



"Phone Call" Cover Image by Lilit Davtyan

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### From the Issue Editor

It would feel misguided to ignore the elephant in the room, the room we all share despite being denied the pleasure of being in a physical space together. As we approach the one year marker of sheltering in place and staying home to keep safe I find myself reflecting (incessantly) and talking (at length) with friends and family about our favorite ways to escape at home.

On the days that productivity feels futile, I disappear into a book -- preferably science fiction or fantasy, as long as there is adventure, it will do. This is new for me, this desire to detach from the world we know and into another unknown. There's something about a new landscape, new rules, that soften the life lessons I struggle to learn. These books are an escape of sorts, yes, but not the kind that turns away to turn off. This escape is an internal one. These books have served as a reminder that it's possible to create new worlds -- even if it just starts with paper and pen, oil on canvas, light refracting through lenses. It's through these internal escapes that we start on a journey to self discovery, where we begin to understand how we want to move through this world we share.

There's a line from Ursula K. Le Guin's writing that has been a guiding source in putting together this issue:

**"We all have forests on our minds. Forests unexplored,  
unending. Each of us gets lost in the forest, every night, alone."**

This notion of getting lost in ourselves with the emphasis on unending lone exploration signals the importance of isolation and that there is much to discover in our forests alone. To escape into ourselves -- making paths, clearing road blocks, venturing down false trails to discover what is true, and knowing the profound joy in the endless discovery that waits at every turn.

All of the pieces in this issue, walk, trudge, and sometimes run -- flashlight in hand -- into the forest of their making. Going into that forest alone and offering an inspection of self, of routine, of worlds imagined.

Here is a small glimpse into the many forests offered by our contributing writers and artists:

*A small bird surrounded by an opening portrait, layered and dissected. Vibrant  
multicolored flowers and butterflies leap from a grayscale charcoal face.*

Andreo Vazquez

*I'm in tenth grade, home on a Friday night.*

Gemma Castro

*A chorus of phones chimed in offices and bank queues, men and women  
paused their conversations to check the notifications. Then it was all  
gone.*

Nicole Jean Turner

*Alone, in this mindscape, I feel myself rot.*

Sean Ban

*Those others,  
my fellow transients*

Zakary Ostrowski

*Your work has the potential to be someone's dearest company.*

Lilit Davtyan

Thank you to the contributors for allowing us a moment in the interiors you venture through. And for inspiring us to explore the parts of ourselves unknown.

-Sarah K. Roethke  
Issue Editor





Nicole Jean Turner *High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program*  
Zakary Ostrowski *Transit*  
Gemma Castro *Ponche All Winter Long*

*Hidden Garden* - mixed media - charcoal, oil pastel, and construction paper

by Andrea Vazquez



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*Hidden Garden* - mixed media - charcoal, oil pastel, and construction paper

by Andrea Vazquez



Andrea is currently a Pasadena City College student majoring in Graphic Design transferring to CSUN this fall to receive a BA in Graphic Design. She not only enjoys designing but also enjoys fashion, photography, and music. She says, "Our faith doesn't determine who we are, we create ourselves."

*Expectations*

by Sean Ban

By now, I know the world wants something from me.  
Lately, I feel lost because of this.  
Often, it is something I don't readily see.  
Otherwise, it is something that'll bring bliss.  
Don't worry about me though, I'll live my years.

So for now, I'll take the time to jot this down.  
Waiting for my mind to finish its thought.  
Easy it is not, as other thoughts make me drown.  
Alone, in this mindscape, I feel myself rot.  
Thrustured expectations upon me; I'm left with my fears.

Tiny and insignificant, I feel my words are.  
Even or odd, my lines are not meant to be.  
Attempting to even rhyme, I feel like a star.  
Reality shows that I still have much to see.  
Soon, I realize what the world wants: my blood, sweat, and tears.

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Sean Ban is a current student of PCC as well as a graduate of California State University Long Beach, with a degree in Marketing. Sean is an aspiring writer whose interests lean towards poetry, at the moment of writing this. Sean would often credit himself as a creative person with too many avenues to showcase his mind but, no drive to actually show it.

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## Featured Artist: Lilit Davtyan

A conversation and look at the work of photographer Lilit Davtyan.

*Featured photos below were shot in March of 2019 by photographer and Pasadena City College student, Lilit Davtyan. Film was shot, developed, and printed by Davtyan.*

*Davtyan graciously answered some questions from Issue Editor Sarah Roethke over email correspondence.*

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**Sarah Roethke:** So Lilit, when would you say you first start getting interested in photography?

**Lilit Davtyan:** *I was first introduced to photography when I was 13 years old when I took black and white film photography classes at Barnsdall Art Park. My most valuable memories as a teenager were spent in the dark room developing photos under red lighting and smelling like the chemicals we used to develop film.*

**SR:** Oh amazing, there's something that feels innately stylized and spooky about dark room lighting, something about a work of art that can only be made visible while working in complete darkness or red light - it's a moody environment! Besides the entrancing atmosphere do you have any specific influences or inspirations that have stuck with you in your work?

**LD:** *I've always been lured to the whimsically absurd with a bit of the uncanny. I am positive it started from my infatuation with Alice in Wonderland from childhood. I love anthropomorphic animals, such as the apron wearing cats that sip tea in Beatrix Potter's tales or unapologetically expressive clowns who act like caricatures. I also love artists and photographers that experiment with themselves and have the ability to transform into new entities. Specifically, Claude Cahun who took very surreal self portraits: portraying a wide array of self made characters.*

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## Photoset by Lilit Davtyan



0 Face

**SR:** Those are some strong origins to work from -- this expressive clown character you've mentioned comes up in different iterations throughout most of your work -- what's drawn you to explore this character?

**LD:** *I have an obsession with clowns, specifically Pierrot the clown! Pierrot is a pantomime character dating back to the 17th century who was notable for his hopelessly romantic tendencies and for being overly naive. I find a lot of reliability in a character who can't help being romantic towards most aspects in their life and having this inability to hide their feelings due to their expressiveness. Just as a Pierrot clown is unmistakably recognizable with their white face make up and overly cartoonish expressions, I feel as though I'm the same. I am pretty terrible at hiding my true feelings because my face distorts on its own when I'm disgusted, I smile widely when I try to tell a silly lie or I gasp when I'm shocked. I love how Pierrot's personality is framed around an overly hopeless romantic, poetry writing, poof collar wearing clown and I feel like that is how I look and truly am from within. It's reached a point where I have Pierrot memorabilia (teapots, soap dishes, and candles galore) but I will stop at that!*

**SR:** Oh I love that, you've somehow captured Pierrot's classic style but brought him into the 21st century in a sort of modern day melancholy portraiture. You mentioned Claude Cahun's portraits as a major influence -- have you always been drawn to the art of portraiture?

**LD:** *The portraiture form was again introduced to me by the black and white film photography classes and it stayed me after them. I love focusing on a single subject and molding them into personas that can sometimes be a bit of a challenge to embody. For example, my lovely younger cousin is one of my most reoccurring models and I'll tell her, "Imagine yourself as a young child who's always been misunderstood by her family and is now looking at her reflection contemplating where her life will go, you see she*

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always been misinterpreted by her family and is now looking at her rejection contemplating where her life will go now as she further questions her identity." And I watch her raise her eyebrows or ask me more questions to get a better grasp of the character I'm asking her to portray. It's a riveting challenge for the photographer as well because you have to do your best to make the subject captivated by using their facial expressions, lighting and the setting that surrounds them.

SR: It sounds like a lot of discovery happens during the shoot-- what would you say is your favorite aspect of the process overall?

LD: *My favorite part of the process would have to be shooting! Because no matter how thoroughly I plan a story or dynamic I want to capture with my camera, once you interact with the model it's a whole new array of possibilities. It always ends up being quite the collaboration because the models bring so much more in the moment. As you are shooting, new ideas start blossoming in your head from their expressions or reactions and by the end of the shoot, you realize you've expanded beyond the ideas you thought you had completed beforehand. Just the model's personalities alone can alter the mood of the photos. Their eagerness or enthusiasm after I tell them about my ideas or the themes behind my photos is always one of my favorite parts as well. That feeling of completion once you sit down after a shoot and look at the images that were once merely a random burst of thought but are now a fully visualized picture is priceless.*

SR: What do you see for yourself going forward as a photographer? And what evolutions have you seen in your own work as you've grown into the process?

LD: *I see myself expanding beyond using a film camera because unfortunately, the dark rooms have been closed during the pandemic. But regardless, I need to get more familiar with a digital camera because technology is always going to evolve. I will always have a soft spot for using old fashion methods and the hands on process of developing film though. It's truly one of the most wonderful feelings to go from a roll of film, to a glossy print you have just taken out of the last tray of developer. Looking back at my work there is a significant difference. I used to take photos with less of story and context to them whereas now, I feel that it's a must to have fully realized characters when I approach a project. Before it was much more experimental with trial and error and now it's usually a set with one of the stories I've written. Sometimes the story comes first, or the visuals of the characters pop into my mind.*

SR: I hope you get back in a dark room soon enough, the pandemic has really affected a lot of hands-on art access, hasn't it? Though it sounds like you've got a positive outlook on getting comfortable with the digital side. Other than going digital -- what else is on the horizon for Lilit?

LD: *I've had a short film concept in mind for a while that revolves around a short story and shoot I did titled, "Pierrot & The Mother". It's about an estranged mother and son who's dynamic is one of utter chaos and disarray. Where Pierrot embodies childlike innocence and the mother is a glamorous ex-starlet whose failed and chooses to blame her pure son for all the wrong doings in her life. I have also been sitting on a book idea for a bit but it is much more fresh than the rest of my concepts.*

SR: A Lilit Davtyan production to look forward to -- it sounds like you've got a good road map ahead of you. Lastly, any advice or words of wisdom you'd like to share with photographers getting started?

LD: *The greatest advice I could give as simple and as repetitive as it sounds is do not be afraid. Or as the late Carrie Fisher worded it more gracefully, "Be afraid but do it anyway". This may sound cheesy but it's true, there are so many dreamers and artists in this world who have notebooks or sketchbooks full of beautiful ideas and work but are too afraid to show themselves. They do not have enough faith in their own work and I relate to this feeling all too much. Till recently, I've been hiding in a shell with my poetry, photography and stories. What's pulled me out was the support I've received from loved ones. But it's also been reading absurd books and seeing how unapologetic so many writers are about their kooky ideas. I like to view it this way, if a talking white rabbit with a pocket watch and little girl who follows him out of curiosity can become a universally known duo, then what is stopping you from being afraid that your work is too weird or too left field. There is always an audience or a person who can find a sense belonging, understanding, or inspiration from your work and that's the best part. I say this because literature and film have gotten me through the worse of times and brought me company. Your work has the potential to be someone's dearest company.*

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Lilit hopes to inspire and accompany other overly dreamy dreamers of the world -- because the combination of literature, film and a cup of tea will always be timeless. Lilit's curiosity steers towards poetry, film critiques, gothic novels, and whimsically dark short stories. She believes that her true form is a Pierrot-like clown child. Lilit constantly feels torn between two worlds: one of childlike wonder and curiosity (similar to Alice stumbling upon a rabbit hole whose hunger for more whimsy is never ending), and one of realism that knows the world is not always fantastical and full of magic. At the end of the day it is quite difficult for Lilit to hide this concoction of emotions, but it fuels her expressionism. It is through writing poetry, shooting black & white photography, editing video (or through the way she easily flinches or raises her eyebrows when she is confused) that she finds joy. (Sometimes in the quiet of a dark room, or the coos of an owl during a summer night, or reading till her brain has soaked in every last written word.) Lilit's feelings are always there for everyone to see --just like the hopelessly romantic Pierrot-- unmistakable with pale face and cartoonish eyes.

Read and View her work [here](#).

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## High Frequency Active Auroral Research Program

by Nicole Jean Turner

Cupped stone reached out from the shore and scratched at the bottom of the boat. Each wave ripped against the petrified wood. The sound like shovels dragged across gravel. Water sloshed up and shivered my ankles as I stood, straddling the seat. My jacket snagged a branch and I shimmied out of it to keep moving.

With each step was another spider web barrier to break down. The beam from my flashlight wrapped around jetting shadows in every direction until the edges crept up wooden wall. The long shed was built obtuse, to not uproot the surrounding pines. Heavy ash from a campfire still glowed with orange freckles.

When the earthquake trenches tore open, the evacuation route sunk into a river of sewage and shattered gas lines. My phone still blinks red with the emergency alert. Cars and buildings collapsed into the puckering lacerations spiraling away from the first sinkhole. Everything had stopped. A chorus of phones chimed in offices and bank queues, men and women paused their conversations to check the notifications. Then it was all gone.

On a normal day, noise from the mainland would drift across the lake like sound bleeding between apartment walls. The chill of the lake wouldn't shake from my legs, but the strange silent warmth leaking off every patch of green breathing and throbbing at the camp was a comfort. The old door wiggled in the wind. When I stepped inside, my flashlight began to fade. I smacked it against the ball of my hand and the wood panels below me shook. I got to my knees, lifted and pointed the pathetic gaze of my flashing into the hole. I saw feet.

I jumped down the ladder and the heavy boards slammed above my head. Before I could say anything to the man I'd found, my flashlight came into full power again. Maps covered the walls, thumb tacks, drawings. Tossed over the back of a desk chair like a discarded jacket, the feet dangled from a body, dead. By his sides were notebooks scribbled with the same charcoal from the walls, 'HAaRP = Hell PoRtAl'. I gagged over the milk sour seeping from him.

An aftershock howl rang. Loud as if hundreds of forest limbs were falling from every direction, so loud I cupped my hands over my ears. I reached for the television on the desk to check for a news broadcast. I pushed my head as close to the screen as I could to try and hear the reporter. Static danced over my ear and down my neck from the glass.

I couldn't read the banner on the screen, little squares and asterisk marks between letters. There came a loud crack from inside my ear, a pop. From behind me a whisper, as if the dead man had his dry lips pressed to my open ear. *It is open, thank you.* I fell back from the television into a wall of paper, and the ground began to vibrate again.

## *Transit*

by Zakary Ostrowski

Those others,  
my fellow transients

held the stare of sleep  
and want of a few

hours. Aboard this public  
limo, I ignored my

for this business and  
how their demand for

risers and night owls clearly  
did not account for

Sight upon sight passing by  
the glass, to me it looks

One great painting stretching  
by, barred from me:

I and others aboard a shared  
prison escort, forcing

to our own prisons of our own  
making, designed without a

The old man behind  
coughed, followed by a

and wet sneeze,  
across the back of my

Right now, I thought:  
Dead, I'd rather

also

more

hate

early

me.

Beautiful.

Freedom.

us

key.

powerful

head.

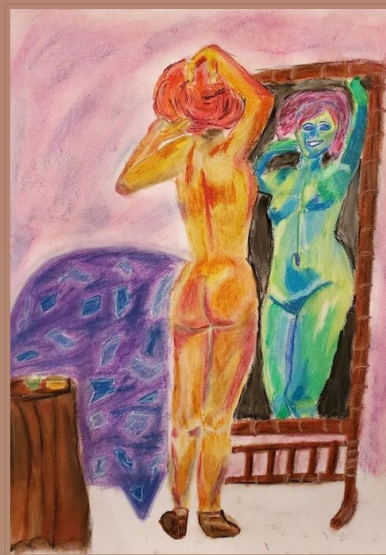
be.

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Zakary Ostrowski is currently a student at Pasadena City College who is awaiting transfer in the fall. He likes to write, though nothing in particular, he just simply writes. Typically, what he does write takes on a ton of dark-humor, generally taking on the form of a short story, though occasionally poems come up here and there. The oldest thing he remembers writing was a limerick in the sixth grade about a man falling into a well and smashing his head into the bricks below. His middle school English teacher confronted him about why he would write this, to which he responded: "Cause its funny".

## *Reflection* - oil pastel on paper

by Andrea Vazquez



Andrea is currently a Pasadena City College student majoring in Graphic Design transferring to CSUN this fall to receive a BA in Graphic Design. She not only enjoys designing but also enjoys fashion, photography, and music. She says, "Our faith doesn't determine who we are, we create ourselves."

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## *Ponche All Winter Long*

by Gemma Castro

I'm ready to drink something sweet and comforting. I'm freezing after all and anyone who knows me knows I hate the cold. I need a break from my room. Even though it's just me in there, it can get very hectic. Probably because it's just me in there.

Anyway, I'm here standing in front of the stove in our cramped little kitchen. There's hardly any counter space to put down the large spoon after I've dipped into the pot to taste the ponche. *Not ready yet. Not hot enough!* I settle for what I can find and set the spoon down on the vacant divider on the stove. Ahh, I can't wait to feel the warm sweet drink swim through my cold body. Ponche feels like an internal hug. A hug from one of the greatest gifts of mother earth, fruit.

My mom asked me to pick some guyabas from the tree in the backyard earlier today, and now they are in that delicious steaming pot. I think my favorite thing in there is the sugar cane. I dip the large spoon in the pot to feel around for it. I bring it up to the surface and admire it for a bit then let it float down, satisfied.

I guess I'll just stand here until it's hot enough to pour into the largest mug we own. Regardless of the size I know I will be back in the kitchen shortly for a refill.

I can hear an old western playing from the family room -- my mom making commentary on the film, my dad's silence. The sound of the hot iron touching the buttons on my dad's factory uniform as my mom multitasks, watching the movie and ironing, always ironing.

This is my favorite part of the winter, enjoying the sweet and tart hot juice trickle through my body. There are dishes in the sink. My brothers, Tomas and Egbert, have been coming in and out of the kitchen all day to restock on my mom's pork tamales.

I finally serve my cup after almost burning my finger from touching the ready to serve pot. I scurry back to my room and sit at my desk to watch a Chinese film. I love the way the drink makes my room smell. I have on leggings under my sweats and a sweater under my oversized cardigan.

I spend the night in my room, clicking between more trailers, Tumblr pages, and listening to Fiona Apple. Crying in pockets here and there. Imagining all the exciting things I'll be doing as a grown-up on a Friday night but, for now I am not a grown-up.

I'm in tenth grade, home on a Friday night. My parents don't let me sleepover places or let me out late at night but, I don't mind. I got over that in middle school. Aside from that, there are so many great movies online and Tumblr pages to scroll through - way more interesting than hanging out with other teenagers from my high school could ever be. Plus I've tried that before and I didn't really like it.

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Gemma Castro is a musician, writer, and artist born in Long Beach, California. She is a first generation Mexican woman and currently hosts a monthly radio show "Primera Generación" on Dublab radio. In her own work, Gemma explores the idea of representation, identity, and femininity. Gemma has studied cinema at Pasadena City College since 2019. She decided to enlist in the Summer Writer's Academy after discovering the PCC English department and has treasured the opportunity to learn more about herself through writing. This fall she will be completing her occupational certificate in film production and working toward transferring to an art school outside of California.

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Inscape, formerly "Pipes of Pan," Vols. 1-29, is published online and in print by the English Department at Pasadena City College. It appears in the Spring and Fall of each year and serves as a learning opportunity for students. PCC students serve as the magazine's staff, reviewing submissions, communicating with authors, marketing the magazine, and deciding the layout. All PCC students and affiliates are invited to submit their writing, art, and photography to the magazine. Submission guidelines, online issues, and information regarding this year's staff are available on the website at [pccinscape.com](http://pccinscape.com). Copyright 2021 by Inscape, English Division, Pasadena City College, Pasadena, California. Please note that the student content reflected here does not reflect the opinions of Pasadena City College or the editors of PCC Inscape magazine. All rights revert to authors after printing. Please visit [pccinscape.com](http://pccinscape.com) to purchase a physical copy.

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