

Vignettes from an Aspiring Artist

By Jacqueline He

During the lulls of chemistry class, as the silk-fine breeze of autumn whisks in through open windows, I doodle on the borders of my notes. Jeweled raindrops that glistened dully from the sheen of graphite lead, inked hyacinth flowers with tight curlicues that flourish outwards, an ornate necklace of molten silver. The necklace drips down the clavicle of a snoozing mermaid. Mechanical pencil in hand, I try to fill in the details - by arcing the lead tip outwards and reining it back in, I form the mermaid's loose, wispy curls and high forehead. The song from last night - you don't know until you do, darling - circles my head, and I find myself carefully delineating the lyrics in slanted calligraphic font. Before the clang of the school bell breaks me from my reverie, the mermaid splashed her holographic tail - once, twice - and disappeared in a spray of icy rhinestones. I blink, and the spell is broken.

For me, creating art has always been a cathartic experience. Isolated from the hustle-bustle of everyday life and cloistered away from the uncertainties of my future, I regain control of my life with each brushstroke. With my worldview limited to my brush and canvas, each mark I make is deliberate and intentional. It's in art where my imagination spreads onto paper - a packet of wishbone needles, blood-flowers blooming on linoleum tiles, yesteryear's swollen dreams.

At home, I trace peach blossoms in ink, applying steady pressure with my trusty .5 mm fineliner. Each petal, delicate and ephemeral, is expressed with brisk and expansive strokes. The branches are darker, slender and rigid. Every so often I try to concentrate on refining the technical aspects of my piece, but mostly I prefer to let my thoughts wander. I leave the piece unshaded and

uncolored, a monochromatic lineart that joins its companions on the wall: the sprigs of hederia hibernica, the white calla lilies freckled with splatters, gold-leaved wreaths encircling sleek chignons.

I use stubs of charcoal for quick sketches. They are rough and smeary, but I get a wonderful semblance of movement. With care, I mark out geometric proportions before fleshing out the details - a prima ballerina suspended in arabesque position, sleeves of watery silk draping down her elbows, swan neck curved towards the bone-shard moon. My hand tilts just so and I smudge hard at an angle, until ashy shadows seep through the paper. The interplay of light and dark renders her incandescent.

Watercolors blend beautifully and softly, a continuum of hues spread smooth. My movements are sedate and peaceful, as if I was meandering through stagnant backwater. I paint atmospheric candlelight scenes, dabbing washed yellow hues to create evocative fairy glows. The shadows are kept hazy and indistinct, blurred into the background - a study in sfumato. My starry horizons are indigo blue, deepening to sensual purple at the edges. Tiny diamond stars dot the nightscape in swirls, vanishing over the silhouettes of conifers.

A dragonfly suns itself at my windowsill, rubbing its legs together contemplatively. My cat sleeps with paws tucked in, white tail twitching in lazy arcs. Surrounded by the smells of turpentine and linseed oil, I mix oils on my palette - blending the lemon with a dab of cerulean for a dewy emerald hue. Oil paints are thick and creamy, their colors lend vibrancy and clarity. I had started off slow - peeled lemons amidst foliage and backdrops of red, of varnished jars perched jauntily next to portobello fungi, a still-life capturing the muted iridescence of a nautilus shell on lace tablecloth. A handmade sweater with a

yellow sun embroidered at the center, its yarn tassels drooping and dirty. My paintings have slowly progressed towards the chimerical - I depicted godfish floating towards coronas of celestial light, sunlight striking their glistening scales. Tiny fairies nestled inside traffic lights, who power each bulb - red, yellow, green - by flicking the circuits with clawed fingers.

I want to preserve my fleeting thoughts before they abandon me, inevitably drifting away into the infinite cosmos like motes of dust. Art brings a touch of whimsy into my life and a tranquility to my soul. It becomes a means of escape - through art, I find a whole new world free from the constraints of reality.