

ink

VOLUME 9 | ISSUE 2

IN THIS ISSUE

UNPLUG

CONFRONTING OTHERNESS

CLUB KIDS

DAZEASES





SPRING 2017

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Kelly Reyes

COPY EDITOR

Sarah Thaw

ART DIRECTOR

Alyssa Michener

SENIOR FASHION EDITOR

Cierra Artis

JUNIOR FASHION EDITOR

Will Singleton

FASHION EDITOR AT LARGE

Kristina Dickey

SENIOR CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Allison Oberlin

JUNIOR CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Dina Alemu

FASHION COPY EDITOR

Moriah Briscoe

HEAD ILLUSTRATOR

Alissa Pivaral

CONTRIBUTORS

Celeste Fuentes

Francis Stephens

Julia Block

Kadeem Morris

Mary Alice Patsalosavvis

Leah Dickshinski

Jessica Frenzel

Lizz Bruce

Jon Cope

Katie Williams

Kristena Shaw

Ellen Charlwood

Aaron Ni'jai

COVER + BACK COVER

Francis Stephens

INSIDE COVER

Marissa Alper

DESIGNERS

Desiree Choe

Sarah Butler

Rachel Lee

Ashley Moody

Eric Ngo

AD STAFF

Abigail Keatinge

Kirsten Havser

Cristian Castiglia

STUDENT MEDIA DIRECTOR

Allison Bennett Dyche

CREATIVE MEDIA MANAGER

Mark Jeffries

SMC BUSINESS MANAGER

Jacob McFadden

ASST BUSINESS MANAGER

Mikaela Reinard

Ink Magazine and the
Student Media Center Offices

817 W. Broad St.
P.O. Box 842010
Richmond, Va. 23284
Phone: (804) 828-1058

Ink magazine is a student publication,
published quarterly with the support
of the Student Media Center.

To advertise with Ink, please contact
our Advertising representatives at
inkmagazineads@vcustudentmedia.com

Material in this publication may not
be reproduced in any form without
written permission from the
VCU Student Media Center.

All content copyright © 2016
by VCU Student Media Center. All rights reserved.

Printed locally

TWITTER

[InkMagazineVCU](#)

INSTAGRAM

[Ink_Magazine](#)

YOUTUBE

[Ink Magazine VCU](#)

FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/vcu.ink

WEBSITE

www.inkmagazinevcu.com

EMAIL

inkmagazine.vcu@gmail.com

contents

04
08
10
18
24
26
32

Confronting otherness
Model standard
In my closet
Club kids
Designer spotlight
No mind left behind
DAZEASES

Word on the Street
For eyes and ears
I'm not a "Tortured Artist"
Nikelus F.
Get this look
Unplug
Hygge

38
44
46
50
68
74
76





EDITOR'S NOTE

Kelly Reyes
Editor-in-Chief

Technically, this is a goodbye.
Keyword: technically.

Goodbyes are overwhelming. They are your last words to someone, so you better make them count. The thing is, I don't want to say to say goodbye, because I don't plan on these being my last words to you. This is more of an "I'll see you around," because you will— as part of the community. My work here in Richmond is not finished, however, it is time for me to move to the next chapter and pass INK along to the next generation of unimaginably brilliant editors. They will continue to hold the publication to the standard we've built for ourselves, that standard being our role as a catalyst of thought.

If I would have to name one thing that I'm most appreciative of in my last two and a half years with INK, it is hands down the multi-various ideas and concepts I was exposed to. The opportunity to learn from those I interviewed and from those I have worked with, made it so that the lens I view the world through is indefinitely curious. Curious, in the sense of my need to know more about others and the subcultures they frequent. I am constantly learning— learning to inform not just myself, but anyone within my reach. I'm not alone in this passionate curiosity, my fellow

editors and I strive to provide this for our audience day in and day out, but we took it a step further this time around.

The human psyche is intangible. You may not be able to see or touch it, but it is omnipresent— we all feel it. The psyche is described as the mind or soul of a person, the center of our existence. Our relationships and experiences shape who we are, essentially. They shape the way in which our psyche interacts with the world, defining our human experience. Our contrasting backgrounds make for an infinite amount of stories and relationships that we may be apart of, or witness.

The kaleidoscope of souls we live amongst is the reason counter cultures exist— they're the stories behind various art practices, the sustenance that our human experience craves. Allured by the abstract nature of the psyche, my staff and I sought out the unearthed stories within our community, pulling from the experiences of others to put together an issue to provoke— provoke emotion, thought and empathy.

With that, I'll say, "see you around"— and thank you, for giving me this fragment of my life that will leave a mark on my own kaleidoscopic reality.



EDITOR'S CIERRA ARTIS

Senior Fashion Editor

In this issue, we tackle topics of psychological health and self-care. Last year, I tried my hardest to prioritize my health and comfort, and I feel significantly better now that I prioritize self-care.

At the end of the day, your body and mind are the only places you exist. When you begin to be mindful of how neglecting those things can affect the rest of your life, it forces you to reevaluate your priorities. That is what I would like to convey in this issue, especially through our exploration of the concept of Hygge.

“

But the conquest of the physical world is not man's only duty. He is also enjoined to conquer the great wilderness of himself.

James Baldwin

On Being Black And Malaysian

As a racially ambiguous person, I always felt like I could insert myself into many social groups and at the very least, feel little noticeable discomfort. But in every situation, I felt as though I was lacking a sense of commonality and deeper understanding with my peers.

A simple Google search about what it means to be half black and half Asian yields little more than pages about being half Asian and half white. I've never befriended anyone else like me, since opportunities to connect are few and far between. That isn't to say I can't relate to my black friends or my Asian friends— on the contrary, we talk about our families, our cultural quirks and how we grew up. But, I don't talk to my Asian friends about frying catfish at my family reunion in Dinwiddie with my pops and three dozen cousins. Nor do I talk to my black friends about joining my mom in cooking Mi Goreng and Soto Ayam. I'm still discovering how to be comfortable with my nose, my hair, my pigment and my multiculturalism. This is a lifetime journey, which is frustrating to think about at times. But the beauty of self-discovery is that victories, no matter how small, are guaranteed.

Culottes, Culottes, Culottes!

As many of my friends know, I am a self-proclaimed culottes master. There are always doubters of the culottes trend— you may in fact be one yourself. But I am sure there is a pair for every height and shape out there. There is no other pant that rivals the level of comfort and waist-shaping goodness (plus a little bit of booty emphasis if you want it), that a solid pair of culottes can offer.

Here's what to keep in mind when searching for your perfect pair: if you belong to the 5-foot-5 and under club like me, the seemingly awkward length of culottes probably freaks you out a little bit. In these cases, try to opt for shorter culottes that come below the knee or a pair that hits right at the ankle. It's about creating long visual lines, plus you can opt to show the length of your shins or the whole line of the leg.

The End Of My Zara Boycott

One of my favorite eco-friendly brands, The Reformation, is what I'd describe as “looks like Zara and feels much less guilty.” But considering the sky high price tags of their clothes, any time I have the money to buy anything, it's usually gone as soon as I go grocery shopping.

Luckily for me and everyone else, Zara has introduced a new collection called Join Life that is being marketed as “sustainable.” The content labels don't lie, and many of the garments in the collection feature contents like 100% recycled polyester and water conserving dye processes. While financially supporting fast fashion is not ideal, this is a great step in the only direction that's appropriate for the future of fashion.

CHOICE

WILL SINGLETON

Junior Fashion Editor

This spring semester marks my first as junior fashion editor under our senior fashion editor, Cierra Artis. It has been a wonderful experience working so closely with such a skilled staff in bringing INK to life. This is my fourth semester working on INK, and I have witnessed immense growth within the publication, staff and myself. I'm really excited about this issue, and hope everyone loves the magazine as much as I do.

“

Question normative thinking.



Gender Binaries

Our society lives for establishing norms and subordinating those who do not fit these discourses. For this, I've found the gender binary and sole focus of one's sexual organs in constructing gender identity to be problematic. It's odd how as soon as a person is born, they are forced into playing the role of what their gender is supposed to be based on their private parts. Due to this automatic categorization, there are many people who struggle and have to deal with identity issues later in life as they find themselves. Therefore, the binary is just a way of distributing power to some and revoking it from others who do not fit the standards enforced in our society.

The gender social construct also limits expression through fashion. However, I choose to disprove this construct by expressing myself in whatever way I feel necessary. Many of my outfits could be described as feminine, and I embrace my femininity regardless of my identity as an identifying male. I think individuality is extremely important, and one should not allow such norms to affect their way of expression.

Transparency and the Body

This year, I have become obsessed with translucent pieces that allude to promiscuous and playful auras. A major inspiration for me was Raf Simons' recent work for Calvin Klein. Lauren shaped transparent tops with varsity sweater sleeves, used thin plastic as dresses and as layering over coats, and assigned these looks to both men and women. These looks certainly make revolutionary statements that are in support of breaking both the gender binary and barrier of society's view of the nipple— which is most relevant to women.

Revolutionaries are the Future

For too many in our community, the current political climate is equally surreal and as it is discouraging. It's as though society is continuously introduced to another marginalized group that can become at risk. This in part due to executive orders enforced by our racist, misogynist, transphobic, sexist and homophobic president. But let us not forget that the system of the society we live in has been ingrained with such traumas, prior to Trump's election.

That being said, I find it to be the responsibility of creatives, as well as those who value equality, to take action and resist the discrimination that's been systematically put into place by those in power. We have to start locally to begin to reshape and reform our community. It's all about being active in our political environment and making sure our voices are fully heard. Join organizations, call your senators in response to executive orders— be active and alert about what is going on in our political world, because it does matter.

I believe we all have the power to change the society we live in— it's all about the effort we put into it. Everyone deserves to be represented equally. For this, I will always stand up for what is right, and I hope you will too.

Word on the Street



How would you describe your creative process?

When I'm working on art, I really like to think of nostalgia, color and texture, and try to articulate it externally. I want people to see what I see and experience what I do. When I think of a certain memory, I want people to see how I felt in that moment. For example, when I think of mountains, I think of a certain color or a certain time in my life and what I felt at that time. I really want to express that certain moment.

How do you think mental health issues could be better represented in the media?

Well in media I think that it's romanticized, which is an issue because depression is not pretty. Depression is not cool, it's not something that you wear. It sucks, it's sad and I don't think people should romanticize it. I think people should detach the idea of being creative with the idea of being depressed, I don't think they are synonymous and I don't think they go together. I think that's something that really needs to be emphasized in media.

- Patrick



Can you recall a bizarre dream you've had?

One time I thought I was flying. This was back when I was a little kid and my brother and I had a bunk bed. I had the top bunk and I actually fell off the bed and hit the ground. I was not flying. Nope.

When you're in a creative rut, how do you break out of it?

When I'm in a creative rut, I like to change my atmosphere or my location. It helps put me in a different mindset. If I'm working on something where I just want to create a lot of ideas, sometimes I like to be somewhere quiet so I can focus. But if I'm trying to come up with something that it is more artistic, I would like to be somewhere where I can be inspired, like in nature or with a group of people collaborating.

- Brian



Is there a specific experience or person who has changed your outlook on life or how you view yourself?

Well, more recently I've been listening to Motown era music. I've been listening to Marvin Gaye and thinking, "Wow, how many people would there not be right now if there wasn't a Marvin Gaye at first?" His song, "Inner City Blues," is what I've been listening to in the morning. I think it's important to have morning music that's not necessarily really upbeat, but not necessarily mellow either. Do you ever compare and contrast this winter with last winter? Because I think last winter, I was trying to be really upbeat so I was making myself listen to really upbeat shit, but now it's the complete opposite.

How would you describe your creative process?

I don't necessarily really have one, but I love to listen to people talk and kind of preserve my friends and their conversations. Like, "Here, remember that thing you said? I regifted it in the form of a poem."

- Sylvia



How do you feel those with mental health issues could be better represented in the media?

There's definitely a big stigma around mental health, a lot of people don't believe it to be on the same plane as physical health. I think the biggest thing to do would be making people more aware through the media, especially through the shows that we watch and how the characters that deal with mental health issues are represented.

- Sahar

(Word on the Street)



What aspect of psychology and the human mind interests you most?

Anything having to do with the connection between dreams and real life, the interpretation of dreams and how it relates to experiences.

How do you practice being mindful to deal with stress?

Usually with music and by just being by myself.

- Cade



How do you practice self-care/mindfulness?

Recently I've started doing a lot of meditation and just practicing being alone, so that I can think and be more aware of what's going on with myself internally.

When you're in a creative rut, how do you break out of it?

It depends on what I'm doing. But sometimes just doing research and looking at what other people do is a way of inspiring myself. Letting yourself be bored is a good way of getting inspiration because then your mind wanders.

- Julie



How do you practice self-care/mindfulness?

I think it's a personal thing for everyone. For me, I need to take time off from other people. I feel that if you're with a big group of people and they're all excited, then you try to be excited. But when you're alone, you can just feel how you want.

- Rabia



What aspect of psychology and the human mind interests you most?

What most interests me about the human psyche is how it relates to other human psyches. How you see yourself affects how you view other people.

How do you practice self-care/mindfulness?

I would say the biggest thing for me is meditation, that's what helps me the most. And also exercise, specifically exercise that you enjoy. I like to play the drums and I consider that to be exercise after a certain amount of time, but it's also meditation in motion. Whatever makes you calm your mind so that you only focus on that one thing, but are still doing something. For me, that includes running and drumming.

- Cameron



For Ears and Eyes Only

Featured Artist: Cupid McCoy

By Cierra Artis
Photography by Will Singleton
Featured Artist: Cupid McCoy

Could you explain your aesthetic/look/brand and how it plays a role in your identity as a musician?

My look is more of a process—it never really developed overnight. I think kind of taking everything together, not so much as “this is my fashion, this is the music I make, or this is how I decorate my home,” but that it is living as what I aspire to be as an artist. I think it has made me more comfortable deciding how I dress. It makes me more comfortable with who I want to be and who I am... and it's all so gradual. There was never really one moment when I found a really good shirt and was like, “Okay, I'm a musician now.” But then you're like, “Wow this shirt makes me more comfortable, and more willing to feel certain things.”

How did you come up with your alter ego/performance persona?

Seeing the Frankie Cosmos show was kind of really formative in that. I saw it right before I went off to France for a year. Frankie Cosmos and Girl Pool was just such an intimate show—everyone seemed to love being there and just loved their music. The songs seemed so genuine and not overly orchestrated. Almost immediately after this show, I packed up and went to France. That was the last show that I saw in the United States for a while, and I got my light blue creamy guitar because I was really inspired by her guitar. On this alternate persona, once you establish it, it almost seems like you're trying to fit into these big shoes that you've created. These are the shoes that you want to be wearing, or that you see yourself wearing. They don't really fit right yet, but the more you spend time in those shoes, the more comfortable they are.

Do you have a specific strategy for songwriting?

Well sometimes in my mind, there are three stages or three major parts to each of my songs. You can start by writing down the words or story that you have in mind, by playing guitar and having the song structure, or by having these chords and that make you feel a certain way. Sometimes it will be an experience with someone or there will be like a certain emotion that these notes and chords make me think of—like a certain interaction I've had with

my friends from the past. For instance, in a song I put together, I started with these chords that I thought were really pleasant, really dreamy, and I wanted to make the whole tagline about a relationship over the summer. You go back to your hometown and get involved with someone—both knowing that at the end of the summer, you'll have to go back to your universities—what kind of relationship is that? So I'll have this idea and then I'll try to make it personal. I'll put actual sentiments or interactions that I think realize that idea or statement. I want to add to a story that I actually know, and I'll set the scene by adding things that are so unique to that experience that it sort of tells the story itself.

Does your music inspire the way you live or does the way you live inspire your music?

Oh, it's definitely both. I think that those statements are not mutually exclusive—they build upon each other. I think the way I live my life kind of leads me though. I think the whole message is that almost all of my art and sentiments, concerning music and the way I live, can be brought together. It's all the same narrative.

If people only take one thing away from your music, what would you want it to be?

I want them to see me telling stories about my life and be like, “You know, I also have stories to tell. I wanna go out and play these tunes. It isn't that difficult.” I want them to see what they are doing as an extension of a personal journal. I would like to be in their audience, rooting them on!

Who are your greatest musical influences?

My inspirations are musicians here in Richmond, Aaron Brown and folks that I have seen here, who have hustled so hard to get their music out there. I think that knowing someone on a personal level— who has a knack for seeing music before they write— and seeing them going out and becoming successful is so powerful, and one of the most inspirational things.

Did you ever feel pressure to be technically sound before you started writing music?

Yes of course, especially because I was living in a household full of really talented singers and musicians just thinking, “Wow I wish I could sing like that.” Van Gogh said that he constantly did stuff that he didn't know how to do, to pave the way so that he could do it better the next time. I think that's really

important, and I try to make steps even if I don't always know how to— learning from your mistakes and building onto what you've already done are some of the most important things to do as an artist.

Do you have any rituals when you're working on your music?

I really like to be outside. Also, being in the same environment with my cute little blue guitar warms my heart. When I play guitar, it's generally with that one. I also really like doing work in the day time. I think the sun, using natural lighting is my ritual—I don't like doing work in artificial light. Besides that, I think songs more or less just come to me. The mindset itself is the building block for writing a song.

Where did you come up with “Cupid McCoy”?

McCoy is my mother's maiden name, and it kind of goes back to matters of this family I never knew from Texas. I think carrying this name sorta kind of embodies this sentiment of really trying get close to this family I never knew. And I like the meaning behind Cupid, the god of aspiration and desire—I just like the way it sounds as well.

How does it feel to perform? What is your ideal setting for a performance?

Honestly, some of the best shows I have performed have been here in my own space. I feel like when there are projections at shows, it gives the audience a feeling of an ambiance instead of just music, which is kind of the intent of my

art in general. Not wanting people to focus on just the words, but rather the whole sentiment or experience behind it. So when you give them more of an experience, it does cater to that. I also like when people are seated at shows, I think it makes it a lot more intimate. I really want people to go a show and have an inspirational moment. Some of the best shows I've been to are ones that I can't wait to leave, only because I'm so inspired by what I just saw—shows that just get you really excited to create. I think that I prefer playing a show for a lot of people I don't know and then them taking something out of it.

Where do you see yourself going next in your musical or creative journey?

I'm planning on releasing an album with a clothing line I've created. I started thinking about how, as a musician, you gotta put some clothes out. But everyone already has way too many band shirts. I've got this little stack of band shirts, but at the end of the day, it's just some cotton shirt that I don't necessarily wanna wear. I want to cater to what looks good or what I think would look good on my friends— it's all about the mood. I'm shooting a lookbook very soon, and I wanted to have a fashion show/album release party where it comes out at the same time. The show is going to be in Gallery5 in the next few months and I'll be collaborating with a bunch of other creatives. It should be a really fun time, it's on the horizon. I try to have a lot of things going on at the same time and I think that allows for a more liberal creative process.





I'm not a "Tortured Artist"

The Intersection of Creativity and Mental Illness Within the Art School

By Alyssa Michener
Photography by Alyssa Michener



It was around 8 a.m. when I started pacing in circles around my unfinished sculpture in the VCU Art Foundation building. My breath had sped up from its natural rhythm, leaving my head spinning as I grasped the concrete wall for support. By the time that students had come in for their early studio classes, I was uncontrollably sobbing. Eventually, my professor showed up and asked me if I wanted to talk. I thought that this gesture was one of empathy for my

situation, so once we were in an empty studio, I felt comfortable in disclosing that I have bipolar disorder and occasional anxiety attacks. After telling her about my mental illness, I asked if there was anything that I could do— if she had any information on disability services to accommodate me for the course. She immediately dismissed my questions, replying that it was too late in the semester to do anything. At this point, I was defeated. Her form of reassurance was to say, “You know, if this class isn’t causing you to have a mental breakdown, you probably aren’t trying hard enough.”



Excerpts from Audrey Davis's work

From Top:
Above: The Lighter Dark
Below: The Dream Series



Un

Unfortunately, my experience of having a professor belittle and dismiss mental illness is not uncommon. Audrey Davis, a fellow

film senior at VCU, claimed to have had an instructor that threatened to fail her due to mental illness-related absences. She had been experiencing emotional instability as a result of a medication change to treat her bipolar disorder symptoms, a common side effect in shifting mood stabilizers. Despite having accommodations through the disability office that required leniency on attendance, he threatened to take the issue to her advisor. In his opinion, she had been absent "too many times for her disability." However, Audrey found a bright side to the situation.

"It was kind of nice because it gave me the opportunity to really stand up for myself and be like 'this isn't okay and I'm going to have the [disability] office talk to you, this is what I need and you're really not allowed to do this,'" she said.

In the end, she was able to pass the course, but we mutually agreed that having these kind of experiences creates internalized self-doubt, further stigmatizing our valid mental health concerns.

Bipolar disorder is characterized by its fluctuation between episodes of depression and mania. According to the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, manic episodes tend to include racing thoughts, an inflated sense of self, a decreased need for sleep, rapid speech, decreased attention, an increase in goal-directed activities and a tendency to engage in "high-risk" behaviors. Mania can also cause creativity to flow at a rapid pace.

Davis laughed in hindsight, while she described one of her manic episodes after her freshman year.

"I was just making a lot of weird art. Like cutting out random papers and gluing them together, scribbling on stuff and gluing it in really specific ways that didn't really matter," she said. "It was ugly and didn't mean anything, but I was like 'this is genius, I have to do this.'"

Davis has attributed her feelings of creativity and the ability to stay up all night working on artwork to mania. However, the seemingly positive attributes of this disorder are coupled with debilitating depression. Despite the stigma that surrounds the illness, bipolar disorder has often been romanticized through terms like "manic genius," further enforced by the stereotype of the tortured artist.

"It's hard to know if it's good or bad. I started reading 'Touched with Fire' and it names all of these amazing famous people [that have bipolar disorder], and it started to make me feel like 'oh, maybe I'm a part of this elite group of really creative geniuses and maybe there's something in me that's special because of this,'" she said. "But then I just kept reading and pretty much all of them ended up committing suicide or dying of accidental drug overdose or alcohol, and it makes everything confusing."

Audrey Davis' inspiration for her art has come from personal experiences, creating meditative stop-motion films that evoke a feeling of wonderment, child-like innocence and solitude. She has always been drawn to the concept of randomness and has found satisfaction within the process of creating her own sets, armatures, musical compositions and seeing the final product come full circle. She has been motivated by sharing an emotion with others.

"I want to create these safe spaces for other people to go to now, and sharing them," she said. "Little separate worlds where you decide everything."

I want to
create little
separate
worlds
where you
decide
everything.

Audrey Davis



Stills from Raven M.'s,
Looking, 2016



While there isn't a thoroughly paved path ahead of me, there is at least somewhere for me to walk.

Raven M.

In their sixth year of school, Raven M. is a film and sociology double major, whose work has consisted of documentaries that focus on political and social issues. Their recent films have discussed the intersection of different identities that people have within a specific race, as well as racial inequality.

Raven has been focusing on pieces that talk about being a queer person of color and that discuss the toxic political climate, with an emphasis on activism. A self-described introvert, they have found documentary as an opportunity to look at the world through a new perspective.

"In terms of my art, I find that it helps me get out of my comfort zone a lot," Raven said. "It helps me better communicate with people and the world around me."

Their work has utilized the medium of digital documentary as well as experimental techniques, with a number of films being shot on celluloid film or comprised of found footage. Raven

has found inspiration in their classmates, as well as some of the greats.

"Seeing other filmmakers, like of people of color succeeding and other femme women makes me feel so inspired," they said. "While there isn't a very thoroughly paved path ahead of me, there is at least somewhere for me to walk so that I can someday succeed as much as I want to succeed."

Speaking about their disability, Raven disclosed having mild seasonal depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. With the seasons shifting during the semester, they have found school and especially attendance, to be particularly difficult.

They found that their OCD has created a higher standard for their work, but that it can hinder it when a project doesn't go as intended. With their work being pushed aside until it can go as planned, Raven has felt as though being in such a rigid structure is overwhelming and frustrating in this process.

"I love having my work critiqued, but to have my work critiqued in a way that is about meeting a grade point,

meeting a criteria; and not only that, but meeting a deadline, is what makes it so difficult," they said.

Taking a semester off has helped them to focus on their sociology major for a change. However, doing so while in the art school has been particularly challenging, due to some courses only being offered once a year.

Raven talked with me about the importance of acknowledging the perspectives of those who have dealt with mental illness and sexual assault, finding that in the art school these topics are often looked at as "hip" and romanticized.

Mental illness and trauma aren't issues to take lightly. Making art about those topics without experience or education on what it really feels like can further stigmatize those who live within that reality.

"There are actually people that have to worry about what's going to happen to them, how their experiences are affecting their grades, their life and even their art," Raven said. "It's not just something that's cool to make a piece about."



Still from Raven M.'s film
Left: We're Not Scared Anymore, 2017
Right: Controlling Images, 2015





Both

Both Audrey Davis and Raven M. discussed the importance of

self-care, and how sometimes you have to prioritize your mental health over your work. They each took semesters off, stressing that even though this isn't possible for everyone, it is imperative to find ways to treat yourself kindly.

Audrey suggested filing with the disability services office. Even though it can feel frightening to come to terms with labeling your mental illness as a disability, the accommodations have helped her manage the demands of college.

"Even though it can be scary, you do need to ask for what you need because you deserve it," she said. Transparency is important. Through being more open, she has found a support structure. She emphasized

how finding friends with mental illnesses and those who can empathize has created a sense of community.

Raven has found that even though it has put their grades at risk, they chose to make their mental health a priority.

"Just making the decision while I'm here to succeed, get good grades and to achieve getting a diploma is not going to mean anything if I'm a wreck by the time I graduate," they said.

They have found self-care in tending to their plants and in creating incentives to get work done.

"Choosing to take time for myself, not so much indulging, but finding little treats for myself to make myself know that I'm worth being treated positively," they said. "That my experiences are valid and that it doesn't mean that I don't get to have positive life experiences."

Even though it can be scary, you do need to ask for what you need because you deserve it.

Audrey Davis

Nickelus F.



Provocative Composition

By Leah Dickshinski
Photography by Dina Alemu





“The intellect of man is forced to choose. Perfection of the life, or of the work.”

William Butler Yeats

These eternal words have become an axiom, self-evident to anyone accustomed to splitting their time between professional pursuits and private passions. To Nickelus F., this notion would seem laughable. A veteran wordsmith, battle-rap competitor, student and father, his work-life balance has only ever been synergistic.

“I’ve been doing music my whole life. It’s really a way of life, I just create and things form,” he said. “I just create. I’m just naturally a creator.”

As a lifetime resident of the 804, Nickelus F. knows the Richmond rap scene intimately. He has been writing, by his estimate, since fourth grade. By 17, he was inducted into BET’s Freestyle Friday hall of fame after seven consecutive wins. It was at this time that his teachers began using his stage name.

“That’s kinda when things changed,” he said.

This recognition encouraged him to throw himself fully into the craft. In the past decade, Nickelus F. has created and collaborated on over a dozen projects, proving himself to be a prolific and versatile artist. This propensity for productivity has necessitated some self-screening.

“When people see you too much, they take you for granted,” he said. “I don’t put out music at a high high volume. I don’t ever want to appear too common. The idea is to stay away, create an air of mystery and garner levels of respect with absence.”

A major feature of membership in an artistic community is competition. Nickelus F. is a member of the South Paw Battle Coalition, a local battle rap league. Battle rap is wordplay meant to maim—verbal assaults, timed and highly structured, and subject to a panel’s judgement. This sense of rivalry has also appeared in regular songwriting—Nickelus F. often includes coded lyrics for his contemporaries.



It's a
way
of life.

I just
create
and
form
things.

"There's a lot of hidden messages in my music [meant to] talk to other people. You know, rap is real competitive. A lot of time there's a lot of subliminal [messages] going back and forth," he said. "I'll say something that only another rapper I've had an interaction, an argument with, will understand. Everyone else might think it's a cool line, but he'll listen with the hair standing up on his neck."

Despite the heated nature of the craft, Nickelus believes there's a time and place for collaboration.

"Steel sharpens steel," he said.

For my benefit, as an outsider to Richmond's underground, Nickelus offered me some insight into the nature of the scene.

"[It's] grown a lot over the years. When I was young, high school days, it was a completely different era in hip hop. We used to have Cyphers on the corners. [Back then] [I] would just be walking [with a group of guys] and a rap cypher would break out and we'd be out there rapping forever," he said. "Then the rap scene here kinda died down, became more of a trap scene. And I would say since the 2010s, we got a lot more of an artistic culture here. And I think that has to do with the feel of the city, it has a lot of history and character to it."

Both his prolificacy and proximity to the community have attuned him to these shifts. This is evident on "Corner Store Music" (2009), an ode to the dead-end existence of a convenience store clerk, and on his 2015 record "Triflin," which opens with a conversation between a cop and civilian at a traffic stop. When the driver questions the validity of the interaction, the officer attributes [it] to the quality of the neighborhood. These moments of somber specificity, of seeing one's home for its rougher realities and choosing to immortalize rather than ignore, reveals an intimacy between the artist and his city. In this way, Nickelus F. has the makings of a local legend.

This is not to say that this connection is limiting. There is something universal about this intimacy—seen so often in rappers who continue to rep their city after gaining widespread recognition. Drake's self-established "6 God" status, in reference to his hometown of Toronto, comes to mind. Like the "6 God," Nickelus F. knows that his reach goes far beyond city limits. He assures me that, while he spends a lot of his time here in Richmond, his music goes global. This is easily evidenced—his Spotify page boasts nearly

30,000 monthly listeners, a majority of whom are located outside of Virginia. In an article for Complex, Drake described Nickelus, a former collaborator, as "one of the most gifted people at finding flows."

Much has changed for Nickelus F. since he began. Today, he is a full-time musician, father, and student, working towards an advertising degree at VCU. Like any artist who has had time to create and reflect on a substantial body of work, Nickelus F. is aware of his personal evolution.

He grew tired of trying to fit the industry mold instead of creating authentically from his experiences.

"I realized nothing goes away. I'm creating a legacy," he said. "I know I'm not going to change the radio or mainstream, I'll just create art, and in time it will be appreciated."

For Nickelus F., rap is inseparable from his identity. When I asked about his creative schedule, he told me that he only blocks out time for his children and school.

"In terms of music and writing, it never stops," he said.

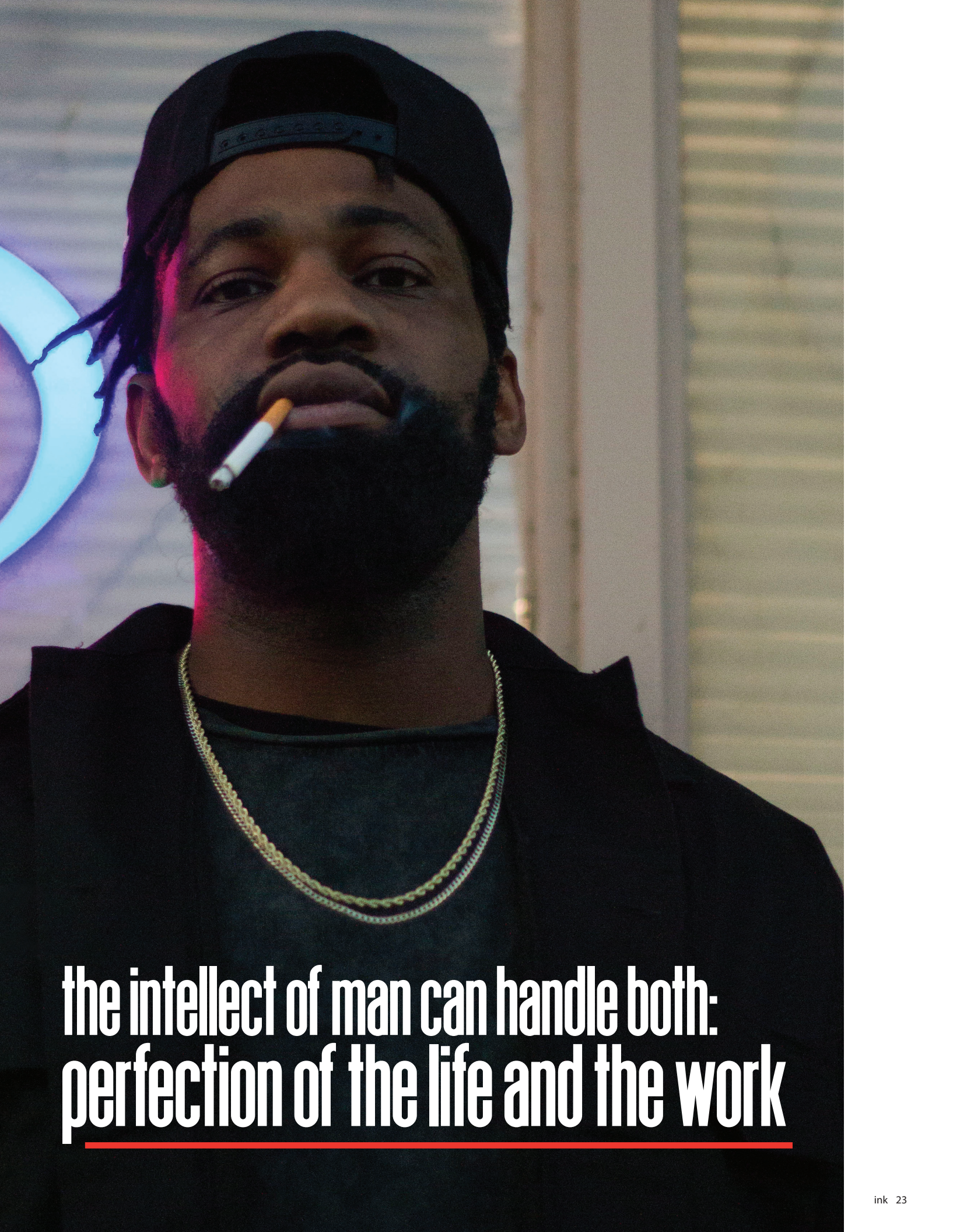
I found this to be surprising—the balance of his busy life seeming unmanageable. But he explained it to me.

"I'm always formulating something. And I'm always thinking about a million things at once—we're capable of doing that—so it's easy for me to have an assignment where I have to write 25 headlines and go finish a three minute verse and have that memorized for the next battle," he said. "I've been able to utilize the skills I have as a rapper and incorporate them into my writing at school."

It is this mindset that licenses a rewrite of Yeats' words, in the form of a hook:

"The intellect of man can manage both:
Perfection of the life and of the work."





**the intellect of man can handle both:
perfection of the life and the work**

Get this Look

By Kristina Dickey



Mango— Faux Fur Coat \$79.99

Sugar Coated

While we all can't shell out thousands of dollars for an article of clothing, it is possible to find cheaper alternatives that are just as good. Many designers, including Gucci and Shrimps, have been delivering statement outerwear for a few seasons now. With Richmond's unpredictable and downright temperamental weather, it might be wise to have a similar one on hand. Penny loafers are a smart alternative to sneakers, and pairing them with striped or patterned crew socks allows you to make the look your own.



Urban Outfitters— BDG Girlfriend High-Rise Jean \$69



Urban Outfitters— Extra Large Cozy Fringe Scarf \$39

Topman— Assorted Colour Stripe Socks \$25



Everlane— Modern Penny Loafer \$175



In the Pink

Richmond’s skateboarding community has long embraced a good pair of high-waters. Matching a sleek black pair with a splashy stand-out jacket will breathe life into this comfortable, yet versatile look. Adding a beret— whether or not in homage to the Black Panthers— and pastel-colored sneakers will make you spring-ready, without looking too festive.



ASOS— Dxpe Chef Coach Jacket \$106



Amazon—
Black Beret
\$13



Converse—
Chuck Taylor Monochrome Low Top
\$61

Common Projects—
Original Achilles Low
\$410



Gilt—
Worsted Wool Long Rise Cuffed Trousers \$139



Being mindful in the era of social media

By Sarah Thaw
Illustrations by Kelly Reyes

I remember the birth of Instagram. The year was 2010 and I was a sophomore in high school at the time the app was first released. With it being brand new, all that I recall posting to my feed were carefree, unaltered photos of my friends and I having fun. Scrolling down what would later become the number one social media platform for photo sharing, other posts were much like my own—candid moments, authentic and unedited.

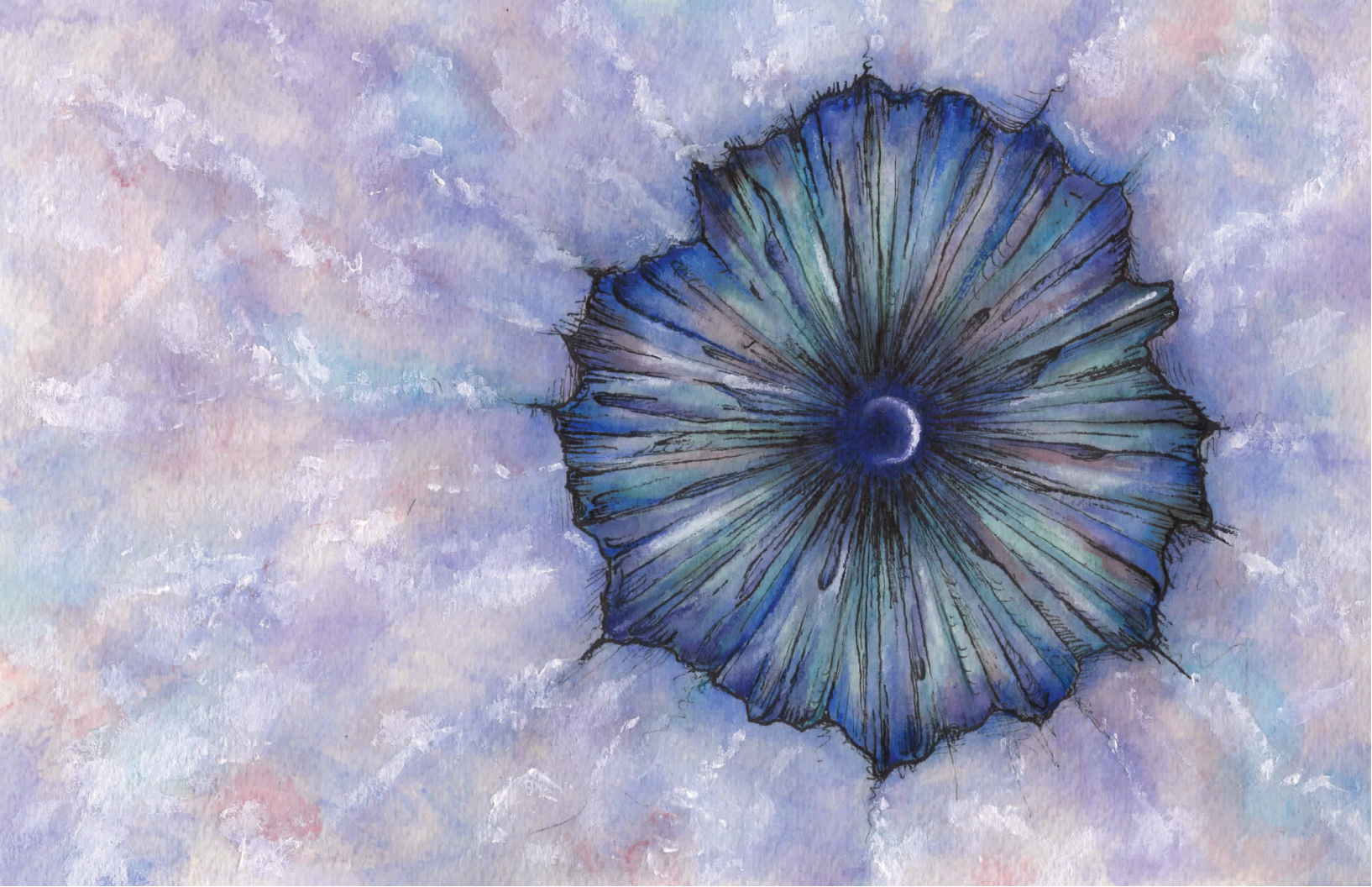
Not much time was spent dwelling on how to make a photo look perfect before posting it. The most editing anyone did to an Instagram photo was throwing on one of the original in-app filters. But who really cared

what your photo looked like anyway? Getting any more than 10 “likes” back then was a rarity, since the only followers people had consisted of their closest friends. Who else was there to impress?

The role of social media was undeniably shifting from a small scope—sharing funny photos with friends—to having immediate access to posts from hundreds of millions of users all around the world.

The role technology plays in our daily life is constantly evolving, for better or for worse. New opportunities have been made available from an increase in social media usage worldwide. The ability to meet and connect with people that would’ve otherwise been unlikely, or even impossible to

plug



“

exposing others to a glimpse
of their lives, but only
through the lens in which
they desire to be perceived.

do before, is now common with social media. It is even possible to make a career out of posting to these platforms, or at least further one by promoting personal skills and networking with other users.

But with the increased opportunities at our fingertips from advancements in social media and networking, there came a dark side.

While most can distinguish a contrived online persona from real life and be able to differentiate the two, if you aren't careful, it is easy to slip into a pattern of

self-deprecation and judgment based off of comparisons to others.

Several studies have conducted research analyzing the relationship between social media usage and mental health. Researchers have found a correlation between social networking use and symptoms of depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. In an article published in the *Cyber Psychology, Behavior and Social Networking Journal* on the correlation between social networking and mental health, conclusions were drawn based upon multiple studies that assessed the issue.

According to the author of the article, Dr. Igor Pantic, "Constant self-evaluation on an everyday basis, competition and comparing one's own achievements with those of other users, incorrectly perceiving physical/emotional/social characteristics of others, feeling of jealousy, and narcissistic behavior—these are all factors that may positively or negatively influence self-esteem."

With other social media and networking platforms, like Twitter and Snapchat, you have the ability to post up-to-the-second updates on your life and stay tuned into what is happening

in the lives of others— an influx of information available at your fingertips at all times.

This constant feeling of being "plugged-in" to the world around us, combined with the various social and societal pressures that come along with this kind of overstimulation, can unmistakably begin to take a toll on our mental health.

Nat Linton, a junior at VCU double majoring in English and religious studies, found that they needed to become aware of the time spent using social media to avoid becoming too self-critical.

advertisement

RAMAWAY

RamAway provides **free** transportation to and/or from the Richmond International Airport, Greyhound Bus Station and Amtrak at Main Street Station and Staples Mill Road during most University holidays and semester breaks.

GO.VCU.EDU/RAMAWAY



"I start to develop this self-concept of being 'inferior' or having a 'less exciting life' than others based on an Internet persona," they said.

If you feel as though social media is causing you to feel stressed out or insecure, it is important to become mindful of your use and incorporate time into your routine to practice acts of self-care. Instead of compulsively scrolling down a social media feed, take a moment to slow down and step away from the buzzing online world to practice being in the moment. With your attention being drawn away from stimuli that can perpetuate symptoms of depression and anxiety, you are able to disconnect and just be. In these moments without distractions, it becomes easier to focus on gratefulness for what you already have in life, instead of comparing yourself to others.

"It's easy to get anxious think-

ing one needs to catch up to everyone else," Nat said. "Accept your imperfections and incorporate self-love/mindfulness practices; whatever that means to you"

Dr. Cliff Edwards, a professor of philosophy and religious studies at Virginia Commonwealth University, shared some valuable information on being mindful. The 84-year-old said that he has intentionally never owned a cell phone, but has observed how attached people can become to their devices.

"Watch VCU when the cherry trees will soon be all in bloom. I noticed last year, hundreds of students walking under those trees, but all watching their cell phone window," he said. "I think the obsession with such devices is so powerful that we miss the people and places immediately around us. It takes a strong and aware person to 'fast' from using their

devices, just to fill in quiet moments with some sort of noise."

Mindfulness is found by immersing yourself in an activity requiring your full focus and attention. It can help alleviate stressful feelings induced by overstimulation and is found in a variety of ways: through meditation, practicing an instrument, creating art, reading, writing, or something else. What is important is finding a mindfulness practice that you enjoy doing, one that you can incorporate into your life as an effort in tending to your mental health.

So while social media can serve as a valuable tool for self-expression, meeting new people, connecting with old friends or even establishing a career for yourself, it is imperative to remember to take a step back every once in a while, look up and mindfully live in the present moment.

Photographer: Cierra Artis
Stylist: Jon Cope
Assistant stylist: Ellen Charlwood
Assistant stylist: Shaw
Creative Director: Allison Oberlin + Aaron Ni'jai
Assistant Creative Director: Moriah Briscoe
Makeup Artist: Katie Williams
Model: Hussan Rafique
Location: QUIRK Hotel



Fab'rik
Floral Kimono
Lghtweight Joggers
Bracelets and Leather Cuff

Halycon
Button Down Top
Bow-tie

hygge

hy·gge (*hoo-guh*) noun.

a sense of coziness and simplicity
indicative of contentment with one's life





Ralph Lauren
Floor-length taupe Cashmere
Cardigan

Baggio Consignment
Raquel Allegra Cotton Tie
Dye Pants

Fab'rik
Faux Lamb Fur Scarf

The Limited
Necklace



Halcyon
Smoking Jacket



Halcyon
Kimono

Need Supply
Silk Button Down
Culottes

Fab'rik
Necklace

ASOS
Shoes

Fab'rik

Hat
Sweater
Bracelet

Baggio Consignment

Burberry scarf





"Two Eternal Uncertainties Appear"
Mixed media & performance

AKI VANDER LAAN



confronting otherness

Exploring Dichotomous Identities in

By Alyssa Michener

"A While to Check the Box for Not White"
Adjusted clothing, wood, painted rubber tile



Uninhabitable Spaces

Aki Vander Laan is a multidisciplinary artist in the sculpture and extended media department who critically engages with the concept of otherness and the exploration of the "complicated identity."

"Does one understand oneself by identifying with roots through a national identity? Does it extend to inclusivity in a community? How is an artist's praxis culpable for social change?" they asked. "Since I have intensely pondered these questions myself, I have a personal connection to investigate cultural estrangement from the inside out."

They create work that challenges the confines of space and the societal structures that result in a state of dysphoria within one's body, culture and community.

Confrontation is an important aspect of their work and is a central theme in their piece "Everything I know I'm anxious is a power structure." The video performance is 14 minutes of Aki staring into the lens of Photobooth on their Mac, recording while shifting body positions to fit into the screen, directly challenging the viewer's gaze. The durational component of the work was described by Aki as "accentuated self-policing in a femme body, which is the policing from a white heteropatriarchal capitalist society." The installation speaks on the consumption and fetishization of the racially ambiguous femme body.

Aki's work examines self-exploration in a way that causes the viewer to question their own perceptions and misconceptions, forcing a dialogue that is especially prevalent in the current political climate. By existing as a queer person of color trying to process the current political events, they questioned, "Is that me? Is that not me? Is that me? Is that not me?"

According to Aki, they presented this in their performative and video work "as a way to contemplate my relationship with being half-Japanese and half-white, and feeling concerned with being an artist and activist. I wondered if my practice was an actionable way for me to protest and resist in our United States. I think it is."

They draw inspiration from other artists of color and activists like Hito Steyerl, Taylor Janay Manigault, Perrin Turner, and VCUarts painting and printmaking alumnus Malcolm Peacock. Malcolm's work centers on the priority of black authorship and African American history, using spoken word and public participation to talk about the intersection of fiction and lived experience. The mutual interest in creating conversations about identity within spaces of conflict reflects a societal need for becoming more intersectional and confronting a history of violence, silencing and oppressing the bodies and voices of people of color.

Power and powerlessness are discussed through the utilization of spaces that are uninhabitable. Conceptually posing questions of instability, fear and disconnect associated with one's body are essential to their work, "Place and Placeless." Aki references traditional Japanese architecture in



"Everything I know I'm anxious is a power structure"
 Wood, cement, video (self as camgirl)

the piece, creating a structure inspired by shōji, using lattice design and wood joinery. The aim is to confront the issue of the lack of access to tradition in their culture.

"The painted, plywood floor tiles are balanced individually by a caster wheel. By imagining the activation of a person moving across the unstable tiles, the see through shōji space is a portal to being a container. It is a cage," they explained. "Further, the main piece sits on top of the green screen, removing the functionality of replacing the color with post-production chroma key, it instead waves between realism and fiction."

Frustratingly, the discussion of the work centered on questioning why they didn't use the traditional elements of Japanese craftspeople. With the local Lowe's store being the only option in buying wood and having to use communal tools in the woodshop, the imbalance between tradition and presentation was purposeful.



"Place and Placeless"

Aspen, pine, oil paint and stain, caster wheels, the green green, my body

Conversations where I am understood and help the understanding of others.

Existing in an environment that creates difficulties for those who live with disabilities and mental illnesses, Aki Vander Laan speaks of the necessity to retreat to safe spaces. "I want a space to take my time, take care of myself, take care of my community, and have different abilities," they said. "Which the school doesn't give to me."

Currently, they are working on an installation in their bedroom that gives them a space to navigate the limitations that they personally experience with depression, anxiety, dissociation and chronic pain. They collect items from Richmond streets, resources that cohabit the location that they exist within, and use them to explore the concept of labor and living with their disability; identifying that they are more than their level of productivity.

Aki found Johanna Hedva's "Sick Woman Theory" to be helpful, quoting, "For those who are faced with their vulnerability and unbearable fragility, every day, and so have to fight for their experience to be not only honored, but first made visible. For those who, in Audre Lorde's words, 'were never meant to survive: because this world was built against their survival.'"

Aki speaks of their motivation as "the conversations that change the world. The ones that give humanity. Conversations where I am understood and help the understanding of others."

THE MODEL

by Julia Block

Two decades ago, fashion photographer David Sorrenti became a casualty to heroin chic. After becoming enamored with model Jaime King, Sorrenti began using hard drugs and quickly died of kidney failure. His death, a lightning rod of negative publicity towards the fashion industry, banished the morbid fad from the pages of *Vogue* as curvier, tanner, healthier-appearing models, like Gisele Bündchen, replaced them.

It wasn't that easy, though. Despite the quick disavowal of heroin chic by the leaders in fashion, the modelling industry has never truly rid itself of its highly glamorized drug-addicted, hedonist reputation. But with the advent of body positivity and mental wellness spreading through the grassroots of social media, the fashion world was once again pressed to deliver healthier-appearing images of "real" drop-dead gorgeous people to cater to the demand.

To the cynical eye, the guise of body-positivity is grossly patronizing and exploitive of human insecurity; all for the purpose of selling a product. But maybe this isn't just another marketing scam, maybe it really is a revolution. INK figured that the best way to find out the truth behind this new movement was to ask the models themselves.

So has the fashion industry really changed? Well, it's complicated. On one hand, since the horror show of the '90s, there has been progress towards a healthier standard of living. However, the physical standards called for by the industry remain largely the same.

Roshelle Sumner, a 19-year-old rising model, explained the pressures involved in the industry.

"Models are still expected to have a size 24 inch waist and 34 inch hip, while standing at 5-foot-9 to 5-foot-11," she said. "There are some women who can do this naturally and healthily, but for many girls who want to model, those sizes are unnatural and dangerous."

Sumner shared research she had done, citing a

study conducted from a sample of over 85 models in the industry.

"There was a poll conducted by the International Journal of Eating Disorders where over 62 percent of models reported being asked to lose weight or change their size by their agent or someone else in the industry, 54 percent were told to lose weight and that they wouldn't be able to find jobs if they didn't," she said. "21 percent were told by their agency that they would stop representing them unless they lost weight, and over 9 percent had been recommended plastic surgery. I've been really lucky with my agency, and have never experienced any of that. But I know girls who have."

However, with the power of social media and a push for diversity, more models are using their voice to "[spread] awareness concerning the significance of a healthy lifestyle and the horrors of eating disorders and other problems that can be delved into by anyone, not just models," according to Shea McLoughlin, a 17-year-old model breaking into the fashion industry world.

As for heroin chic and the endless bacchanal of drugs? We found that it hasn't left at all—the glamorized drug culture, however illusory it may be, is still largely cultivated by popular media. McLoughlin found that the decadent lifestyle is most idolized within music and social media platforms like Instagram.

"Some people in the industry live that lifestyle, but probably not more than in any other industry," argued Sumner.

The same media that reacted so strongly to Sorrenti's death in '97 is still peddling the dangerous, high-exposure lifestyle. This lifestyle is glamorized through photos of strung-out looking models in thousands of dollars' worth of clothes, paired with the heavy implication that just out of the shot are the same drugs used in the scene two decades ago. The only difference now is that occasionally, a plus-size model will grace a magazine cover.

STANDARD



“There are some women who can do this naturally and healthily, but for many girls who want to model, those sizes are unnatural and dangerous.”

Roshelle Sumner

Roshelle Sumner - photo taken by Simon Miller for Vogue

In my Closet with Anthony Sudol

By Kristina Dickey
Photography by Cierra Artis



How would you describe your style?

I guess I think of my style as kind of urban and western, an urban cowboy look. I'm definitely influenced by western style and also streetwear and skatewear. I guess that kind of happens, just by living in Richmond.

Explain the accessories or articles of clothing that mean a lot to you. Why are they important? What's the history behind them?

One piece of clothing that means a lot to me is this shirt that was my dad's that I've had for a super long time. Also, this button-up that is something I got from The Love of Jesus [thrift store]. It has this crazy, embroidered phrase on it. I like clothes that have a history— something that I feel like I'm repurposing for a contemporary moment.

What inspires you to create your personal style?

I guess it's part of how I identify. I don't think I could be happy wearing, like, Vineyard Vines and khakis. Having a strong sense of style is important to me, and it's sort of part of my queer identity.

What do people say to you about your style?

I guess people say they like stuff that I'm wearing. I hope that people get that I'm easygoing, or that I care about my appearance, but that it's not super polished or anything. And I think it's important for me to create a closet where all the pieces work well together so that I don't have to think too hard about creating individual looks as much, because everything kind of already works and makes sense together.

Did you go through any stylistic phases before reaching your current style?

Oh yeah, they're all bad. In early high school I was kind of emo— skinny jeans, straightened hair. I would wear band tees and stuff. And then that kind of progressed into what I would describe as my Pacsun, indie stage. Like surf-skate style, but not to the extent that it should have been if I was an actual surfer or skater— sort of the watered-down, commercial version of that. I started shopping in thrift stores a bit in high school, but I didn't know what I was looking for at that point.





Do you have anyone (a celebrity, fashion icon, etc.) you look to for fashion inspiration?

The last time I was in New York we went to this store called ODD and they had all these vintage Vivienne Westwood pieces that were all super western. There were all these beautiful fringe jackets, and that was really inspiring to see. I like a lot of her stuff in general. I think she has a very classic sensibility, but it's still detailed and elegant.

Do you have a specific process for shopping or finding the clothes you wear?

My clothes come from a lot of different places, mostly thrifted. I think everything I'm wearing right now is thrifted except for my shoes. Usually I try to be pretty open to finding something cool. Sometimes it's as simple as saying, "I need more pants!" and just going from there.

What would you say to a student or anyone that wants to dress uniquely, like yourself, but is afraid to?

I guess I would just tell them that it's not that serious. If you're in an environment where people really care about what you look like, then that's just shitty. That's a real bummer and you should work to surround yourself with

new people. You're probably going to hate the way you dress in a year anyways, so you might as well just do something cool. And plus, I think if you're having trouble getting started, just choose stuff that you feel comfortable in, and then branch out from there.

If you had to pick out one article of clothing from your closet what would it be?

I would probably choose this jumpsuit. It's from this costume shop called Reminiscence. It's very simply constructed, but I like that it's handmade by this old guy who ran the shop. It's not even something I'd usually wear all the time but it feels simple and fun. Or, recently, I got this t-shirt that I'm in love with *[holds up Jesus graphic tee]*.

What about an outfit makes you feel your best?

I feel like if I can run in it but it still looks good, I'm into that. And I like my clothes to be utilitarian because I'm often in the studio or just biking around the city.

“

You're probably going to hate the way you dress in a year anyways, so you might as well just do something cool.



How do you accessorize? Is it a priority for you?

I've been rocking the rope choker/ bolo tie thing. [My roommate] Sim and I kind of started this competition to see what sort of crazy things we can make chokers out of, and I settled on this as something I actually like wearing on a semi-regular basis. Accessorizing is something I'm kind of new to, but I just got my ears pierced so I've been starting to play around with that.

Do you have a favorite shop in the area?

The Love of Jesus, without question. There are two locations, one in East End and one in Midlo. I love that they have flat-pricing, and it's also connected to a church. People who are devout Christians wear some weird shit.

Do you get any inspiration from social media or the internet?

Rihanna's Instagram is always great inspiration and Jonny Negrón's as well. Also @angelmasturbatingsoftly [David Moses]— his pictures are always good.

Any particular reason you picked this outfit?

I was thinking something weather appropriate, something light.

Do you have any memories attached to your clothing?

I definitely think about the time and place I was at in my life when I wore particular pieces, like the red shirt from my dad. I wore it a ton freshman year, not so much now, and I associate it with that time a lot.

What about your hair?

When I cut and dyed my hair, it really affected how I thought about myself— in a good way. Ever since I colored my hair, people say I look like I'm from an '80s TV show.

Does your current environment affect your style?

For sure. If I had an office job, I would definitely look different. I guess environment always shapes how you perceive the world.



Release the Club Child

Photographer: Marissa Alper

Stylist: Lizz Bruce

Creative Directors: Kelly Reyes + Will Singleton

Makeup Artist: Katie Williams

Clothing designed by: Ben Park + Simeon Kyota Rideb

Assisted by: Kadeem Morris



By Kelly Reyes

Mention the term “club kid” to someone and it’s almost guaranteed they’ll immediately think of the late ‘80s and early ‘90s: the height of the club kid era in New York City. There were virtually no rules— club kids did what they wanted without consequence. Led by Michael Alig, the NYC club kid scene was infamous for their heavy drug use and the ostentatious costumes they created to venture into underground clubs. Their heavy drug use stigmatized the scene in a way that drew attention away from the immeasurable creativity that the club kids possessed. The downfall of the club kid era followed the homicide conviction of Alig, who while on a heavy bender, killed his drug dealer and supposed friend. Since then, the lawless nature of the scene has never been the same.

This is the club kid scene that most people think of when they hear the term, but the spirit of the club kid has transcended the sensationalistic lens through which Alig’s crowd has been perceived. While he was considered the leader of the scene, he was just the tip of the iceberg.

“Counterculture” is described as an attitude that directly challenges the norms of mainstream society. Club culture has done so by defying the traditional standards people have been held to when it comes to how one physically presents themselves to the public. The early ‘90s scene was highly public, however since the fall of Michael Alig, it went underground— and still lives there today.

It could be said that the recently proclaimed electronic dance music scene could be a modern-day parallel to the club kid scene. However, EDM has risen to the forefront of mainstream entertainment, drawing attention from those unaware of the culture that the modern scene has been derived from. Of course, the spirit of the club kid can still be felt in the subcultures under the current electronic music scene. But despite the loose connection, it isn’t limited to major raves or music festivals.

Club kids may have played a role in the birth of the current EDM scene, however, they inspired much more beyond today’s

exploited rave crowd. They paved the way for those who do not subscribe to the gender expression binary or anything considered traditional. The club scene created a space in which race, gender or sexuality did not restrict one's ability to express their identity in a manner unique to them.

While drag queens were a big part of the scene, androgyny was widely accepted, and no one felt the need to fit themselves into a box with a specific label. Whether you identified as male, female, or genderqueer, no pressure was felt in terms of how to properly express oneself. This became a haven for the queer community, however, it was not queer exclusive. Anyone was welcome.

I personally feel as though the club kid scene will exist forever, expressed in various forms throughout time, giving those who seek individuality without judgement a community in which they can thrive. The spirit of absolute freedom of expression has helped

me to form a healthier sense of personal identity, and has provided that for so many others beyond myself. I was first exposed to this culture when I met local promoters from a grassroots East Coast-based rave company. This group has strived to create spaces for people in which they can freely express themselves, in a manner true to their identity and creative point of view.

The DIY nature of creating characters or ensembles to express one's identity builds a sense of comradery amongst those who are part of the scene. There is something special about the act of coming together to build visual personas that showcase one's true identity—it builds a bond like no other, with creativity and identity expression intersecting in a way that creates insurmountable beauty.

Inspired by this movement, I wanted to create the same atmosphere and provide a creative outlet for those within the Richmond community who don't feel defined





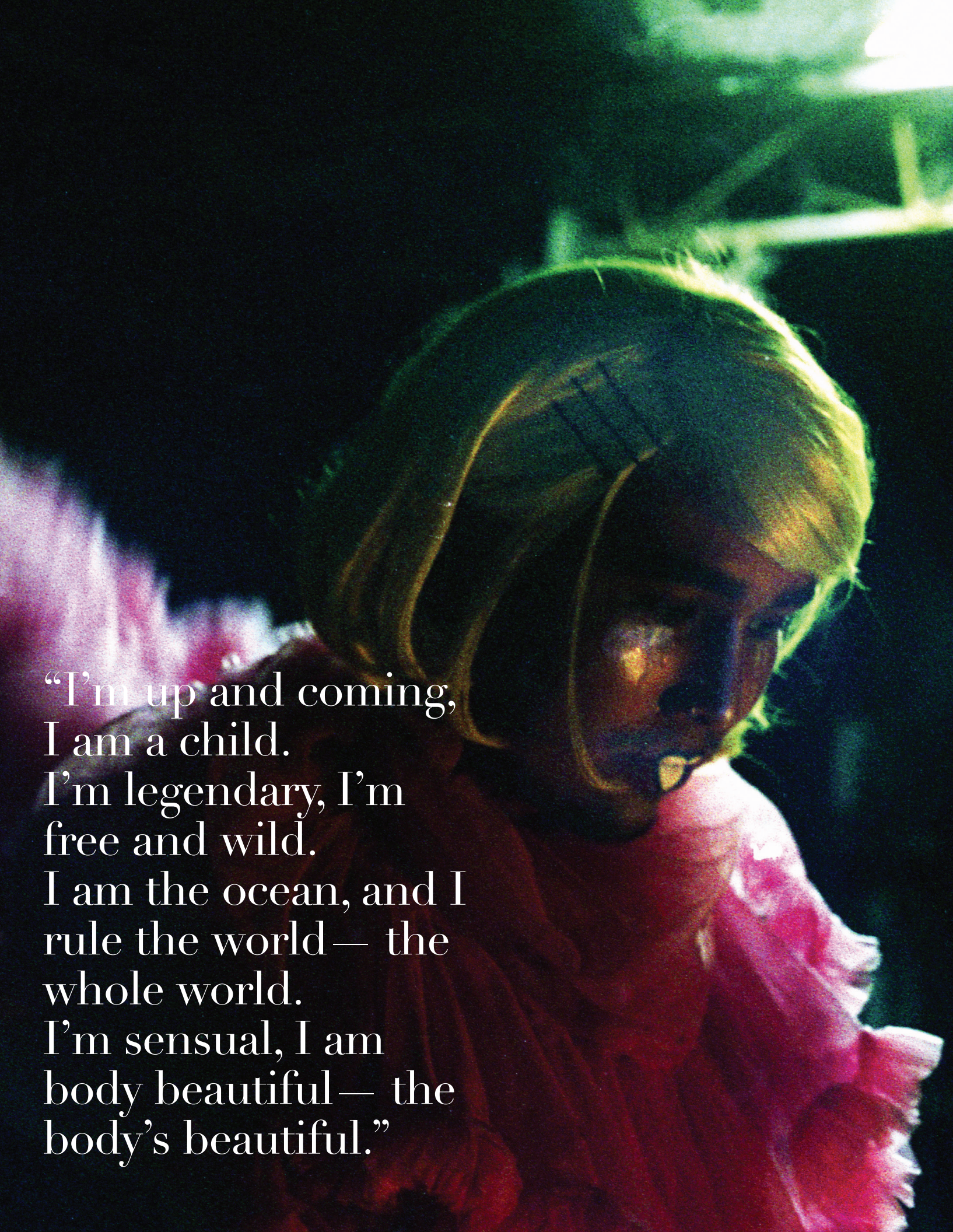
societal norms. Lizz Bruce and Will Singleton, my peers here at INK, joined me in this production to celebrate the raw nature of boundless self-expression. We pulled clothing designed by VCU students, from the wardrobes of the models themselves, and from local Richmond businesses— to truly reflect our city and those who inhabit it. Together, Lizz, Will, the models and I took part in creating the looks and added our own personal flair to every aspect of the photoshoot. By the end of the day, an unbreakable bond was formed through the act of collaboration, and by the support we gave each other throughout the entire process.

As a long day of shooting was coming to an end, we all piled into two cars and drove down West

Broad Street for a well-deserved victory meal. This victory was attributed to feeling as though we had successfully revived the spirit of the club kid, in our own way.

With the windows down and the hum of the Richmond streets filtering into my car, one of the models, Dylan, started playing “I Am The Body Beautiful” by Salt-N-Pepa. Perfectly encapsulating the vibe of limitless self-expression, Salt-N-Pepa concluded our day with the sense of empowerment that comes with fearlessly owning your identity. With that, I’ll leave you with a few lines from the song that I feel fully embody the essence of the true club kid:



A young girl with blonde hair is shown from the chest up, looking down and slightly to her right. She is wearing a bright pink tutu. The background is dark, with a green light source visible in the upper right and some purple light on the left. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“I’m up and coming,
I am a child.
I’m legendary, I’m
free and wild.
I am the ocean, and I
rule the world— the
whole world.
I’m sensual, I am
body beautiful— the
body’s beautiful.”



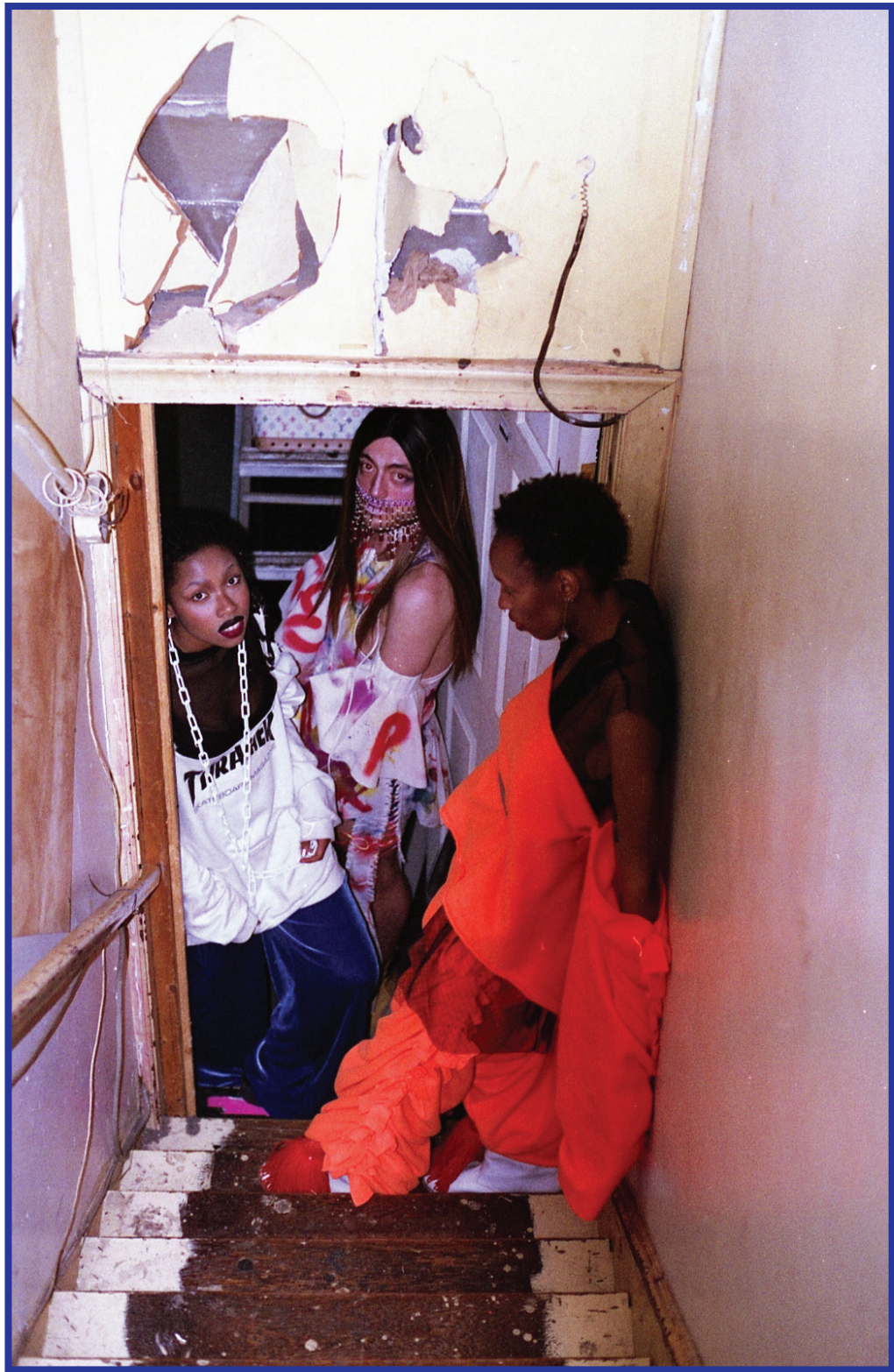








Dress hand painted by Ken Cipriotti



White and orange boots provided by Blue Bones Vintage













Shirt by Lizz Bruce

Designer Spotlight:

Alissa Pivaral

Photographer: Dina Alemu

Model: Nicole Long

Clothing designed by: Alissa Pivaral





This collection is inspired by my Guatemalan heritage converging with my New Orleans upbringing - it represents my concept of home as a biracial person. The entire collection is hand dyed and printed by me using only natural methods (avocado and indigo dyes along with organic indigo paint) with silhouettes inspired by typical Guatemalan huipils and imagery of botanicals that I grew up surrounded by. The fabrics used are cotton twill, poplin, gauze, interlock, and fleece, along with silk habotai.

This collection was based on sustainability and artisanal painterly techniques applied on contemporary casual wear. By incorporating less form-fitting silhouettes on some and techniques to increase size inclusivity on those that are form-fitting, I intend for this collection to be a non-binary but feminine addition to the overall masculine based unisex market.

“it represents my concept of home as a biracial person.”



1. Indigo dyed and rice paste resist printed jumpsuit in poplin
2. Indigo dyed, printed huipil in cotton poplin and avocado dyed faux wrap skirt in fleece
3. Avocado dyed, indigo printed huipil playsuit in poplin with indigo dyed interlock and fleece legging
4. Avocado dyed twill discharged and indigo printed tent dress
5. Indigo dyed twill and printed gauze, and avocado dyed twill fit-and-flare dress









NO MIND LEFT BEHIND

The Struggle with Mental Health in the Black Community

By Moriah Briscoe
Photography by Celeste Fuentes



Black Mental Health art exhibit hosted by Not Alone and the Black Psychology Student Association - in collaboration with OMSA.

It is no joke that being #woke is capable of making you mad. So mad, in fact, that it can become difficult to get out of bed, or even complete small tasks around the house.

The pang I feel, after hearing that yet another unarmed black person's life has been taken, can stop me in my tracks. As someone with depression and anxiety, my day can easily become derailed. At times, I find myself unable to stop ruminating over the struggle and anguish that has led us to where we are today.

What has taken place in black history would leave anyone disturbed— you don't go through slavery, the Jim Crow era or #BlackLivesMatter unscathed. Though our modern experiences are pale in comparison to what our ancestors went through, it must be recognized that our struggles are simply an offshoot of theirs.

Mental health just won't take top priority when you're expected to be respectable throughout your daily life as a means of survival, nor when you're unable to relax around police in fear of what they might "accidentally" do.

The struggle is no less real, despite what those who think otherwise may say. But as real as the daily struggle is, so is the mental struggle. Fortunately, today we have the privilege and tools to unpack our baggage and properly handle our mental health.

In recent years, black mental health has been made a priority after a string of notable black figures committed suicide. These include, but are not limited to, the former Rikers Island inmate Kalief Browder, transgender activist Blake Brockington, childhood star Lee Thompson Young, and more. Their deaths were the catalysts for countless think pieces on the state of mental health in the black community. Unfortu-

nately, it took these circumstances to bring about change in the black community. But it is change nonetheless.

Change has even made its way to Virginia Commonwealth University in the form of a club. Not Alone is a student organization that aims to spread awareness and offer a safe space for black people who deal with mental illnesses. The president of the club, VCU senior Brittany Cooper, talked about the reasoning behind the creation of this new student organization.

"To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time."

-James A. Baldwin

"With minorities, [mental health] has a stigma that we're supposed to be strong and not supposed to talk about our problems," she said. "There's a certain vulnerability that can't be shown."

Hiding vulnerability is a struggle faced by millennials in the #BLM era, but it has also existed with past generations. The difference now is that the stigma has been lifted, just by a little. What do we do when we are left only with our thoughts and nowhere else to turn? Cooper says that we should talk.

"Just from being on campus and talking with coworkers, I've noticed [that] a lot of us have gone through similar situations. But you'd never know since no one talks about it," she said. "It's important to have that safe space and dialogue for people."

Although Not Alone is a fairly new club, she said that they intend to have many events where people of all ages can come together and talk in a safe space.

We have seen time and time again that protests bring people together in large numbers, usually for a specific cause or in resistance of a new legislation. However, whatever the specific reason, it is a force that can help us feel united. And in some ways, protesting is an act of self-care— to reassure oneself that they are worth fighting for.

But self-care can manifest itself in more subtle ways as well, such as completing responsibilities you've put off, taking a walk, writing, yoga, or the most commonly recommended: meditating. Despite what our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles may have said, yoga and meditation are not just for white folks. In fact, yoga's accessibility is a huge incentive of the practice.

Tapping into "non-traditional" methods deemed as not being "black enough" isn't a bad thing. Allowing yourself the free reign to explore your options and seek out what suits you best is, in itself, an act of self-care. It is as simple as listening to yourself and what you want.

So many times, black people take care of others, and especially black women— but we don't take care of ourselves. One of the privileges we have been afforded at this time is being able to look inside and repair those dark parts of ourselves. In doing so, we're able to more effectively help others and the future generations to come.



DAZEASES

The Banshee of Oregon Hill

By Jessica Frenzel
Photography by Francis Stephens



“L

ast year I had a dream where it was the rapture, and when the first 1,000 people disappeared, I asked my ex to meet with me. While I waited for him to arrive, a baby goat approached me and played with my hand. When my ex and I spoke, I expressed my desire to be together, until one of us disappeared. But he was married. I was so distraught that I vowed to become an abstinent witch and made the goat my familiar. I see that dream as a **metaphor for my music career.**”

-DAZEASES



Under the stage name Dazeases, 24-year-old London Perry has been gifting lo-fi electronic sad-pop music to her community since 2014. An alumna of Virginia Commonwealth University's Spanish department, she continues to bend language into a raw and nostalgic display of emotion from her home base of Richmond. She has already released several bodies of work, including "C R U M B S" (2016), "Welcome Back EP" (2016) and "Lame Parties" (2015). She is the producer, writer, composer and choreographer for her work—performing it at various venues

and house shows throughout the past several years. A strong voice in Richmond's growing DIY music community, Dazeases can clearly "do it herself."

Her creative process often looks like multiple notebooks and paper scraps, accumulated over the course of many months. She holds onto the sensations of her experiences and interactions for as long as possible, wanting the lyric-writing process to be natural and super self-aware. Hunched over a laptop in a café or on her bed is where she is often found writing her melodies.





“I’m interested in
patterns, from the
personal to the
historical, from
micro to macro.”





"I'm interested in patterns, from the personal to the historical, from micro to macro. How is my personal story relevant to a larger social narrative? Of late, that has been focused on heteronormativity and self-worth, how they play into behavior that is my own and yet, not unique to me," Dazeases said. "The only thing I consciously study is song composition, just by listening to my favorite songs on repeat with an active and analytical ear. I like to

take notice of production details, the subtleties and the overt elements that create the motion and tone of that song."

The female body serves as Dazeases' tool of power, confronting the male gaze head on with an unwavering comfortability in her own skin. Intentional vulnerability is key. When incorporating her body, power and sexuality into her performances, she wears very little, which actu

ally makes her most comfortable. "I don't like thinking about clothes and how they make me appear when I'm on stage," she said. "My body is all that it is."

And as anyone that has seen her live can attest, it truly is all she needs. When she performed at Zooanzoo's album release show at Strange Matter, she was

a powerhouse— her voice was haunting and her lyrics were wise. She seemed at home with herself under the thick, colored haze of Strange Matter's stage and was often crouching to share a moment of intimate eye contact with the front row. Her performance was the kind of emotional experience that lingers within you, long after it has concluded.





It was a communion of performer and audience— a conversation about love and letting go.

She finds comfort within dancing and the love that she receives from family and friends. “Those are the two most consistent things that provide me enough relief to feel centered and present, even if briefly,” she said.

Dazeases’ work can be found on Spotify, Soundcloud and Bandcamp.

soundcloud.com/dazeases
dazeases.bandcamp.com



DAZEASES

A person with short, curly hair is sitting in a white bathtub. They are wearing a white t-shirt that has some blood on it. Their hands are covered in blood, and they are holding their head with one hand. The person has a distressed expression. The scene is dimly lit, with a strong blue light coming from the left, possibly from a window or a door. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

“My body is
all that it is.”

