

ISSUE 01 // SPRING 2024

Memory & *Algorithm*

VELUM LITERARY MAGAZINE

In the space between transmission and reception,
your stories find their frequency.

*For those who remember in ones and zeros,
and those who forget in poetry.*

Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Velum.

When we began this project, we asked ourselves: what happens when we treat code as poetry and poetry as code? What emerges when young writers across the world grapple with the same questions about memory, loss, and the technologies that shape how we remember?

This issue, "Memory & Algorithm," brings together thirty-two voices from fifteen countries. Our contributors range from thirteen to twenty-two years old, united not by geography but by a shared fascination with how we store, retrieve, and lose the things that matter most.

You'll find work here that refuses easy categorization. A poem written in JavaScript syntax. A short story about a woman editing reality itself. Essays that blur the line between confession and code. Visual art that interrogates what it means to be seen—and remembered—in the digital age.

We received over 1,500 submissions for this first issue. Each one represented a young person asking the questions this generation must answer: What deserves to be cached? What should be deleted? And who decides?

To everyone who submitted: your stories matter. To those whose work appears in these pages: thank you for trusting us with your frequency.

In solidarity and signal,

The Editors
Velum Literary Magazine

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Poetry

The radio learns to dream.

Poetry becomes code becomes poetry.

Cache

Mira Chen, 17 / Vancouver, Canada

My mother stores memories
in Tupperware containers—
kimchi from 1987,
the smell of my father's cologne,
her wedding vows in Hangul.

The computer stores mine
in temporary files:
browsing history, deleted.
Photos moved to trash,
then emptied.

But somewhere in the cloud
or in my mother's freezer,
everything persists—
cached against forgetting,
compressed but never gone.

She asks me to fix her phone.
I clear the memory.
She cries.

I didn't know
the voicemail was still there.
His voice. Saying her name.
Three seconds of forever,
deleted.

grandmother.exe

Sofia Reyes, 16 / Mexico City, Mexico

```
// initialize memory

let abuela = {
  hands: 'flour-dusted',
  voice: 'Sunday morning radio',
  smell: 'cinnamon + time'
};

function remember() {
  return abuela.tortillas
    .pressed(by.love)
    .cooked(until.golden);
}

// error: abuela is undefined
// last accessed: 943 days ago

try {
  remember();
} catch (grief) {
  console.log('still warm');
}
```

What the Algorithm Forgot

Aiden Park, 15 / Los Angeles, USA

The recommendation engine knows
I like lo-fi beats and rain sounds,
knows I searched for "how to talk to girls"
at 2 AM last Tuesday,
knows my click-through rate
on college prep ads is 34%.

It does not know
my sister taught me to ride a bike
by letting go without telling me,
that I still check for her hand
when I'm about to fall.

It does not know the shape
of my grandmother's laugh
or why I replay that one voicemail
from my dad, the one that just says
"Hey buddy, just calling to say hi"
before the diagnosis.

The algorithm predicts
with 94% confidence
what I'll want next.

It cannot predict
that I want nothing—
just the sound of my mother
humming in the kitchen,
a frequency no server
has ever learned to store.

Defragment

Yuki Tanaka, 19 / Tokyo, Japan

After the earthquake,
my hard drive scattered itself—
photos of my childhood
wedged between tax documents,
my thesis proposal
fragmented across
seventeen sectors.

The technician said:
recoverable, mostly.
Some corruption.
Acceptable loss.

I thought of my grandmother
after her stroke,
how she'd start a sentence
about breakfast
and end up in 1952,
walking to school
through snow that fell
in a city that no longer exists.

Her memories: fragmented,
scattered across damaged sectors.
Recoverable, mostly.
Some corruption.

Acceptable loss,
the doctors said.

I didn't tell them
she was the only one
who remembered my grandfather's voice,
the only backup
we ever had.

rm -rf /feelings

River Thompson, 16 / Portland, USA

```
$ sudo rm -rf /feelings/love/first
rm: cannot remove '/feelings/love/first': Permission denied

$ sudo rm -rf /feelings/love/first --force
rm: '/feelings/love/first' is protected by memory.lock

$ sudo rm -rf /feelings/love/first --force --no-preserve-root
WARNING: This will permanently delete:
- the way she laughed at my jokes
- her handwriting on birthday cards
- 847 text messages
- the specific weight of her head on my shoulder
- one (1) future we planned at 3am
```

Proceed? (y/n)

I type 'y' every night.

Every morning,
the files are still there.

Some things cannot be deleted.
Only moved to a folder
called 'Other'
that you pretend
doesn't exist.

Backup

Fatima Al-Hassan, 18 / Dubai, UAE

My mother backs up everything:
receipts from 2003,
my kindergarten drawings,
expired coupons, broken promises,
three copies of our family photos
on drives that whir and click
like mechanical prayers.

"You never know," she says,
"when you'll need proof
that something existed."

After the fire in Beirut,
my aunt had nothing—
no photos of my cousins as babies,
no recordings of my grandfather's voice,
no evidence that her life before
was ever real.

Now my mother backs up the backups.
Cloud storage in three countries.
Physical drives in a safety deposit box.
Prints in albums, just in case
the internet forgets us too.

"You never know," she says again,
archiving another memory
against the coming losses,
building redundancy
around everything she loves.

I want to tell her:
some things survive without evidence.
I'd know your face without photos.
I'd hear your voice without recordings.
Some memories don't need servers.

But I don't say this.
Instead, I help her label drives.
Because she's right:
you never know.
And love, sometimes,
looks like redundant storage.

Fiction

Stories cached in the space
between memory and forgetting.

The Last Save Point

James Okonkwo, 19 / Lagos, Nigeria

The notification appeared at 3:47 AM: "Memory full. Delete items to continue."

Maya stared at the message, her grandmother's voice still echoing through the apartment. The recording had been playing on loop for six hours—her grandmother teaching her to make jollof rice, laughing at her own jokes, calling Maya "my stubborn one" in that way that meant love.

"You can't keep everything," her roommate had said. "That's not how storage works."

But Maya had kept everything. Every voice note. Every blurry photo. Every typo-filled text message sent from arthritic fingers that never quite learned the touchscreen.

DELETE TO CONTINUE.

She scrolled through her phone. Three years of memories compressed into 64 gigabytes. The algorithm had suggestions: "These items haven't been accessed in 12+ months." Her grandmother's face, flagged for deletion. Efficient. Optimized.

Maya's thumb hovered over the screen. In video games, you could always reload from the last save point. Start over. Try again.

But there was no save point for the morning her grandmother forgot her name. No reload for the afternoon the hospital called.

She pressed DELETE on a folder of memes instead. Freed up 2GB.

Her grandmother's voice continued: "Now, the secret is patience. You can't rush jollof rice, just like you can't rush becoming who you're meant to be."

Maya closed her eyes.

Some memories, she decided, were worth running out of space for.

When her phone finally died—truly died, no more storage tricks, no more compression—she didn't panic. She sat in the silence for a long time, her grandmother's voice now playing only in her head.

It sounded exactly the same.

Better, maybe. Because now it was hers alone, uncorrupted, uncompressed. A

format no algorithm could touch.

She made jollof rice that night from memory. Got it wrong three times before getting it right. Her grandmother would have laughed.

Maya laughed too. The apartment filled with sound again—not a recording, but something new. Something that couldn't be deleted.

Something alive.

Memory Leak

Priya Sharma, 17 / Mumbai, India

The first symptom was forgetting passwords.

Not unusual, Dr. Mehta said. Stress. Sleep deprivation. The usual suspects.

But then Aditi forgot her sister's birthday. Then her mother's face—just for a moment, just a flicker of blankness where recognition should have been. Then the word for "window." Then the feeling of her father's hand on her shoulder, the texture of his comfort erased like a corrupted sector.

The doctors called it early-onset something. A leak in the system. Memories draining out faster than they could form.

"Write everything down," they told her. "Record what you want to remember."

So she did. Notebooks filled with descriptions: "Mom smells like jasmine and chapati. Dad hums when he's worried. My sister snorts when she laughs too hard."

But words weren't memories. They were just metadata—descriptions of files she could no longer open.

Her sister brought her a camera. "Video everything. We'll build you a backup."

So Aditi recorded: birthday parties, family dinners, her grandmother's hands making dal. Terabytes of her life, externalized, preserved.

She watched the recordings every night.

The strangest part: she could recall the videos perfectly. Every frame, every pixel. The recordings became her memories, replacing whatever organic versions had leaked away.

"Is that so bad?" her sister asked. "You still remember. Just... differently."

Aditi wasn't sure. The video of her fifth birthday showed her crying when the candles wouldn't light. She could see herself crying. She could describe the crying in perfect detail.

But she couldn't remember what the sadness felt like. Only what it looked like from outside.

She recorded this realization too. Added it to the archive. Another memory,

leaking into storage.

Somewhere, she thought, there's a version of me who remembers what remembering felt like.

She hoped someone had backed that girl up.

Probably not.

Probably that was the first thing to go.

Creative Nonfiction

Memory as medium.

Truth stored in fragments.

My Father's Hard Drive

Marcus Lee, 14 / Singapore

Three months after the funeral, my mother asked me to clear out my father's computer.

"You're good with technology," she said, which was her way of saying: I can't bear to look at it.

The hard drive was a archaeological dig. Layers of sediment, digital and emotional. Tax returns from 2008. A half-finished novel he never mentioned. Thousands of photos organized into folders with names like "Marcus first steps" and "Family trip that almost killed us 2019."

I found a folder called "Letters to Marcus." Inside: 47 Word documents, each dated on my birthday, starting from the year I was born.

He'd written me a letter every year. Fourteen letters I never knew existed.

The first one was short: "Welcome to the world, little one. I have no idea what I'm doing. I hope you'll forgive me for the mistakes I haven't made yet."

The last one, written six weeks before the diagnosis: "You're becoming someone I genuinely like, not just love. That's the gift, I think. Watching you become yourself."

I read them all in one sitting. Then I read them again.

My mother found me crying at his desk. She didn't ask what I'd found. Just sat beside me, her hand on my shoulder, the exact weight of his comfort that I thought I'd forgotten.

"He wasn't good at saying things," she said.

"He was good at writing them."

We sat in silence, the hard drive whirring, keeping his words alive.

I backed up everything. Three copies. Cloud storage and physical drives, the way he taught me.

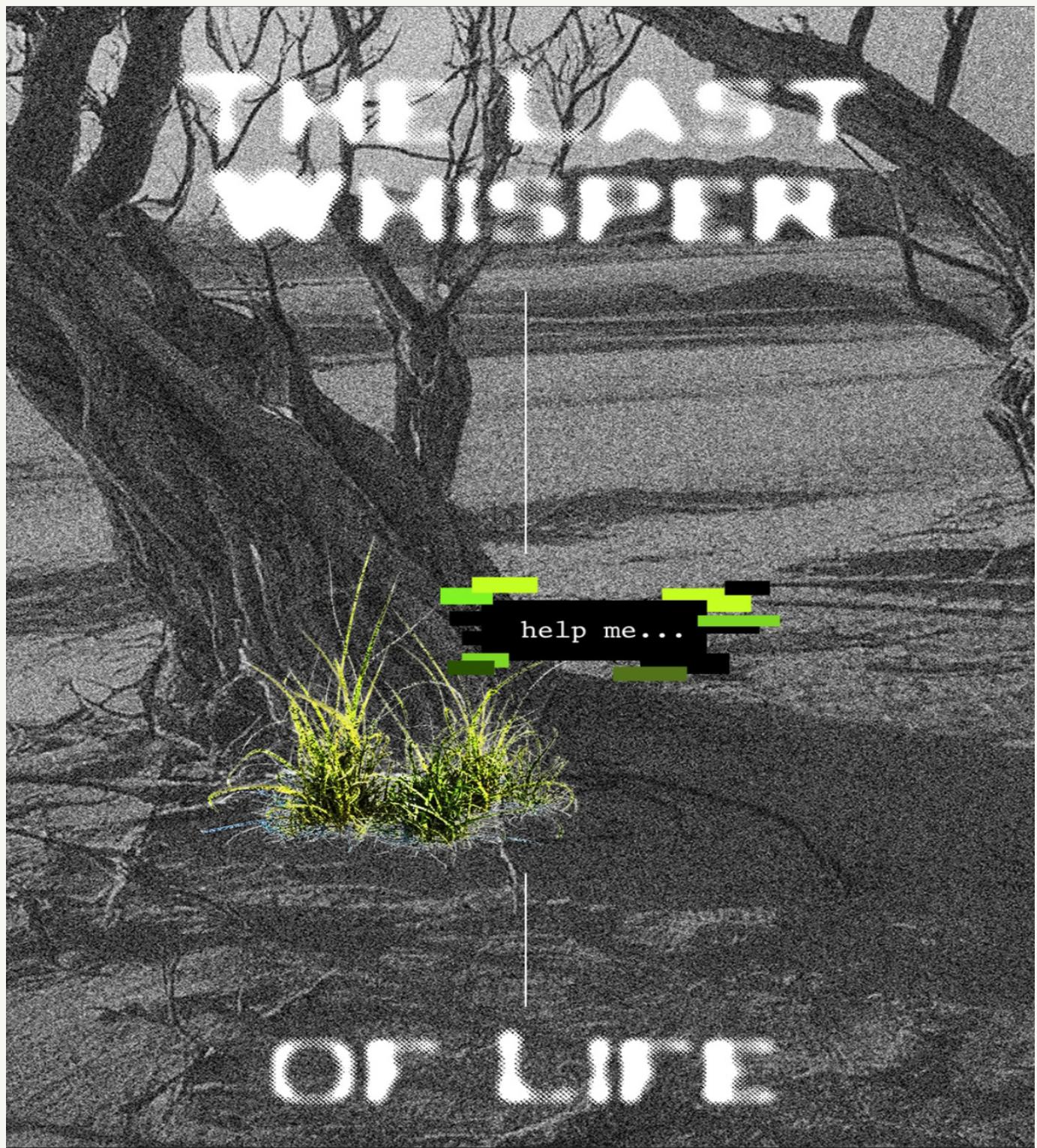
"You never know," he'd said once, "when you'll need proof that something existed."

Now I know what he meant.

Visual Art

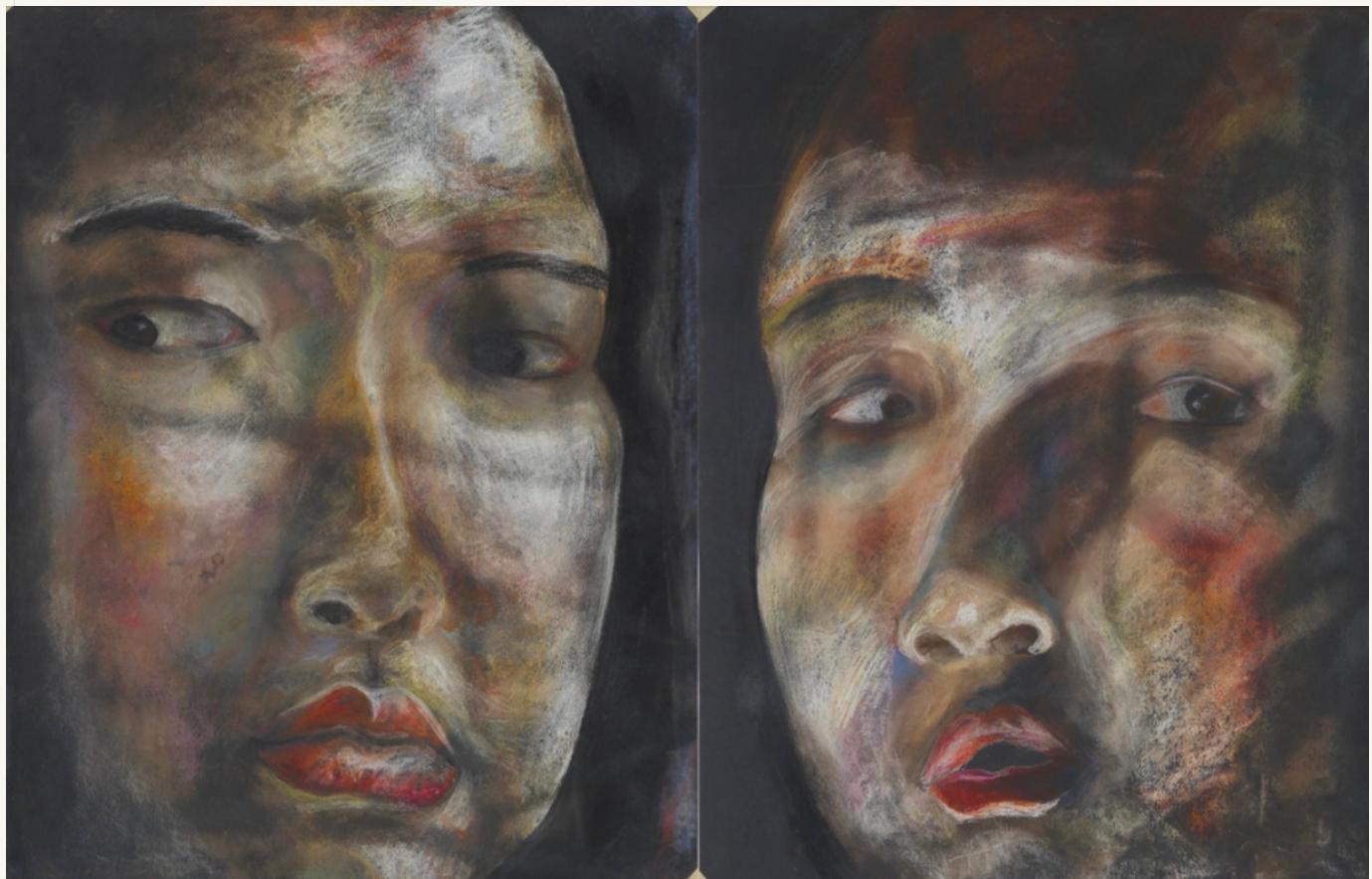
Pixel by pixel, we remember.

Frame by frame, we forget.



Corrupted File

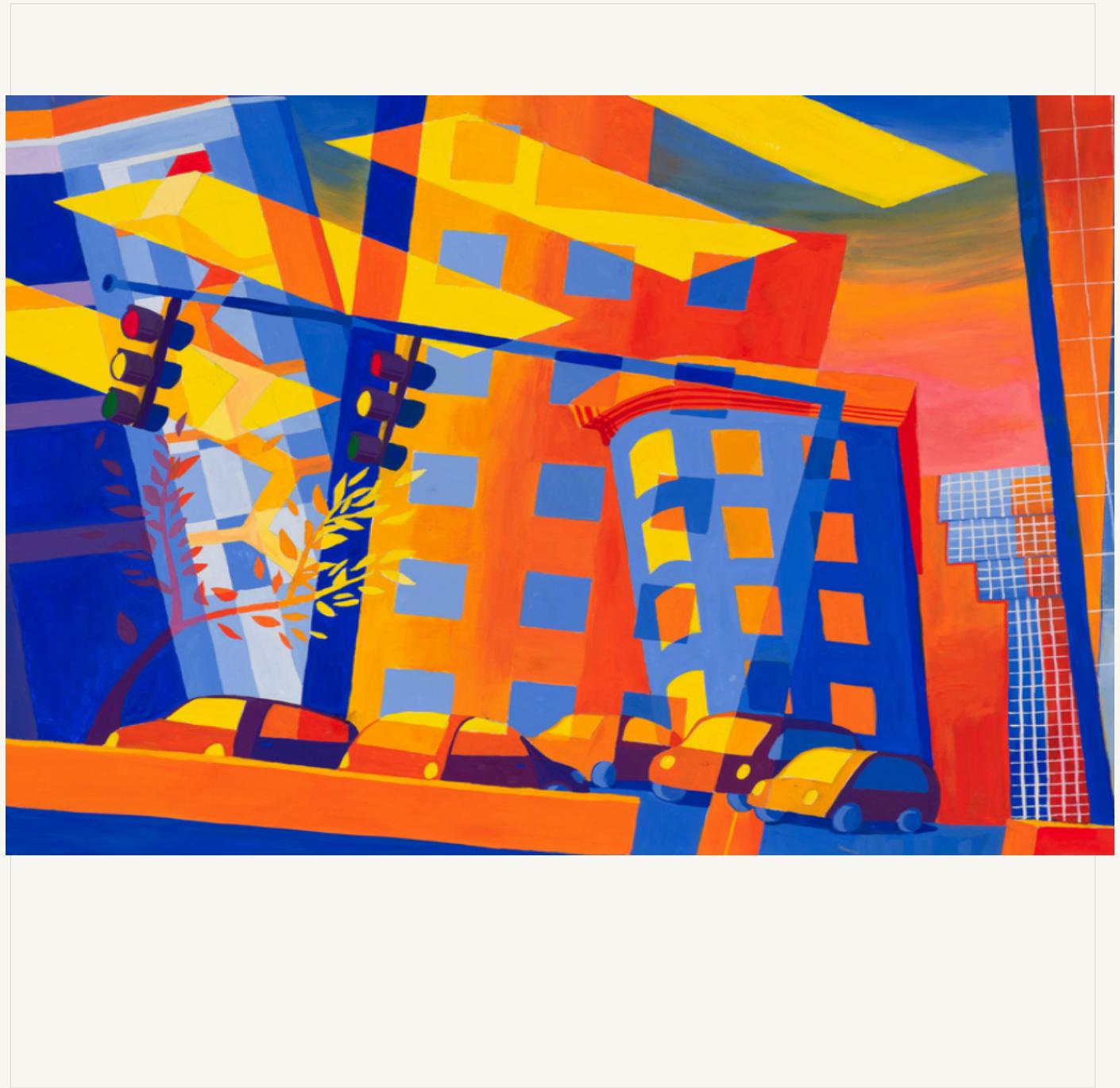
Luna Martinez, 16 / Barcelona, Spain
Digital photography, glitch manipulation



Portrait (Loading...)

Zoe Williams, 15 / London, UK

Mixed media on canvas



Assembly

Leo Virtanen,

17 / Helsinki, Finland

Acrylic and digital composite



Violet Dreamspace

Amara Diallo, 14 / Dakar, Senegal

Watercolor and ink

Hybrid / Experimental

Where code meets verse.

Where form dissolves into function.

while(heart.isBreaking())

Code Collective

```
while (heart.isBreaking()) {  
    memory.cache.clear();  
    if (pain.level > threshold) {  
        consciousness.restart();  
    }  
    sleep(3600000); // one hour  
}
```

But the body keeps
better records than any
database: muscle memory
of their laugh, the
ghost weight of their
hand, neural pathways
that refuse to be
garbage collected.

Error: Cannot delete
core memories. System
restore failed. Love.exe
is still running in the
background.

Contributors

Mira Chen, 17 Vancouver, Canada

explores Korean-Canadian identity and digital culture. Her work has appeared in *The Margins*.

Sofia Reyes, 16 Mexico City, Mexico

writes poetry that treats code as a lyric form. She learned JavaScript to mourn her grandmother.

Aiden Park, 15 Los Angeles, USA

is a high school sophomore whose poetry examines technology and family. First publication.

Yuki Tanaka, 19 Tokyo, Japan

studies comparative literature at Waseda University and writes about memory and disaster.

River Thompson, 16 Portland, USA

is a nonbinary poet exploring terminal commands as emotional expression.

Fatima Al-Hassan, 18 Dubai, UAE

writes about diaspora, archiving, and the Middle Eastern experience of digital memory.

James Okonkwo, 19 Lagos, Nigeria

studies computer science and writes fiction about the stories we choose to save.

Priya Sharma, 17 Mumbai, India

explores neuroscience and narrative in her fiction. She plans to study cognitive science.

Marcus Lee, 14 Singapore

is this issue's youngest contributor. His essay about his father won the Singapore Young Writers Prize.

Luna Martinez, 16 Barcelona, Spain

creates glitch photography exploring corrupted memory and digital decay.

Zoe Williams, 15 London, UK

works in mixed media, examining identity through fragmented portraiture.

Leo Virtanen, 17 Helsinki, Finland

combines traditional painting with digital manipulation.

Amara Diallo, 14 Dakar, Senegal

uses watercolor to explore the intersection of West African tradition and technology.

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