





What We're About

We are a dedicated platform for women to share their stories – because every story, whether serious, silly, or simple, matters. Our goal is to build a community where everyone feels seen, heard, and a little more connected to each other.



A NOTE TO THE EDITOR

HOLY SHIT. HOLY SHIT. HOLY SHIT.

This issue actually exists! I am feeling mostly grateful and a touch giddy. It moved from my wouldn't-it-be-nice idea pile to a real zine. For someone like me who has a large stack (both real and metaphorical) of half-complete projects, this publication feels like no small wonder.

Creating a zine featuring work by women has been a simmering dream of mine for many years. I think, like basically all of us, I crave connection with other women in my community and get so excited when people come together to share a piece of themselves. Whether that be their view on the world, their heartbreak, their silly ideas, or beautiful artworks. We are such incredible beings with unique perspectives that should be shared. There is magic in creating something that connects with another person. Summoning that everyday magic is why I wanted to start this zine.

An incredibly enthusiastic thank you to my friends who helped birth this project and see it become a reality. A special shoutout to Jessie, who created the visual brand – you blow my mind. Thank you to the friends cheering me on from afar, and, of course, a thank you to all of the talented individuals who submitted their work. I am beyond grateful. And I look forward to seeing where this leads and what kind of community we can build.

THANK YOU.

THANK YOU.
THANK YOU.



MEET THE TEAM BEHIND HARD CANDY

At HARD CANDY, our team is the heart-shaped lollipop at the center of the wrapper: smart, creative, a little weird (in the best way), and totally unapologetic. We're here to empower, inspire, and throw a little glitter on the ordinary.

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Equal Parts Wisdom And Whimsy



GOT STORIES TO TELL,
ART TO SHARE, OR BIG WEIRD
ENERGY TO BRING?

SLIDE INTO OUR INBOX TO JOIN!
HARDCANDYNASHAGMAIL.COM

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HARD CANDY

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Abbey Kostyal (She/Her), First Rodeo, Black Visual - Digital Art



"Yellow makes people nauseous"

She cautioned from that soft chair in her office
As if I worried about people
And nausea was enough to stop me

I was nauseous during office hours empty stomach double espresso deadline mode

I try to argue my point
but the words are dull and hollow
Back at my easel it taunts me
I knew she was right
but "wrong" loops in my head like a song

I painted in yellow for almost a year sunsets that dripped in golden pollen glowing doorways to shiny places the way the light danced across their faces flecks in an eye lemons and limes ticking clocks and dripping drops of cadmium

Oxygen

phenergan Time

mine all mine

Alone in a room with paint on the floor and the walls and the door in the lines between my finger prints coiling yellow brick roads half of me my identity

Back when the brush wouldn't work because I couldn't learn that was the day she called herself crazy for letting me in her class

Letting me

like I wasn't paying
like I wasn't praying
for salvation through pounds of yellow paint
and the blue nausea
swirling me green with envy
for every other painters intuition
like absent ignition
my engine couldn't turn

But when the bristles broke and my shoulder shattered and when I flattened the yellow stained my skin and teeth and claws On the floor
gasping for
breath and waiting
for death
in a bath of bloody red

That's the pool where she pushed me in

Look for the crimson

Follow the light

Loosen your grip but hold on tight

Stand up tall and take a step back

Square up your shoulders and take off your hat

Have some respect for the class and our time

Wait your turn and clean up quick

When the time comes, try not to be sick

Hold your tongue in a silent line

An empty critique?
Well then, grit your fucking teeth

Not a single one of you could stand to be me

You would've walked out
You would've quit
Anything else has to be easier than this
You'd rather do math
Essays and taxes
You'd rather be sleeping and dreaming
of questions with answers
than the truth of the matter
that none of this matters

which makes it so easy to go unless you know

that you're wrong

Years down the yellow brick road there came the day she called me by my name she called me brave and intuitive connected and expressive

"Loose like Van Gogh"
"He loved yellow too, you know"

That's when she told me

Stage whisper
Between me and you
This whole thing?
folie à deux

her favorite color was

yellow

too

A Love Letter to Lover

My phone pings twice almost simultaneously. Notifications from Instagram: "bro I'm happy for her" followed by "but I also wanna eat a brick" are the responses I get from my sister after I sent her the video of an engagement.

How do you respond to that? I ask her why.

Her answer "i love love but i ain't in the headspace for seeing lovey dovey rn lol." I nod my head in understanding before responding again. She has a turnultuous love life for an eighteen-year-old, and I have never felt love like the kind that merits engagement in my life. We have two different understandings of how being in love works but respect each other's journeys. She is the kind of person to discuss future plans with a partner before they are anywhere near ready for that level of commitment. And I told myself at twelve I was never getting married.

I message her back, "welp sorry bout that bud" and go about my life thinking about the complexities of love.

Track 1: 1 Forgot That You Existed

How many days did I think about how our friendship crumbled? Consistently? About 362 days. Realistically? 2,437 days and counting. I am a pretty reserved individual, so it takes me a while to really open up to others. I have a good group of friends. That group used to be bigger, but people tend to screw others over. My best friend did me wrong, and I cut her out of my life.

Going into seventh grade, I felt like I knew very few people. But the first day of school, I met a new person through a mutual friend. We became fast friends and were very rarely separated. She was the first friend I ever said "I love you" to. She was also the last. The way our friendship ended changed the way I go about making and behaving around friends. I love the relationship that I have with all of them, but I don't tell them I love them because of the one I wish I could forget existed.

"How many days did I spend thinkin bout how you did me wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong?"

Track 3: Lover

I have issues with physical touch. It dates back to the person I wish I could forget exists. Our friendship was one filled with lots of hugs and physical connection. Some people get excited about something and reach out to touch those around them. That was our relationship. I welcomed it because I had never had that connection with anyone, not even family. I wasn't raised in a family that enjoyed hugging. We all know we love each other but never relied on the gesture to prove it. Gaining that sense of security in a friendship was startling. I always wondered if it was too good to be true. I asked myself a lot if we would always be that close. I was gutted to find out it wouldn't be forever. I've hated hugs ever since.

"Can we always be this close forever and ever?"

Track 5: The Archer

when I finally found out why our friendship was unraveling. I sent an apology text begging to fix the problem. That message went unread as far I know for six months. It might have gone unread since I sent it, I'll never know. I wrote the first letter to her after the first day of school that year. I gave it to a mutual friend and asked her to deliver it because I was afraid of doing so myself. That first letter never got there, lost in the mess of crumbled papers at the bottom of a high school girl's backpack.

I wrote a second letter after I found out the first never made it. I was brave enough to drop that one in her backpack, but not brave enough to stick around to watch her find it. I never heard anything from that. As the year ended, I got fed up with waiting and messaged her on Snapchat, the only social media she could have. She responded. We made up very quickly which made me elated at the time. We went back to normal like nothing happened. Then our friend group blew up. It was her fault.

I had been journaling about everything that happened from that summer throughout freshman year. It took me years to delete that note on my phone. It was full of hundreds of questions I wish I had asked that school year. It was full of pain and tears. It was full of red flags I wish I had seen sooner. It was full of things I was afraid to say aloud.

"I've got a hundred thrown-out speeches I almost said to you"

Track 7: Miss Americana & the Heartbreak Prince

I tend to hyper fixate on things. A favorite actress, character, sport, athlete, tv series, movie. You name it, and I have been so focused on one it became my entire personality. When you are an insecure teenage girl, you focus on finding something to take away that shame and fear. That was my best friend. She made me feel seen. We connected quickly. We shared so much of the same trauma and the same interests. She introduced me to theatre. We were inseparable. If people saw one of us at school the other was right next to them or very close behind.

She became my hyper fixation. I was laser focused on being the best friend I could be to the girl that treated me better than any other friend had before. Being her shoulder to cry on, her support system became my whole purpose -- my reason in this world. How do you recover when your world stops spinning, but you have to keep moving? What do you do when your whole world is destroyed, and you're left in the rubble wondering what went wrong? Can you find a new purpose when you feel like yours has been taken from you?

"It's you and me, that's my whole world"

Track 9: Cornelia Street

There were a lot of places I was afraid to go and a lot of people I was afraid to talk to after that dreaded summer. I didn't know whether it was smart to be in the same areas as her more than required. We were already forced to be in the same classes. I was worried spending more time near one another would make things worse. She introduced me to theatre which I fell in love with. Signing up to be a crew member was terrifying because I knew she'd be auditioning. I knew we would have to spend countless hours of countless days in the same auditorium. The place I had hoped to be a sanctuary for my four years of high school quickly became my personal purgatory.

Our first "conversation" after that summer happened in October. She mouthed a question to me, and I nodded in response. We didn't speak in person again until after Christmas when we made up. Then what had been purgatory became a safe space again. I felt comfortable being around our mutual friends in her presence. Things felt like they had gone back to normal.

Sophomore year she quit talking to me again. Sophomore year she quit theatre. Sophomore year I found a home in that auditorium riddled with memories good and bad. Even though theatre reminded me so much of her, I managed to reclaim the space and make it the sanctuary I had hoped it would be freshman year.

"And I hope I never lose you, hope it never ends / I'd never walk Cornelia Street again."

Track 10: Death by a Thousand Cuts

I am a pretty vivid dreamer. I often see dreams in episodes throughout sleep. If one wakes me up, I can fall back to sleep and dream something new. Freshman year, I would dream of reconciliation. I would dream of places I had never seen with people I was not talking to. In those dreams I would see flashes of happy moments tangled between the stress inducing sad moments of reality.

Those flashes would forcibly wake me up. I would bolt upright like I was in one of those falling dreams. Sweat would cover my body, the cool air of my room would suffocate me, and I would panic as I tried to catch my breath. Sitting, staring into the abyss - I would heave a sigh of relief after realizing it was all a dream. Tears would slip down my face, and creep onto my pillow as I collapsed.

I would wake up the next morning, dreading the day that waited for me after the nightmarish slumber chased me toward it.

"Flashbacks waking me up"

Track 15: Afterglow

July 28, 2019, I texted her. "My mom told me what your mom and her talked about the other night. Can we talk things out please?"

After she ignored me every time we passed each other at freshman open house, I had my mom call hers to see what the deal was. Allegedly she felt like I was spamming her with messages over the summer. School let out for the summer May 25th of that year. We promised to keep in touch since we had different summer plans.

She kept that promise for nine days. She was travelling through The Badlands, Grand Teton National Park, and Mount Rushmore so service was spotty. She apologized for the lack of service and would text when she found a signal. The last time she texted back that summer was June 21st. I still sent her messages every other day or so because we talked EVERY DAY before summer break. She read a message on July 17th - no response.

After I figured out she felt I was spamming her, I wrote her letters. I apologized profusely in both. On December 30th of that year, I apologized one more time - and it worked. At least for a few months.

"I'm the one who burned us down, but it's not what I meant"

Track 17: It's Nice to Have a Friend

Quality time is my love language. Being around the people I value makes me feel whole. Throughout our friendship, I was constantly trying to make plans. I invited her to movies, church, dinner. I even tried to get concert tickets a few times for an artist she introduced me to. Most every time I extended an invitation; I was met with some sort of excuse of preexisting plans. If she didn't claim to already have plans, she would say she would ask her parents. When I would follow up before the event, she would apologize and say she forgot to ask.

The first time I convinced her to hang out, we went to see Love, Simon. She showed up late. A few months later, our school took the eighth graders on a trip to Holiday world. We had planned to hang out around the park together. She left me for a group of different friends, and I ended up spending the whole day with my mom - alone.

The last time we hung out together before we quit talking was her boyfriend-of-the-times soccer game. I invited her to see a movie two days later. She said she would have to find time between physical therapy and drama rehearsals. I went without her ten days later.

She never found the time.

"wanna hang out?" Yeah, sounds like fun"

Track 18: Daylight

Just a few short months after our reconciliation, the strength of our friendship was put to the test. She got into an argument with one of our other friends during rehearsal. The fight divided our friend group. I chose to be by her side and told the other friend I was also on her side. I played double agent essentially. I would report back with what others were saying about her while acting like I was against her in the face of her gossipers.

we ended that school year still part of a severed friend group. She ghosted me over the summer again, and I decided to give up. I turned to the people I had been who had been on the other side of the "war" hoping they would welcome me back. They did. They taught me what she had been hiding from me about the fight. They taught me I had been part of the wrong alliance. I never talked to her again. I have been friends with her enemies ever since.

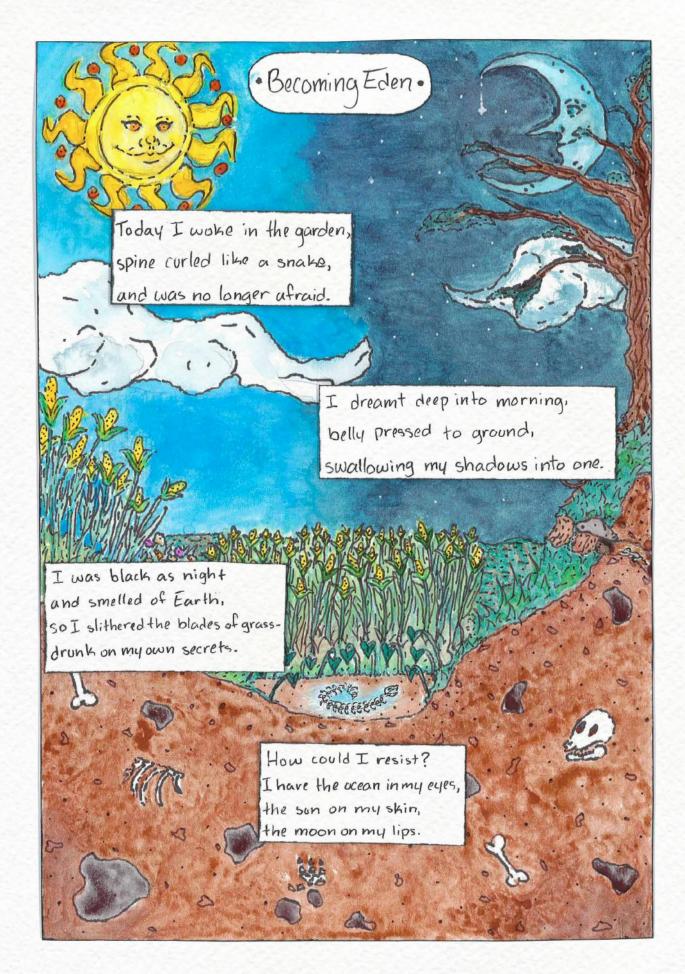
"I wounded the good and I trusted the wicked"

I have always had a difficult relationship with love. I learned the weight of words early in life. I learned the value of an "I love you" holds greater weight with certain people. After roughly four years of chaos, I discovered that even though someone says "I love you" back, the feeling can be unrequited if not convenient for them. I found people that love me for me who put equal effort into loving friendships. When I think about the love I felt for her, the blood in my veins courses like fire raging through dried foliage.

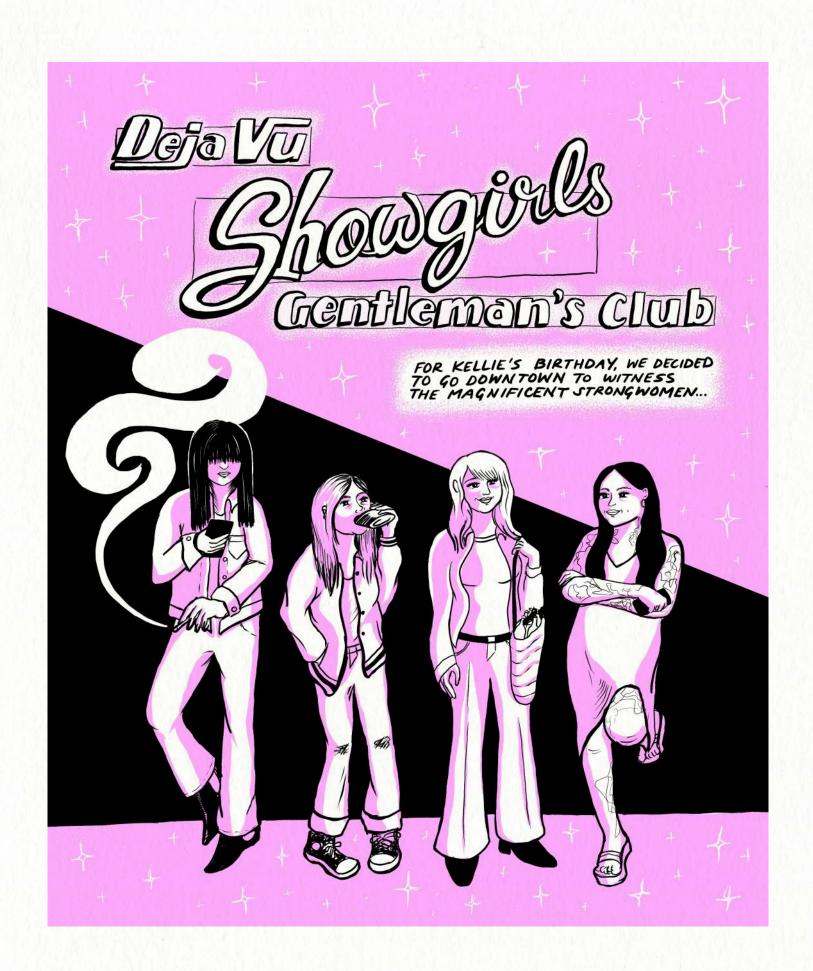
After all: "Teenage love taught you there's good in goodbye." And that goodbye was the most relieving one I have ever uttered.



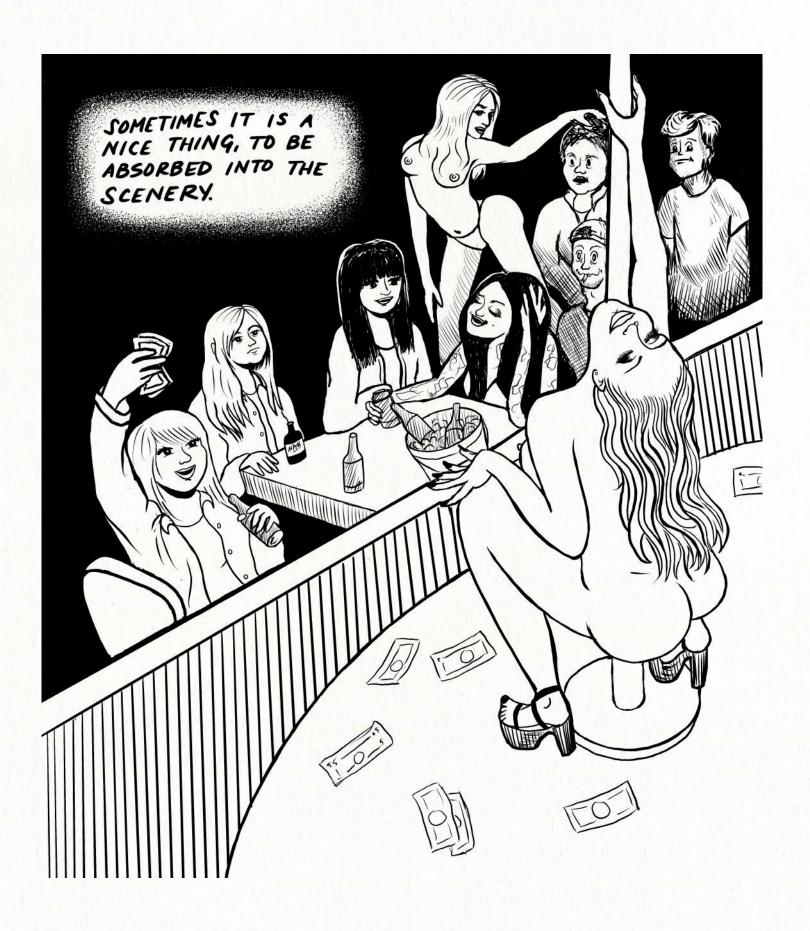
SONG OF THE EAST, SONG OF THE WEST, THE SONG OF THE NIGHT IS THE SONG I LIKE BEST. IT FLOWS FROM THE NORTH, IT FLOWS FROM THE SOUTH, THE SOUND HOLDS MORE BEAUTY THAN IF IT FLOWED FROM A MOUTH. FROM THE BIRDS TO THE CRICKETS, WHO SPREAD THEIR GREAT WINGS, THE STARS PLAY A TUNE OF MOST BEAUTIFUL THINGS. AND WHEN THE PINK FINGERS OF DAWN SHALL REACH UP, THE LIGHT FILLS THE SKY AND THE TUNE CLOSES UP. - ALISON WALTHER

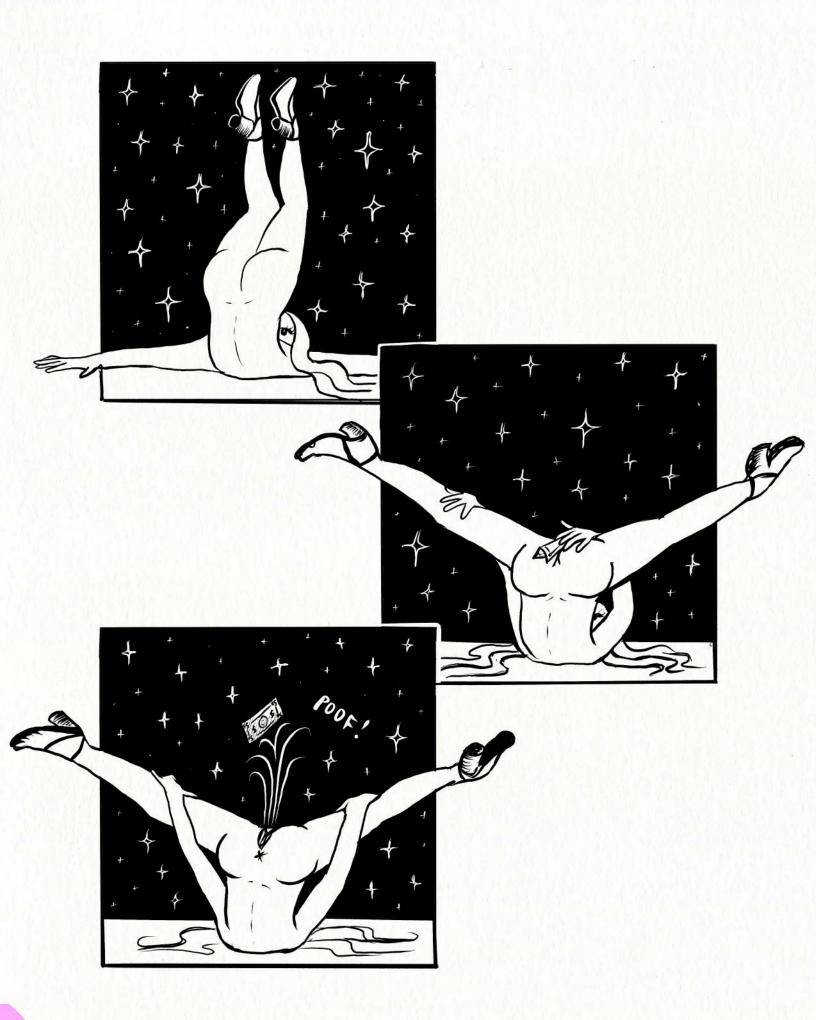


Kelsey Mahaffey (She/Her) and Molly Mahaffey (She/They), Becoming Eden Mixed Media – Poem, Watercolor, Ink



Casey Jo Stohrer (She/Her), Untitled Comic









I HAD BEEN
HAVING A LOT
OF ANXIETY
AND SADNESS
ABOUT MY NEW
FOUND INFERTILITY,
AND ABOUT
MOTHER HOOD IN
GENERAL.
I DIDN'T KNOW
HOW TO TALK
ABOUT IT.







She Asked

Another completion, the story of uncertainty, boldly visible in the custom map to freedom. Journey to nowhere. Journey to Anywhere.

Dreams of going EVERYWHERE

Journey through the wrong turns, the head on collisions.

The second tries, the failures.

MY journey

A road trip in my discovery to freedom.
The shedding, visible in the pattern of the brushstrokes.
Tracing these lines.
These layers of scar tissue. Tissue scarred.
A blindfold. A roadmap.
Limited resources in a mansion of unclaimed privilege.

Eyes closed. Hands on this canvas.

You won't know me until you put your hands on this canvas.

YOU WON'T KNOW HITE UNITY YOU DUT YOU HEARDS ON A WITH A HOPE.
Acknowledge the lines, they feel like veins. Hardened but filled with hope.
Awareness that those same veins are built with the fragility of vulnerability.
The ability to feel, a result of exhausted attempts to escape the expectation of compliant mediocrity, the expectation of silence.

The EXPECTATION that MY WORTH

is less valuable than YOUR EGO.

Feelings; undiscovered dialects of generational back seat drivers, applied with the heaviest strokes of unforeseen persistence.

Colors so vabrant.

Detours, textured relentlessly by the price of determination. Stories attached with frayed fibers of feelings, healing, visible in their vibrancy.

Trace each scar.

Miracles seen in time lapsed flashbacks.
Only visible with clear lenses and badass, bold frames.
The sky seemingly the only way out, searching for any route to freedom, no matter how hard, no matter how dark.

Exhausted.

When mere existence has taught you that nothing really means anything, survival finds

When mere existence has taught you that nothing meaning in everything.
Finding meaning in everything.
Choosing discovery over predictability.
Every feeling paving an untraveled path to healing, a new perspective of pain.
Finding meaning in everything and of everything. Meeting the demands of awareness, silence, stillness, and presence.

I have built this strength.

Strength has a conscious awareness OF the pain. I remain, CHOOSING the path TO pain AND the continued path THROUGH pain anyway. Choosing the pain to find meaning in everything because I know nothing about me. Lost

RESET TO FACTORY SETTINGS

Maps have always been hard to follow.

Unfamiliar with the gift. Born, devoid of the ability to sit with complacency. I still remember what fear felt like pounding through my carotids as I confirmed the choice to RESET TO FACTORY SETTINGS.

'CONFIRM OR CANCEL'

'All data will be LOST, all CONTACTS will be LOST.

Carotids POUNDING.

Silence always had a mean right hook.

In hiding, my mission to preserve hope became my long game.

Becoming everything to everyone, my resources always depleted for any personal travel plans.

Every choice used to be a dream.

Every dream used to e a nightmare.

Nightmares only enforcing silence when a single word could set me free.

Choice, polluted with manipulation, deception and false advertisement.

Finding the meaning of the journey means feeling the differences beneath each pixel of color on this canvas.

It means...

It means...

Buried under layers of makeup, attempts to camouflage.

To hide the scars that still clothe me.

Determined to prove something to anyone.

Trapped in decades trying to

prove EVERYTHING to SOMEONE.

Camouflaging became my talent.
Special effects and artistry.
A master class in hiding.
Hide and Seek.
No longer a game I'm willing to bet on, not even willing to play.
I am, fo' sho' not interested in being a spectator.

So, after you walk your fingers down every piece of relevance, every variation of texture on this canvas, open your eyes.
Look every story in the eye.
Look at yourself as you read the stories.
There is an "assembly required" human behind this paintbrush.
A human able to formulate these words.
A human, deserving of everything that you see in your own reflection.
I dare you to find the human starting back at you when you look in the mirror that hates everything.
Everything this stands for.
Everything that I stand for.
EVERTHING THAT I AM.
I dare you.

I dare you. Messy truths. Feelings. Pain. Hope. Evolution. CHOICES.

Gratitude for options and the freedom to choose. So, hiding is no longer an option.

Gratitude for options and the freedom to choose. So, hiding is no longer an option.

These scars, now beautifully aged and smooth.

The logs of location history, preserved. The paths to freedom still visible. The texture of compassion unraveled, reminding me that even chameleons are born with their superpower just to survive.

No longer ashamed, I am proud and grateful for the super powers that pain left behind. Now trusting myself enough to identify the pain behind your eyes.

I see you.
Compassion.
Hidden super powers, as the rusty ruins become the favorite parts of my paintings.

Compassion.

COMPASSION.

The epitome of broad spectrum coverage.

Compassion unraveled into a life raft.

Compassion let me float in the waters that used to hide the silence.

Compassion kept me safe as I made the conscious choice to get lost in the ocean.

Compassion for myself, slowly revealing an oil leak.

Compassion. Ever so subtly, ever so gently, ever so patiently, a life saving stent that protected me from ischemia that threatened my existence.

Ever so softly, showing me that I had accepted the responsibility of a HELLA LOT of oil changes of cars I didn't own.

I could never afford that many vehicles.

Supply and demand.

POSIT Mungy leeches, consistent with their unrealistic expectations.

Layers of rust fall off, dehydrated and exhausted.

PAIN HAS BECOME MY PRIVILEGE.
Call it luck. Call it privilege. Call it choice.

I have perspective.

Privilege in disguise.

In a world designed to shame idiosyncrasies, it is a privilege to have courage.

Now, responsibly using this privilege as my power,

my juxtapositions will no longer be CONFINED.

My style, UNIQUELY IMPECCABLE.
THAT is my privilege.
The previous free access to front row seats, now marked RESERVED, the show is sold out.
Stories sold as interactive installations only, live performances not sold on this tour. stories sold as interactive installations only, live performances not sold of Authenticity, now an endangered species.

Stories peaking through in vibrancy.

Intrigue and novelty on BOLO posters for everyone familiar with these scars. Attempts to invade and infect, alerted by the most sensitive of sonars. Ask again.

But only when you are ready to form

But only when you are ready to feel the texture of my path and listen to the voice that i have HAD TO DIE THREE TIMES to find.

HURRICANE ROUTE TO FREEDOM

HURRICANE ROUTE TO FREEDOM

Feel it. Actually feel it.

It's there.

It's beautifully BROKEN.

Smooth, only an illusion.

The map.

Historical preservation of the

Historical preservation of the

Paved by the journey to find me.

Landmarks, attractions, and speed traps hidden beneath hues of color.

The FINAL FAREMELL TOUR and you turned down free tickets.

You remind me that I am worthy of the inconvenience and discomfort.

Love allowing me to revisit history with an updated prescription and badass spectacles.

Experiencing pain with new perspective.

Sharing stories in the SAFETY OF LOVE, instead of the DANGER OF DELUSION.

I HAVE LET GO.

Existing AND growing.

I chose first. I never had first choices.

IRREFUTABLE DUALITY

I will no longer be charged admission fees for my own existence.



gas.stamps (They/Them), skulls
Visual - Linocut

When I think about the state of the world, my stomach twists and turns in knots. Powerless doesn't begin to describe it.

We as young people have a responsibility/opportunity.

WE CAN CHOOSE to stand united against oppressors. WE CAN CHOOSE to make a better life for ourselves,

and most importantly those who have been kept down by systemic hate.

WE CAN CHOOSE to come together and talk at length about these things that keep us down, and brainstorm solutions/ways forward.

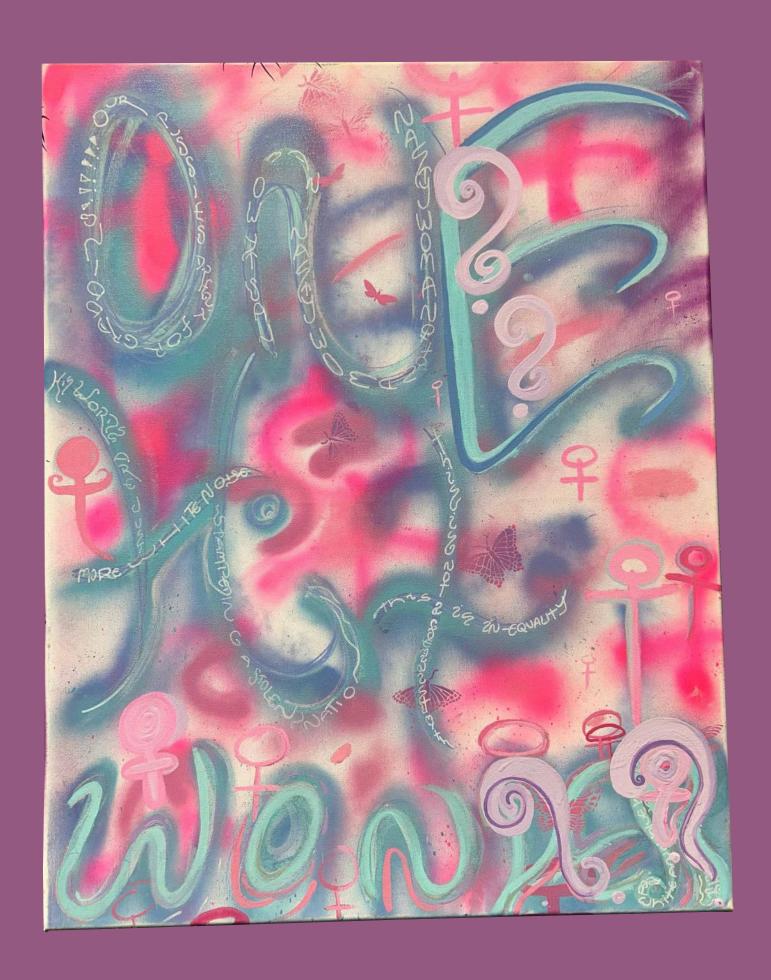
People everywhere feel this way. People everywhere are done being complacent. Feminist groups of the 1970s held consciousness raising meetings to discuss personal experiences. I have a need for a consciousness raising group that takes it further than just open discussion. While talking is essential for revolution it must be partnered with action.

Living in Nashville, there is no shortage of groups doing all they can for the people.

This is a call to action for women, gay, and non-binary folks to come together to discuss how our own shared experiences can foster change.

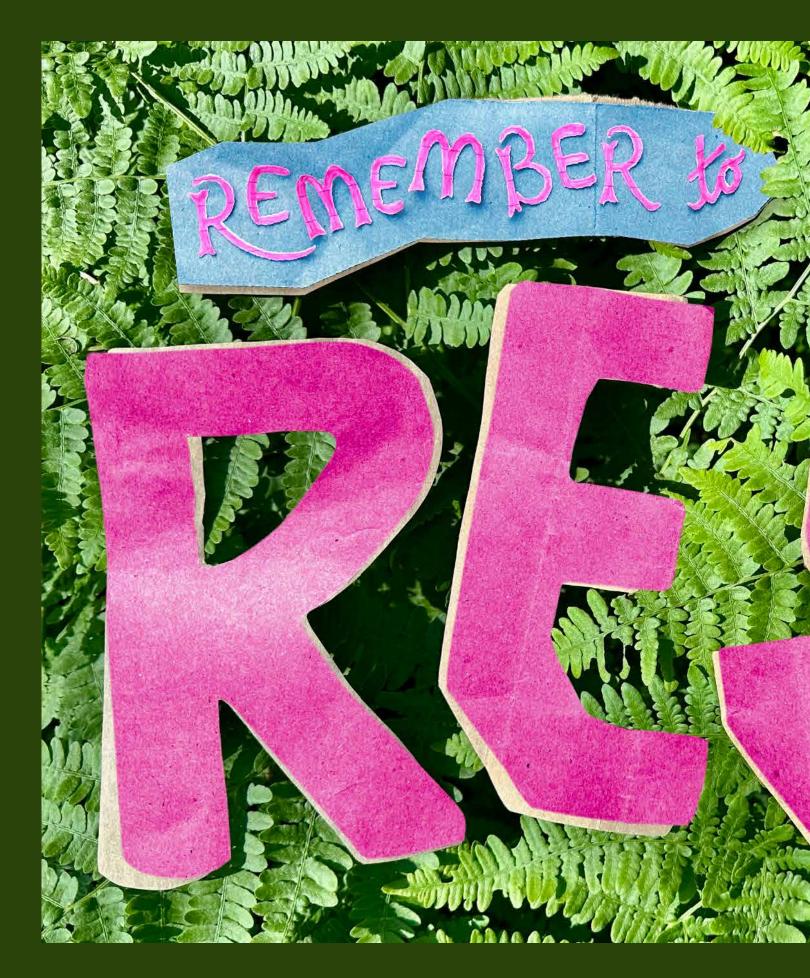
For those of us who feel voiceless, scared, and alone, talking seems like a good place to start. I moved to the area just three months ago and I feel a longing to get a group of people together for discussion. If you are into art, and music, or just talking about ways to make a difference I am looking to get into contact with you.

My instagram is @scoutgilmore, and as the summer turns into fall I will be looking for chances to foster friendships, and create art with like minded people. I know like minded people are out there. I'm just working on finding them.



simp.goddess (She/They), one hit wonder? Visual - Painting





Jessie Garland (She/Her), Daily Practice Visual - Photography, Collage



Beauty was a thing to aspire to when I was growing up. Passing pictures in the hallway of myself as a child, my mother never missed an opportunity to remind me how cute I used to be. Present tense excluded.

I was not a disappointment at my emancipation from the womb, the disappointment seemed to come later, after I was able to form opinions and my opinions were not deemed of appropriate nature. Reminders that I should be grateful I was a baby who was loved were peculiar forms of "bless your heart" manipulation I was ruled by. Any disagreement made towards my mother growing up was only met by a retort of what I should be grateful for instead.

Beauty was a goal I was given by those raising me, but the root of that goal was a greater one, to become a Mrs.

Beauty, therefore, was seen as a means to an end, but a necessary one.

I have never been fond of makeup.

I still don't wear any on a regular basis.

To the women in my family, this was unacceptable.

In high school, the boy I was dating at the time was driving to my home to take me out on our second date. My mother was convinced that my not wearing makeup on the first date and still being asked on a second was surely a fluke, an oversight on Josh's part of not being detail oriented, but one that would surely change.

I was ready for my date by my standards, and started to walk to the living room to wait for him to arrive when my mother entered the room and balked at my naked face.

"Put on mascara before your date!" was the demand.
I refused.

My mother locked me in the bathroom until I complied.

Through the door, my mother was waiting for the wand to be applied to my lashes, and also presenting her case: "You were lucky to get asked on a second date, don't take that for granted. If you do not put effort in, don't cry to me when you don't get a third. I am just protecting you, I am ensuring that you will be loved, you will be grateful one day." That day likely being a time when I am voicing a present complaint.

I refused to put on the mascara. I stayed in the bathroom after Josh's arrival. He watched a round of golf with my father, not questioning that I was taking a long time because the stereotypical narrative of "women always take forever to get ready" was proportionately ingrained in his mind with the same strength and resolve that the "no one will love a woman unless she is beautiful" was imprinted in my mother's.

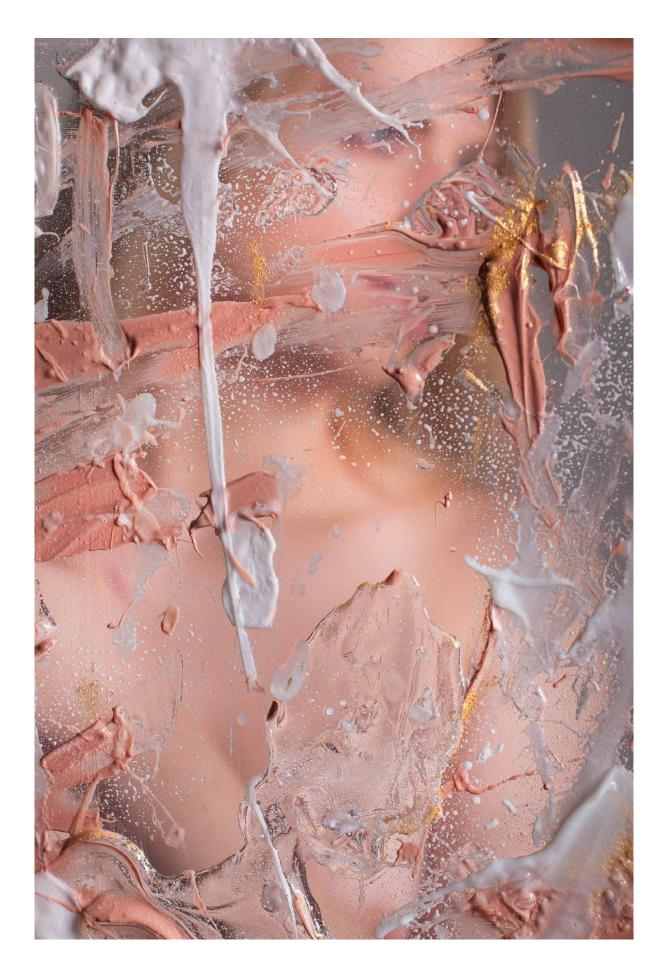
I was finally released when my mother tired of waiting. She found my tube of mascara broken in the trash. I was asked on a third date and the world still turned, much to my mother's chagrin.

The turn of phrase "bless your heart" has been adopted in my mind as a way to say something ugly while coating it in sugar. To me, just because something subjective and condescending is said in a sugary voice doesn't make it any less harmful or anymore sweet. It is a turn of phrase that only tastes bitter. It is a preservative, fattening and fake, but long-lasting.

I still have a hard time applying mascara or makeup of any Kind.

I am single.

My mother feels justified, and we are both happy.



Liz Johnson (She/Her), Made Up Visual - Photography



Gas.Stamps (They/Them), Dead Head Moth Visual - Linocut

Me and my mom both work at the food stamps office It's not glamorous but it's work

Me and my mom both work together Processing cases Calling moms Feeding kids

Me and my mom both work at the government Running government computers To do government tasks

Me and my mom both work together Clearing cases Calling clients Cashing checks Checking cash

Me and my mom both spend all day in two cubicles in state offices cleaning up other people's messes

And one day, she taught me how to check for eligibility and rule out felonies who failed the test she gave me a name to feed the system

Jason Slusher

I ran his name and it popped back

Jason Harris Slusher

I told her I never knew my fathers middle name

And she apologized

But she didn't have to apologize

But between me and my mom, she's always the one who apologizes

But I didn't know his middle name

But she's the one who raised

me loved

me works beside

me

She's the one who apologizes when I don't know his middle name

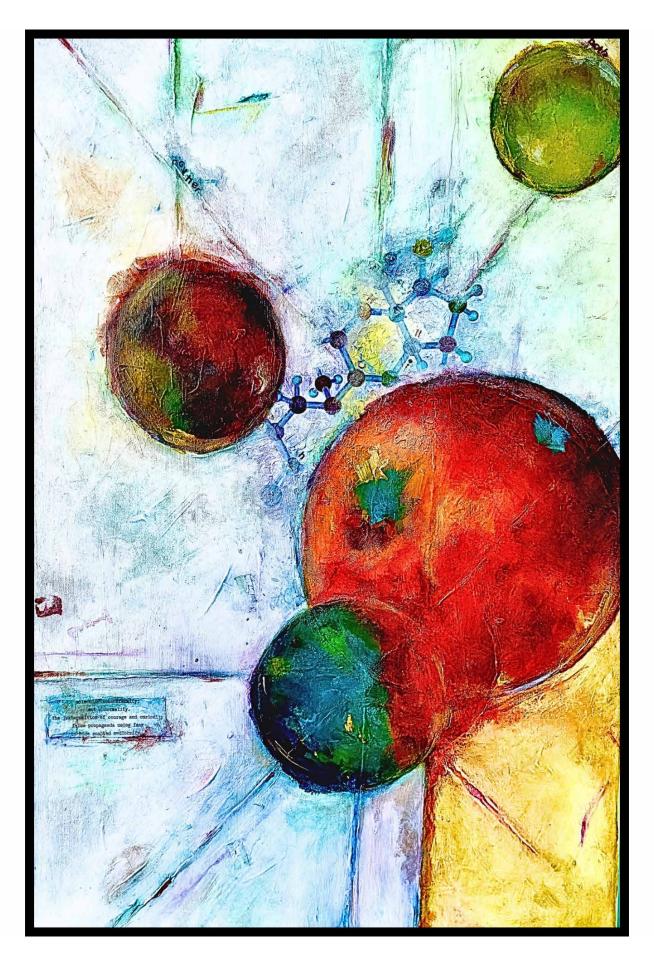
How do I tell her that today is also the day I learned his birthday? From his rap sheet? How can I give her one more thing to apologize for -

on a day we spent feeding other people's hungry children ?



Yanet Mireles (She/Her), Specimen 2

Visual - Embroidery



Silla Sumerlin (They/She), Molecular Nonconformity Visual - Painting



Liz Johnson (She/Her), Becoming / Unbecoming Visual - Photography



I Watch You Through a Screen

A man I do not know—
No connection, no shared story.
Two lives, distant and dissimilar,
Worlds apart,
Yet I grieve.

I watch you through a screen, As they carry you on a white stretcher, Silent and unmoving.

The mourners reach you,
Fingers trembling
As you move past—
Carried through the crowd,
Their voices a tangled hymn of despondency.

They touch you
Gently.
A brush of hair,
A kiss on a cold cheek.

They touch you, but you no longer feel. They call for you, but you no longer hear.

Your eyes are closed, your lips tinged blue— Peaceful, But gone too soon.

I watch you through a screen, And still, I feel the ache. I read the endless comments,
A river of mourning flows through the digital void,
Strangers and friends,
Pouring out hopelessness and prayers,
Grief stitched into every word.

I see the posts, the pictures And the stories. I see a man smiling, In a prison with no bars.

As I scroll and scroll,
My eyes begin to blur,
Heavy with salt and bottled up anguish.

I do not know you, And yet I grieve you.

And so many others.

Every person gone.

Every heartbeat silenced too soon.

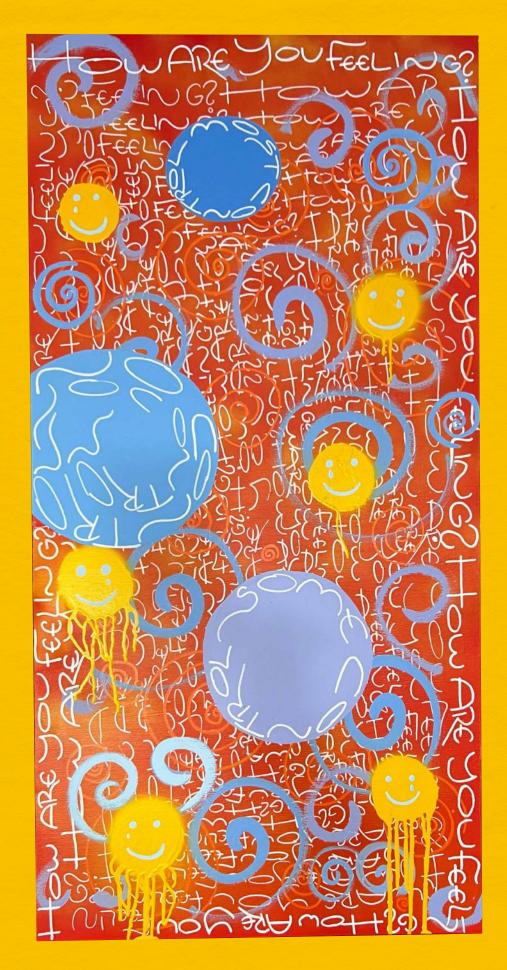
I sit with it.
The heaviness settling like dust,
Still,
And alone.



Ashley Bravin (She/Her), Get Well Soon 1Visual - Painting, Photography







simp.goddess (She/They), how r u feeling?



Kelsey Christine (She/Her), Am I Gay or am I just listening to Chappell Roan? Visual - Collage

DOGS DON'T DO FAST FASHION

SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT: BOBO CHEUNG, PET MUSINGS

By Sarah Kozlowski (She/Her)

When Bobo Cheung launched Pet Musings, it wasn't just a leap into entrepreneurship — it was a love letter to her rescue (and soul dog) Darwin and every animal waiting for a forever home. What began as a pandemic-era experiment has grown into a thriving, woman-owned business known for its playful, stretchy snapped bandanas and heart-forward mission to support rescues.

"If I could help others experience the joy Darwin brought me, even in the tiniest way, I will have done something worthwhile."

Before Bobo ever picked up a sewing machine, she tried on many hats

— restaurant work, project management, even real estate — but none quite fit until Pet Musings. What truly sets it apart is the deeper purpose woven into every piece: a commitment to rescue animals. With over 500 "Adopt Me" bandanas donated to shelters nationwide and a bold new goal to reach all 50 states, Pet Musings is more than a brand — it's a movement.



BEHIND THE PRINTS

From custom-printed fabrics to adjustable, machine-washable designs, Pet Musings reimagines pet accessories as both practical and joyful. Known for her cheeky prints (like the crowd-favorite "Single. Taken. Hungry." bandana), Bobo's creative process is delightfully scrappy. Inspiration comes from late-night Notes app scribbles, friend brainstorms, and candid moments of oh shit, I need to design something panic. Each product passes through her hands—designed, sewn, tagged, and snapped with intention.

"I want bandanas to be as easy to wear as they are joyful.

If I wouldn't iron my own clothes, why would I iron my dog's?"

Beyond printed bandanas, Pet Musings offers other fetching accessories, such as human apparel, poop bag dispensers, and other pet-friendly goodies.

LESSONS IN HUSTLE & HEALING

Running a woman-owned small business hasn't come without challenges. Though Pet Musings has grown, it's still deeply hands-on. Bobo designs most prints herself, cuts and sews many of the pieces, and manages fulfillment, events, and branding with the help of a few trusted team members. She reflects honestly on burnout, pressure, and the toll entrepreneurship can take on your body and mind. When asked about how her identity as a woman has shaped her identity as a business owner, she candidly explains, "My mom is the matriach of our family and I think that seeing her and my sister be bad ass entrepreneurs planted the seed of entrepreneurial spirit in me. As a woman, I've had to navigate what success means and looks like to me. When I was younger, I thought that meant getting a corporate job and making a lot of money. Now, as a small business owner, I find myself reevaluating what I want. I've had burnout and zero mental and emotional bandwidth because the business took so much out of me. I'm still figuring out what I want to do with Pet Musings and how to have a small business while still enjoying life outside of work. The goal is to work smarter, not harder."

Adopt Me Adopt Me Adopt Me Adopt Me

Community plays a massive role in Bobo's journey. Through markets, pop-ups, and the supportive network of small business owners she's met along the way, Bobo has found her people. This support system now shapes how she moves through the highs and lows of entrepreneurship. "Having people who get it—who know what it's like to feel stuck, burnt out, or unsure—has saved me," she reflects. "They remind me I'm not in this alone. That kind of community is everything."

FOR OTHER CREATIVES WITH BIG DREAMS

Bobo's advice for aspiring femme creative business owners?

"You can do it—but be ready to work hard. Ask questions. Build community. And know that it's okay to do other jobs while you build your dream."

And if you're looking to support Pet Musings beyond shopping, Bobo says every social share, kind comment, and personal recommendation matters.





SHOP

AND SUPPORT

PET MUSINGS

Website:

PETMUSINGS.COM

Instagram:

APETMUSINGS

TikTok:

APETMUSINGS

Where to Buy in Nashville:

BAXTER & BAILEY
BITS & PIECES
MODERN DOG COMPANY
CROSSROADS PETS
SERENDIPITY

HARD CANDY is dedicated to supporting local businesses in Nashville like Pet Musings.

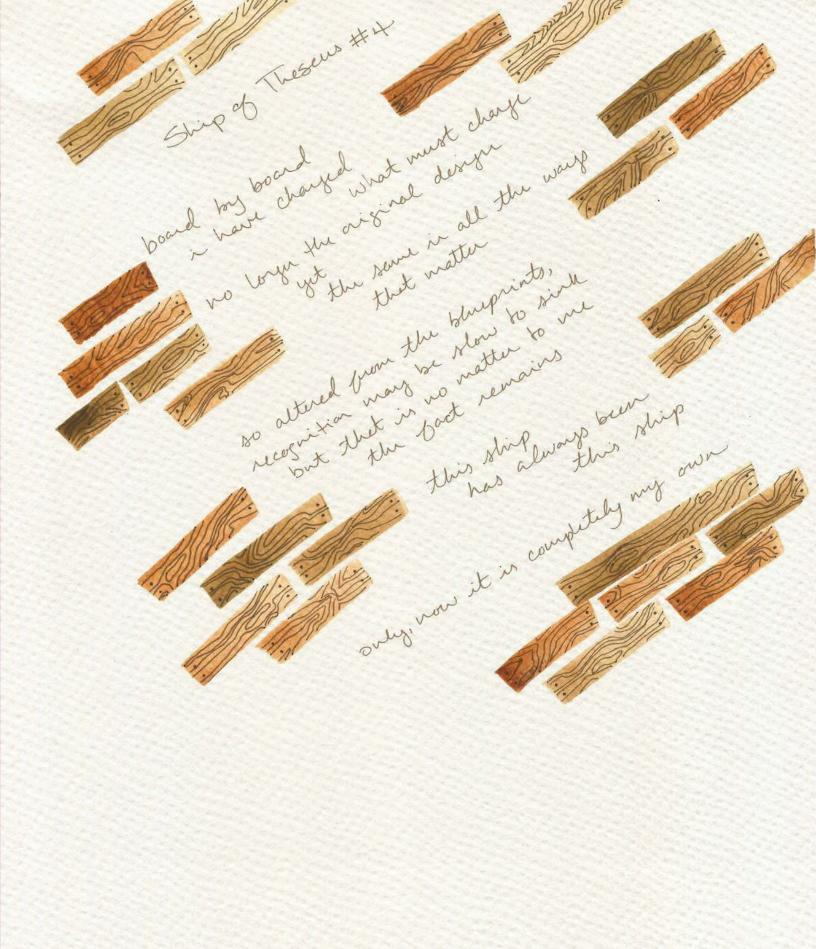
We've gathered a list of a few of our favorite small businesses and organizations owned by women, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and/or by POC.

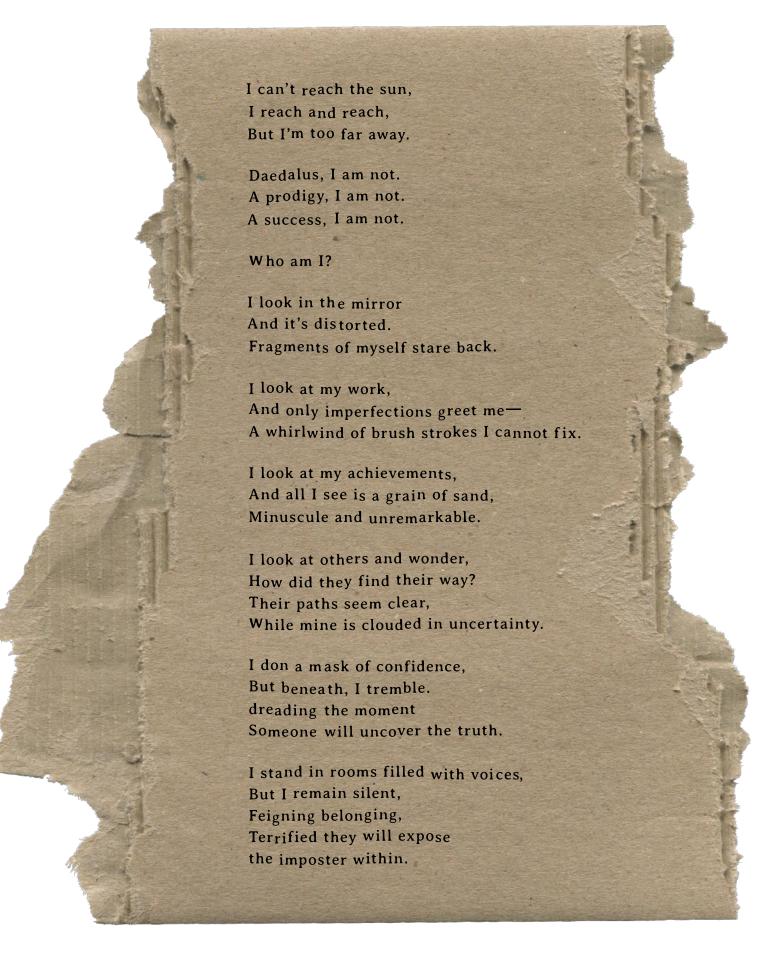
CHECK IT OUT AT

HardCandyNash.com/Community-Resources

THINK SOMEONE GREAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED ON THIS LIST?

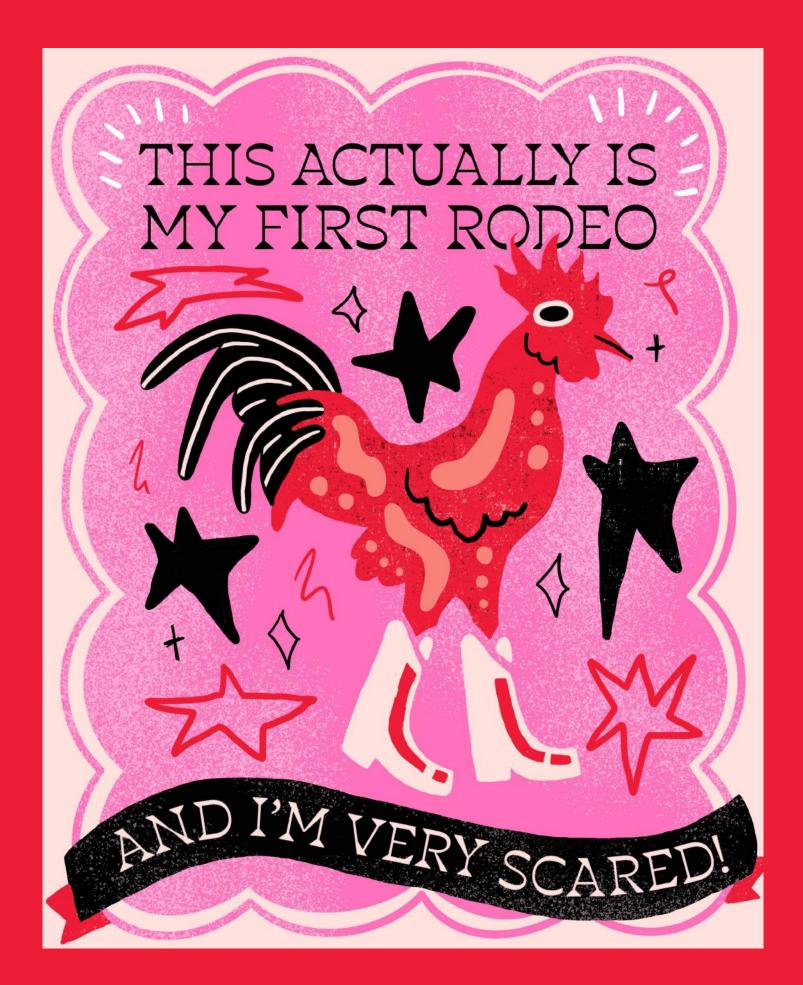
Let us know! hardcandynash@gmail.com





Halima (She/Her), Imposter

Poem



COMMUNITY RESPONSES

That it's better

to not have
friends.

Friends aren't

trustworthy

TOP TOPICE LEGISTANCE

Stay because it could be worse.

No one will love you if you don't

You CAN ask too many questions.

If I'd believed that I don't think I would have the desire to constantly learn like I do.

dress more feminine.

To get rid of acne in college, I was told to "wash my face", by a girl with zero acne.

To join all-male bands it was recommended I suck dick to get "recognized"

The American Dream is the ideal.

Don't go to New York.

If you can't beat them, join them.

Never go to bed angry.
Sometimes rest is the best cure.

"Don't do art, it doesn't
make money." I don't make
art for money—I make it
because I need to. Capitalism says
art isn't valuable unless it turns a
profit, but that's not why I
create. Art is about expression,
not income.

Ho to Broadway "to have a fun time".

Care less. - I was given this advice by an employer in a well-meant gesture, but it's not in my nature to care less. Caring and feeling is human. Care less gets our community no where, especially when it comes to fighting for what's right, for the needs of others, or advocating for ourselves.

Was from someone I'd never want to be





QUEER

Always was afraid to say it, because I never felt 'queer' enough. I am enough and I'm queer!

means I know what I want, I won't apologize for it, and I'm not here to make you comfortable at my expense.



FIRD

I'm basically just a spacy eccentric obsessivecompulsive lady who is learning how to turn negatives into positives

TRUST

3ASIC

Yeah, I do like simple pleasures that other women also happen to like. What's not to love about friend brunch, a matching yoga fit, and screaming along to Chappell Roan?

IMPERFECTION

it's an inherent part of existence. Normalize being

SLOW. DOWN.

POISED

I've been called this all of my whole life. Sometimes it has felt like a compliment, and other times it has felt like an accusation or an insult. I am ok with being a softer, more reserved version of myself when I need to be and the loosey-goosey, freer version of myself when I want to be!

LOUD!

Even the word angry. We have to right to take up space, and feel anger

IT WILL BELIKE THIS FOREVER No it won't! Everything is

passing through us, whether it's a hard feeling, an uncomfortable circumstance, nothing is permanent and everything is temporary.

JOY

REST

NON-GATED COMMUNITY RESOURCES

GATEKEEPING? NEVER HEARD OF HER.

We've rounded up some of our fave local businesses in Nashville that are run by women, LGBTQIA+ folks, and/or people of color. Think of it as your go-to guide when you're looking for a tattoo artist, herbalist, hairstylist, or new yoga studio.

MENTAL HEALTH COOPERATIVE IN NASH

Helping adults with severe mental illness to live quality lives in the community <u>mhc-tn.org</u>

THE LOTUS ROOM IN WEST END

Ayurvedic healing studio that provides massage, skincare, and reiki. thelotusroomnashville.com

N.B. GOODS IN EAST NASHVILLE

Gender-neutral, nostalgia-driven brand specializing in accessories, apparel, and gifts.

shopnbgoods.com

GENERAL FEDERATION OF WOMENS CLUBS

Dedicated to community improvement by enhancing the lives of others through volunteering. gfwc.org

PET MUSINGS IN NASHVILLE

Featured business on p. 45!
They make & donate "adopt me"
bandanas to rescue shelters.

petmusings.com

THE HIDEOUT SALON IN EAST NASHVILLE

Very LGBTQIA+ friendly.
Hair cuts, color, and Raven
Beauty Bar sister brand.
thehideoutsalonandlounge.com

HOLA YOGA IN EAST NASHVILLE

Offers classes, workshops, and training for every body, in every season of life.

<u>holayogastudio.com</u>

SKETCHBOOK CLUB IN NASHVILLE

Free open studios and low cost art workshops to bring creatives together in an accessible, low-pressure space. hummingbonesart.com/sketchbook-club

SANCTUARY FOR YOGA IN WHITEBRIDGE

Calming, peaceful studio mostly offering vinyasa flow yoga.
In-person and recorded classes.
sanctuaryforyoga.com

RADICAL RABBIT POPUP

Vegan soul food pop-up concept.
Progressive, natural, and
revolutionary food to all people.
radrab.com

HAVE A PLACE WE SHOULD ADD?

HIT US UP: HARDCANDYNASH@GMAIL.COM

GET INVOLVED WITH HARD CANDY

Hard Candy is more than a digital magazine—it's a community. We're building something bold, vibrant, and inclusive, and we want you to be part of it. Whether you're looking to connect with local resources, submit your art, or just vibe with our Spotify playlist, there's a place for you here.



OUR PLAYLIST

YES, WE HAVE A HARD CANDY PLAYLIST—AND IT SLAPS.

This issue's playlist is full of songs by women artists that make us feel powerful, inspired, connected, or make us want to get up and dance it out. Got some of those? We want to hear it.

CLICK HERE TO ADD YOUR SONG TO THE PLAYLIST

Or slide into our DMs or email (HardCandyNash@gmail.com) if that's more your speed.

SUBMIT YOUR WORK

We drop a fresh online issue several times throughout the year—and we want your voice in it. Whether you write, photograph, paint, sculpt, collage, film, or do something that defies labels, we want to see it. Our submission form is open all the time and we review on a rolling basis.

WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR:

Cis women, trans women, femme-identifying creators, nonbinary babes—we've got room for all your brilliance. (Cis men, we love you... but this one's not for you.)

SUBMIT YOUR WORK HERE

Please Note: We only receive submissions through our Google Form. Please do not email us any submissions.

CONTACT US

GOT QUESTIONS? BIG IDEAS? JUST WANT TO SAY HI?

We're a crew of wildly talented, smart, goofy, fun folks who deeply value the voices and experiences of others.

WANT TO JOIN THE TEAM? PITCH A STORY? START A CONVO?

Email us anytime: hardcandynash@gmail.com

STAY CONNECTED

Follow us, tag us, share us, dance with us. We're here to celebrate you—and the community we're building together.

Instagram: **@HARDCANDYNASH**

Email: HARDCANDYNASH@GMAIL.COM

LISTEN TO THE SPOTIFY PLAYLIST







MADE WITH SUGAR, SPICE, AND LOVE.