

# EMBARK



# Enter a world so dreamlike. ♦

Welcome to De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde! In these challenging times, **EMBARK** will walk you through re-envisioning your Benildean identity and its essence beyond the corners of academic learning. This edition features various stories, insights, and guides that will help you widen your perspectives and find your place as a member of this institution.

Re-envision your stories as the new chapter of your life begins.



## About the Cover

A year since the online classes began, our world shrunk to the dim blue light of our computer screens. Our world grew detached from the physical one—our truths too. The interweb, a habitat for both the most ethereal and gruesome creatures, became an extension of our digital self, then—our physical version too. As we journey to this foreign land, we map out the world based on the limited perceptions we are offered. Will these limitations be the void to a limitless world or a trap to an inescapable phantom?

Art by: Bernice Arcangel

**EMBARK** is an annual publication of **Ad Astra**, the sole student organization tasked to produce **AD ASTRA**, the official yearbook of De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde.

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# Editor's Note

Dreams are not unique to the human mind. Studies show a vast population of fauna experience this phenomenon too. Yet, how are human dreams different from other species? Do these dreams make us unique?

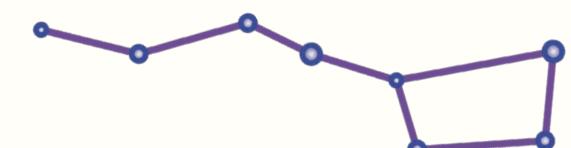
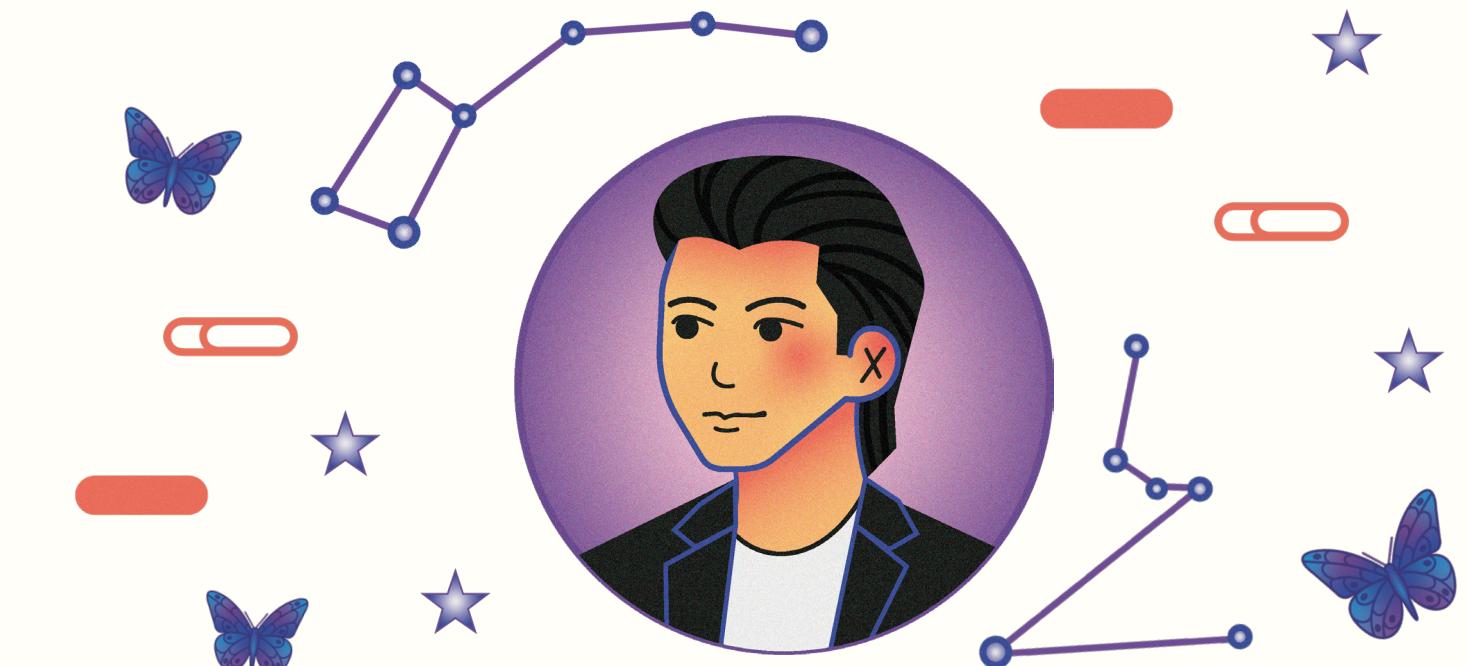
Many suggest dreams are manifestations of our real-world desires. Some say dreams are lives we have yet to discover. Whichever belief you subscribe to, it is apparent how these dreams, among other facets of our individuality, influence how we navigate our lives. Dreams, good or bad, resonate from the moment we wake up to the final hour of our day as we prepare to once again fall asleep—an ouroboros. In most instances, we are unable to recall these visions, yet their whispered echoes tremble our spirit.

Dreams are artforms in themselves too, may it be a Duchamp, a Bacon, or a Ruben, they stimulate a sense of familiarity or unfamiliarity unique to each dream—to each experience. A simulation we shape ourselves and manifest to our physical world. Dreams bring both comfort and disturbance, and as we grow familiar with one or the other, we grow numb, detached, senseless.

Transitioning from this stagnant of a life to the next, Ad Astra hopes for you to not only dream as you sleep—but as you are awake too. A person's death does not come after their last breath, but after they have given up to live out their dreams, so don't just dream—live!

**GRANT**  
Editor in Chief  
Ad Astra

Artwork by SASHA DACLITAN



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## Message from Br. Dodo

### Welcome Dear Benildeans!

Today you start a fresh chapter in De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde. Here, you are set to discover your gifts, your capabilities and the various roles you could play. EMBARK will be one of your guides in navigating the different aspects of Benilde.

As members of the Benildean Community, we are committed to build a just and humane society through inclusive and innovative education. With inclusion and innovation in our DNA, we respond to the challenges brought by these trying times through reimagining what extraordinary Benildean experience could be.

Saint Brother Benilde Romancon is known for doing ordinary things extraordinarily well. As we navigate the developments in the new normal, I hope that you get to discover and explore many opportunities and roles that you can play extraordinarily well in your various groups, organizations and our Community. May you understand and imbibe the Lasallian Values and the Benildean Expressions of these values as you develop your characters.

I encourage you, dear Benildeans, to converse and collaborate with all members of our Community, and engage in various activities virtually and hopefully face-to-face in the future.

Remember, that as you begin to develop your own story in this chapter, you are also writing and building the history of Benilde.

May the story that you experience in Benilde end with forever, as you live out our Lasallian prayer: "I will continue oh my God to do all things for the love of you." Live Jesus in our hearts, forever.

**“**  
May the Animo  
live in you!

**BR. EDMUNDO FERNANDEZ FSC**  
President  
De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde

Artwork by SACHA MANCERA



# A Sacred Space For The Ever Yearning

by GRANT and MARGE ROBANG  
Artwork by JAMES LACANLALE

Touch some grass

—they said.

Yet how can I when we closed our doors to the world?  
Yet how can I when the nation is at war with itself?  
Yet how can I when the walls of my room continue to engulf every breath I pause?

Zoom

—I scroll my feed as I go.

Zoom

—I comment the words I refuse to speak.

Zoom

—I react the emotions I refuse to feel.

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Two years

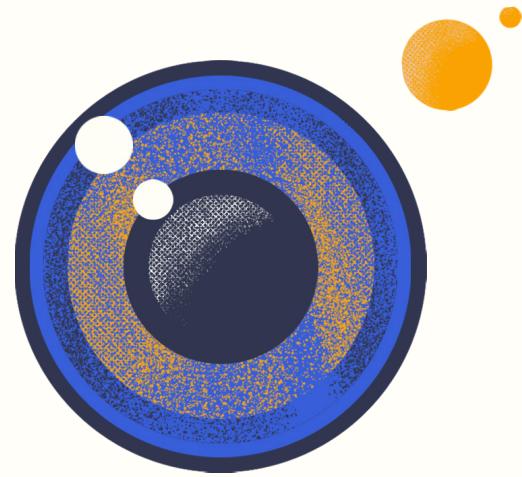
Two years

Or so it felt like two years

I fear the faces I once knew sink into the sand.

I fear the bodies I once yearn melt to a sea of frozen tears.

I fear the touch I once craved leaves the marks of my sunburnt skin.



Zoom

—I snap an image of a story to tell.

Zoom —A gif of my ever unstable mental state.

And so my world collapses.  
A breath as I know it isn't mine at all.  
A borrowed life from who knows who.

And so I pause.

I lay my body cold—  
I began to dream.

An attempt I took with a vapid heart.  
For what more do I have?

Zoom

—A cup of tea to put my soul to rest.

A dream.

A thing of the many things I can and cannot control.

Whispering—

Trembling—

An echo chamber of secrets I cannot put to rest.

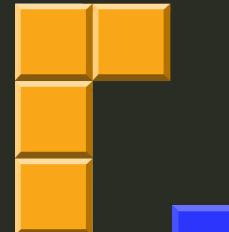
A dream.

Whispers of the universe I cannot refuse but hear.

But they are mine.

My dreams.

Forever mine—and mine alone.



# Out of the Reverie

by RIZIA GUICO and KIAN QUINTANA

Artwork by LAYNE YAP

It's a peaceful sunny morning, but the city noise dominates. Cars are swerving and jeepneys are honking. The train is grumbling along with the chattering students who are waiting to cross the road. You stand in front of a building, iced coffee in one hand. The water is trickling down the cup alongside the trickling of your sweat. The train station and the establishments around the building conceal its facade but it screams green and white, "De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde" in big green serif letters inviting you to come inside.

You look at the people, with bags hanging over their one shoulder, coming through the green gate—the portal to the world of inclusivity, innovation, competence, and creativity. The people in front of you, wearing black formal attires, placing their bags inside a machine devouring the bags, and depositing them on the other side of an arc beeping when you pass through it. They proceed by tapping a small rectangular card on another piece of machinery and pushing against a rotating baton-shaped metal. You follow what they're doing, a dance everyone seems to have mastered. Still holding your iced coffee, you enter the building.

The first sound greeting you is the soft chatter of people. They're speaking in hushed voices, afraid they might wake something. Your eyes land on the tables and chairs—strategically aligned to mimic the tables in a library. People

in preppy clothes, with their hair slicked and laptops in front of them, occupying the said area. You look straight ahead and see a miniature size of a cargo ship container filled with clothes and other goods—goods that represent the building. Green and white.

You move your head to your right and see a long hallway leading you to who knows where? You look to your left and recognize a stairwell. You go upstairs and find yourself facing a quadrangle occupied with mini-houses resembling huts. The noise here is louder—people talk and laugh, and glass doors screech as they close and open. The familiar ascending and descending tune that you've repeatedly heard in malls can also be heard from a distance. You slowly step forward towards the gazebo-like structures and the open sky greets you with its blinding white lights that make you squint. You look upward and realize, four long hallways enclose the quadrangle you're in. The building is rectangular, and you're in the middle of it, open for everyone from the upper floors to see.

You begin to wander the bewildering halls. You find a corner shelf with a stack of magazines. The pattern the spines are forming is mesmerizing. You pick one magazine from the stack. "BARKEM." The intriguing title captivates you with its regal illustrations. You scan the pages of the magazine, and a rush of enthusiasm envelops you. "I'll read this later in

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You follow what they're doing, a dance everyone seems to have mastered.

my free time," you quietly mutter to yourself and place it inside your bag. Clueless about where you want to go next, you find yourself going in circles. Not until a bellowing and heart-pounding beat shake you out of reverie. It's so loud; it should've caught everyone's attention, but you look around and nobody seems to notice. The high-energy sound is still prevailing. The shouting is muffled—it's obvious it's coming from the upper floors. You follow the "dum-dum-dum"—a beat you're certain is coming from a bass drum.

As you climb the flight of stairs, the rhythmic beat sounds become nearer and the shouting clearer—"Animo Benilde!" it bellows. Panting from taking two stairs at a time, you arrive at a gymnasium. The floor is wooden, and the wall is cream-colored. There's a group of people at the far end of the gymnasium wearing green and white. There are people vehemently hitting the bass drum and people being tossed into the air. Holding strips of green and white papers, they scream in unison once again, "Animo Benilde!" Although the deep pounding agitates your guts, it gives you a warm feeling—a sense of identity. "Animo Benilde," you mutter to yourself.

Thinking about where to go next, you find yourself looking for something that will lead you downstairs. One flight of stairs and you're facing a dim hallway. Chills go down your spine but you continue walking until you see an old-looking elevator. It suddenly opens—ready to swallow you. You go inside. The doors gradually close and the dim hallway is the last picture you



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One by one, creatures appear. These terrifying creatures crawl from the floor, to the walls, and up to the ceiling.

eyes capture. The faint elevator light begins to flicker while your heart starts to race. The elevator rattles as it descends. Rattle. Rattle. Rattle. Various noises make their way to your ears as the elevator's rattle prevails. There's the honking of cars, the shouting of kids, the beeping of a machine, the ear-splitting noise of a jackhammer, and the creaking of a glass door. It's so complex and muffled you can only decipher bits of it. Suddenly, everything goes silent. Your gut continues to feel weird as the elevator succumbs to gravity. The last jolting almost made you stumble. The elevator doors open and a glaring light welcomes you. It took several seconds before your eyes adjusted.

"What is this place?" you ask yourself. A bizarre big building now stands before you. It reminds you of an enlarged printer. It's like you entered a different dimension. You take a step towards the building and your feet lead you to yet another set of elevators. There's a long line of people waiting but the line is at standstill. To your right, you glimpse at the stairs. You walk past the sea of people who are up-to-date with the latest trends—outfit, accessories, makeup, hairstyle, and hair color.

You leave the line and choose to use the stairs. Again. The stairs lead you to the low-ceiling second floor where you find yourself at a dead end with no other way to access the higher floors—it's a mezzanine. Clueless and confused, you decide to explore the mezzanine in search of the stairs that will lead you to the next floor. You follow the hallway, it leads you to a fire exit. As you reach the second floor (for real), the gray cement floors suddenly turn red. "Blood?" One by one, creatures appear. These terrifying creatures crawl from the floor to the walls and up to the ceiling. They fill the staircase until two floors up. Out of breath, you hurriedly abandon the fire exit.

You are now on the fifth floor. Various innovative structures fill the hallways. Inside the room is a group of people shaping wood into something majestic. You then come across a big theater leaving you speechless, adjacent to it is another fire exit. You make your way to the next floor. The seventh floor has a

whole new layout. There are dance studios where these big mirrors swallow you. You even have a glimpse of a recording studio. On the eighth floor, you meet some friends—mannequins in extraordinary outfits. On the 11th floor, you enter a green room. It's as if you are one of the actors of a Marvel film. You continue to explore the building. Each floor leaves you in awe—it has its own style and structure, yet the whole building has one defining characteristic—it radiates creativity. Everything is so white, a blank canvas, and artworks left and right pop up to bring it to life. Everything about the building makes you want to think outside the box.

Upon seeing a bench, fatigue slowly creeps in your body. You are now facing this huge floor-to-ceiling window. The white walls reflect the natural light entering from the huge window. It illuminates the space and uplifts your mood. The cool breeze touches your warm skin inviting you to enjoy the view of the city.

You give in and sit on the bench. The sun is beaming at you with the skies as bright as the future awaiting you. The tall skyscrapers look small from where you are and the cars pass by like busy ants on a rainy day. A piece of paper being blown away by the wind distracts you. It sways along with the wind until it meets your foot. You pick it up. It's a drawing—the same scenery you are currently enjoying. You can't help but smile. You decide to keep the drawing to remind you of this extraordinary experience. After one last breeze, you go on with your day.

You stand up, but one step in, your worn-out legs seem like they will give up any minute. You head to the elevator and join a bunch of people waiting, as expected. After three steps, you reach the front of the line. A flashing red light signals the opening of the door. Much to your dismay, the elevator is full. You see red. Instead of charging like a bull, you decide not to choose violence. Your frown turns upside down when the elevator comes back with a special space left just for you.



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## A commotion gets your attention.

One eternity later, you finally arrive at the ground floor. A happy sigh left your lips upon stepping outside but you realize you have no idea where you are. Just as you are about to take another step, a small rectangular white vehicle magically pops in front of you. Oh, how lucky! Clueless for the nth time, you hop inside anyway. The vehicle is quite spacious but nowhere near the size of a public jeepney. You decide to leave your worries and enjoy the sights instead.

Several minutes later, you are approaching another building. The architectural design is New Classical. It's rectangular, like a matchbox standing upright. It's tall but not as tall as the previous building. The structure's facade is similar to hotels with its pillars and rectangular windows strategically aligned. As you come closer and closer, the signage becomes clearer—"Hotel Benilde". But not just a hotel, it is also a place of knowledge. The vehicle drops you off and like it's your second nature, you enter.

The first thing that welcomes you is a cafeteria. "Chef's Station," the signage says. A commotion gets your attention. People in chef's and executive attires fall in line outside; you're right, another set of elevators. You wonder where these elevators will bring you. Curiosity prevails once again. You fall in line and ignore the cafeteria and your growling stomach. Minutes pass by and people are frantic. With no idea what to do, you let yourself be swayed by the people entering the elevator. You find yourself in the deepest corner of the elevator

with no ability to press any button. Sighing, you decide you'll just go to whatever floor you feel like dropping off and work your way down. "Ding!" The elevator doors open. The first thing hitting your senses is the smell of brownies. You follow the aroma and it leads you to a "Snack Bar". Sandwiches, pancakes, pasta, and your target, the brownies, are saying hello to you from the glass encasing. A smiling lady in chef's attire accommodates you. You leave the snack bar with a brownie in one hand. Marching on the eighth floor, you see a line of lecture rooms. "Wow, I thought this was a hotel?" Amazed, you find yourself in a fire exit and climb down another flight of stairs.

"7th floor," describes the signage. You open the heavy doors and a pungent smell rushes to you. This floor also has weird noises—chop, sizzle, clank, fizz, ding. Still chewing your brownie, you explore the floor. Looking to your left and right, you glance at people in chef's attire through the glass window. "Ooh, that's why," you whisper to yourself. Everyone is busy chopping, kneading, sauteing, and plating. Each room serves a purpose—for baking, for cooking, and for bartending. One room catches your attention. Unlike the others, it is elevated. More people in chef's attire take down notes and look toward the front of the elevated room where someone seems to be cooking. This building is doing wonders for you. How is it possible that a hotel can also be a school? Still munching the last piece of your brownie, you go downstairs again.

The door leading you to the sixth floor is open. A person holding a folded table cloth and candle holder comes out. Drawn once again, you enter the door. The hallway is deserted. It's quieter compared to the floor above. This particular corridor makes you feel like being in a hospital with its dim light and shiny floors. To your right is a carpeted room. It looks like it's used for formal events—a ballroom or gala too. The room is unoccupied, but you can

already imagine the sound of the soft thud of footsteps just by looking at the carpet. You look upwards above the doorway, "Halle de Reims," it says.

In front of this deserted room on your left, is a room filled with endless kitchen equipment. Pots, pans, blenders, mixers, you name it—this room can supply it. It looks like it's the most expensive room in this building. Someone inside is arranging a shelf full of shining silver bowls used for baking. Five bowls in one hand, and two on the other. Your eyes roam around the room when suddenly, an ear-splitting clatter—



a loud honking jolted you. You were standing in front of the first building, iced coffee in one hand. The water was trickling down the cup alongside the trickling of your sweat. The train station and the establishments around the building conceal its facade and it screams green and white. "De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde" in big green serif letters that seem to invite you to come inside. You looked at your watch, then left a sigh. "Soon..." you whispered to yourself while looking at the green gate. With a heavy yet hopeful heart, you walked away.

# Work Table Set-up Check!

by RIZIA GUICO  
Artwork by GIAN SAN PEDRO

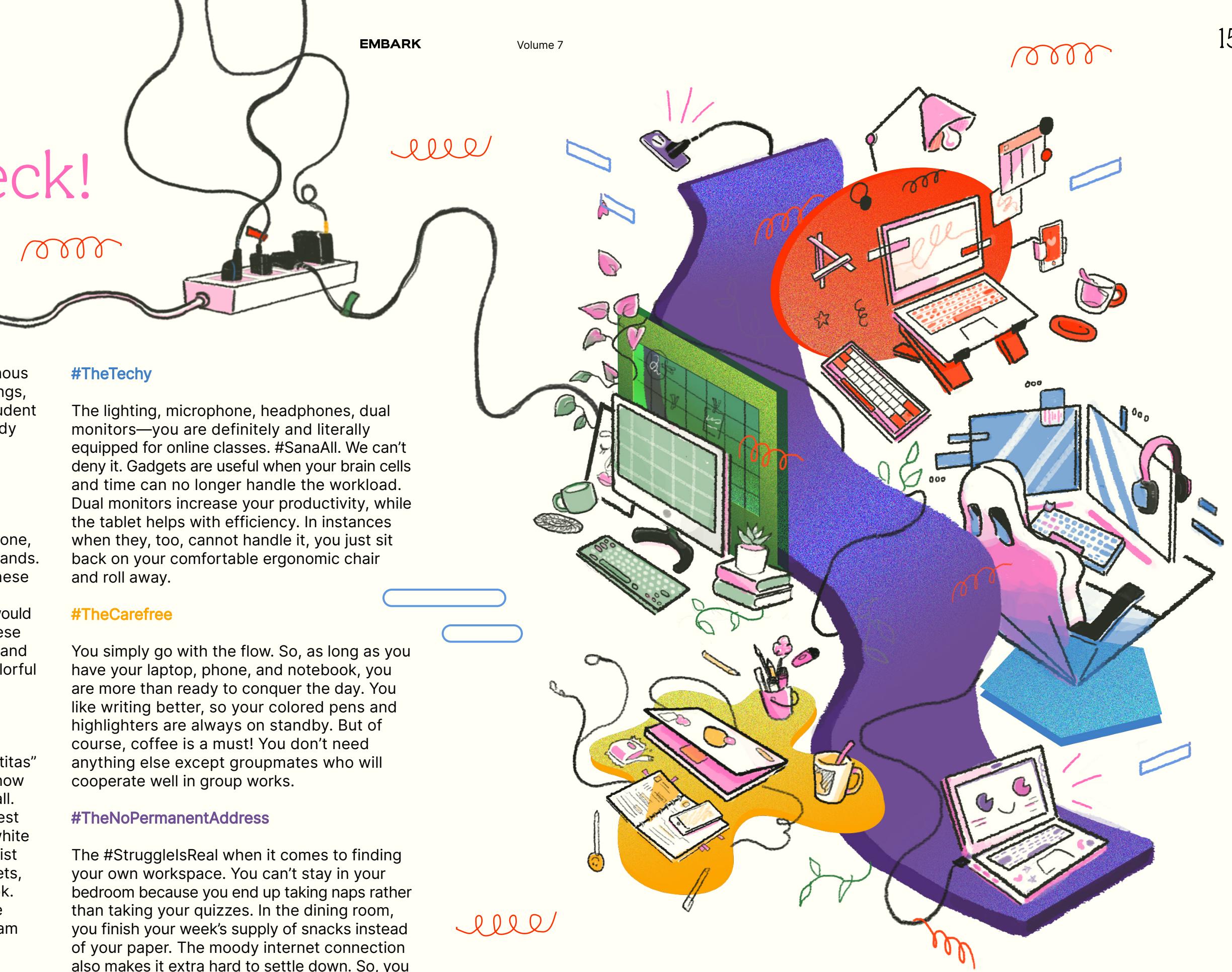
Fourteen weeks of nine hours of synchronous classes and indefinite hours of org meetings, there is a definite need to spice up our student lives. From our simple study table and study lamp set-up, how far has your work table set-up come?

## #TheShopeefied

You were content with your laptop and phone, until you heard about laptop and phone stands. The next thing you know, you're buying these stands, along with a wireless mechanical keyboard, stationery, and more things we would no longer specify. But hey, no regrets! These simple accessories boost your efficiency, and the mechanical keyboard's sounds and colorful lights bring unique joy.

## #ThePamimalist

Are you one of those "plantitos" and "plantitas" born during quarantine? Then, you know how good green plants look against a white wall. To achieve this vision, you came to Pinterest for advice. And the end result, you have white walls, a white Scandinavian table, minimalist white accessories, a touch of rattan baskets, and of course, plants to complete the look. The sight is just so clean and easy on the eye—just the environment you need to cram your module.



So, which work table set-up are you?

# Allegory of the Interweb

by GRANT and MARGE ROBANG  
Artwork by MIKA BONUEL

“

Comfort is the easiest drug to get addicted to and the hardest one to attain sobriety from.

Living through the pandemic provided the human population two different realities: the physical landscape where one interacts with tangible beings and the virtual realm where one coexists with the pixels on their screens. With people adapting to the new virtual world, their physical and virtual identities intertwine and disconnect in juxtapose. However, as the world enters a new period of transition, the population is now forced to reintegrate into physical society. With this, how should one face the escape on the allegory of the interweb?

With 10 to 14 hours of an individual's day set in front of a computer screen, their perspective of the world is limited to the light the computer emits and the frame bounding the very pixels creating the images they perceive. They exist in a virtual world of conventional opinion where people accept what they are shown—a passive observation and inheritance. As one curates the media they consume, the interactions they conduct, and the online relationships they build, they become attached to the ease the internet provides. Yet as these media, both in written and in visual form, are tailored by those who produce them, they become a mere shadow of the “thing” itself. The “thing” it hoped to capture and the physical “thing” it hoped to translate to the digital world. As the population consumes these filtered “things,” their perception of reality has tampered. In retrospect, Plato would phrase this lost in translation as: humans are only able to perceive mirages of the true. And as humans grew to the new world, they succumbed to the comfort of these phantoms.

Yet how can we blame these people?

Even in a period of true horror and despair, they were forced to stare at their computer screens to be a productive member of society. To function. To contribute. To survive.

To live to a standard set by who knows who. They became accustomed to the ease of the internet, as to what options do they have? During these difficult times, it was the easy choice. However, these familiarities repercussed laments on the human mind. Facing the murky-bright screen of a computer shifted one's prerogative and ideals. They opted to grow in silence, in the dark, and in their own space—neglecting human nature—the desire for commune.

Forced to be trapped in this state of selected reality, the population was robbed of their youth, time, freedom, and enlightenment. The shift transformed one's physical entity to mere data floating in the virtual cloud. As these numbers intertwine in mid-air, the lives these people live were reduced to numerical figures utilized for business and commerce. **To live one's youth died of age. To course through time was set to alarms. To rage for freedom was written in under 280 characters. And to search for enlightenment was forgotten.** With these facets of one's life dumped into chaos—is there a way out?

## Chapter I. Tailoring a routine.

The opportunity of tailoring a routine enabled the population opportunities to curate a workspace fit for their commitments. The shift could be clearly seen in individuals with disabilities who were previously forced to conform to a workspace where their physical limitations were not thought of. While working in a remote setup, individuals in the autism spectrum can showcase their capabilities as they are not forced and stifled by the very nature of social interaction. In addition, individuals who are wheelchair-bound are also able to well-navigate their tailored workspace in comparison to the ones constructed for the abled. With this, people in the workforce who were then limited by their very environment can demonstrate their skill set without the restrictions of the physical workspace set-up.

Those who successfully adapted to this lifestyle consequently sequestered themselves into what Plato would liken to prisoners trapped in their cave of shadows. A place of fabricated reality wherein how and what they perceive of the world is through viewing pixelated photographs and videos through the dim light of their smartphones and computers. They started to confine themselves in the digital world, where their

grasp of reality, of which they once so intimately knew—is altered. In a study and experiment conducted by the World Wide Web Foundation, Facebook, a prominent social media site, heavily curates and presents its users' content based on an algorithm that reads how a user interacts with a post, not the circle of pages they like and follow. Even in circumstances when two users follow the same pages and simultaneously browse the platform on their respective profiles, nearly half of one user's algorithm-generated content would be excluded from another user's timeline and vice versa. Hence, people's perception of "things" outside their figurative cave is limited to what they are shown on their screens and what appears through their curated feeds when they browse on social media sites. In this manner, their perception is at times, unknowingly, altered and confined within their limited reality composed of algorithm-generated news and information.

#### **Chapter II. Setting up the mise-en-scène.**

For the past year, the majority invested their time and finances in constructing a workspace fit to the lifestyle they were forced to live. As they reintegrate into physical society and public spaces, will they be able to function without this tailored fit set-up?

Laptop stands. Mechanical keyboards. Bluetooth mouse. Ergonomic chairs. These are only a few pieces of equipment spreading all over one's social media page. A trend where one navigates different workspace set-ups curated for the self.

In an article by Emily Courtney in flexjobs, they detailed the value of having a customized workspace set-up at home. In the article, the writer enumerates a variety of positive impacts the pandemic brought to the working class. The highlights of the writer's selection are: less commute stress, location independence, improved inclusivity, increased productivity and performance, and positive environmental impact.

**“Bedrooms became offices and study tables became workspaces—an unplanned transition the population was forced to overcome.**

overlooked, making online interactions something the workforce desire for a successful online working environment.

Pandemic professionals now grew comfortable in their customized workspaces and rejected the idea of the traditional desk job. With this, the corporate world is faced with a dilemma. In a recent survey conducted by LiveCareer USA, it was found that 81% of the workforce enjoyed their work at home set-up, 61% would rather continue their remote work, and 29%, if not given the option to work from home, would quit their job. As these individuals were forced to be flexible, there's no point in sailing back to the traditional

method and dumping all the skills they were obliged to learn for the past year.

Courtney discussed how working from home led the workforce not to traverse an impeding commute route and end up producing more carbon footprint. The workforce had also freed themselves with the innate stress of a commute. The writer also emphasized the location independence and inclusivity of the work from home set-up. Individuals who live in rural areas can now access opportunities in urban areas to which were not accessible prior to the pandemic.

People with disabilities can now work in the comfort of their own homes without the stress of a workplace landscape not tailored for them. The writer expounded on the effects of the lack of office politics on a person's productivity and performance. Emily discussed how physical separation provided the workforce to better prioritize their interactions with their colleagues, making the selected virtual collaborations to be more productive than the physical ones. It was brought up here how physical interactions were often undervalued and

#### **Chapter III. Beyond closed doors.**

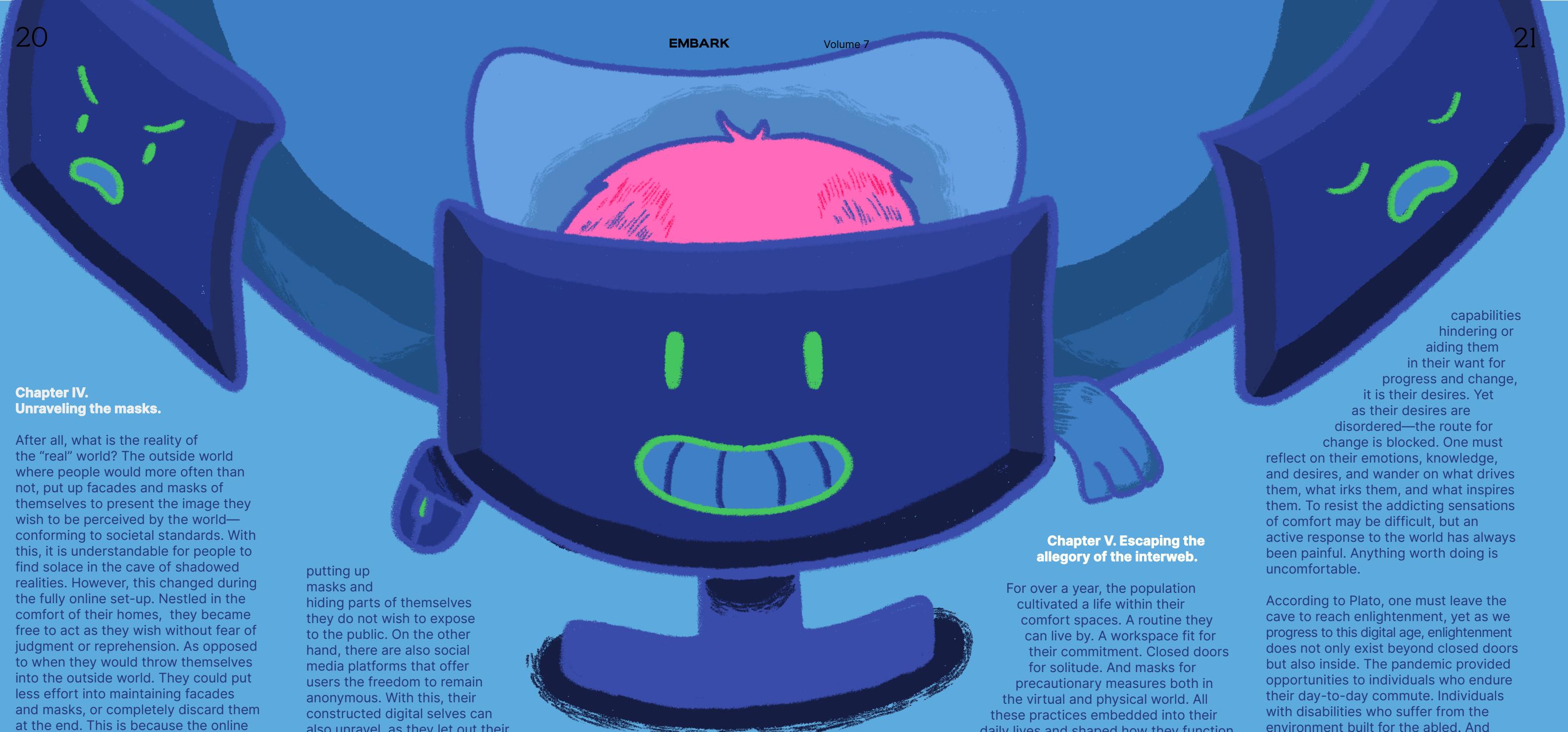
A clinical psychologist, Julie Smith, explained what a person does every day would eventually become their comfort zone. When a person is suddenly exposed to the new and the unfamiliar, whether it is their environment or the people, one may experience a spike or a sensation of stress. This is simply a human brain's survival instinct to remain alert and mindful of its surroundings. Hence, when a person ventures outside to meet people or to accomplish errands, they may experience distress.

For a long period of time, people used the interweb to vicariously experience being able to live out their lives. They would view and consume text narrations, photographs, videos of events, "things" of the events, and "things" in the outside world. Their perception of reality was altered into what they regularly saw online. In the "Allegory of the Cave," Plato posed the precept of how humans would favor seeing the shadows they perceived as being truer than the unfamiliar things they would

be shown and exposed to. Human beings tend to give in to what they perceive as reality rather than the true reality of the world around them, even when what they perceive are mere mirages of the truth. It is a natural psychological response for human beings as their brains are wired to find comfort in what is known and familiar to them for a long time, rather than what feels strange and foreign. They find solace in the comfort zones, in the phantoms, and the mirages of the real world they saw on the interweb.

But with the easing of quarantine restrictions, more and more people started venturing outside once more. Some venture out to seek physical human connections and to reunite with their loved ones. Some do so out of necessity. However, some experience difficulty in moving forward, going outside of their comfort zones, unraveling their masks, and back towards the real world.

**“As Plato postulated, humans would be stunned at what is reality after finding solace in the shadows.**



#### **Chapter IV. Unraveling the masks.**

After all, what is the reality of the “real” world? The outside world where people would more often than not, put up facades and masks of themselves to present the image they wish to be perceived by the world—conforming to societal standards. With this, it is understandable for people to find solace in the cave of shadowed realities. However, this changed during the fully online set-up. Nestled in the comfort of their homes, they became free to act as they wish without fear of judgment or reprimand. As opposed to when they would throw themselves into the outside world. They could put less effort into maintaining facades and masks, or completely discard them at the end. This is because the online set-up established a distinct boundary between the private selves and the public selves of an individual.

Unknowingly, these carefully constructed masks and facades are still put up and maintained, but through different means. Through the interweb, people can carefully construct a mask of how they would like to be perceived by the people around them in real life, especially on social media sites where they are registered with their real names and are connected to people they know. They construct their digital identities,

putting up masks and hiding parts of themselves they do not wish to expose to the public. On the other hand, there are also social media platforms that offer users the freedom to remain anonymous. With this, their constructed digital selves can also unravel, as they let out their unfiltered thoughts and opinions on these online platforms freeing them of societal judgment and peer pressure. Ironically, whether carefully curating their image online or expressing themselves freely behind a wall of anonymity, they remain trapped behind the masks they construct. They may alter and hide behind these digital identities, or find comfort in this anonymity.

#### **Chapter V. Escaping the allegory of the interweb.**

For over a year, the population cultivated a life within their comfort spaces. A routine they can live by. A workspace fit for their commitment. Closed doors for solitude. And masks for precautionary measures both in the virtual and physical world. All these practices embedded into their daily lives and shaped how they function as an individual and as a member of society. Yet as they grew familiar with the benefits and mileages comfort provides, they turned their backs to reality and accepted the phantoms of the real.

As the population was forced to shift their perspective, one must overcome the grip. According to Plato, human behavior is shaped by three things: emotion, knowledge, and desire. One must recalibrate the three to reenvision their preconceived ideas of the new world. It's not one's mental or physical

capabilities hindering or aiding them in their want for progress and change, it is their desires. Yet as their desires are disordered—the route for change is blocked. One must reflect on their emotions, knowledge, and desires, and wander on what drives them, what irks them, and what inspires them. To resist the addicting sensations of comfort may be difficult, but an active response to the world has always been painful. Anything worth doing is uncomfortable.

According to Plato, one must leave the cave to reach enlightenment, yet as we progress to this digital age, enlightenment does not only exist beyond closed doors but also inside. The pandemic provided opportunities to individuals who endure their day-to-day commute. Individuals with disabilities who suffer from the environment built for the abled. And individuals in the autism spectrum who are suppressed by the very nature of human interactions. Progress comes in different forms. A need to choose between the worlds is irreverent.

Nobody can be led to a state where they do not desire to go. If one does not desire progress themselves, one will not be able to attain it.

# We are No Goldfish

by RIZIA GUICO

Artwork by

GABRIELLE MABAZZA

How long is your attention span? Thirty minutes? Fifteen minutes? Five minutes?

Six years ago, we were told that our average attention span is eight seconds long, close to a goldfish's. Since then, the world has run according to our "goldfish brain". However, is it true that our attention span is that short?

## "Paying" attention

They say social media makes our attention span short because we mindlessly tap through Instagram Stories. Next, we rapidly scroll through our Facebook feeds. Then, swipe through our TikTok's For You Page without finishing a single video.

Social media did not make our attention span short. It turned attention into an important resource. As more people dive into the digital world, different social networking apps fight harder to manipulate people's attention better. This led to the creation of the "attention economy,"—

an endless fight of information versus limited attention. Instead of money, we "pay" attention to digital content. Our intangible attention became quantifiable through likes, clicks, reads, retweets, shares, and other forms of engagements.

Our attention is not becoming short, it is becoming scarce. Digital media is a vast dimension feeding us with insurmountable information,

yet we can only hold so much. As a result, we learned how to extract information more efficiently and quickly. We also began to alternate between tasks without necessarily losing focus on either one of them. We gained new skills which allowed us to redefine what attention means. Paying attention no longer meant focusing on one specific thing for a long time.



“

Our attention is not becoming short, it is becoming scarce.

So, you choose YouTube.

Then, we keep going because of the purpose. The goals we set for ourselves are our motivation to maintain our attention. You are motivated to study for your exam the next day because you want to do well. So, you study for two hours.

“

We should not be too hard on ourselves.

## Understanding attention

Forget about the length of your attention. Focus on the demands of attention instead. These are the factors that make or break our attention: interests, benefits, purpose, and distractions. Attention starts with our interests. If something piques our interest, we immediately get attracted to it. If you saw an article you are interested in, you will read the whole article even if it's a thousand words long.

We then weigh our attention with its benefits: What will I get from this? Do the pros outweigh the cons? If you are 20 minutes into a two-hour movie but nowhere near interested in the story, you stop watching. It's because you would rather watch a one-hour YouTube video you enjoyed from start to finish than watch a two-hour movie that you only appreciated halfway through.

It gets tricky when distractions come our way. Distractions do not always take away our focus. When you are focused on making notes of a lesson and an important Messenger notification appears, you check the message. You send your reply to the message, then you get back to making your notes. In this case, attention is switched from one task to another. But when distractions do take away our focus, they are only sending us a message: take a break.

To some extent, being easily distracted is unhealthy. However, distractions are normal. If they break your attention, you mend it by revisiting what you like, what you will get, and why you are doing the task. If it is still broken, this only means you must realign your interests, bring more benefits, and find the right purpose. Distractions also help us renew where we direct our attention.



An overwhelming amount of information is brought to us by the internet. It is only natural that our scarce attention can't keep up. But, we should also evaluate ourselves. In a world where attention is a valuable resource, we must spend it wisely. Do you "pay" attention to things worth paying attention to? Or do you pay attention to things that matter? Which should you value more?

# Beneath the Rippling Surface of Language

by KIAN JAZPER QUINTANA

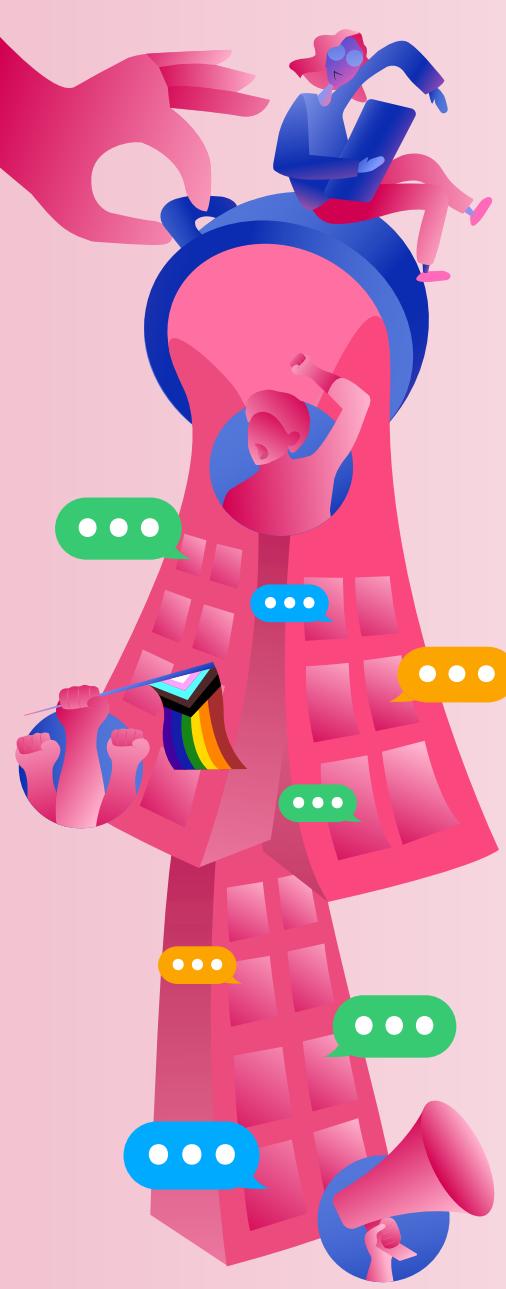
Artwork by XAM



Our familiarity with phrases such as, "spill the tea, sis," "the shade," "vibe check," and terms like "wig," "iconic," "shade," and "period" is apparent as these slangs are sprawled in the media we consume. However, the media's presentation of these terms does not reveal its roots. Beneath the vibrant facade of the African American Vernacular English or AAVE, there is a fundamental theme that is worth discussing.

Let's spill the tea, sis.

African American Vernacular English or AAVE is a dialect with orderly, coherent, and rule-bound grammar that is often used by African-Americans. Historically, Africans were displaced from their homelands, brought into concentration camps, and were forced to work. With this migration, the Africans brought their rich culture with them, including their language. Decades later, AAVE's origin is still debated with two major hypotheses: Anglicist and Creole.



According to the Anglicist Hypothesis, for the enslaved Africans to communicate with their enslavers, they had to adapt and speak their enslavers' language. On the other hand, the Creole Hypothesis suggests that AAVE is a creole language born out of two different languages. Because there's a need for the enslaved Africans to communicate, they developed a Pidgin—a simplified language used for communication between people with different languages. This pidgin is a mix of the English language and the African language.

Over the years, AAVE evolved together with the LGBTQIA+ community. Words such as, "Yas queen," "the shade," "werk," and "sickening," grazed everyone's ears, thanks to popular TV shows such as RuPaul's Drag Race and Pose, and cult classic films such as Paris is Burning and Pink Flamingos. What is common between these shows is the representation of drag culture that started in Harlem, a neighborhood in New York

City, with a demographic that is dominated by Black individuals. The 1920s, dubbed as the Harlem Renaissance, was an important time for Black individuals and the LGBTQIA+ culture. Their colorful literature, art, and music undoubtedly reshaped the community's cultural, intellectual, and artistic movement. Numerous forms of drag also originated from drag queens of color. This pivotal movement paved way for a new language that shattered social structures and established intersectionality between sex, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

Clearly, attached to the AAVE is a fundamental theme. Both groups of people went through unethical and inhumane treatments and language is a

central part of it. Black people were deemed uneducated and illiterate just by speaking a language a part of their roots, and the LGBTQIA+ community was perpetually abused and denied access to privileges. The tea is, Black individuals and members of the LGBTQIA+ community have always been marginalized and disdained. Their cultures and the way they live were viewed as unprofessional, vulgar, and irreverent. White supremacy and heteronormativity prevail. Black and LGBTQIA+ individuals are always pinned to be the target of supremacism.

Language is used as a weapon for discrimination but we almost don't pay attention to it. The same rings true with oppression. Both evolve and interrelate since

the beginning of time. The only difference is, language is undergoing an upgrade as time goes by whilst oppression persists.

“

**Oppression inflicts fear, trauma, and deprivation, and intensely shakes humanity**

As long as there is racism, oppression, discrimination and violence, hatred, and prejudice, language will also continue to breathe, evolve, and strive. And these evolved languages will not just be a splinter of the past—they'll be part of the future as well.



# Art or Publicity?

by GRANT  
Artwork by AIMEE ROLLORATA

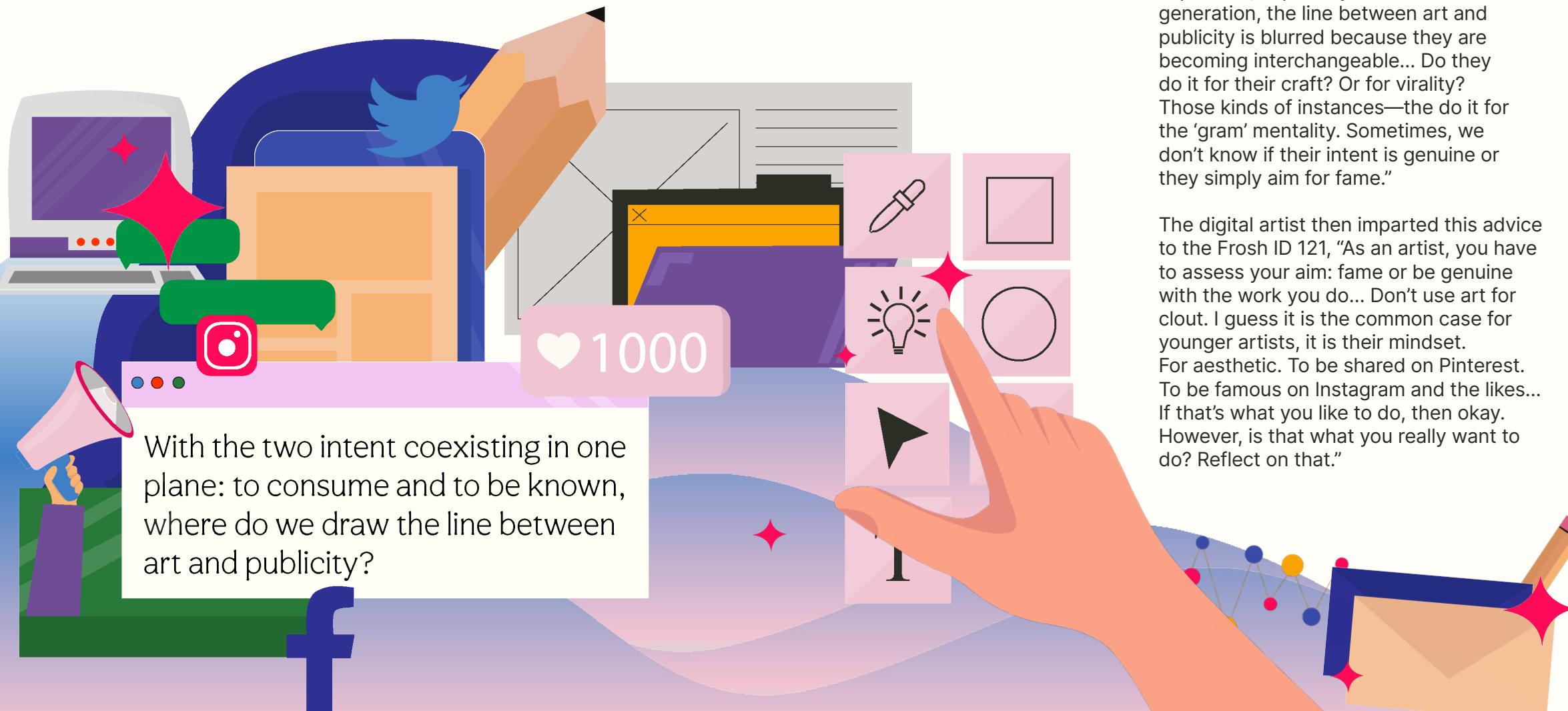
De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde (DLS-CSB) is known for cultivating and honing the talents of aspiring and budding Filipino artists. Moreover, Benildean artists develop their craft beyond the elaborate rooms of the institution. Along with this independent practice, Benildeans delved into distributing their works online and widening their reach beyond their familial community.

As art, similar to most industries, transpires to the digital sphere, the audience and the artists' connection expands into wider horizons. With the ease of modern art distribution and consumption, the disconnect between artists and consumers blurs.

To begin the conversation, Ad Astra's Editor in Chief opened the discussion to Benildean artists

who practice different mediums of art inside and outside the College. The conversation revolved around the contemporary definition of art and publicity and how these definitions directly influence both the consumers and producers inside the industry. As the conversation deepened, the artists began to unearth different facets of their practice affected with the ease of modern art distribution: the burnout culture, the attention and digital economy, different social media algorithms, and fame.

Benildean artists of different backgrounds discussed their experience both in the physical and virtual creative space and shared their insights and pieces of advice to incoming Benildean ID 121.



Floresse "Pis" Trinidad | ID 118 - ABMMA  
Digital Artist  
asap.piso on Instagram

Floresse "Pis" Trinidad, ID 118 - ABMMA, is a digital artist known for their eccentric body of work. Pis defines her body of work as vulgar and the antithesis of minimalism. They practice illustrations, graphic design, and video and photo production. Pis recently collaborated with OXGN as a stylist.

In discussing the definition of publicity, Pis shared, "I think publicity is how you market yourself as an artist. It is how you present yourself to everyone, to your audience... For some people, as long as you are getting recognized and seen feels enough." Pis then discussed her perspective on the relationship of art and publicity, "I think they [art and publicity] should be separated, especially now. In our generation, the line between art and publicity is blurred because they are becoming interchangeable... Do they do it for their craft? Or for virality? Those kinds of instances—the do it for the 'gram' mentality. Sometimes, we don't know if their intent is genuine or they simply aim for fame."

The digital artist then imparted this advice to the Frosh ID 121, "As an artist, you have to assess your aim: fame or be genuine with the work you do... Don't use art for clout. I guess it is the common case for younger artists, it is their mindset. For aesthetic. To be shared on Pinterest. To be famous on Instagram and the likes... If that's what you like to do, then okay. However, is that what you really want to do? Reflect on that."

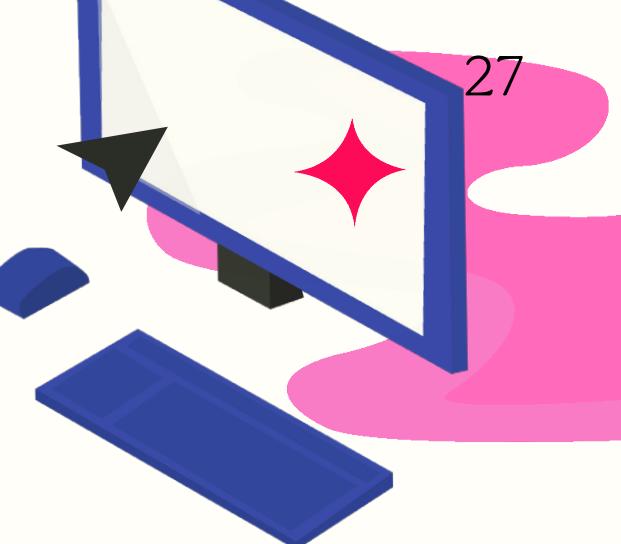


Rexel "Rex" Bartolome | ID 118 - ABMMA  
Concept Artist  
rexelbartolome.carrd.co

Rexel "Rex" Bartolome, ID 118 - ABMMA, is a concept artist whose main mediums are 2D and 3D digital art. Rex describes his works as dark, gritty, grotesque, and his reinterpretation of the popular genre "urban hell". Beyond his academics, Rex is an instructor to aspiring creatives who want to pursue a career in 2D or 3D digital art.

To begin discussing his perspective on the matter, the concept artist differentiated art and publicity, "Art is anything with the capacity to have beauty or the lack thereof... I'm attracted to works that exude grotesque, grit—I find beauty there even though beauty is not the right word." Moreover, the concept artist defined publicity as "I view it like clout. I think that's more of a shallow or superficial term, but I also view it as an influence which is something I kind of strive towards."

Rex highlights the importance of both entities, he then imparts pieces of advice on how artists and consumers alike should navigate the discussion, "I think they [art and publicity] will [coexist]. Sometimes we just don't have a choice. They will [coexist] no matter how hard you think that they should or should not. However, for me, it's not about 'should they coexist' but, more of, we need to make artists learn how to wield this kind of power properly."





**Leslie Tortal** | ID 119 - ABMMA  
Digital Artist  
lestorts on Twitter

Leslie Tortal, ID 119 - ABMMA, is a digital artist and student-activist who utilizes her platform to voice out discussions of importance and urgency. Tortal considers herself as a “cultural worker” who continues to cultivate and help shape the Filipino culture through the work she practices.

Tortal began with defining art and publicity, “Art is powerful and influential. Art is powerful because it can serve the interest of the artist and comfort the artist as well. Art can also serve the interest of the ruling class or those who have businesses, and art can also be for the masses. Similar to art, publicity is also powerful because good or bad publicity is still publicity. Publicity is a strategic approach we use to widen [our] audiences.”

To conclude her statement, Tortal discussed the impacts of the attention economy to the artists and left pieces of advice to fellow creatives, “During this time when publicity is accessible and there is so much ease in publishing artworks; it is easy to introduce oneself on the internet, it is important for an artist to step down and rest.

“

It's okay to take a break, not be a slave to the algorithm, and be drowned with the simple joys the interactions and engagements provide.”



**Erick “EJ” Gagui** | ID 119 - ABDFILM  
Filmmaker

Erick “EJ” Gagui, ID 118 - ABDFILM, is a regional filmmaker from Pampanga. Known for their unique perspective on rural life, EJ continues to garner recognition from different award-giving bodies both in the international and local filmmaking scene. Beyond directing his own works, EJ collaborates with other filmmakers as a film producer. EJ values collaboration not only in filmmaking but in art in general. For the filmmaker, art is supposed to be a shared experience between the artist and other artists whose body of work they respect and value.

In discussing the interplay between art and publicity, the filmmaker shared, “At this time, publicity is more on sharing. Before, for me, publicity was more on boasting your work, it is a negative word. But now, as our community exists on social media, I think publicity is one of the most important aspects of our lives now. People exist through publicity now, since publicity is about sharing your work, who you are, what you do, and the likes. As art defines life and publicity attracts many audiences; I think they should coexist because it can help society in somewhat like a call to action and spread awareness.”

EJ imparted these pieces of advice to the incoming Frosh ID 121, “My advice is for them to help each other. It helped me a lot that I do films not only for myself but I also make films by supporting others even those outside Benilde. Artists should not just make art on their own. Join a collective. Make a collective of artists and support each other.”



**Beatrice “Bea” Quirante** | ID 118 - ABREM  
Writer  
Editor in Chief - Benildean Press Corps A.Y. 2020-2021

Beatrice “Bea” Quirante, ID 118 - ABREM, is Benildean Press Corps’ Editor in Chief for P.Y. 2020-2021. Aside from leading the publication, Bea produced different written content for the publication: editorials, features, news, and sports articles. Quirante continues to utilize her platform in exploring and publishing stories both inside and outside the Benildean community.

In defining art and publicity, Bea expounded “Art in general for me is the embodiment of stories of the artist and [their] society.” On the other hand, “Publicity is the availability of the material to be seen in public. It is also a means for the artist to be more exposed to [their] audience.”

“Art is not done for publicity’s sake. I think every artist has a purpose for making [their] art. I think the purpose is just fulfilled by publicity since usually these artists, or we as an artist, have this goal for our work to be known by our audience, to be seen by the audience, to be read. I write this because I want others to read it. I write this because I want others to know,” BPC’s Editor in Chief details the interplay between art and publicity.

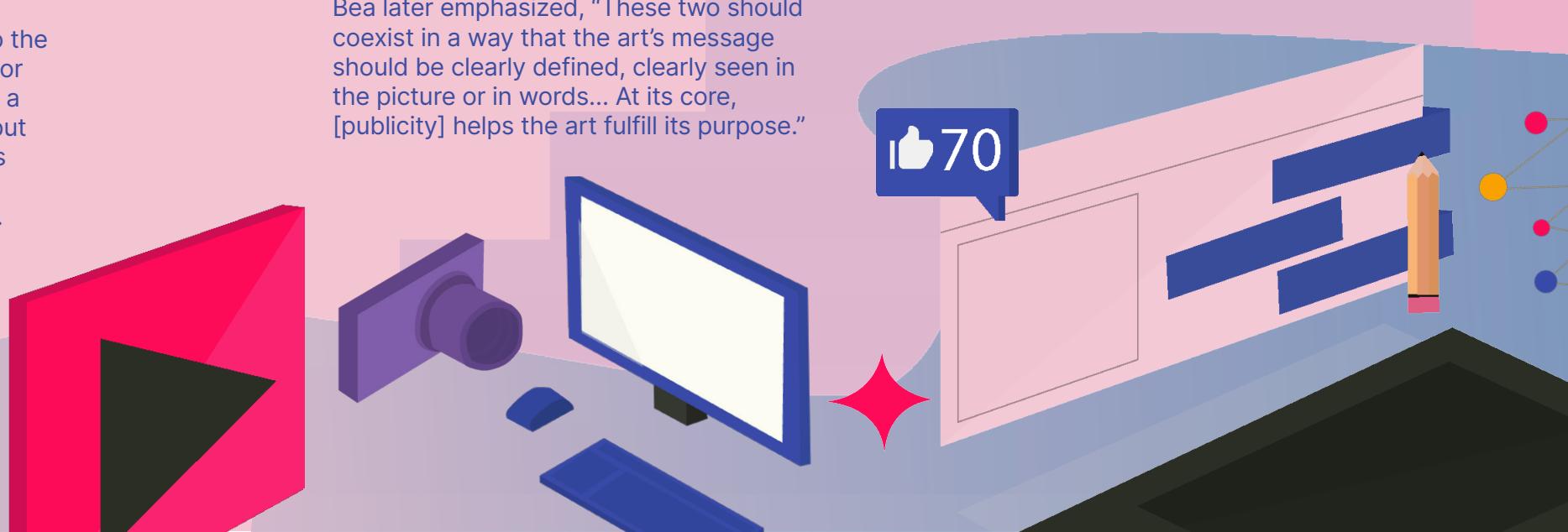
Bea later emphasized, “These two should coexist in a way that the art’s message should be clearly defined, clearly seen in the picture or in words... At its core, [publicity] helps the art fulfill its purpose.”

“

At its core, [publicity] helps the art fulfill its purpose.”

An artist’s intent for years past was considered to be the core identity of their work. However, as we continue to explore the different facets of this digital economy, the push and pull between art and publicity remain to be prominent. Once a piece of work is published to the public, the artist will no longer be able to control how the audience will read and respond to their work. Their intent is lost, their message too, and these are only a few of the repercussions marked by this mode of distribution. With the internet expanding to be a space of virtual freedom, it is of value for the virtual community to construct and cultivate interweb etiquettes benefitting not only the algorithm but also those who rely on the very system. Engagements are fleeting and fickle and once one relies on them—their work remains futile.

To view the full-length discussion go to Ad Astra’s official Facebook page, [fb.com/theadastra](https://www.facebook.com/theadastra).



# In This Battlefield, Where Do You Stand?

by YEN ESTIGOY  
Artwork by ABBY TAMAYO

There are many advocacies circling around at a growing number, and more than just knowing them, are we doing something about them?

## The Battlefield

When the pandemic hit, we've been grappling with issues emerging from this global concern. But the pandemic, in reality, is only one from a multitude of battles around the world. The presence of an issue is nothing near a rarity, so why did many of us open our eyes just now?

There are countless concerns from all around the globe that call for our attention as much as this does. People are beginning to set their hearts on a mission, on advocacies they find themselves passionately willing to fight for. Some have chosen to support the frontliners by making sure they have time to rest and food to eat. While some have

chosen to support the jobless by providing relief goods and encouraging their re-employment.

**“**  
**This caring concept remains unyielding in a time of crisis and has moved our sight to others beyond ourselves.**

Perhaps, it was the opportune window of realization and awareness, the “pause” in our normal lives, allowing us to rethink the way we live. Many have already begun the fight, and many are still choosing their battlefield, but what matters most—is the move.

EMBARK

Volume 7

## Health and Access to Care

The gravity of COVID-19 certainly led us to practice extra caution and care for our health, but even so, not everyone is granted that privilege. Even before this global health concern, accessibility to healthcare is an absent case in some parts of the world. With reasons of either being in remote locations unreached by medical attention, being in a community with no healthcare budget, or simply being rejected with discrimination.

This pandemic has further heightened this absence. While the demand and need are high, the expectations to be met are dwindling over time as we run out of medical equipment. Thus, people are even more so advocating for responsible living in this threat-thriving situation and rapid dissemination of healthcare opportunities especially to the unfortunate parts of the world.

## Hate Speech and Discrimination

Discrimination against certain groups of people rose this past year. Some of the most targeted groups are the LGBTQIA+ community, the Black community, and the Asian community. This targeted hate has

fueled feuds and misunderstandings, rather than the most sought-for understanding. This has become a major factor in the decline of mental health—how a verbal attack can cause self-loathing, trauma, and anxiety. In the fight against this, campaigns such as “Love Yourself,” “No Bullying,” and “Freedom of Expression” rose to discourage hate speech and encourage openness.

## Animal Life

Adoration for animals seemingly looks like the winning side when you consider a lot of people's perceptions of pets. However, there are some industries that do not hold the same value for these animals. In the fashion and makeup industry, animals are still utilized for the testing of products and physically used for the production of the products themselves. Certain clothing brands use skins and furs, while makeup brands use them for testing. This turned from a horrendous trend with secrets unbeknownst to its consumers into a battle the very same consumers are advocating for. Currently, with the rising advocates and boycotts against companies using this method, more brands shifted to an animal cruelty-free approach.





People who fought against child labor advocated for free education and boycotted companies who execute such malpractice. Individuals who fought against violence chose kindness over war.

#### The Weapon

**“**Regardless of how you were called, and to whatever called you, the world needs you.

But more than knowing these battlegrounds, the bigger question is: are you willing to wield your weapon? In pursuit to make this world a better place, we have weapons. Individuals who fought against plastic pollution opted to use metal and wooden utilities as an alternative for its sustainability.

**“**Where's your battlefield and what's the weapon you will wield?



# Zoom Escaped

Written by Lee Ann Austria  
Illustrated by Gabrielle Mabazza





# Reframing The Terror Gaze

by LEE ANN AUSTRIA & YEN ESTIGOY  
Artwork by EARL MATTHEW PEREZ

For once in a student's life, one professor marks an undeniable influence. That professor who makes us shiver with the infamous flashcards, whose voice makes our hearts pound, and the footsteps that scream sophistication and fear—terror professors.

Theirs are the faces we visualize in our nightmares. But, what are we really terrorized about? Is it the way they set strict deadlines or the way they straightforwardly criticize a student's work?

## Ms. Luz Palacios

School of Diplomacy and Governance

**Are you aware of how some of your students perceive you as their professor? How do you feel about it?**

They can call me anything they want to call me

### How do you think your teaching method benefitted the students?

Being serious as a professor, demanding that they study—it's because I want students to develop a work ethic and to realize when there is no pain, there is no gain. I'd like them to develop their work ethic of working hard, trying to attain their goals—their goals are to be successful in the profession, to be good citizens, to serve their country. I mean that's the ultimate goal of a teacher, I think—to mold students to be the best that they can be so that they can serve their country.

**“**To them, a teacher who is demanding, exacting, and serious; they easily label as a terror.

### Do you have any messages for your incoming Frosh students?

They really have to learn to bear in mind that they are in college because it's a preparation for life. They should not take their studies just lightly because in life, there is no such thing as free lunch. You always have to give a lot of yourself—work hard and develop your character because ultimately ultimately that is what is expected of you by your school and by your country. Education is a continuing process that we should never stop leaving.

### Jag Garcia

School of Design and Arts

### What is your teaching style?

[My teaching style] is very anchored in two things: one is real-world, the reality. My goal being, to hopefully be understood that the whole thing is: one, not as easy as you think, and two, actually not as hard as you think if you compare it to the whole real world. The second aspect that I want to anchor my lectures in, my teaching, are principles. How things work and why things work—it's not about a theory, but if I do a theory, then I relate it to how that does work and what it really means in the real world.

### Can you share with us what are the moments when you feel proud and accomplished about your students' achievements?

I think if you would say memorable, I had a student, probably more than a decade ago. This guy, he's listening in class, and then suddenly—I almost stopped my lecture there 'cause I saw the look in his eyes, and you literally could hear the click. It's probably one of the first times as a teacher when he actually got me. To see that kind of impact, to see that kind of stroke of brilliance in the classroom. He was hit by lightning, heavens opened up, and basically even the answers to the questions of the universe. It was like that—and I was like, "Damn, it makes sense, what I'm saying. It made sense to someone, it's not just garbage and a theory that somebody said in a book somewhere."

### Is there anything you want your students or future students to understand? Do you have any messages for your incoming Frosh students?

I want my students to know that what is out there is not really about classroom knowledge. It's not. It never is. You're never unprepared; you can totally be unprepared but nobody knows that, you keep it all inside—and you manage that. It's about being maneuverable, it's being adaptable, it's being ready for [what] the world will offer because the world is crap. If you go into the world with only pops and roses, unicorns and rainbows, you're in for a very very rude awakening.

It's not about the deadlines or the harsh truth. Most times, it's their perspective and their expertise.

As we age and gain worldly experience, we slowly realize that we judged them too soon. These professors, who make the future seem terrifying, should not be simply seen as terrors. It's time to look at it as it is: a window opened for us to experience realistic possibilities. After all, fearing challenges means fearing growth.



# About Ad Astra

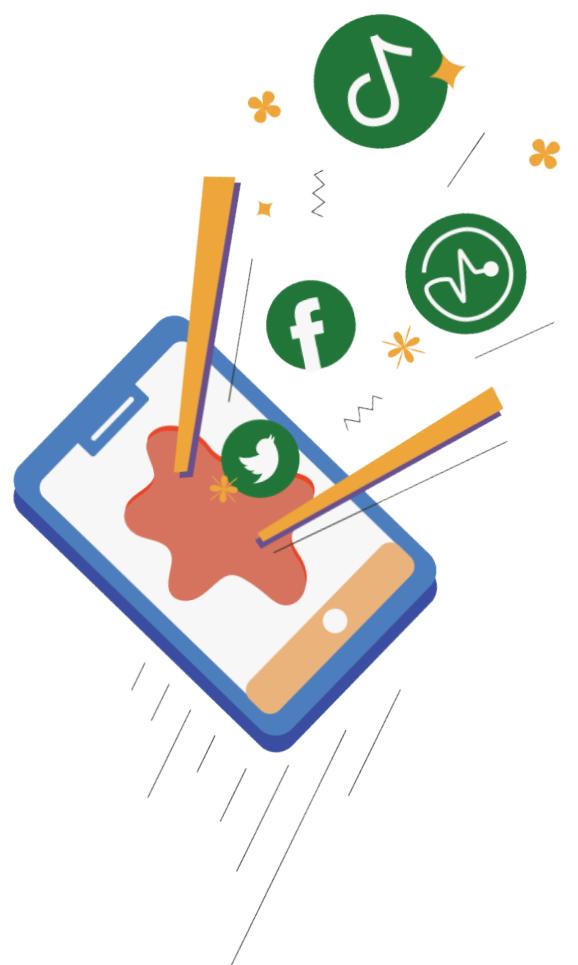
**Ad Astra** annually publishes **EMBARK**, the College's official and only Frosh publication, and Benilde's official yearbook, **AD ASTRA**. With its mandate to capture Benildean stories, this media organization keeps the students' journey alive in more ways than one.



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## EMBARK 7

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