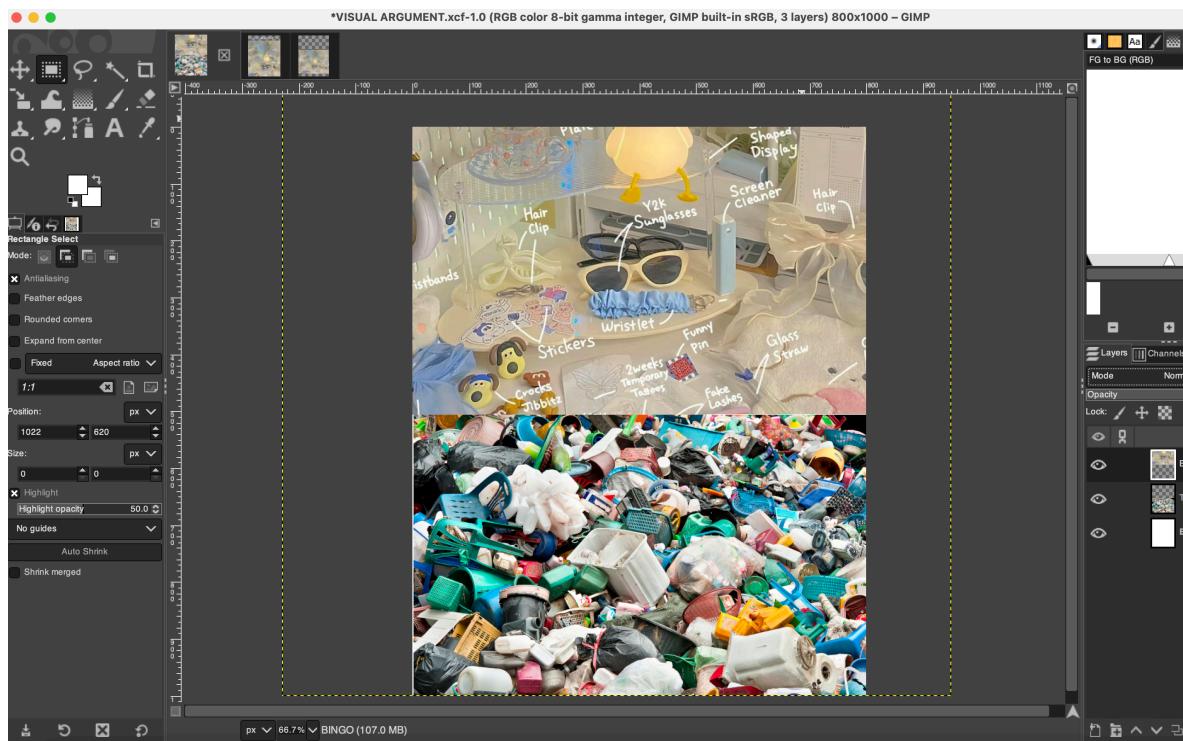
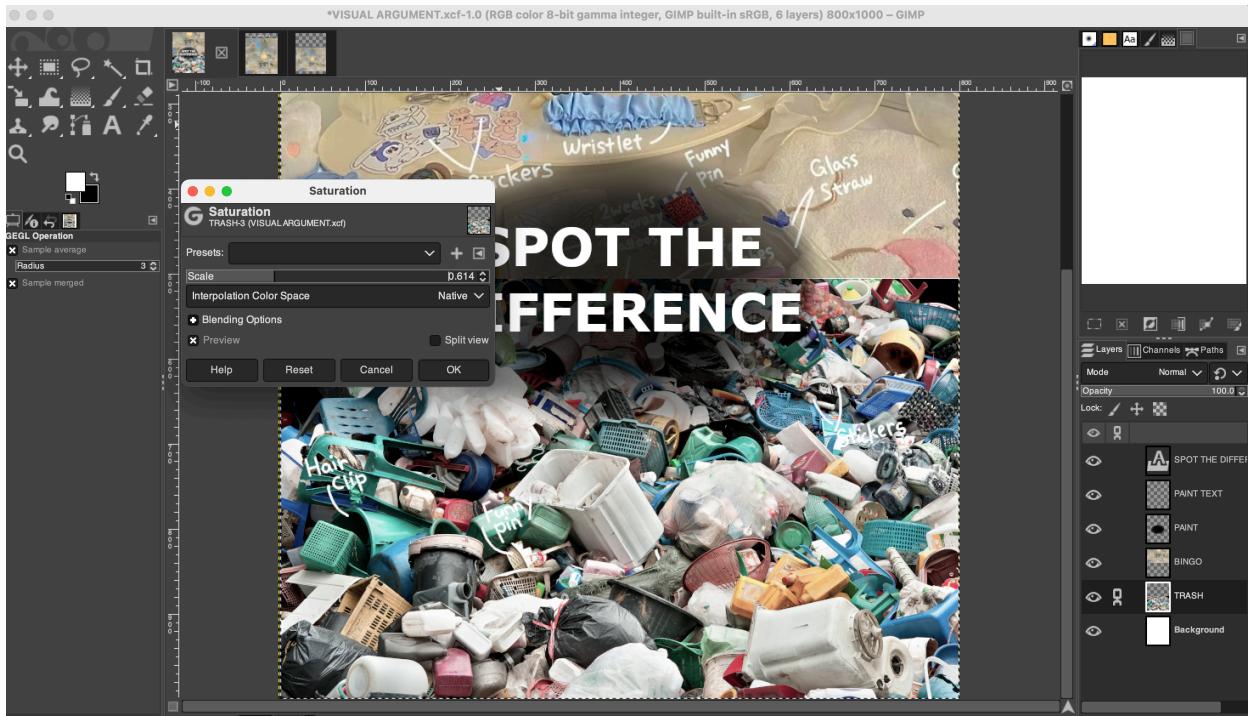


“The Real Costs of Consumer Culture” is a Visual Argument meant to draw attention to the many negative environmental and societal effects of overconsumption in the current age. In the modern digital age, we are constantly presented with ads for incredibly cheap products from companies like Temu, Shein, and TikTok Shop. Not only are these products unethically sourced through inhumane labor practices, they inevitably end up in the garbage, creating an excess of waste in landfills that harms the environment through greenhouse gas emissions, groundwater contamination, habitat destruction, and many other detrimental effects. This piece aims to draw a stark contrast between the luxe, hyper-aestheticized conception of the consumer lifestyle and the real, dirty and damaging results of participating in such.

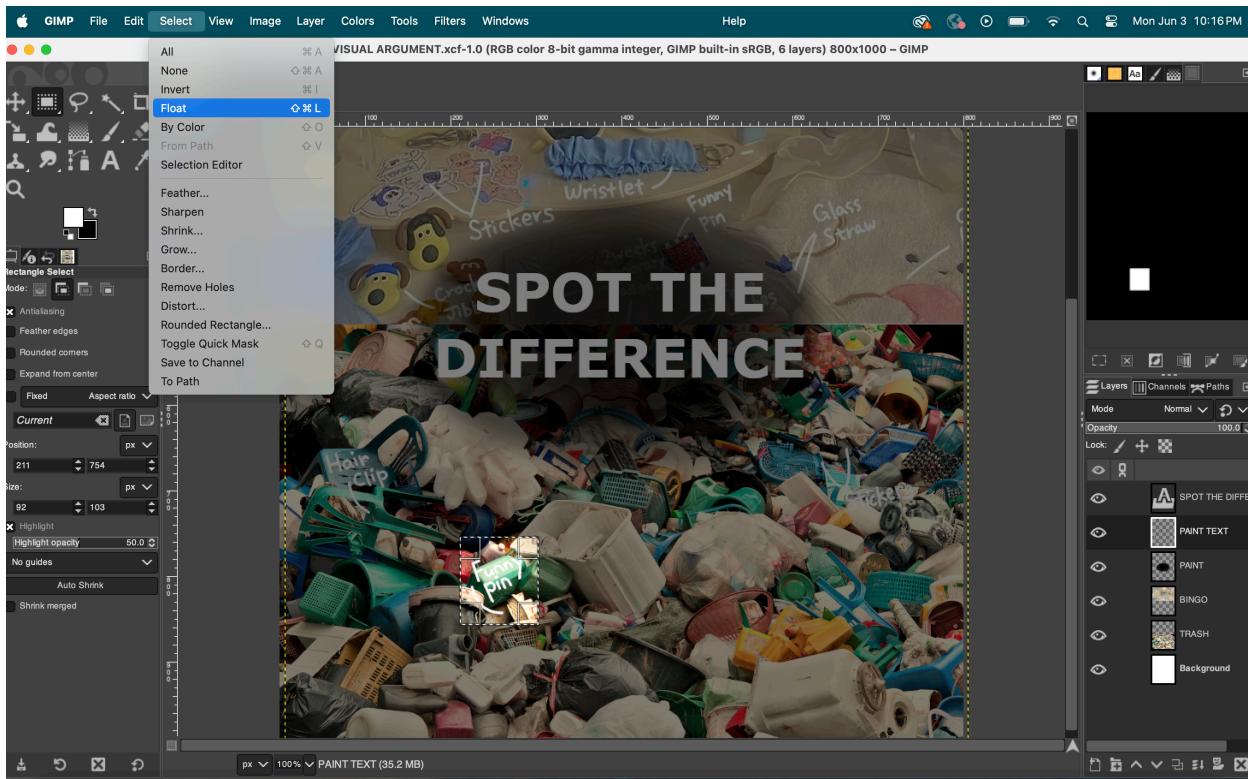
Creating this piece was quite the challenge for me, as I have never worked with Gimp before. I spent many hours researching and watching tutorials to figure out how to complete the most basic movements in the software. I learned mostly from trial and error, trying out tools and hoping for the best. When the results weren’t what I intended, I started over.



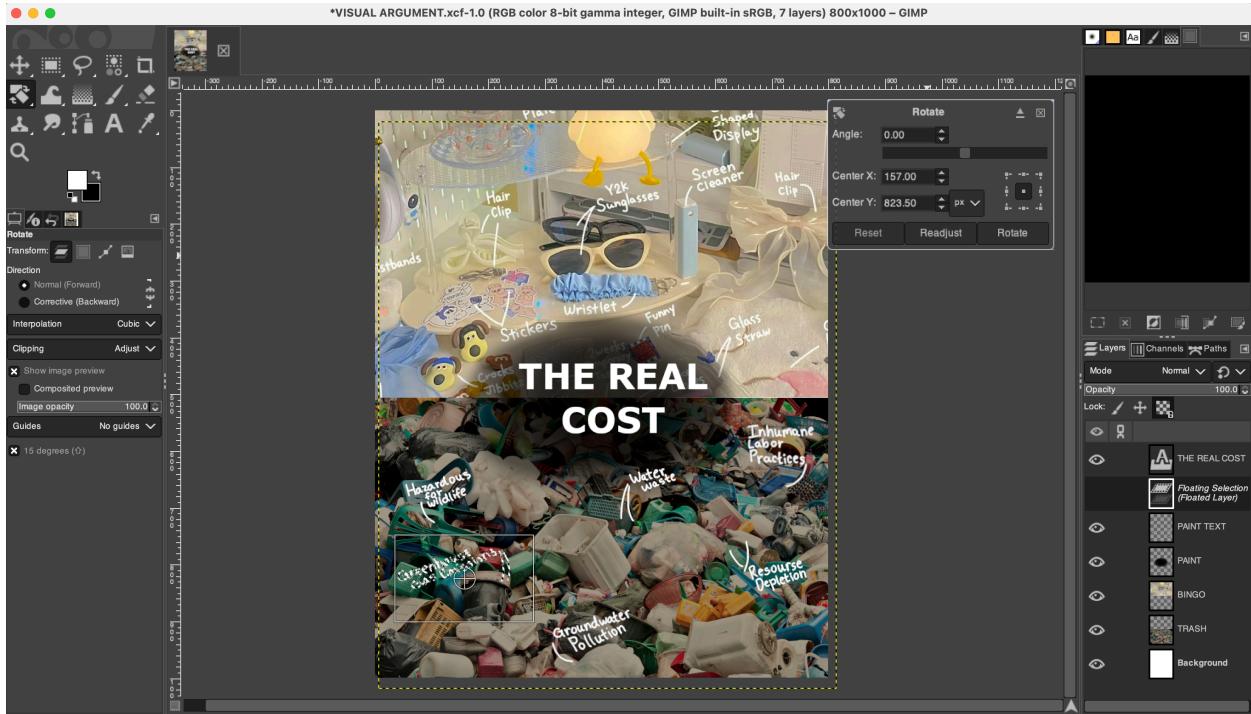
Pictured above is an early sample of my project. Here, I had to figure out how to get two images on the page while keeping them in separate layers for later editing. The intention here is a stark contrast between the “cute” aesthetic of a Temu haul and a landfill, where these products will eventually end up.



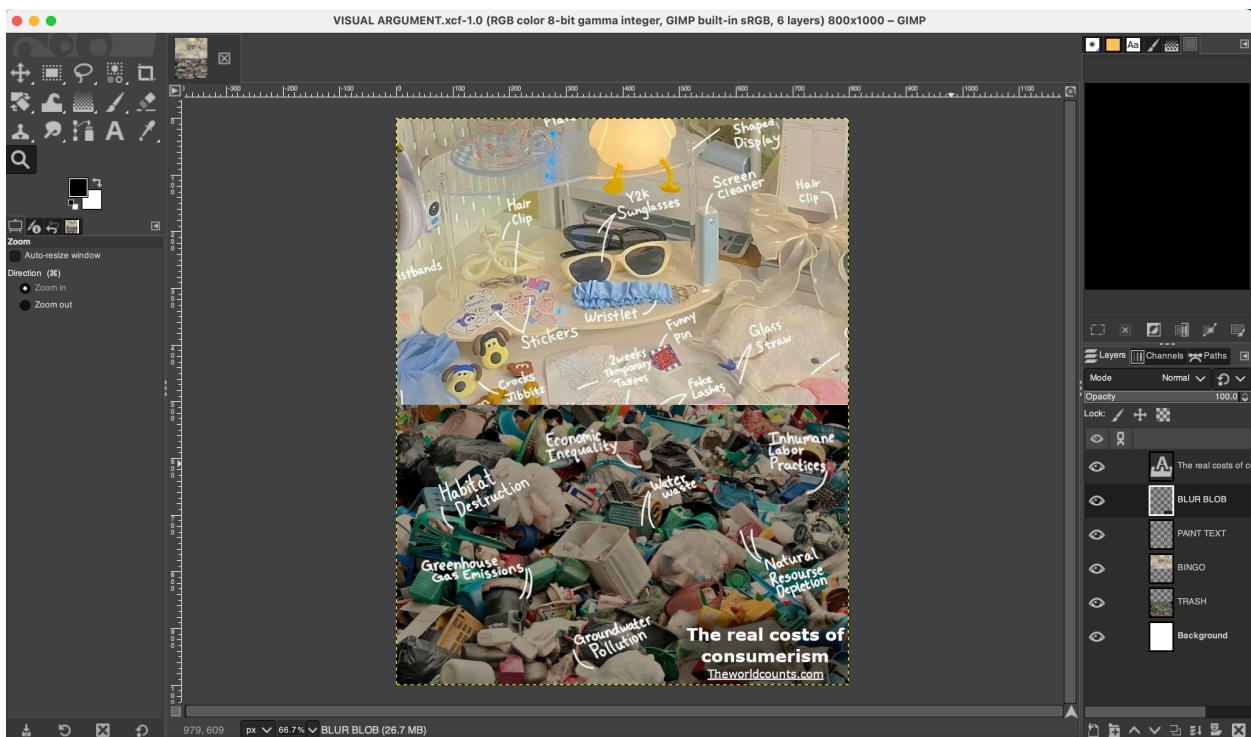
Shown here is where I decided to edit the color balance of the two images to make them more cohesive. While I wanted a stark contrast, the difference in the color palettes between the pictures was a bit too visually jarring. To remedy this, I edited the saturation and hue of the bottom image to be closer to that of the top. I also added in a slight vignette to give more of a dirty, ominous look to the piece. This screenshot also shows the original center text of the piece. I used the paint tool to make the text stand out. I wound up changing the text a few times before scrapping the center text idea altogether for a more cohesive look that better got my point across.



I ran into trouble after I used the paint tool to draw in words on the bottom image, emulating the style of the text in the top image. The words were unclear, falling into the colors of the background. Here, I became acquainted with the hardness and opacity settings of the paint tool, as well as the “floating selection” tool, which allowed me to freely move individual aspects of the layer. This was the most challenging part of the project, which took much research and trial and error to remedy.



After repositioning the bottom text and using the hardness and opacity paint tools to make it easier to read, I decided to edit the text to be more impactful. Instead of the names of the products, I decided to use the same cute, written-text style of the top image to write in some of the most prevalent negative effects of the cycle of consumption. I feel like this choice made a huge difference in the impact of my piece, adding in a level of sarcastic humor while also highlighting the issues I meant to address.



The final steps of completing my project included me renaming the piece and repositioning the center text. The original center text looked sloppy, and it wasn't giving the effect I wanted it to. I repositioned the new text to the bottom right corner, using a the paint tool to create a soft black background to make it stand out. The text chosen is short and to the point, in a PSA-style position with the URL to a website that goes in-depth about the negative effects of overconsumption. This choice is more visually pleasing, and urges viewers to look into the problem outside of just my visual argument.