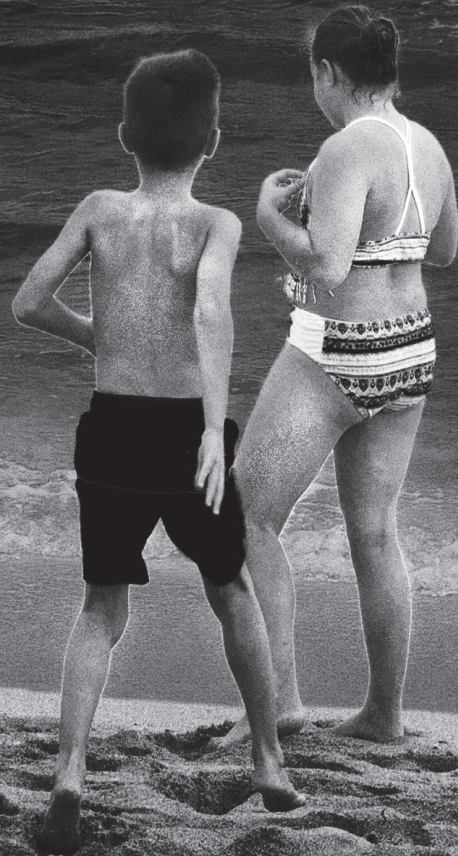
“My pleasure!”

After he drenched his salad in ranch, I let him finish dinner and made some meaningless small talk. I turned my head as we walked out the door. I saw Isaiah standing, taking orders. Humble beauty. I smiled at him and longed to glance into his eyes again. Isaiah’s eyes are hope and his smile is victory. I let the man drive me home, but not walk me to the door. I even told him that I had a nice time. This wasn’t a lie. I think Isaiah and I are off to a great start. I let him do all these things because I knew it was the end for us. But it wasn’t the end.



After the Creation of the World

Ainslee Johnson



Rock and rubble, land and water swam within themselves like a fully functioning machine created delicately and purely by its Master.

Darkness waited around the corner like a mousetrap. People made clothes out of leaves.

Languages, different faces, and experiences now move with the wind. Fire, water, salt, and sweet spice-flavored textiles. Slow down, man has conquered the sea.

The earth has crumbled into a ball like paper—it used to be flat. People paint pictures while others carve weapons for war. It seems like forever ago when we said goodbye to the dinosaurs.

Traditions are beginning, and pilgrims are pilgrimming. Selfish desire sits on a wire like a crow in the morning, weapons that explode in many shapes and sizes. Birthday parties, high fives, and candy. Coffee fuels the tone of the world.

Power is hungry and it devours people in deep rage. The computer is coded for decoding and pulling apart our minds. Holidays are celebrated some more. Music is the new coffee.

I could talk to you from here to Australia. Life has become a game, just like politics. Funny how it works. The mousetrap has caught some, but there is still hope.