Volume 004

THE MATCHSTICK

Amnesty Canada's Arts & Human Rights Magazine

VOLUME 004

Created by and for youth — The Matchstick is Amnesty Canada's Arts & Human Rights magazine, amplifying the voices of young activists who use art to challenge injustice and raise awareness of human rights issues.

Collective Statement — Reclaiming the Narrative

For too long, those in power have attempted to dictate whose histories are told, whose struggles are recognized, whose pain is worthy of mourning.

We refuse to be shaped by the hands of those who erase, distort, and disfigure.

We create to survive, to expose, to imagine a world beyond the enforced reality of power.

We wield art as resistance, as rebellion against the false constructions imposed on us.

We believe that art and poetry, in their rawest form, will always exist beyond the grasp of control. They are a sign of our living culture, and a force that breaks through the silence imposed by oppression. Art cannot exist in isolation—it is always a dialogue, a confrontation, a refusal to let fear dictate the next step in time.

We are the friends of all Indigenous peoples fighting against oppression. We are students and activists, artists, immigrants, and children of immigrants, living and working on stolen land — horrified and wide-eyed, paying close attention as those in power choose cowardice, violence, and performative diplomacy when the future demands more.

We must always be in the process of creating and reclaiming because they are always in the process of stealing away those rights — our stories, our agency, our right to define who we are and what we expect from the world. Each word and chosen shade in this volume is a declaration of our presence, our concerns and our hope for a better world.

MASTHEAD

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FEATURED PIECES

Cover Art by Maria Abu Askar

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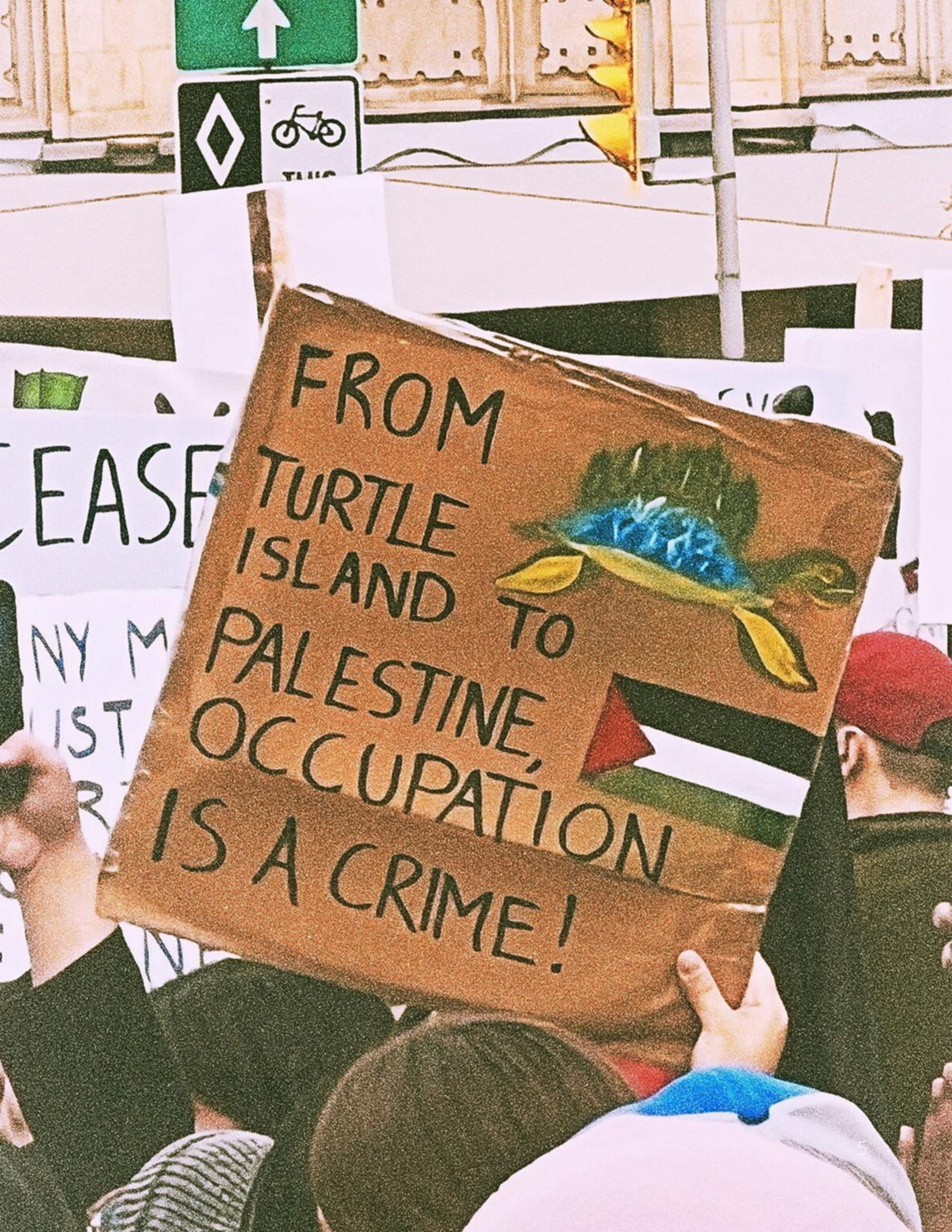

FROM
TURTLE
ISLAND TO
PALESTINE,
OCCUPATION
IS A CRIME!

“Our home ~~and~~ **ON** Native land”

As activists and artists, we at The Matchstick are committed to advocating against systems of oppression that have dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands and denied them of their rights to self-determination.

We believe that this work is essential to broader human rights work across the world and are honored to be able to pursue our goals together on Turtle Island, and on this land that we now know as ‘Canada’. The name ‘Canada’ is the colonial version of the original Huron-Iroquois term ‘Kanata’ meaning settlement or village. As this publication focuses heavily on visual and literary arts in all its forms, it’s crucial that we discuss the colonization of Indigenous languages and ongoing erasure of Indigeneity.

As an inherently settler-colonial organization based on land acquired through genocide, Amnesty Canada recognizes its role and its duty to uplift, empower, and stand in solidarity with Indigenous communities. Advocacy for global human rights includes equal recognition and taking accountability for our own complicity.

We stand alongside Indigenous peoples as they mourn the lives lost to brutal colonial violence and demand justice and basic human rights. The very institutions that serve as the foundation of so-called Canada are built upon Indigenous suffering and continue to enable capitalism at the expense of Indigenous lives. By collectively demanding action and change, we can hold the state and its mechanisms accountable for the genocidal atrocities it has and continues to commit.

The abuse of Indigenous peoples in the U.S., such as the reservation system, directly inspired Adolf Hitler’s blueprint for concentration camps that massacred over 6 million Jews during the Holocaust of World War II. Likewise, the South African government used Canada’s oppression of Indigenous peoples in the Indian Act and residential schools as a model to form their own racist segregationist policies for an apartheid system that discriminated against the non-white majority.

How does this translate to the Palestinian struggle? The illegal settlements and violent occupation of Palestinian land, resulting in decades-long forced displacement beyond the Nakba, attests to this correlation. When we talk about Israel’s system of apartheid and genocide against Palestinians, we reflect on Canada’s rise to nation-statehood.

"Our home ~~and~~ **ON** Native land"

It is the very strategic and intentional dehumanizing and antagonizing of Indigenous bodies for the benefit of the settler colonizers. We witnessed these same patterns happen to Palestinians as the civilian death toll climbed each day, not taking into account the bodies buried under the rubble or those who were wiped out before rescue teams could be deployed.

Acknowledging Canada's direct role as a colonial institution built off the blood and bones of Indigenous peoples should lead to strong support for the rights of the Palestinian people as well. However, Canadian apathy shouldn't discourage us from mobilizing.

Many of us on the editorial team are immigrants or children of immigrants who have a distorted and incomplete understanding of the history of this land. Although we are both victims and perpetrators of colonial values, we are, nevertheless, here as settlers and must devote ourselves to unlearning harmful misconceptions and relearning the truth from Indigenous peoples.

Given the theme of this volume, *Reclaiming the Narrative*, it's necessary that we make space for youth to tell their lived experiences through the art of multi-media storytelling.

Art is a means of creative expression and a form of resistance that can provide healing. From Turtle Island to Palestine, art channels light in times of darkness. Art is loud. It's accessible. It can reach audiences beyond borders regardless of language barriers because everyone can find a unique way to interpret meaning. By mobilizing art for change, it transforms these spaces into true means of activism, resistance, and solidarity by connecting communities despite the challenges of distance and location. Art is a form of protest and when we are silenced and forbidden from using words, other visual elements can be adapted to create that same effect.

A powerful example is the use of the watermelon as a symbol of Palestinian resistance. The fruit, with its vibrant green and red hues, was co-opted by supporters to symbolize defiance against the Israeli occupation. The watermelon became a subtle yet potent visual protest after the Israeli military imposed a ban on the importation of the fruit into Gaza in 2017. Palestinian artists, activists, and supporters worldwide began using the watermelon as a symbol of resilience and resistance—its colors representing the land and the bloodshed Palestinians have endured.

“Our home ~~and~~ **ON** Native land”

As an artistic tool, it transcended its simple form to become a statement of pride, survival, and the unyielding demand for justice.

From Turtle Island to Palestine, occupation is a crime and we as settlers currently occupying these lands must remember that wearing an orange shirt on September 30th and preaching for truth and reconciliation is hypocritical if we don't stand up for Palestinians enduring mass slaughter, as their truth is constantly being undermined.

Freedom, peace, and justice are interwoven — you can't have one without the other two. Just as we must apply an intersectional lens when examining social issues, we must integrate that same approach when exploring solidarity links, for they extend beyond movements and borders.

Everyone has a story to tell, and everyone interprets and reflects on a story differently. It’s important that we make space for those who produce knowledge and action through the power of storytelling.

The Last Trip

Madura Muraleetharan

When I return from work, Appa is already packing. He doesn't pause as the door creaks shut behind me, instead continuing to tuck pictures of him and Amma, taken out of their frames, into the neat folds of each of his shirts. My boots fall open as I unzip them, and when I remove them,

my feet are weighed by the water that has persisted through the leather. He doesn't look up at the squelching sound that they make as I walk towards him.

"What are you doing?"

At this, he finally stops. He looks me over, searching. "You don't have it?"

Even though today wasn't so bad, with the water only reaching my calves, I was still careful to lift my bag up to my chest, my arms shielding it from the rain. I reach into it now, all the way to the bottom where the slim envelope rests. I pull it out and place it into Appa's waiting hands.

Despite his anticipation, he is slow to tear it open. That has been his tempo for the past year; slow to walk, slow to answer, slow to anger. It would have been nice to know him like this sooner. He pulls out the two documents.

"This is all?" he verifies.

"Should be. I got it through somebody I know, so if you have any problems, then call me and I'll call him."

"Him?" Appa's voice peaks with a familiar but tired hope.

"A co-worker." Regardless, there's no chance for Appa's hopes to play out after what I did to get his ticket, but there's no need to tell him this. I move from the sofa towards the bathroom. "I'm going to shower."

Appa tucks the envelope into his shirt pocket and continues to pack in silence. Lately I have worried whether it's because he has become hard of hearing, too tired to answer, or has just accepted that a strangled form of communication is the best we'll be able to achieve. After tonight, the worry will likely erode away. After two weeks, the worry will stop eroding completely.

I don't tell this to Appa either, and enter the bathroom.

I pretend, in the shower, that this is how it will feel. It will be warm, first slipping through the front door, then rippling at my ankles, to my knees, the tops of my thighs, then pressing against my chest and back, blanketing over my head, and once it takes over, I will not fight it. I ignore the practicalities, like the fact that the gentleness of a shower will likely feel different from a flood.

It's not like dwelling on that fact would make a difference.

I wonder what my coworkers think of outside of the office, how they use this time that's been made new by the meeting from a week ago. I wonder what those who don't know yet, will not know until it's too late - although it's too late for those who do know, as well - will make of the time that they have left.

It had been both instinct and resignation that had caused me to keep my phone recording in my pocket. The information wasn't ready for public announcement; it was easier than I'd anticipated to play the recording to an office higher-up who knew somebody who knew somebody else, and use their panic to arrange for a ticket. Whenever I try to feel bad about it - about their panic, and then their swift compliance - it feels pointless.

I turn the shower knob and let the chill take over me, bracing myself to face Appa after changing into my home clothes. Maybe he'd been sensing it, with the weather that had gained a solemn consistency of downpours, with my soaked pants from my treks from work, or maybe because where there is land, no matter how many inches of water cover it, Appa can feel some sort of connection to it. Whatever it was, roughly a month before that meeting, Appa had started talking about wanting to go back home. He wasn't one for reminiscing; I knew his wishes were serious.

"It's not much better there," I'd warned one night with my work laptop open, as he'd stared blankly at the TV. In fact, being an island, Sri Lanka was likely worse in many ways, especially is northern homeland. I'd added, "And it won't be anything like how you knew it."

"I'm not planning on living there."

"I don't see the point, then."

"You wouldn't." The words are a swift cut, like all of Appa's frequent expressions of my

shortcomings. "You were born on land that isn't ours. Land - you don't even understand the word."

"Okay." I'd resumed working as Appa went on.

"Land doesn't have to love you, or heal you, or wait for you." Appa's voice had carried thee signed note that it always had whenever he discussed anything he deemed important with me. Regardless, he'd continued. "That land is what gave me life, and is what gave those before me life, and is where all of them have bled and have been burnt or buried. When I say I am from that land, that is what it means. You wouldn't understand."

"Still," I'd began to counter, trying to shut the lecture down, "Planes won't fly us." It was true; planes were largely reserved for political figures, or those who could afford the exorbitant prices, and reaching an airport with a tarmac that was safely drained from water took hours. Appa hadn't repeated the conversation, so when I approached him a while later to tell him he would have a plane ticket ready in a week's time, he had been uncharacteristically surprised.

I step out of the bathroom now, steam following me, and look for him. He is absent from his room, from the kitchen, from the living room. He is standing at the door, bags at the ready, feet clad in the boots he has used so rarely that they remain uncreased. This will likely be the image of him that stays in my mind. I take it in, the meticulously ironed clothes, the sheen of his balding brown head, the stooping posture granted to him by age. For the first time in a while, I want to be a little girl again.

"You have time." I tell myself that this isn't synonymous with a request to stay. "If you're waiting with your bags before the boat arrives, you'll look suspicious."

"It'll take me time. I don't have your speed." A rare concession.

We don't move to embrace, don't express that we'll miss each other. I don't miss him yet, and I probably won't have enough time for the feeling to set in before the water rises. He rests his hand on the door knob, and I open it for him.

"Be safe," he tells me, and then leaves.

I close the door from where the end will begin. I sit on the sofa that gives me a view out the window. First it will be the low-rent buildings in the valleys, and then the water will work its way up until it reaches me. I will be able to see it coming. Only those on higher ground will remain. I wonder if I should go to work tomorrow; I feel a foreign embarrassment at having to face the co-worker that I'd rattled down for a ticket. I'll save the decision for tomorrow. For now, I sit on the couch and wait for something to happen to me. Outside, the rain patters on.

Artist Statement

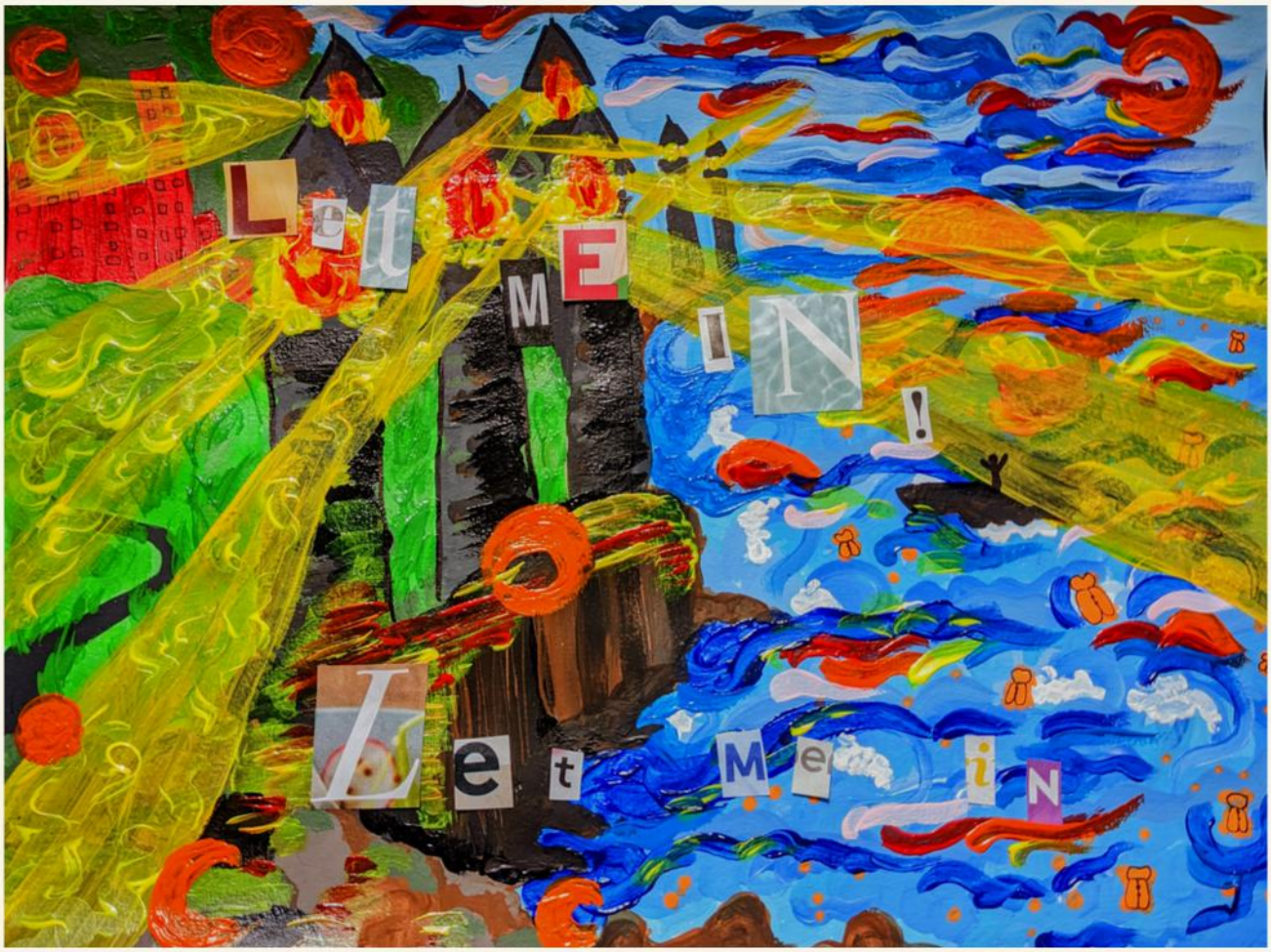
In a time when climate activism is becoming an increasingly critical responsibility, this story asks the reader to consider how the surge in statelessness and forced migration will affect our relationship with land and the environment. Settler-colonial nations in the Americas where land is stolen are also populated by those who have lost land in other countries, often as a result of decisions made by the same colonial powers. This system of dispossession gives rise to new, complex relationships between person, place, belonging and survival making it necessary to wonder what avenues of action and policy can be utilized to nurture genuine care for land and our own sense of home.

This piece delves into the shifting generational realities shaped by statelessness and climate crisis. It reflects on how histories of displacement impact our connection to land and identity/or how a world marked by upheaval can change one's definition of 'belonging'.

Artist Bio

Being Tamil from Sri Lanka, Madura is deeply engaged with issues of political violence, land dispossession, and effective advocacy. As she pursues a Juris Doctor, she maintains a strong passion for the literary arts, believing that literature serves as a vital medium for facilitating and reflecting social dialogue. She sees storytelling as an essential activity for reclaiming agency over personal narratives and voicing the fears and concerns arising from current political realities.

Borderline Hopeful



Sydney Grenier

Artist Statement

"Borderline Hopeful," connects deeply to justice, human rights advocacy, and the power of activism by shedding light on the arduous journey of forcibly displaced peoples. When individuals are displaced and compelled to leave their homes, borders initially symbolize hope—a promise of safety and new beginnings. However, as they draw nearer, this hope often fades due to the harsh realities of false promises from international institutions and the intricate migration systems of host countries.

These institutions often present themselves as protectors of human rights, yet their bureaucratic structures and slow-moving processes can lead to disillusionment. Refugees and asylum seekers are frequently promised safe passage or resettlement, only to encounter extensive application delays, lack of adequate social services, or even detention. Migrants, despite facing overwhelming obstacles, resist their erasure by persevering in their quest for asylum. The very act of seeking refuge in countries that make it difficult to do so is an act of defiance. Their determination to carve out a life in places that are hesitant to welcome them speaks to the power of their strength. By sharing their stories and standing against oppressive policies, these individuals reclaim their agency, refusing to be silenced or reduced to statistics. No human being is 'illegal'.

"Borderline Hopeful" is more than art; it is a call for solidarity with displaced people who are not just surviving but resisting. The work advocates for systemic change and for the world to honor the promises made to refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers —not only through words but through meaningful action every day.

Artist Bio

Sydney's education in Human Rights and Conflict Studies has naturally intertwined with her passion for art and storytelling. Her approach is defined by a deep exploration of social justice and the belief in the transformative power of narratives. In every aspect of her life—art, academics, and personal endeavors—Sydney channels her love for storytelling into the pursuit of social justice. Through her advocacy, she navigates the complexities of human rights issues, recognizing the powerful role that personal stories play in driving change.

Rapid Over Jagged Rocks

Jasmin L.K Smith

I've heard,
On the outside of this wall,
There is a bell that tolls each evening,
and that there is a beautiful, winding river
That flows into a tall, dark wood.

I've heard
If you follow the rapid, winding river,
You can hear laughter over the sounds of the stream
Rippling over jagged rocks.

I've heard
The river leads to a park,
The sounds of happy, playing children,
Reminding us of who we will leave our world to,
Who will fix our mistakes,
Or choose to let them fester.

I've heard,
The playground's children play children's games;
Cops and robbers,
and the bright primary colours
Are the background they use
To play out the scenes learned from the news screens.

I've heard,
Some of these children are always robbers,
and others are always cops,
and they are never allowed to switch places,
It is a hidden rule.

I've heard,
On the outside of this wall
There is a bell that tolls each evening,
While I dream of being a message in a bottle
On a beautiful, winding river,
Knowing the next bell that tolls will be for me.

Artist Statement

Jasmin's poetry submission was originally written in partnership with the 2023 Write for Rights Arts Commission. The poem, using repetition and sensory sounds, portrays the sonic passages outside of a prison cell, whose occupant faces the death penalty. The poem was inspired by a real case in 2023's Write for Rights campaign, about an intellectually disabled Black man who was served the death sentence by a majority white jury.

Jasmin's personal activism is greatly focused on anti-racism advocacy, and the pursuit of real adequate justice. Jasmin uses a portrayal of the natural world around us, which we often take for granted, as imagery for the world lost to the poem's subject, a world they will never get to see, or touch, or hear, ever again. When given the opportunity to create art about the 2023 Write for Rights case, Jasmin felt as though the lyricism and flow of poetry was the only form that could adequately capture this feeling of isolation and seclusion, and the horror and despair in response to a possibly equally doomed future.

Artist Bio

Jasmin L. K. Smith has been involved in activist spaces since middle school in the small community of Malton, Mississauga, Ontario. In the early years of her activism journey, she focused on addressing and protesting against anti-Black racism, a cause that remains close to her heart and is well-represented in her work. She is currently a member of Amnesty International's Canadian chapter and the National Youth Advisory and Action Committee, where she combats racism, misogynoir, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination while also shaping youth policies and strategies within the committee. Jasmin is incredibly passionate about her advocacy work and aspires to become an investigative journalist, aiming to report on human rights shortfalls around the world.


This is not the first time that I am driving
and I will continue to do so

Artist Statement

Using still images from Tamil-British musician M.I.A's music videos, and juxtaposing them with photojournalism, Maresha creates diptychs that symbolize the experiences of women, migrants, and refugees, by bringing to light the ongoing Refugee Crisis (images 1-3) and highlighting the fight for Women's Rights (image 4). The quote "this is not the first time I am driving and I will continue to do so," embodies female resistance, and is a response to its contrasting image; depicting men standing mighty, with their arms crossed, disapproving the notion of women's freedom. The images are appropriated to deep orange tones and dark shadows to reflect the rights violations and unjust conditions faced by migrants and refugees due to displacement, and the constraints women face in earning their right to freedom.

Artist Bio

Maresha Khokhar is a Pakistani-Christian musician, poet, and community organizer, with a passion for film, photography and digital content. Maresha graduated with a Bachelors of Fine Arts in Film Studies from Toronto Metropolitan University in 2021. In her artistic expression, she draws on her own experiences of immigration from Pakistan to Canada. She turns to visual arts, film and photography as mediums for storytelling, to explore the intersections between race, identity, and historical and intergenerational trauma, as experienced by racialized and marginalized communities.

Dear Mill Creek

Neela Rader

In the springtime of 2017, Mill Creek flooded. Mill Creek flows through traditional, unceded, and ancestral syilx territory, from "the east side of the Okanagan Basin into Okanagan Lake" ("Mill Creek"). My apartment building sits only a few metres away from the Creek, so when it rose, the spring weather was at my doorstep. According to Astrida Neimanis and Jennifer Mae Hamilton, the weather can be understood as both meteorological and more-than meteorological. They write that weathering is "a particular way of understanding how bodies, places and the weather are all inter-implicated in our climate-changing world". That spring, Earth's tilt toward the sun caused more heat energy to reach syilx territory, turning the snow on the mountaintops into water, which moved with gravity into the Creek and raised it. In part, the meteorological weather brought the Creek to my doorstep.

But the weather was also colonialism. The first dam was put near the headwaters of Mill Creek about 100 years ago ("Mill Creek") so that early settlers could control the annual flooding and build on what was once marsh and floodplain. Other colonial technologies included water diversion and channelization ("Mill Creek"). The City of Kelowna ostensibly owns and manages the Creek and surrounding riparian ecosystem, making decisions about and changes to this place without any recognition of syilx sovereignty. In fact, the City of Kelowna actively undermines syilx lifeways (fishing, treaty-making, harvesting) in its harmful relations with the Creek. My apartment building is only able to exist because of the colonial technologies of damming, diversion, and channelization. Without them, the abundant spring floods would destroy the building's foundation. When I helped my neighbours protect our underground parkade by putting sandbags around the perimeter of the building, I was deeply entangled with meteorological weather and more-than-meteorological weather.

But weathering is more than just understanding the ways meteorological and more-than-meteorological weathers meet; "weathering also names a practice or a tactic: to weather means to pay attention to how bodies and places respond to weather-

Paying attention to how different bodies weather the weather differently is key to an ecofeminist understanding of solidarities, "difference and intersectionality", not just between humans, but with other bodies of water too. How is the creek weathering the weather? According to the Okanagan Basin Water Board, "reduced freshet peak flows from floodwater diversions to Mission Creek, as well as extensive water storage activities, have reduced the stream's seasonal ability to blow out beaver dams" ("Mill Creek"). Urbanization and pollution have also decreased salmon spawning and other riparian species' habitat ("Mill Creek"). Settler-colonial water control has made the Creek less and less able to give life. But I weather it differently.

For me, the dams, diversions, and channelization on Mill Creek function as shadow places. Val Plumwood defines shadow places as "places that provide our material and ecological support, most of which, in a global market, are likely to elude our knowledge and responsibility." As I write this from my apartment building, I can see the Creek and its low water levels, but the places upstream that keep the levels low and my building untouched are invisible to me. Without those places, I would not live in this place, at least not in the ways I do now. The shadow places are also my places. While the Creek is harmed, I weather the dams and diversions with ease.

Mill Creek is my more-than-human kin. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins defines kin as "a mutuality of being"- certainly, my being and the Creek's being are entangled. Part of my being, the place where I live, is dependent on ongoing colonialism in syilx territory. But simply recognizing how I benefit from colonial harms to Mill Creek is not enough. Neimanis and Hamilton write, "to weather responsively means to consider how we might weather differently-better-and act in ways that move towards such change". What change would be required to mend these harms of colonial water control? The Syilx Nation Siwɬkʷ Declaration offers this: "Syilx peoples assert that siwɬkʷ [water] has the right to be recognized as a familial entity, a relation, and a being with a spirit who provides life for all living things."

Perhaps understanding the flood as a gift of life is a step towards weathering better.

There are important feminist lessons to be learned from Mill Creek's 2017 flood. As Val Plumwood articulates with her concept of the 'master model,' the human/nature hierarchy is always connected with man/woman (and other oppressive binaries), and therefore must be dismantled. The flood is a direct challenge to the master model, forcing settler humans to contend with the failure of their attempts at domination. That spring, I remember sitting on the stone wall that holds the Creek in place and seeing two sets of beady eyes and slick bodies coming towards me-river otters. They were swimming upstream, greeting me with their bobbing heads. This rare experience was made possible by the Creek's gentle and generous flood, by its resistance to colonialism. It challenged settler domination over land, premised on anthropocentrism, and gave life to the tmxwulaxw and timixw (Syilx Nation Siwɬkʷ Declaration).

Around the time of the 2017 flood, I often made a game of cleaning up garbage at the Creek with my friends. One of us would dislodge garbage in the water and the rest would try to use sticks to remove it as it flowed past. I was eleven years old and trying to do right by the Creek by cleaning it up, instilling in me some small sense of responsibility for the waters around me. Still, I did not know about the root injustices of displacement and colonization, so my efforts at restoration were insufficient. In Pleasure Activism, adrienne maree brown offers transformative justice as a tool to move beyond shallow responses to harm. She writes, "I believe in transformative justice-that rather than punishing people for surface-level behavior, or restoring conditions to where they were before the harm happened, we need to find the roots of the harm, together, and make the harm impossible in the future." So how can I practice transformative justice with the Creek, my more-than-human kin, and make a relationship of control and domination impossible in the future?

do not have all the answers. So, to move towards transformation, I want to call on two key ecofeminist tools: reciprocity and humility.

I am learning about reciprocity with more-than-human kin from The Syilx Nation Siwɬkʷ Declaration, which asserts that "[s]iwɬkʷ must be treated with honour, respect, and reciprocity."

This means not simply being thankful for when the water gifts us life but also giving it life back. This means affirming syilx sovereignty by not making decisions about siwɬkʷ without syilx people, interrupting the settler-colonial sense of entitlement to Land. Alexis Pauline Gumbs teaches me about humility; "MUCH RESPECT!" she tells her more-than-human kin, "I am at your service. I am in your debt. What can I offer?". When the Creek responds, Gumbs reminds me, listen-this is the first step of many. These feminist principles of reciprocity and humility remind me that knowledge is always situated, and that care is powerful.

Thank you to those who have guided me in my learning about this place and its connection to broader ecofeminist thinking. brown, Haraway, Neimanis, Hamilton, Plumwood, and beyond. Thank you to the Creek, the river otters, the salmon, the beavers, and the many other more-than-human kin with whom I am entangled. Let this be a beginning. May my learning evolve and grow. May our collective love for the Creek expand until it is big enough to hold the change that needs to come.

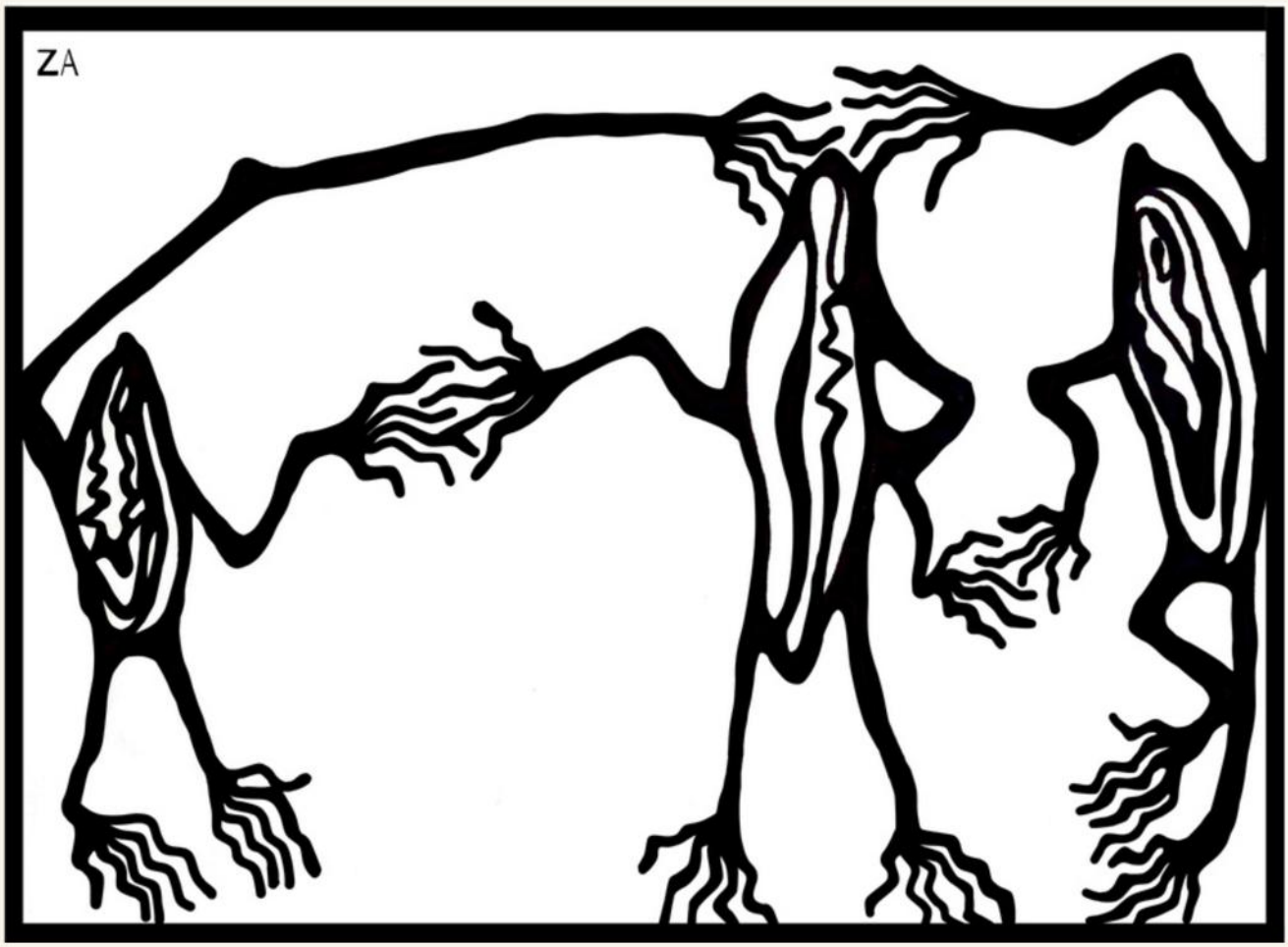
Artist Statement

In this piece, Neela examines large-scale systems of domination and control through her small-scale relationship with Mill Creek. As such, this vignette necessarily reckons with colonialism on syilx territory, syilx sovereignty, and anticolonial feminism. Neela believes in love and kinship as tools of resistance, and believes in moving beyond the protest tactics that the settler-colonial state and non-profit industrial complex prefers. Neela believes that movements for collective liberation will be strong by humbly learning and loving in deep relationship; because, as bell hooks told us, love is the practice of freedom (see bell hooks, "Love as the Practice of Freedom" in Outlaw Culture).

Artist Biography

Neela Rader is an 18-year-old sibling, artist, and community organizer living in the traditional, unceded, and currently occupied territories of the syilx people. A white settler of Dutch, Gaels, Italian, and British ancestry, they are committed to learning from and practicing solidarity with syilx People as they move towards decolonial futures. Neela's writing, art practice, and movement work is grounded in queer feminism, and currently guided by their learning from the waters and Lands they are enmeshed with. Outside of their activism, they love David Bowie, playing the fiddle, and spending time with their sibling.

Ceremony



Zineb Allaoui

Artist Statement

Zineb's collection, *Black Lines White Canvas*, challenges the racial and gendered values imposed on African artists in Canada, while reimagining the feminine form as a central character. Bold black lines interweave and interact, revealing themselves only to those who look beyond the surface. The stylized, graphic nature of her figures draws inspiration from African art, particularly Arabesque patterns rooted in regions of Africa where Islamic art thrives. Popularized in the early 20th century, this style has been co-opted and reclaimed by African artists across the diaspora. Through her work, Zineb reflects and honors her heritage.

Artist Bio

Zineb (she/her) is a 23-year-old artist with a degree in Communications, using her art as a powerful platform for activism. Through painting, she channels her inner emotions, expressing them in a nuanced and subtle way that avoids the shock often associated with words, yet preserves her radical critique of white supremacy and patriarchy. For Zineb, painting is an act of rebellion—a way to challenge norms and expectations in a space that is uniquely her own. Rebellion, for her, is not just about defying authority but questioning the systems and structures that dictate how we should live and who we should be.

Zineb's work invites viewers to engage deeply, asking themselves:

Who are these characters? What are their stories? How do they make me feel? By removing obvious racial and gender markers, she encourages the audience to move beyond surface-level perceptions and engage with the emotions and essence of her figures. Her depiction of reproductive organs is a deliberate attempt not to shock but to destigmatize these often taboo subjects. She reclaims what is objectified and hidden, placing it in a space where it can be viewed without judgment or discomfort. For Zineb, it's about normalizing these forms, making them visible without the shame or fear society attaches to them.

Pavel Nangfack

Artist Statement

As a street photographer and an activist, there is a bit of an intersection in which it is my responsibility to document protests that happen in the city, especially as a way of documenting the truth of things that happen at protests, as some media reporters will twist stories to portray protesters in a bad light. The photo is a symbol of resistance and the long road it faithfully takes. Resistance is important to me as it is one of the most impactful ways for us as a community to communicate to those oppressing us that we will never conform and that we will always fight for the rights of not only ourselves but for the rights of everyone experiencing any form of discrimination around the world.

Artist Bio

Pavel Nangfack is a photographer and videographer based in Ottawa, Ontario. Much of his work serves as a documentary of everyday life, driven by a motivation to find inspiration in the mundane. He aims to demonstrate that even the most easily dismissed moments can possess beauty, particularly in today's fast-paced world. Pavel believes in the importance of slowing down to appreciate life, capturing the essence of nature, man-made objects and structures, as well as the activities of people throughout their day.

Reaparición

Luna Cardenas

I stand before you
Supple skin
Fed by the blood that flows underneath
And a heart that pumps within

If I should speak of social justice,
in defense of water and land
From the highest mountains
To the rivers and lowlands
My voice carries little threat of being silenced by a gun
Or of being taken
Into the darkness of the night

A disappearance by force
By forces unbeknownst
But to the very same corrupt government,
corporations, and paramilitary forces
That today
Continue to threaten the lives of Latin American land and water defenders who say
Basta
Y hasta que los ríos fluyan sin parar
Y hasta que los peces no queden envenenados,
Y hasta que los territorios indígenas no sean robados,
Hasta que
They stand.

Defiant in the face of the disfigured metal proponents,
who call themselves fair opponents
Still they stand
Graceful in their moment

So that even if death or violence takes it's pass
Madre Tierra holds their souls and cups it in her hands,
Resilience cradled in the warmth of a mother who doesn't forget
And a peoples
Who in solidarity, stand

Artist Statement

This piece aims to highlight the importance of advocacy and solidarity for Latin American Earth and water defenders, who face unprecedented levels of violence, death threats, disappearances, and assassination. It seeks to celebrate the light these defenders shine through their ongoing resilience and, for those who have passed, their enduring legacy.

Artist Bio

Luna, a 23-year-old Mexican and first-generation immigrant, has been passionately writing poetry for over a decade. She finds joy in weaving verses during spare moments, often scribbling her thoughts on trains, in cafes, and wherever else inspiration strikes. Luna is a longtime Amnesty International volunteer, and has, for many years, chosen to write about observed human rights injustices around the world. These topics encompass a wide range of issues, including the abuse and working conditions of migrant farm workers, racism, forced disappearances and more.

Dahlia F.

Artist Statement

A Charcoal portrait of a Canadian Palestinian activist, representing resilience, perseverance and rebellion. A Keffiyeh scarf is wrapped around their head symbolizing resistance and the Palestinian identity intertwining as the protestor locks eyes with the viewer, confronting them with the reality of the movement. The motivation for this piece was to capture the strength and determination in the faces protesting against the occupation and oppression. In dedication to my close friend, a Canadian-Palestinian activist who protests frequently on the frontlines, I created this piece to highlight the global solidarity with the Palestinian people and the rebellion that transcends borders, as a worldwide pursuit for human rights.

Artist Bio

Dahlia Ferrarin (she/her) is a Canadian artist and young activist studying at the University of Ottawa for a Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science. Although pursuing a degree in the sciences, Dahlia is passionate about art and uses it as a medium to convey emotions and topics of activism to a broader audience. Using her artist platform to display the everyday faces of the resistance and the individuals who work in the shadows of activism.

Welcome To Tomorrow

Raniya Chowdhury

When the doves mourn the wildflowers, they sit and cry heavy tears against the gravel where pink blossoms once bloomed, fettered between chain link fences. I stand awkwardly at this funeral, crying for something that was never really mine. I assume that it is a funeral, the cats flick their tails and narrow their eyes, poised to pounce. But instead, they are prisoners of stasis and stagnation, not wishing to disrupt the respecting of the dead. Here, we inhale sooty clouds and exhale black smoke churned from concrete mixers (a forest grows into a red brick neighborhood, a stream into a sidewalk). Here, in our grand vision of Tomorrow, there is only the whine of cranes and squealing train tracks humming beneath the ground. When I press my ear to it, I find the distant drip of water, and below that, worms, and below that, the fragile bones of passenger pigeons. This clump of dirt is home: knowing that there is only now, and Tomorrow, and grief is but a momentary lapse of time where the Earth stills enough to let us say goodbye, before it turns again—like a cat's hunger will eventually trump its patience—saying: "You are either with us, or you rot." The doves and I are trapped here, in a cemetery of wildflowers, watching the meadow shrink, Toronto's skyline looming on the horizon like a threat. I ask you, is my expression an artifact of the past? I ask you, can you commodify the human experience? I ask you, can an assembly line carve Adam of clay and breathe life into his skin? I ask you, when art dies for your Tomorrow, will you sleep soundly knowing it was you who killed the birdsong?

Artist Statement

The sleepy suburb I grew up in has metamorphosed into a developed city of its own, not too far from the metropolis of Toronto. Plots of land that were once full of wildflowers and weeds go from pockets of nature into pits of gravel overnight, with cranes groaning across them like hulking beasts. This prose reflects on the juxtaposition of progress and loss. I recognize that development and progress are necessary components of growth, and such advancements can allow more people room to live and pursue art, rather than laborious work. Still, the quest for progress can often lead to the erasure of unique cultures on the basis that “civilization” and “modernity” looks a certain way, obfuscating the vast ways people can live fulfilling and authentic lifestyles, both in the West and throughout the world. As urbanization continues to encroach on what little green space remains, it is essential to ensure that the voices advocating for nature are heard amidst the clamor of progress. In navigating these changes, we must strive to create a balance between innovation and preservation, reminding ourselves that our well-being is intertwined with the health of the land we inhabit. From this discourse, I raise the question to the advocates of technocracy: What are you giving up for your Tomorrow?

Artist Bio

Raniya Chowdhury is an award-winning writer from Ontario. She has been recognized by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, receiving the Student Achievement Award for poetry & prose. Her work has also won the Rotary Club of Stratford's annual short story competition and the New York Times Learning Network's "How-to" essay contest. Her writing is an act of protest against institutions and systems of belief that create injustice. When she’s not writing, she can be found haunting museums and libraries or, most often, blaring My Chemical Romance in her bedroom.

The Last Year of Weather

Sydney Grenier

On the surface, Kerrow had always been a quiet town. Old newspapers and plastic bags swirled in the breeze. The intricate, dark soul of the town only revealed itself to those who stayed.

Pasted on a crumpled newspaper, a photograph of Parliament consumed by flames bore the date October 21st, 2030. The paper, dusted in thick black soot and marred by greasy tire tracks, screamed in bold letters, "Fire Destroys Nation, Warnings Ignored."

Nowadays, tides gnawed at the edges of Turtle Island, and smoke from a decade ago still cloaked the sky. People lived on the move, wary of staying together too long for fear of diseases like the 2020 pandemic. They sought refuge in towns spared by the fire, and Kerrow was one such desolate place, devoid of grocery stores, hospitals, or schools. Large cities were no longer sustainable.

Those who survived did so because they respected the Earth. Fishing in small lakes, drinking
from rivers, and eating small plants, they left hardly a trace. Then there were those who, stuck in their ways, still wanted to leave a mark. Jack MacDonnell planned to build new roads across Kerrow. He could not reconcile that his slashing and paving had caused this barren continent.

"This town has so much potential. Look at all this empty space!" Jack had exclaimed.

But the space was not empty.
Beneath the crust of burnt forests and sunlight filtered through a red haze, Kerrow seemed to be withering away.

In reality, it was a wild and proud place. Those who tried to tame it quickly saw the truth.

Kerrow had a way of making you question your reality, making you feel small. The crows on the telephone wires spoke fortunes you would never see. The height of the trees drowned time. Your lifespan was a sliver of theirs.

The rings of the trunks would keep rippling and growing while the ripple of your irises would falter and fizzle out. Strong roots would swallow your blank stare.

Jack turned on the headlights of his truck as he drove out of town early one morning."Where did this fog come from?" he grumbled into his cigarette, exhaling hateful air into the atmosphere.

The spirits began to simmer with the heat of anger. That was what caused the fog in the mornings. Wispy fingers reached out from the wheat fields, grasping at the tires of the truck, trying to restrain him. Jack drove on, flattening milkweed as he turned toward the exit. The spirits sighed and evaporated in anguish.

Jack drove to the work site, kicking up dust and greed. He felt he was being watched.

Out the truck window, on the telephone wire, an eagle with fire-yellow eyes fixed its gaze on the man's neck.

With the speed of cracking lightning, the eagle swooped talons-first toward the man. "Christ!" Jack exclaimed, pounding the gas pedal. The eagle grazed the paint of the truck with its sharpened talons, a satisfied flame in its eyes. Jack was weak prey.

Wheezing air in and out of his blackened lungs, Jack wiped his forehead with his sleeve. Maybe he had gotten a bad night of sleep, but it seemed to him that Kerrow was eating away at him.

As he rounded the corner to the work site, Jack thought, What an eyesore. Land defenders and ancestors had painted "LAND BACK" in dripping red paint across the rubble that was once a place where dreams, languages, dance, family, and healing were choked out of existence. The land, which witnessed the cruel injustices, stood stoic across time.

In the basement of the dilapidated church, the soul of Kerrow thumped like a pair of drowning lungs. Those stolen childhoods, confined to the place where so many lives faded into black, seethed with anger.

Any person who dared try to tame the land for their benefit would have to confront the unyielding souls. Hopping out of the truck and thumping his boots on the ground, MacDonnell dragged his tools out of the box of the truck and started toward the old church.

The trees, crows, wind, and plants rustled and leaned in with anticipation. Let's see him fall, they hushed in a haunting chorus. Overgrown grass bent toward resounding footsteps, braiding into each other for strength. Clutching and tugging at his bootlaces, Jack stumbled, and several tools clanged to the ground.

"What on earth?" He remarked.
Glancing at his surroundings, Jack admired what he had found. The old graffitied church stood like a lone scarecrow in the middle of an expansive field.

The plants that the eye could see had fought to peek above the earth. The fires left behind trees with sturdy trunks but no leaves. Whispering grass, but yellowed due to a lack of sun.

The only other indication of human life was the disused telephone poles and wires which stood small like toothpicks and string in the distance. Dark clouds heavy with rain crept into view. Jack wasted no time. He raised his arms above his head, and with a deft swing, his steel shovel pierced the earth.

A powerful silence swept across the land, ringing in Jack's ears. Turning around madly to see what caused the seemingly nuclear silence, Jack clutched his ears. His vision blurred and speckled black. He felt his vocal cords vibrate from his screams but heard no sound. It began to rain freezing droplets through the overcast of smoke, and in the distance, Jack saw a shadowy figure. It rained and burned all at once. The sky seemed to kiss the ground. The rain pelted down. The shadow spread its wings of fire and its voice resounded, "You did not listen."

Jack was being pulled into the earth. He did not resist.

As his blinking slowed, the truth of his existence struck him. He, too, was part of the land. And if it burned, he burned too. Jack realized he had set himself on fire. Cheekbones, ribcage, kidneys, brain, eyelashes softened into the dirt and grass.

This was the last year of weather. The seasons melted into each other and all that was left was parched earth. The fire was blooming, and Jack's heart was caving in. His guilt was relentless, like waves crashing into the shore. Like the summer warming, until it didn't anymore.

Artist Statement

This submission is a reflection of Sydney's generation's frustration with the neglect of the climate crisis. Through this story, Sydney hopes to encourage reflection on the Land Back movement, and the return to Indigenous sovereignty as a powerful path to addressing and easing the suffering caused by the climate crisis. By advocating for justice and human rights, particularly for Indigenous communities, this piece highlights the transformative power of activism in fostering a more equitable and sustainable future.

Artist Biography

Sydney's education in Human Rights and Conflict Studies has naturally intertwined with her passion for art and storytelling. Her journey is defined by a deep exploration of social justice and the belief in the transformative power of narratives. In every aspect of her life—art, academics, and personal endeavors—Sydney channels her love for storytelling into the pursuit of social justice. Through her advocacy, she navigates the complexities of human rights issues, recognizing the powerful role that personal stories play in driving change.

Fragmented Silhouettes

*Maria Abu Askar

"Fragmented Silhouettes' is a screenprint that examines Palestinian culture and heritage, focusing on the women of Palestine. During times of war and displacement, women were left behind to take care of their children while their husbands went to defend their country. Since 1948, women have locked their doors and hung their home keys around their necks, keeping them safe and hopeful to one day return, reflecting their strength and resilience which persists today.

I wanted to associate their traditional practices with their roles as women of Palestine so I included cultural embroidery patterns of olive trees on the silhouettes. The red silhouette features the olive tree branches, while the black silhouette features the olives themselves. This represents both proof of existence and cultural heritage tied back to the history of the original people of the land.

The title Fragmented Silhouettes suggests internal conflict, personal struggles and feelings of being torn between two different roles of balancing ethnic identity and immigrant experience and living in multicultural societies, which is what a lot of Palestinians have experienced since 1948. This work represents history and ongoing struggles, portraying the persistence of cultural identity in the face of displacement and attempts at erasure.

***Maria Abu Askar** is a second-year student specializing in Art and Art History at the University of Toronto Mississauga, focusing on print media, painting, and photography. Her work often explores personal identity, Palestinian heritage, and cultural memory, drawing from her family connections and experiences growing up in Saudi Arabia. Last spring, two of her works were exhibited at the Project Project exhibition at Sheridan: a drawing depicting her journey in Saudi Arabia and a photograph centered on the theme of resistance against oppression in Palestine. Maria's latest work, Fragmented Silhouettes, continues her exploration of cultural identity, focusing on the strength and resilience of Palestinian women. Her goal is to revive and elevate Islamic art, showcasing its beauty and making it something


THE MATCHSTICK