

CARINA YEE stress in art

BY ChristopherChen

At Art Hub Academy, student artists work on their paintings propped up on desks and on easels lining the walls. The well-lit room smells heavily of oil paints and carries the ambient mix of audio — folk rock artist Don McLean's lyrics blending with teachers talking to students and rough brush strokes against canvas.

Most of junior Carina Yee's oil paintings are created in this studio and at her home, with canvases carried back and forth between each location.

Although Yee started drawing at 5, she began to take art seriously as a teenager. To Yee, art is a calming influence in her life — as long as she meets her own deadlines! — and it has taught her to explore topics on a deeper level.

Each piece Yee creates starts with an idea or a prompt and a collection of reference photos, with her generally using photos of "mundane things" as inspiration. In the search for things that appear visually interesting, she also looks to connect them to something she could portray in her art.

For example, Yee was inspired to paint a moth mask because she was interested in the insect's aesthetic; she looked at pictures of

moths online and connected the predator-refilling eyes on moths' wings to human eyes to create a mask.

A recent painting, "Trapped in Curtains," features a figure whose torso and head are completely surrounded by a thick gray curtain. The curtains trap the figure, symbolizing the feeling of academic stress and other responsibilities engulfing students.

"I was just taking pictures of curtains and I wanted to see how I could twist it visually to fit my message," she said. "Often I hold myself back, and I feel like what seems easy in concept — staying organized, paying attention, and being on top of responsibilities — is always difficult for me. I should just be able to stand up and take off the curtains, and things would be clear, but then I just sit there waiting for something to change."

For this piece, Yee took inspiration from a hotel room where she stayed, incorporating the hexagonal pattern of the curtains to add dimension and create interesting shapes. Although this patterning was a struggle, they were also what Yee was most proud of.

Yee chose heavier colors for this piece, shifting the tones from clean and bright colors to pallid greens and browns, to emphasize the concept of stressors. "It's not a super pleasing color palette to look at, and I wanted people to be vaguely confused and put off when they looked at the piece," she said.

Yee said she usually starts paintings with

a rough sketch in graphite or charcoal, then creates an underpainting — an initial layer of paint to help plan out where the rest of the colors should go.

Her style incorporates bright highlights, smooth gradients and fuzzy edges in a semi-impressionistic way. She attempts to emulate Mark Tennant's high contrast and "collage-esque" artworks, as well as the "raw emotion" of Egon Schiele paintings.

For each art piece Yee creates, she thinks carefully about how to incorporate her ideas and messages into the piece, twisting the original image into something new and different.

"Instead of just having the imagery of someone trapped in a curtain, I wanted to see how I could turn feeling of the artwork into an unsettling experience," she said.

In college, Yee plans to major in fine arts. Although she is certain on pursuing traditional art over digital formats like design, the uncertainty of financial success as a fine artist deters her from pursuing that career path, and pushes her instead to a career as an arts professor or art curator.

"I've been doing art for such a long time that I feel like it's just a part of who I am," she said. "I try to revolve my life around furthering my art." ♦



"Sketch" (digital art)

SHANI CHIU fear in art

BY AnnieLiu & JoAnnZhang

A face drowning in quicksand, a screaming figure bound in gauze — senior Shani Chiu's art isn't afraid to get scary.

But a sense of complex beauty underlies many of their haunting works, like their graphite illustration of a man crammed within the parameters of the page. His gaunt, puppet-like face and terror-stricken eyes subtly contrast with the pretty floral pattern of his pants, though the concentric circles on his blazer hypnotize and deepen the tightening gyre of panic conjured up by this piece.

"I really liked this concept of something being scary but also beautiful and captivating at the same time," Chiu said. "So I tried to put that eeriness but also that sense of beauty into artwork as well."

The illustration, which they posted on Instagram alongside the caption, "Claustrophobia," emerged from Chiu's own experience with claustrophobia, which has made driving and staying in small rooms uncomfortable, if not unbearable.

"I tried to portray an unsettling feeling. I like how scary art is able to affect people," said Chiu, whose AP Art and college portfolio centers on phobias. "It's fascinating that people have these different reactions toward certain things."

In another portfolio piece, captioned "fear of drowning in quicksand," a terrified eye just barely surfaces from the sand, which subsumes the rest of the face. "I wanted to show how desperate and afraid the person was despite not being able to see many of their features,"

Chiu said. The same sense of nearly feral helplessness is present in much of their work, but a greater motivation towards understanding and empathy drives these frightening

pieces.

"Fear is something that is stigmatized, looked down upon and not often addressed," said Chiu. "People are unable to understand each others' fears, so I tried to create art pieces that would inflict the same feeling the person with that phobia [would experience]."

Themes of the taboo, particularly regarding mental health, also color much of Chiu's work. Their art often reflects what goes on in their life: In an untitled painting made at a low point in their life, somber blues surround a figure with roughly painted red horns and wings. Raw-edged brushstrokes and a face replaced by scrapes of red are unnerving and unsettling.

During difficult times in their life and mental health, they "tend to go more towards a morbid theme" and add more emotions and the feeling of helplessness.

Their usual sources of inspiration are aesthetics and their mood, and also different media — as an artist with ADHD and autism, Chiu often hyper-fixates on games and TV shows, and enjoys drawing characters and celebrities.

Chiu also creates their own characters, with complex and often marginalized personalities— sociopaths, psychopaths and sadists.

Chiu wants people to feel conflicted when they see their characters' personalities. Their inner turmoil and their divergence from the norm make the characters interesting for Chiu, who admits they "really like making characters with a bit of a crazy personality."

One of the characters Chiu is currently working on, a girl with an eyepatch on her left eye, stands with her hands on her hips in a tough, belligerent



"Claustrophobia" (graphite and ink)

SAMIKA AGARWAL anxiety in art

BY LynnDai

Bold strokes of orange melt across a frame littered with scraps of assignments and tests. A dark abyss of blacks and blues drips down the right of the painting, framing the silhouette of a frowning leaning against her desk, arms crossed. Thin threads of orange and black entangle in a mess above her head.

These are snapshots from "Tangled Shut Down," a selection from junior Samika Agarwal's AP Drawing portfolio. She felt that the mixed-media painting was "eating her alive."

"I was so invested in it, I couldn't sleep," Agarwal wrote in one of her progress-check-ins, online Canvas discussions where she and her classmates can share the inspirations behind their works.

Her AP Drawing portfolio explores a range of mental health issues and the perceived toxic competitive atmosphere of high school in ways that Agarwal says she can't express through words.

"You understand complex things through art that you can't say through words, and you're connected to a certain feeling or thought," she said. "It's important that artists use that voice."

In many of her artworks, Agarwal illustrates the ways she deals with the stress and frustration of schoolwork.

One of her favorite pieces, "I need to play tag," showcases a somber, black-and-white collage of ripped homework, tests and notes crumpled underneath two hands. Doodles of cartoon animals and childishly-drawn buildings are etched throughout the canvas, representative of the childhood innocence she longs for.

At the bottom of the painting, four children hold hands as they run across a field, the bright colors of their clothes pervading the mundane gray space around them with shades of pink, purple and blue.

The painting illustrates a prevalent process Agarwal uses in her paintings: She often takes bits of homework, newspapers and Post-Its and pieces them together to create the background and framework for her paintings. Agarwal said the process of destroying things and pasting them back together allows her to portray her feelings and communicate directly with her intended audience: high school students, who she hopes can relate to and resonate with her work.

The hands-on approach also allows her to work more quickly and keep pace with the rigorous workload of the school's AP Drawing course taught by Diana Vanry, where students are expected to complete 15 quality pieces based on a self-selected theme in just under

nine months.

Unlike most other AP Courses, AP Drawing has no formal test. Instead, the assessment consists of a "Sustained Investigation," a portfolio submission graded out of five points on the artist's ability to explore their chosen theme with a variety of materials, ideas and processes of creating the works. At school, Vanry and AP Drawing students critique each other's work in a group meeting at the back of the class, once for every piece they complete.

"I'm not a very patient person," Agarwal said. "I try to pour everything into my artwork, but when I work on a piece for too long, that initial excitement for the idea fizzles away."

As a result, she said she doesn't follow a structured way of approaching her paintings but instead "works in the moment." Agarwal spurns the traditional process of planning out her pieces in small sketches called thumbnails in favor of working on her pieces directly. This spontaneous way of working has often led to "accidents" that turn out for the better, she said.

While Agarwal mostly draws inspiration from her daily experiences with high school, she has found inspiration in the works of modern artists like Banksy, a street artist and activist known for spray-painting poignant, black-and-white images on buildings; and historical movements like the Bay Area Figurative Movement of the

1950s and 1960s.

"Learning from other artists and immersing myself more in the art community will help me build a stronger portfolio," she said. "These artists take experiences from their own lives and spread messages about issues people should be more aware about, and I want to do that with my art."

Agarwal's latest art piece, as yet untitled, is a continuation of her theme of deteriorating mental health in the face of anxiety and stress. It depicts modern students' struggles with school, a system which she said is both "built for students but also against us." The piece juxtaposes the act of destroying textbooks and learning from them through cut-up sections arranged to represent a stomach, an analogy for the feeling of a knot-in-stomach test anxiety.

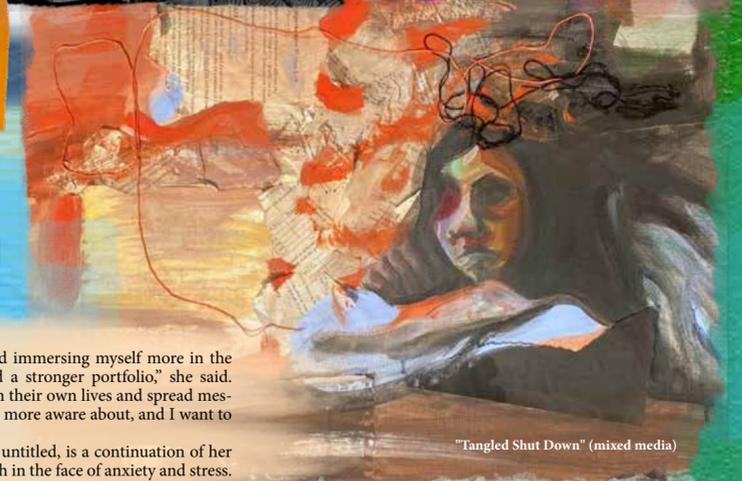
While she hopes to continue painting throughout her life, Agarwal believes pursuing traditional art wouldn't be feasible financially. Still, she hopes to explore her creativity by combining the field with technology and other areas of study in interdisciplinary majors like industrial and communications design.

"I create art because I enjoy the process and looking at my completed pieces makes me happy," Agarwal said. "But most importantly, it's a platform for me to advocate for what I care about. When promoted the right way, art can have such a strong impact on people." ♦



+ ARTISTS

at work in Toga



"Tangled Shut Down" (mixed media)



"I need to play tag" (mixed media)