

ISSUE I

JULY 2022

# THE ALCOVE





# FOR WARD

Dear readers,

The summer of 2020 prompted the rise of online activism within our generation, and we were part of many who felt captivated by the idea. Living in the digital age, some may question the relevancy of an arts magazine. After all, compelling works of art and writing could easily be posted online with one click of a button. Outside of social media, online publications and exhibitions exist for artists and writers to present their work. So, why a magazine?

The Alcove is a collective that strives to amplify international voices through creative mediums by forging a platform that functions in a way exhibitions and social media cannot: it designs a space for artists and writers to reflect rather than present. Of course, a vital purpose of this magazine is also to introduce powerful perspectives to our audience—just like social media. Yet, we provide opportunities for young creatives to inspire an impact and leave a permanent mark with their voices. This magazine compiles arresting creative works that display the artist or writer's opinion on relevant issues commonly found in discourse today.

From the exploration of self-identity to the impact of the pandemic on AAPI individuals, The Alcove publishes a wide variety of works, spotlighting reflections and opinions expressed through art and writing. Each piece featured within this issue includes an artist or writer's profile, highlighting their approaches and personal experiences that embody an essence of turbulence that is universal to our rising generation regardless of our backgrounds. The Alcove is more than honoured to unveil these creations. We hope you will enjoy our debuting issue of The Alcove and discover new perspectives from the youth voices expressed within.

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July 2022

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## GOLDEN HOUR

Charcoal, chalk pastel, white chalk on paper

Golden hour references the time of day before the sun sets, infamous as the best photo-taking opportunity. However, the light in this photo is not the amber radiance from the setting sun but a blue blaze from commercial lights.

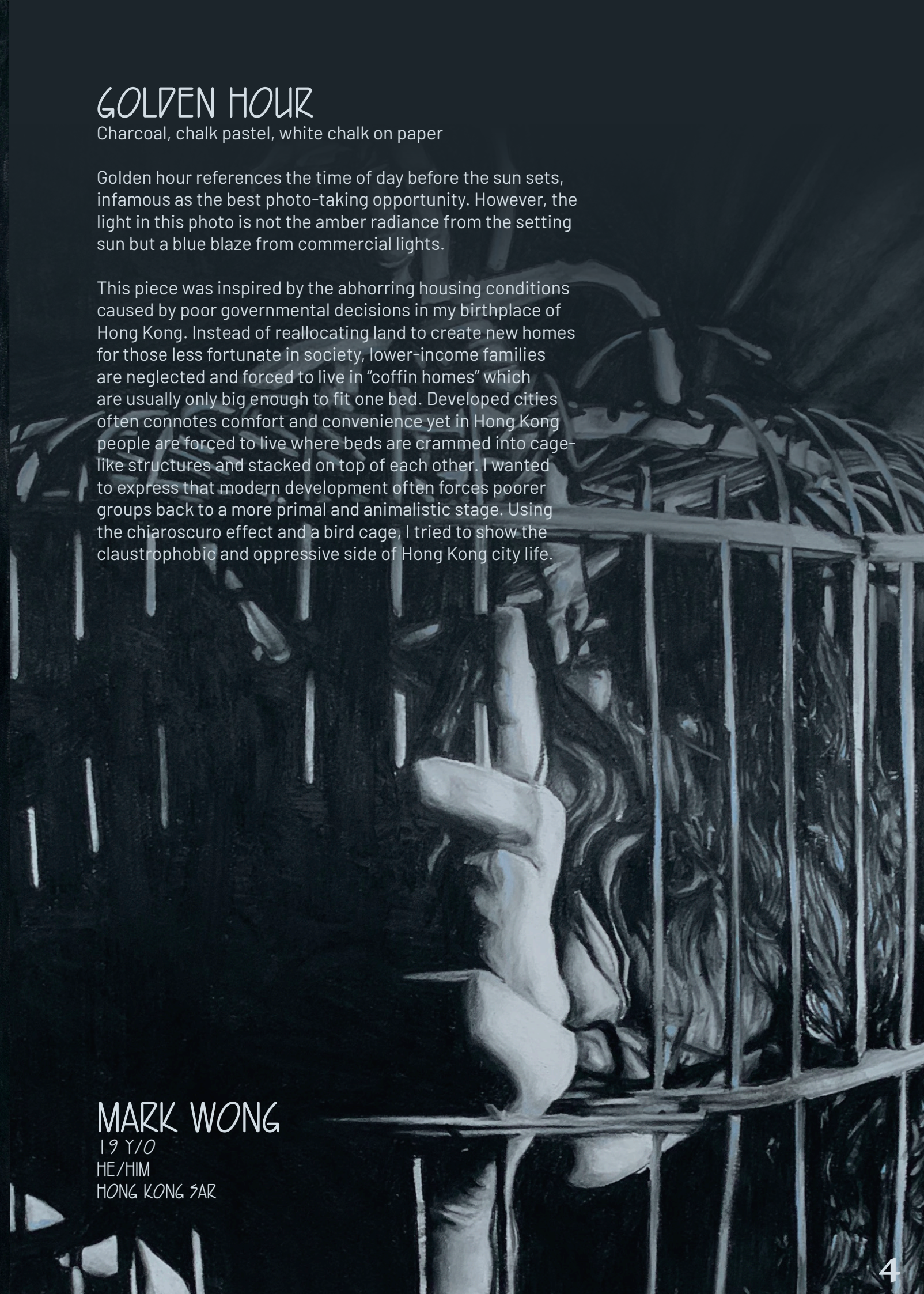
This piece was inspired by the abhorring housing conditions caused by poor governmental decisions in my birthplace of Hong Kong. Instead of reallocating land to create new homes for those less fortunate in society, lower-income families are neglected and forced to live in "coffin homes" which are usually only big enough to fit one bed. Developed cities often connotes comfort and convenience yet in Hong Kong people are forced to live where beds are crammed into cage-like structures and stacked on top of each other. I wanted to express that modern development often forces poorer groups back to a more primal and animalistic stage. Using the chiaroscuro effect and a bird cage, I tried to show the claustrophobic and oppressive side of Hong Kong city life.

MARK WONG

19 Y/O

HE/HIM

HONG KONG SAR







## LAUREN ZHOU

18 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
CHINA

My art traces my process of navigating the two sides of the human-nature relationship: the beautiful and harmonious, and the immensely disharmonious and complex. By visually showcasing my environmentalist ideology, I hope to inspire viewers to support causes through creative mediums.

I work quietly and methodologically, much like how nature herself works silently yet meticulously. My works are gentle and carefully attenuated, as I believe this way, viewers can feel at ease when exploring my visual messages.



## MIRCOCOSM

东北花布, hula-hoop, rain boots, thread, fishing wire, acrylic paint

Coming from a Northeastern Chinese fishing family, I understand the destructive effect of overfishing on ocean health, as well as humanity's dependency on the ocean's natural resources to make a living.

In this installation, I navigate the intensely interdependent relationship between humanity and nature, and reflect upon the cultural fabric (depicted with the traditional "Northeast Flower Cloth", 东北花布) that forms the Chinese fisherman's self-destructive microcosm.



## THE PAST POSCA

This piece illustrates my journey as a transgender woman. The words in the background were derogatory comments I received when coming out. The character in the foreground represents the pain I have gone through during this process. However, I have learnt to embrace my identity and love myself for who I am. This is represented through the bright saturated colors utilized in the piece, which contradicts the messages and the weeping character portrayed.

## CALEB WU

17 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
CHINA

An artist from China who currently studies abroad in the United States. She uses her imagination to deliver messages that addresses global issues such as discrimination towards the LGBTQ community and corruptions within the society.



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“ Overall, this piece illustrates the dichotomy of womanhood—on the one hand, I am extremely proud of my identity, but on the other hand, I also endure the backlash of being a woman. The metal spikes inside are both representatives of the pain associated with womanhood as well as the courage to fight back. To me personally, this piece honours womanhood and also celebrates the courage and resilience of women through history. There is immense power hidden under the softness.

”



ROSIE DING  
17 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
CHINA

Rosie Ding was born in China in 2005. She studied in the Bay Area for 4 years and currently resides in Beijing. Through the experimentation of different media and style, she makes powerful statements and strives to evoke thinking in the audience revolving issues like feminism and mental health. In the future, she wishes to create more art that makes a change in the world.

Cotton, metal, plastic,  
papier-mâché





## UNITITLED

Oil on canvas

In my piece, it is clear that except for the clashing illusion of the two faces, there are no other significant differences from them to normal human beings. Through my art, I hope to encourage people to not treat mental illness patients differently as it often make them feel different, excluded, and uncomfortable.



## SARAH CHENG

18 Y/O

SHE/HER

UNITED KINGDOM

A Beijing-born artist who is currently studying abroad in the United Kingdom. She enjoys stippling and painting, and regards them as forms of self-healing. She is fascinated by human organs and enjoys playing with the optical illusions created by facial features.





# UNTITLED

Digital

## KEELY LAU

17 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
UNITED STATES

Keely Lau is a high school senior hailing from Beijing. Art has been her dream, and photography her outlet. What her camera captures transcends the eye—it is more vivid than a simple object. Instead, it is a story.



Our bodies, ourselves! Presented is an art piece that seeks to challenge the detrimental patriarchal systems which affect society and art. The piece critiques harmful female stereotypes, specifically gender stereotyping in fashion. I pose the question here, *are the high heels a tool of empowerment or a tool of the patriarchy designed to slow a woman down?* Moreover, throughout the piece, a mirage of the hyper-sexualised female body is displayed, indicative of the role women are perceived to hold in a patriarchal society: a fantasy, a wife, a child-bearer, a mother, subservient to the dominant man. We should have control over our own bodies and our own life. I have more respect for a life being lived than a life that has not even begun.

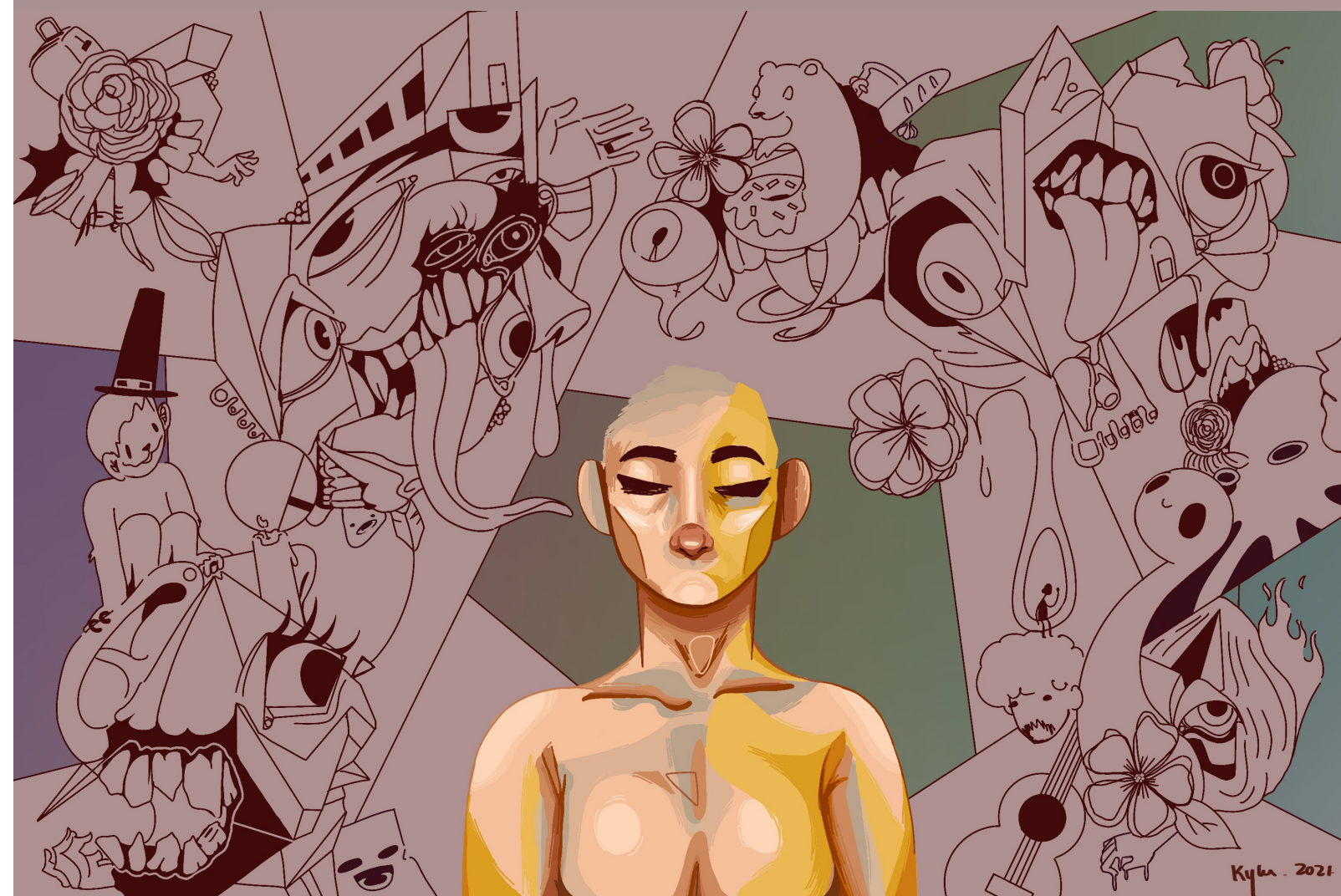
# I WONDER

Digital

This piece was made while being on call with a couple of my friends, with them feeding me ideas as I doodled in the background. This almost collaborative artwork displays the imagination and self-expression of women and exemplifies the creativity we have. The ridiculous nature of the doodles contrasting against the straight lines in the back shows how thinking out side of the box breaks the preset expectations for us, and how we make our own rules in the ways that matter, in our thoughts and the ways we present ourselves.

## KYLEE CAMPBELL

17 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
CHINA



Kylee . 2021



# DO NOT BE AFRAID TO CALL YOURSELF A FEMINIST

Do not be afraid to call yourself a feminist.

Of the numerous individuals who do not call themselves feminists, a significant portion are those who do believe that men and women should have equal rights in society. A study by YouGov in 2018 found that while only 27% of people interviewed would call themselves feminists, 81% of the same group expressed that they believed equality between genders should be realized. If we take the common understanding that feminism is fundamentally a movement for gender equality, which holds that men and women (I know, the standard definition is so non-binary exclusionist) should have access to equal socio-political and economic rights and opportunities; then why are people so afraid to call themselves feminists?

"If you stand for equality, then you're a feminist. Sorry to tell you." – Emma Watson

Some may refuse to call themselves feminists due to the negative labelling of the feminist movement over the years. While it is true that select self-proclaimed feminists have tarnished the reputation of feminism, focusing on those individuals means missing the point of the much broader movement, which has always been and still is a movement of equality. Many tend to say they support the movement for gender equality instead of saying they are feminists. Although gender equality and feminism are at their core the same, they should not be used as substitute terms in this context.

In all essences, "gender equality" is a less direct term than "feminism". For one, it is neutral, not focusing on a specific gender but promoting them all. It is easy to agree with and seems intuitive: of course, we would want equal levels of rights and freedom for everyone!

It is a lovely mask to hide behind. Feminism is harsh. It says that women demand more attention. It calls for you to acknowledge them. By replacing "feminism" with the broader "gender equality", women are no longer at the forefront. In stripping them away from the conversation, it glosses over how women are systematically excluded, denying the existence of the long-pervading discrimination they have faced.

The goal of feminism may be equality, but it is an equality that must first come from an acknowledgement of the current patriarchal society and those who have suffered from it. To rename the fight for feminism as one for gender equality is to draw a veil over our eyes that allows us to obfuscate the true vulgar nature of the issue simply because it hurts to confront this reality. Gender equality as a broad goal is respectable, yet when used in context as a substitution for feminism, it, by comparison, diminishes the individual experiences of women. For the same reason "All Lives Matter" technically argues correctly that all lives should be considered equal, but in context became a phrase that diminishes the experiences of black people.

If we keep being afraid to call ourselves feminists, a casual statement of "I care about gender equality" cannot be a suitable replacement as it does not carry the same weight. If you care for equality, why not call yourself a feminist?

VALENE WANG  
17 Y/O  
SHE/THEY  
CHINA



# THE PATRIARCHY

Watercolour

In the book *Eve was Framed*, Helena Kennedy stated, "The double standard in relation to sex is still invoked in our courts." Though this book was initially published in 1993, we can see that the courts of justice remain prejudiced to this day. The personal objections of one to abortions do not give them the right to deny bodily autonomy to others. Justice Samuel Alito, a male's opinion draft on abortion rights for women, does not stand in the eyes of the people, and we should therefore voice our dissent to fight for human rights.

CHRISTINA ZHANG  
17 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
AUSTRALIA

Christina was born in Shanghai in 2004 and moved to Sydney where she stayed for 5 years and finally to Beijing in 2010. Christina is an active voice when discussing the equal rights of the people, specifically for the rights of women. She believes in equal opportunities between the two genders and hopes to advocate for change through her art by allowing more people to acknowledge the inequality within the world order, specifically in law.





?

Acrylic on canvas

IRIS SEO

17 Y/O

ŒHE/HER

SOUTH KOREA

This work, inspired by René Magritte, embodies Hyperrealism. Reflection is incorporated in this artwork by using 3 mirrors—two in the hands of the figures and another that can be seen from the viewer's perspective. They act as literal mirrors that reflect problematic social media use by implying the hollowness of self-identity and give viewers a rare opportunity to become introspective about themselves and question their true nature.

## VIGNETTE

The morning frost on the grass, the winter sunrise tinting the horizon a pale pink.

The rich smell of coffee still brewing in the pot, and as she gazes out the window for what feels like forever, her mind wanders like a lost soul, not yet able to focus on anything concrete. The beige paint on the corner of the window chipping off; the sunlight streams into the spotless, lifeless white kitchen.

She turns to the mirror in the cramped kitchen and sees herself. In her eyes she can see the 4 a.m. exhaustion that still lingers like tendrils of ivy that have crept in and wrapped themselves around her soul.

The feeling of everything you do never being enough, of falling short, of letting down everyone including yourself. Your own inadequacy whispering shame into your ear, until you start to believe that little voice in your head that is never satisfied.

As if it's not enough, what she's accomplished so far. All she sees are the jagged lines that disappointment left behind. The match of determination that burns bright but dies out much too quickly.

I wish my words could fall from my mouth and form a bridge to lead her back to herself once again.

I know that, today, she doesn't believe me. She has climbed the impossible asymptote of perfection until she thought she could see the end. When she saw there was no end, she fell like Icarus from the sky, consumed by the flames of ambition. Now she is in the depths of the ocean, trying to crawl back to the heights of the clouds she once soared over.

She wanders through the halls of her cold, empty house. She hardly cares when she leaves the front door unlocked. It's like she's standing in a fishbowl, watching all of her

responsibilities press their faces against the glass, alone but for the muffled silence.

She meets her friends, goes to work, buys groceries. On the outside, she looks normal, happy. But underneath all the mundane regularity of her day is that same hopelessness, that gnaws at her joy and sours her morning.

By the end of her day she's dead tired. She trudges back home, to the beige chipped window and the lifeless white kitchen and the cold. The mirror that taunts her. The coffee from the morning, still in the pot.

She collapses onto a chair and looks out the window again, feeling the dread pile onto her shoulders.

To her surprise, a scarlet cardinal sat perched on the windowsill, its head cocked with curiosity. It chirps and knocks on the glass. Joined by another, both flutter off.

A surprising warmth in her chest. The smallest smile that breaks out. She suddenly remembered something.

She rushed and grabbed a box from her closet and opened it to a cloud of dust. Grabbing an old notebook, she ran back to the window.

She spent the rest of that afternoon, sitting on the floor, staring outside and sketching the red cardinals that danced past her window.

Her happinesses are slight compared to her misfortunes; delicate as the air, easily floating out of reach. But in between the strokes of her life, she redraws her sorrows into serendipitous epilogues.

MAYU NAKANO

17 Y/O

ŒHE/HER

UNITED STATES



## I. INVITATION

The wheels of the golden bike push through the waves of sand  
A sand dune (almost)  
Wind carries the sand into the air  
Dry like the back of one's hand in numbingly cold weather  
The wheels of the golden bike come to a halt when the wind stops  
Cacti dance in the silence  
... A silent paradise

## II. OCTOBER SONG

We dance in October like the cacti in their silent paradise  
Under the sunset (a cliché)  
The sand dunes stretch far into the strangely pink horizon  
A never-ending land of emptiness  
Human life is found near the center of the dunes  
A small hut filled with nothing but joy  
– and love  
We dance under the sunset in August  
... Where to next?

## III. BYE BYE BLUES

Outside these sand dunes, there are paths that lead to a town  
Filled with silver bikes  
I represent humankind; I stand alone in these sand dunes  
I dance with myself under sunsets and the moonlight but do I want more?  
My golden bike lies against the swaying cacti  
Golden from being covered with sand  
I am not so different after all,  
Just buried underneath my own escape  
“Dust away the sand!” “Rise!” I think to myself  
My sand dune is my reality  
... Bound to collapse

COURTNEY CHEN

16 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
UNITED STATES



## DICHOTOMY

Charcoal, pastel

Reflecting on my passion for Classical mythologies and art, I found interest in the story and lives of the subjects behind them. Daniel Arsham's works imparted to me how broken statues can be used to represent a further concept—much more than just ruins.

An important technique I used is chiaroscuro, the contrast of light and dark. Not only does this portray the literal imagery of an object coming out of the dark, in other words emerging into the sunlight from the darkness of the soil, but it also represents the emergence of clarity and the construction of identity behind the statue. This piece highlights the intersection of the past and our present, allowing us to look at ancient artefacts with novel perspectives.



DIANA TSANG

17 Y/O

SHE/HER

UNITED STATES



# A SUMMATION OF POEMS

## CHILDREN OF THIS WORLD

Every soul is thrust  
into bodies and turned to one.  
Cages hewn from meat  
and built on bone to rot,  
cataracted eyes to behold  
a glorious world.  
Wonder working woman,  
your deeds to be shown.  
Miracle making man,  
your actions to be known.  
You saints of men and women  
in the eyes of children only,  
do nought but shift the world  
onto a different set of shoulders.  
The lingering pain,  
all the scars and hurt of this earth  
is left to them  
the children of this world.

## RICTUS LINES OF SYMMETRY

I have no doubt that it'll hurt  
when cold metal draws blood.  
But what else to paint with red?  
Whether by jagged glass  
or tempered steel, the feeling  
is all the same.

Loathing for the soul  
but more hatred for the mind,  
a certain coward who never  
dies. Lies and deceit just for myself  
and a grimace for the showman's act.  
Oh hurt, oh sorrow, oh beautiful pain!

I have no doubt that it  
will run up my arm. Crawl  
up tendons from torn flesh and  
skin with nail-dug trenches  
revealing barebone. Dead  
blades that rickshaw live skeleton.

I have no doubt that it will  
make me feel, far better  
than drowning in pits,  
each one, a dark hole of despair.  
I know because I dream, I know  
because my nails dug those  
trenches and my heart fought the war.

## HELLO FROM BEYOND

Everyone wakes from the dreamless sleep.  
A thousand roads lead a thousand lives,  
each person a son  
or daughter,  
winding down narrow streets  
and broken alleys  
just to find in all their hopes  
a thousand weights to place upon their  
backs  
each one slowing them down.  
Memories of past,  
dreams of future,  
the rocks that trip our feet,  
the ropes which bind our legs.  
As feet grind to a halt  
or legs stop moving.  
Daughters and sons find  
themselves arrayed in front  
of the same ebon sky,  
all roads do not lead to Rome,  
every path leads  
those who tread to the same end.  
Everyone returns to the endless night.

## JASON LIU

17 Y/O  
HE/HIM  
CHINA

Black hair, black eyes,  
descriptions of skin colour feel  
a bit racist so it will be left up to  
interpretation. An edgelord who  
dabbles in music and art, enjoys  
watching online debates about  
politics a little too much, and  
finds himself in many teaching  
roles, Jason Liu is indeed a  
person who has stuff in his  
life. One rule pervades much  
of his activity on the internet:  
talk smack, get smacked.  
Point is, please don't make  
stupid comments or posts and  
think before you start blasting  
your uninformed thoughts  
on Twitter. Take the time to  
wonder: "am I being a blockhead  
right now?"



ANGELINA DING  
17 Y/O  
SHE/HER  
CHINA

## GRUS JAPONENSIS

Rock painting, screen

This piece places emphasis on the endangered population of the red-crowned crane. By painting the elegant beautiful movements and lines of these animals, I hope to raise awareness for the endangerment and encourage people to be more alert of their actions and the products they buy.



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