

TRABECULAE

Spring 2026





HOW I MADE IT

Boats in Marnay (acrylic on canvas; Marnay-sur-Seine, France, 2025)

This one ended up being the fan favorite of the exhibition I had at the end of my art residency last summer. I'd never had something like that before and it was very fun. It actually came from a photo I took on one of my first days in Marnay-sur-Seine. There's a little path along the water and these rowboats that people can take out, but a lot of them looked half-filled with water and sinking down a little bit. It's been a while since I painted water and I think it's a really fun but tough subject to work with because of how many different ways it can be represented.

Sometimes I'll do a rough pencil sketch before I start painting. Then I do an underpainting, which is the first layer of color that you put down to help create a sense of depth and complexity. If you paint just on white, it can turn out flat. In this piece, a lot of the final version is actually underpaint, and I've learned that I really like to let the underpaint shine through. So, instead of sketching, I might just create these big shapes of bright, complementary colors, and then I'll overpaint on top of that. Traditionally, you would have the underpaint be complementary to what you want to put on top of it—for instance, blue on top, orange underneath—but it doesn't have to be. The underpaint I used here is more of a red-pink rather than orange, and then I sketched out the boats on top of that. In the original photo, the shadows in the tree line were very bold and dark, so I painted those first. For the water, I started more in the middle left, since I wanted it to blend, and then I worked up and down from this middle ground and created the darker space under the boat's shadow.

SOPHIE REWEY '28

EDITOR'S NOTE

Medicine and art have been partnered since the age of Hippocrates, who considered his practice as a union between the art of true living and the art of fine medicine. Most of the contributors and readers of this inaugural issue of *Trabeculae* will have had some formal training in the art of fine medicine. Some have achieved expertise and now impart their knowledge to the next generation of medical practitioners. Others are students and apprentices, eagerly learning and advancing the boundaries of this protean field. But, apart from those who studied philosophy: who among us has been trained in the art of true living?

The late sage of my small New England high school, its longtime English teacher, Eric Davis, used to send the seniors off to college with a nine-point letter of advice for us young people entering the world out there. Point #9 was precisely about the art of true living: “‘To thine own self be true’ is still a better idea than ‘I’ll be anyone you want if only you’ll like me.’” Point #8, all of 15 years ago, foreshadowed the spirit of this magazine and all of the creative submissions we received: “Remember that you carry within you the power to desire, to imagine, to breathe life into things you create yourself. It’s not just artists that invent things, you know. Ideas, armies, families, conversations, seacoast towns, all need a creative energy flowing into them if they are to fully exist.”

We hope that *Trabeculae* will serve as a cultural and artistic commons for the University of Minnesota medical student community to explore the art of true living alongside our training in medicine. The title, recalling the structure of cancellous bone, was chosen to reflect the interwovenness of medicine, art, and the humanities. In this issue, you will peer into a microscope and journey 30,000 feet into the air; travel to India and rural France, and back to a familiar anatomy lab or student lounge; encounter different types of textiles and three-dimensional art; consider life and death; and meet all kinds of human and animal characters.

That diversity of creative expression is the entire point. The community in which it takes place, and the dialogue that it creates, can help us make sense of where we came from before medical school, who we are in this phase of our training, and where we are going.

Then, we might learn to fully exist.

ALEXANDER DROZNIN '28 and MEGAN MENSINGER '28
FOUNDING EDITORS

TRABECULAE

A Journal of Arts and Literature

Issue 1
Spring 2026

Founding Editors
Alexander Droznin
Megan Mensinger

Print Design
Alexander Droznin

Web Design
Hassan Ahad
Neda Tehrani

**Arts and Medicine Interest Group
Executive Board (2025-2026)**
Hassan Ahad, co-president (TC)
Ming Shen, co-president (TC)
Ishita Arora, co-president (Duluth)
Megan Jasicki, treasurer
Alexander Droznin
Megan Mensinger
Neda Tehrani
Sandy Zhang
Sophie Gao
Sophie Rewey

Printing
University of Minnesota
Printing Services

Trabeculae is supported by the John Song Award through the University of Minnesota Medical School's Center for the Art of Medicine (CFAM). It is distributed without charge to students and other members of the medical school community. Opinions expressed in *Trabeculae* are those of the editors and contributors, and do not represent the views of the medical school, CFAM, or their faculty and students.

Online @ trabeculae.org

On the Cover
Butterfly Kisses and Muscle Twitches
Grace Thyen '29
Colored pencil on paper

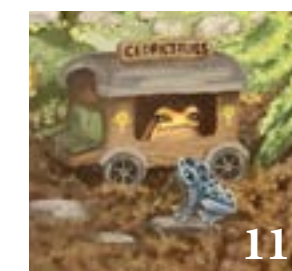
TRABECULAE

A Journal of Arts and Literature

Spring 2026

CONTENTS

Akash Nagapurkar.....	10
Amina Qureshi.....	6
Cailean Dakota MacColl.....	9
Cairo Shetka.....	9
Cassandra Sundaram.....	6, 8, inside back cover
Claire Thorpe.....	15
Constance Chen.....	4
Erin Shen.....	12
Grace Thyen.....	front cover
Greta Prokosch.....	9, 15, 18
Hassan Ahad.....	26
Ishita Arora.....	11
Justine Peredecea.....	14
Kate Weis.....	8
Katie Sherman.....	11, 19
Keshin Visahan.....	17
Liam McLaughlin.....	20
Megan Jasicki.....	19
Megan Mensinger.....	29, 32
Ming Shen.....	24
Morgan McBride.....	4, 7, 10
“Perry Celsus”.....	16
Rashika Shetty.....	back cover
Rob Kranz.....	22
Sierra Bermudez.....	23
Sophia Park.....	10
Sophie Rewey.....	inside front cover, 5, 27, 28
William Shawn Morris.....	13



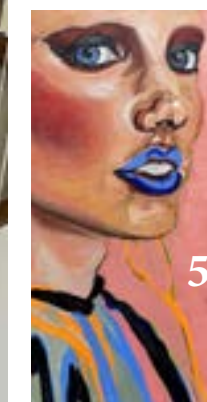
11



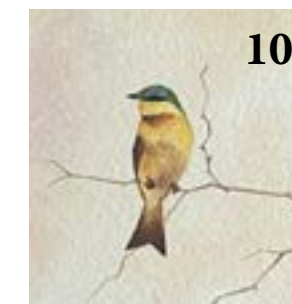
6



11



5



10



33



14



16

A Closer Look

BY CONSTANCE CHEN '27

My grandfather,
Surgeon, soldier, artist,
Horsehair paint brush held like a scalpel in his gnarled hand,
Once said,
“Medicine is art. Art is different for all artists.
When you find your art, you should feel...”
His milky eyes danced across large meters of yellow parchment,
Dappled in the sunlight, wrinkled by stone ink from the Yunnan mountains.
Spanning entire walls,
His art is all encompassing, surrounding, breathtaking.

Yet, what has always been most beautiful to me,
Was never the big picture of traditional Chinese landscapes,
From twenty feet away.

Rather, the minute intricacies standing close,
Nose touching the parchment,
The singular stroke denoting a flying bird,
The whisper of sunset in the corner of the scroll.

My grandfather, Yeye, and I are one and the same,
Healers, artists, in our own way.
But I feel,
That looking closer,
Much closer,
Often evokes more emotion.

Microscopic galleries of living dead artifacts lay,
Frozen in time,
Sectioned to perfection,
So that I may know you.

Heavily mitotic figures dance erratically,
Among tissues that crave sleep.
Patches of death glow pretty and pink surrounded,
By a palace worth of palisades.

An ecology of species, worthy of its own safari,
“There we see the brightness of the eosinophils,
And there seems to be a large herd of them,
It must be allergy season...”

4 *Trabeculae* Spring 2026

Echoes of Picasso, Monet in every design,
Where every individual is one of a kind,
Where the privilege of perception is truly divine.

Cellular symphonies,
Sing your body's battles.

And so when I bear witness,
To that which I cannot outright see,
I feel.

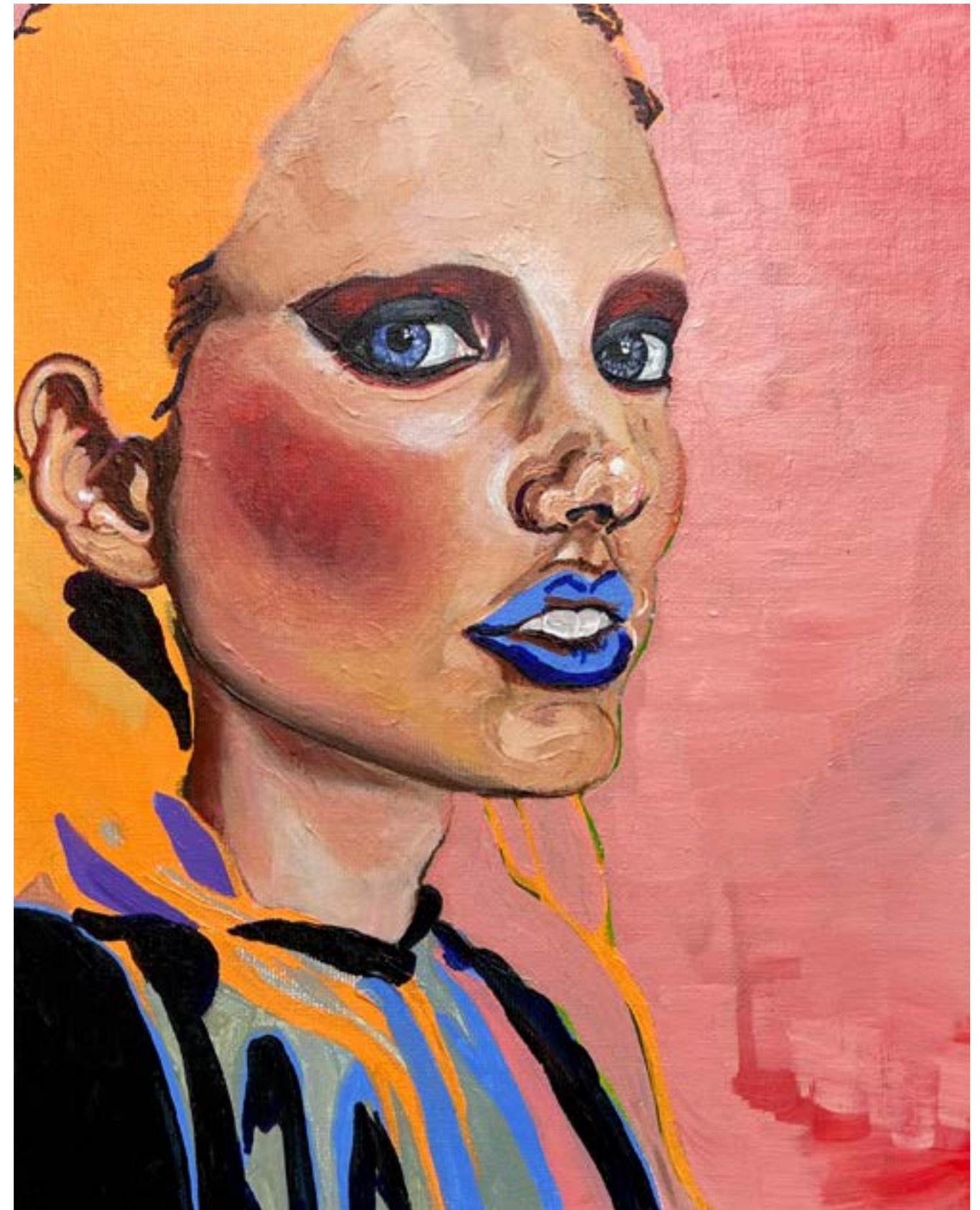
I whisper this to him,
“I've found it Yeye,
The beauty you told me to seek...”
He looks at me blankly,
Hands having forgotten the shape of brush or scalpel,
Only capable of holding mine,
Willing me to be his eyes.
Willing me to carry on,
Seeing, appreciating, healing.



[Untitled]

BY MORGAN McBRIDE '26

Graphite on paper



High School

BY SOPHIE REWEY '28

Acrylic on canvas. Marnay-sur-Seine, France, July 2025



Warmth

BY CASSANDRA SUNDARAM '26

The cafe sleeps on one side of the river before a bridge that takes people from East to West and back again. Light shines through eight windows on the face of an old stone building, finally waking up to a golden alarm clock after a long hibernation. Steel chairs with latticed backs surround six tables just outside the cafe doors and up onto its deck, and couples gather with their friends and dogs to marvel at the recently returned sun and eat the arugula, prosciutto and pine nut salad that is served for \$14.99. It's a nice day in Minnesota. Roller skiers are out, still clinging to their winter; the snow is gone but they've traded wax for wheels and zoom past, crouching their poles under their armpits, navigating cobblestones instead of freshly groomed trails. Two dogs from opposite tables meet in the middle by the side of an empty table in front of me, their owners loosely holding leashes, not realizing a friendship—rivalry?—is presently developing. The dogs smell each

other and initially start to frown, but the sun and the air have beckoned them both to play and now they paw at each other happily, licking tails, forgetting they had not always known each other. The human child-sibling of the dog tugs a shirt and points, reveling in her discovery of pure joy. The owners make eye contact with each other and laugh. I watch as faces widen and shoulders go up and down, hands go up in the air, shrugging. "Dogs will be dogs," someone says. I sit on the deck and look at the string lights overhead that management hasn't turned on yet. They are shining anyway, because of the sun that is now descending and glinting through their sides on this day that signals the eventual promise of spring. Beautifully uneven brown and gray bricks in front of the cafe spit out echoes of strollers with babies and tandem bicyclers slowing and turning toward the sound of the waterfall on the other bank. Across the way, dozens of heads bob up and down on the bridge as generations pass each other going back and forth over the river, continuously. I close my eyes and the warmth of the day blankets everything in a reddish, orange glow.

< Wash

BY AMINA QURESHI '28

Film photography

"This photo was taken in Lutsen, MN after my first final exam in medical school. Film photography has become a quiet reminder to release control, to let moments unfold without knowing exactly how they'll appear. Each frame holds patience, imperfection, and the soft calm that follows letting go. Sometimes the image becomes something beautiful, sometimes it fades. But always, it feels free. I hope this piece reminds others to begin, even when the outcome is uncertain."

**"They are
shining
anyway..."**

Reflection on Conflict

BY MORGAN McBRIDE '26

Oil on wood panel



May

BY KATE WEIS '26

You were admitted on my birthday
Preparing yourself for a long hospital stay
You said I looked tired so you invited me
To hide from my attending in your room
I knew I'd like you

I went to war for you
Brought nail polish for your girl
Tried to make you laugh
And feel heard

And in return
You gave me a safe place to land
To sit for a second and take a breath

You told everyone I looked like Margaret Qualley
And when I got shy it made everyone laugh
You said I reminded you of your friend in middle school
The shy one who you used to protect

When it was time to deliver
I promised you I'd stay
I was so relieved you were safe and ok

On my last day I went to the NICU to leave you a
goodbye note
Not expecting to see you again
But when I saw you holding my hand
I started to cry

I told you how special you are
To always be so kind even in your darkest nights

You thanked me for hearing you
Thanked me for being your friend
Said you'd never forget me
Said maybe we'd run into each other again

I always marvel
At the people we meet
As we walk through life
The ones who change us
Who heal us
Who make us laugh

8 *Trabeculae* Spring 2026

You said God meant for us to meet
I said it was written in the stars
How can you not believe in magic
Or God
Or stars
Or fate
When you came into my life on my birthday

Microwave Fish Friend

BY CASSANDRA SUNDARAM '26

30 seconds left on the microwave in the lounge
What did you bring for lunch? The person behind me
asks, waiting
Tupperware in hand
They are a familiar face
I am 31 years old, trying to make new friends
Leftover takeout, I say—a grilled cheese
Where is it from?
Anchor Bar—it's a fish and chips place
Then I explain why I have a grilled cheese
And not, you know, fish and chips
(No one asked)
I didn't want to be that person heating up fish in the
lounge microwave, I say
Oh
What did you bring for lunch?

Salmon

Oh.

(We did not eat together)

Bequest

BY GRETA PROKOSCH '26

I walk in the door and am
Blasted with formaldehyde.
You must be used to that smell by now.
Your eyes are covered
But your lips and teeth remain exposed.
It's easy to imagine how your smile
once lit up a room.

They rattle off a list
of your medical problems
As if that's what makes you you.

I want to know what made you get out of bed in the
morning,
Not that you had a hysterectomy.
I want to know whether you had regrets in your final
days,
Not that you had high blood pressure.
I want to know the stories you want told at your
funeral,
Not the date of your left knee replacement.

Sometimes I wonder if I'm in the wrong place
If I care too much
About what others might deem trivial.
But maybe I should be here
All the more because of that.

Today I googled the definition of bequest
It said simply: "legacy".
I wonder about your legacy
And wonder about mine.

Hindsight

BY CAILEAN DAKOTA MacCOLL '26

Visions of better days will still come to a man
Who can no longer use his eyes

A woman who can no longer see
Will feel her art through her daughter's hands

One of the most common disabilities
Is one many of us fear

But when my eyes finally fade
After years of bearing witness

I will be able to better remember
The sound of the lake I grew up next to

And can listen more intently
To the secrets the wind tells me
About what comes next

Skin

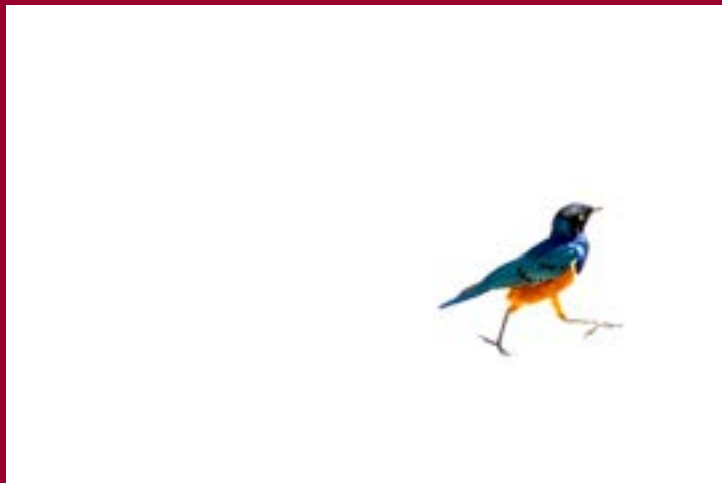
BY CAIRO SHETKA '28

an elegant fortress from the tropical sun
distilled with care, by the African gods of Wallace
whose walls were not preserved in the minds of
western society
and were then unscalable to the deities of Darwin or
Galton

an ironic twist when a castle becomes a cell
held siege by iron, ivory, and impure linen

those shading walls did not cool the brave early fathers
of medicine
and hid any subjects from their schools, sources and
sclera
and hide any citizen from their oximeters, spirometers,
and simple excisions
and receive their side effects, surgeries, and severed
limbs

**“But when my eyes finally fade
After years of bearing witness
I will be able to better remember
The sound of the lake I grew up next to”**



“The original shot was overexposed and cluttered with pale rocks. After adjusting the colors and highlights, the bird seemed to float against a clean white backdrop, with vivid feathers beaming from the edge. The best ideas, and the best moments, often come from the least expected places. All that’s required is an open mind.”



[Untitled]

BY MORGAN McBRIDE ‘26

Watercolor on paper

A Superb Starling

BY AKASH NAGAPURKAR ‘29

Digital photography. Tarangire National Park (Tanzania)

Of Animal Friends

Pause in Flight

BY SOPHIA PARK ‘26

Watercolor on paper

“I wanted to depict a fleeting moment that may be difficult to see in person. I hope this painting prompts the viewer to see the beauty that exists in rest and to take a pause in their own ‘flight.’”



[Untitled]

BY ISHITA ARORA ‘28

Acrylic on canvas

“I find beauty in how each creature’s biological form is designed to solve their unique challenges. Animals are not adapted for human tasks. Because of this, I enjoy making art where animals are doing human-like things, such as working in shops and going to museums, all in a world built specifically for their bodies. Maybe frogs enjoy these mushrooms as homes? Or bugs use this log as a restaurant? I love making those ideas come to life. Plus, it’s cute!”



Honey Bees

BY KATIE SHERMAN ‘29

Mixed media (cardboard, acrylic, pencil, yarn)

“This piece reflects part of my journey in reconciling the many roles I carry into medical school as a non-traditional student, learning to balance the diverse facets of my life.”

In Between

BY ERIN SHEN '26

My eye twitched as I scrunched my nose furiously under my mask. It was our 5th hour into surgery and I desperately needed to scratch my face. I stared at my hand, almost alien-like in my glove, gripping the retractor. My mind had been racing a million miles per minute, trying to pay attention to the questions the attending was asking on the off chance that one of them might be directed at me. “What does it even matter?” I thought to myself cynically. “I probably won’t know it anyway. Maybe I’ll get to close? Hopefully, I can throw my knots better than last time. I should call my mom. I wonder if anyone else has to pee.” To be honest, I had already cried once during the surgery. Silently, behind my eye shield, tears dampening the light blue of my mask. I’ve always been an easy crier so this didn’t really surprise me but still, not an ideal way to start any morning.

I had gotten a text message while rounding. Way too early for anyone in my family to be texting me. “This can’t be good news,” I thought as I sprinted to keep up with my resident down the fluorescently lit hallway.

I scrubbed in for the day, staring at the foamy soapy water swirling and running down the drain. My mind drifted to the message and I kept re-reading the words in my mind. My mom had gotten some new imaging done and the results were concerning. She had been diagnosed with stage four lung cancer before I started my first year of medical school. The first couple of months were full of uncertainty, worry, and immense anxiety. She was getting worse and we couldn’t find a treatment that worked for her. However, as my first year went on, she got somewhat better. Stable, they said. She started on targeted gene therapy and regular chemotherapy and I felt almost hopeful again. Second year started and I settled into the rhythm of school and our new normal.

But this was unexpected. Shocking. Breath-taking. She had been doing well symptom-wise and there had even been some discussion about lengthening the time between her chemo cycles. I had already been struggling to balance my schedule during rotations. My schedule was not mine; I had little control over what time I could be home, what days I had off, and what hospital I was going to next. I didn’t have the same

flexibility as before where I could take a random Tuesday morning or Friday afternoon to go with my mom to her oncology appointments or hang out during long chemotherapy sessions. Or even just make the drive to my parents’ house for dinner. I had so many questions. “What was going to happen next? Was this even all worth it?”

**“This is what I had worked so hard for.
To care for others.
To help them in their time of need.
To figure out the answers.”**

“Erin, look: what artery is this?” My attending’s voice snapped me out of my thoughts. I squinted down and tried to picture the shaky video I had watched last night in preparation for today’s case. I made my best guess and took a deep breath, settling my racing heart. Focus, I told myself.

It was night by the time I left. I felt sticky, tense. Looking up, the bright lights of the hospital illuminated the dark sky but to my surprise, a full moon greeted me. Its yellow presence was calming and reassuring. It grounded me. This is what I had worked so hard for. To care for others. To help them in their time of need. To figure out the answers. But here I was, constantly feeling caught in the in-between. “Am I not being there for my family? Am I missing out on my time with her?”

Sitting in my car and listening to the engine hum, I did what I could do now. I called my mom.

Performed at the Center for the Art of Medicine’s Medical Student Story Slam in March 2025.

Prose from the Stage

Med School at 30,000 Feet

BY WILLIAM SHAWN MORRIS '27

With forty-five minutes remaining in the flight, I exited the bathroom, feeling a level of achievement after successfully completing the complex task of figuring out the small bathroom door latch and opening the bi-folding door. As I took my seat, my friend leaned over to me and said, “that man sitting in the row ahead of us just stood up and passed out.” The middle-aged man was slumped over in his seat, hovered over by flight attendants.

I have been on a couple flights in my life where flight attendants ask for physicians or nurses on board to assist. Since becoming a medical student, this scenario has crossed my mind even more. However, I always pictured being many years into my career, residency-trained, and experienced to handle whatever medical situation presents in the confined setting of an airplane miles in the air. Little did I know, that exact situation presented now.

I began to dig for my stethoscope at the bottom of my backpack. It was still there after my last clinical session in medical school less than a week prior. My initial thoughts: Now what? Do I get up and assist? Am I qualified to assist? If I do get up, do I tell them I’m a medical student? I haven’t passed my board exams yet. I wasn’t residency-trained yet.

As I pushed the intrusive thoughts out of my mind, I stood up and approached. Simultaneously, an announcement was made over the intercom for a “nurse, physician, or healthcare provider.” Surely, an experienced physician aboard the flight would eventually push me aside and take my spot.

I was nervous. My hands were shaking, and I was hastily trying to recall the correct order of my history-taking outline in my mind. As I knelt down beside the man, he complained of shortness of breath and left-sided chest pain with radiation into his left arm. Just as I turned and asked the flight attendants for aspirin, he became more obtunded, and suddenly unresponsive. Desperate, I obtained a bottle of sublingual nitro, shook two tiny pills out into my trembling hands, and placed them under his tongue. His mouth was dry, but it was worth a shot. At that moment, the flight attendant asked if we needed to divert and land. I responded with an emphatic “Yes, now!” and immediately started to realize the power that I had.

As I continued to auscultate the patient’s chest, his heart rate became more irregular and distant. Anticipating chest compressions, I made the call to reposition him to the floor of the aircraft. I also asked for the onboard AED, and attached the pads to his chest, ready at any moment to shock. As he lay in the aisle, I maintained two points of reference: one on his chest with my stethoscope and one palpating his left carotid artery. This gave me a sense of control and instant feedback, which alleviated some of my anxiety. I quietly waited, listening and feeling. There were several brief moments of no heartbeat, but I continued to feel a weak pulse. I watched for the rise and fall of his abdomen. The patient remained in an unconscious state. I had no concept of passage of time, but soon felt the flight attendant’s hands on my back bracing me while we landed. EMS rushed the plane and I handed off the patient.

As I reflect back, I realize that experience, particularly under pressure, can be the best teacher: it forces us to focus and perform. I learned more in 45 minutes on the floor of that airplane than I could have learned from any calm, well-planned clinical scenario or standardized patient in medical school. I also learned that we have more ability than we think we do.

During those 45 minutes, a transformation occurred. I went from timid, nervous medical student to assertive, confident healthcare provider. I realized that we don’t become physicians once we graduate medical school, once we’ve successfully passed all of our board exams, or when we complete residency. We become physicians the moment we stand up from our seat and use whatever knowledge we have to help. We become physicians when our decisiveness and action transform anxiety and fear into confidence and poise. It’s when we connect with that person in dire circumstances who needs someone to calmly sit with them and make it a little less scary. That person doesn’t care if we’re inexperienced medical students or practicing doctors. It’s less about being accurate, and more about comforting those around you through your calm and poise.

Afterward, as we walked through the airport, my good friend who I was traveling with said to me, “You looked like you knew what you were doing.”

If he only knew.

Performed at the Center for the Art of Medicine’s Medical Student Story Slam in March 2025.

Time of Death

BY JUSTINE PEREDECEA '29

Graphite on paper



“What happens to a patient after the physician calls time of death? At the emergency department I worked at, the body was prepared for the morgue. A tube was placed inside the mouth, and the patient was zipped into a black bag before rigor mortis claimed another victim.

What about the patient’s soul? For the pragmatic, it simply ceased to exist as neurons expired. For the religious, it was carried away for judgment. For the providers, it was the answer that gave the highest consolation to the patient’s mourning family. I hoped to convey that sense of comfort through the guardian angel’s embrace in this drawing.”

Broken Heart

BY GRETA PROKOSCH '26

The doctor rattles off the diagnosis
Something with my heart
It starts with a T...
Takotsubo, they say.

All I know is
My heart broke
When yours did.

I heard the news of your heart attack
Just last night.
I have never been more crushed.
And now here I am,
Getting the same labs you would have had drawn
But from my own veins.

Funny, isn't it
We were always in sync
To an uncanny degree:
In our dance moves,
In the boys we liked,
In the cities we were drawn to,
In the jobs we took,
In the schools we sent our kids to.

My best friend.
My neighbor.
My family.
Gone
Leaving behind nothing but
A diagnosis I can't even spell.

But to have loved you so fiercely,
And to have been so fiercely loved in return
That my heart refuses to beat right without yours,
That is the rarest thing of all.

A “Good” Death

BY CLAIRE THORPE '26

A “good” death. I ponder, what is it?
Is it the 85-year-old whose family is surrounding her reciting beautiful memories?
Is it the man who has fought pancreatic cancer to its end and accepted the finality of his breath?
Is it the mother who gained six more months to reconcile relationships and heal wounds?
Is it the patient who receives full control of their transition out of this world?
Is it freedom from pain? Is it life experiences? Or how about spirituality?
Perhaps it is one’s perspective on death which makes it “good”.
Whether they see it as an end or a beginning or a cycle.
Or maybe there is no time stamp, no pattern for which we make classifications.

Some see death as the black shadow that lingers,
Waiting to grab hold of us, in any moment, ready or not.
The fear of the inevitable hinders the beauty of finiteness,
For if we truly had forever, would we cherish as much?
Would we take the risk to love, to create, to adventure, to start afresh?
Would we feel the need for forgiveness, for resolution, for commitment?
Would we hold the hand of someone we love a little tighter,
Would we grasp the beauty of a morning sunrise a little longer?

I am unsure if the phrase “good death” sits right within me.
“Good” does not encompass the various meanings of death.
It suggests morality to a natural process we all experience.
Death is always hard, whether it be from old age, or a tragic accident, or a stillbirth.
The very concept of death is difficult to hold, even if everything was done “right”.
So I guess I’m choosing to live in the tension between what is a natural process,
And what is also the source of immense grief and change and soul transition.
I will honor the sacredness of life and death,
Looking to the narrative of the patient beside me to hold them in the highest honor.

On Death and Dying



Medieval PPE training.

Copium Comics

BY "PERRY CELSUS" '29

Pen, ink, and marker on paper



The subtle art of the interview.

Finding the Way, the Heart Breaks

BY KESHIN VISAHAN '27

Between these black brown eyes
With their broken red and white halos
The no-thing finds the way

Today perhaps comes tears
Tomorrow perhaps something less dear
Each set of eyes that peers back

Between eggshell walls and window-seals
Could they know if the no-thing told them
He would hold their hands if he could

But this voice still claims to remember
Whispers to this heart
That the dew will soon freeze

On rot mottled apple skins
In grassy orchard bellows
That drink from the Mississippi

That same dying mother
Above which lies the bridge
My patients take to work

And still this heart breaks
In this city of Minneapolis
For young mothers

For old mothers
For their children
And for the woman

For whom this heart opens
To break once more
And this voice cries

Open no more then
Let the mind loom
Pulling the no-thing from this moment

Into a warm gray cloak
In this flash frozen desert
That the no-thing walks

Singing

Only the bowels know
In that forgotten recess of our spirit
Where the no-thing grew

And climbed forth towards this world
That the one I took myself to be
Built and deformed

Then released to be held
No longer an arm's length away
But closer than the clenching of your guts

Or the furled wrinkles just lateral
To the any-colored eyes
That answer these silly questions

And accept these unskilled hands
And smile as this body tries
To take some of the suffering held

The no-thing gives thanks
Thanks to you
Thanks to them

Thanks to that which we flow through
That which we flow from
That which we are born of

That which we are
That which is all we can be
That which you and I claim to have once forgotten

That which is here
That which is now
Howling un-alone

And I look up from my screen
To mumble to my patient
Waiting for this voice to recede

Thank you for letting me take part in your care

**“And still this heart breaks
In this city of Minneapolis”**

Friday in the Life of a Neurologist

BY GRETA PROKOSCH '26

She reaches out to me,
Holding my hand,
And says
“It’s okay if you can’t save me,
I’ve had a good life,
I know I’ll never play pickleball again
And I’m okay with that.”
As I leave the room,
I hear my own words as they exit my mouth
“It’s good to see you.”
Baffled by my nonchalance,
As though observing the scene from above,
As if bidding farewell
To a dinner party guest.
What do I say when it may be the last time we speak
Yet I am still just a stranger,
Knowing her for a mere 3 days of her 83 years?
What words could possibly do this justice?
And yet somehow, I leave the room.

The next patient’s aphasia
Forces him to use gestures,
Pointing to clues around the room
In the world’s most heartbreaking game of charades
To tell me that his beloved wife
Suffered a stroke just a week ago.
What can I possibly say to acknowledge
The frustration and agony of not being understood?
And yet somehow, I leave the room.

The next patient,
In her third trimester
Now cannot move her arm or leg.
We are the same age,
Attending neighboring high schools.
It is impossible not to feel that
This could have been me.
She worries aloud
“Will I ever be able to run after my daughter?”
What comfort can I possibly offer
In this unimaginable moment?
And yet somehow, I leave the room.

Then the family care conference.
He is so young,

18 *Trabeculae* Spring 2026

Yet months of illness have aged him
And his loved ones too.
His wife,
Shouldering more strength than seems humanly possible,
Asks me the likelihood of a meaningful recovery.
I feel a quiet relief in the comfort of being a mere student,
Able to observe without carrying the weight of this moment.
I can’t fathom playing a role in a decision
That might strip away their last fragile hope of a miracle.
What could I possibly say
As they face the hardest decision yet?
But then
A page cuts through the silence:
Code stroke
And yet somehow, I leave the room.

How do I then go home?
How do I step out of their storms and into the calm of my own life?
It doesn’t feel fair.
How do I leave these patients alone
To wrestle with the unimaginable
While I escape
Relatively unscathed?
And yet somehow, I leave the hospital.

“And yet somehow,
I leave the room.”



Donations to the Knitting Grandmas and Friends of Maple Grove Hospital

BY MEGAN JASICKI '28

Yarn

“Outside of school, I’m a proud member of the Knitting Grandmas and Friends of Maple Grove Hospital. We knit and donate hats for the nursery, ensuring that every family can pick out a unique hat for their newborn. This group provided a space for me to grow in the fiber arts and I’m grateful for all of their encouragement and support. Despite the small size, the more complex designs took multiple sittings and much trial and error. So, to those at the beginning of their knitting journey, practice makes perfect!”

[Untitled]

BY KATIE SHERMAN '29

Various fibers

“This piece was created using Saori weaving techniques, a philosophy that values individuality, welcomes spontaneity, embraces imperfections, and honors the beauty of creating something one-of-a-kind.”



19

Heavy Metal Soul [excerpt]

BY LIAM McLAUGHLIN '28

Sarah's thumbnail was one of the few things to survive her rebirth into a minor celebrity. The studio remodeled the rest. Gone were those unkempt black curls that long ago might have nested a pair of voles, that Damien had so loved. Now they were pressed straight with clean cut bangs. Even straighter was her new preference for natural makeup. A fleeting touch of eyeliner, a minutia of mascara, a mouth that was a tinge red or otherwise bare; far away from her old love of thick eye-shadow and purple and black lipstick. Damien's fleeting memory of how aggressively she used to strum the 6th string was all that remained of this simulacra.

Her current song weaved a gong into a retro-futuristic pop ballad that sounded like Ella Fitzgerald had returned with a synthetic vengeance. She wouldn't stop moving, squatting to sing over one side of the screaming crowd only to dash back center and smash the gong with a giant mallet. She chased that with a guitar solo, deft fingers dancing over strings, her long thumbnail strumming in place of a pick. She freed notes like a musical Moses, now floating, unbound from fingers, over the heads of this sea. The stage lights shifted, washing Damien in pink light as she looked out, right at him. Their eyes locked, Damien raising his arms not in fanfare but a plea for attention. She spun on her boots and moved to the other side of the stage. Had she seen him?

Back in The Frootloops, she'd been too shy to sing without pressing the mic into her mouth so close she might as well have eaten it. She would just spam the same five power chords, their gigs only fit for basement frat parties and townie dive bars, and it was beautiful.

“The end of the show was like a ketamine comedown. They had walked on the moon, now left stunned.”

God, things were slow back then. Nights spent drunk with the record player on loop, mornings hungover in class desperately paying little attention, evenings sitting on the hill behind the quad and watching the sunset, Sarah on the blanket beside him, and there was Dave,

the drummer, telling jokes and Libby the keyboardist cracking another bottle of wine, both slowly falling in love. Endless time, but somehow, he never found a chance to tell Sarah what they were. Then slowly, time alone with his thoughts became dangerous. While back then, he could spend an afternoon doing nothing, reading, hell, even writing poetry, now, the same music that had once brought purpose only uncorked a sewer in his brain, while Sarah didn't bother a second glance, and a tall guy to his left moshed too hard, throwing Damien off balance, his sight of her obscured.

He tried to mimic her fingers' dance, curling his own as if holding an invisible instrument along the fabric of his jeans. His hands had once known a similar feeling, before he and his bass guitar had washed out of the LA underground. He no longer made notes these days, but his movements stayed precise. He still reckoned that made him some sort of musician, in philosophical terms. His instrument was the Multiectomy Machine, an all-purpose Surgeon's framework. It was one way to make good use of all those synapses he had built for the strings, now tethered to a giant robot with spider-like tendrils bearing scalpels and microtomes.

The faux-encore came with roaring applause, the younger generation jumping in a religious jubilation, but Damien was only interested in seeing out of Sarah's eyes. He could imagine their faces directed at him instead—bass guitar in one hand, Multiectomy controller in another. It was a too-delicate performance for this lot. His fingers could mime the right notes as if it was still his band, but he'd never touch these hearts. Not if they were lucky, that was. The end of the show was like a ketamine comedown. They had walked on the moon, now left stunned. He tried to shoulder to the front, finding the path backstage. The large-belly bouncer honed in on him first. Damien insisted he was an old friend. “The merchandise was over there,” the big guy insisted. “Sarah would want to see me,” he pleaded. “Show's over pal.”

The big fella had on size thirteen or so boots. He'd be a slow klutz if it came to it, and once Damien got Sarah's attention, she'd surely call her hounds off. With little thought, his hand was on the railing, a foot prepared to hop over.

“The illustrious Dr. Whibley?”

The voice snapped him out of it, his hand untensing. The bouncer rolled his eyes and slunk back a little bit. Illustrious. Damien hadn't heard that teasing

voice in three years, back before he got his wits about him and left academia for good.

Standing behind him was Michael Flint, one of these new breeds of doctors. The schools had been trying ways to make them more relatable to patients, so now we had these greasy, chin-length-hair surgeons with their sleeves of tattoos. This one added on a leather vest and ripped blue jeans. At his arm was his wife, or girlfriend, or boyfriend, or whatever. “Nice to see you outside for once. You finally pawn off all that paperwork?” said Flint.

“You could leave early, too, if you just let the Ambient Scribe write your charts.”

That was another thing about these kids. They were always trying to razz you. Let your guard down, they'd treat you like a green cadet. “Haven't done much since the University and I parted ways.”

“Never saw you as the private-practice type. But with the IRS breathing down your neck, I can't imagine that's any less admin work?”

“You should recall I prefer brevity in my write-ups.”

“You always had a knack for putting nothing in the chart,” he said. If Damien still could, he'd put the kid on call for a week for that remark. Still, Flint went along with introducing his woman next. She looked vain enough, so Damien gave her his card in case she ever wanted new cheekbones. “What are you doing here? I never took this as your scene?” Flint said.

Perhaps in silent jealousy, Damien smoothed back his receding hairline. “I should say the same. You're a fellow now, aren't you? Surprised you have time for these sorts of incursions.”

“I'm out here every week, Dr. Whibley.”

“You didn't wash out, did you?”

“Time management was always my big skill, you know.”

“What schedules are they giving you nowadays?”

“Volumes are up, if anything. As long as I wrap up my cases for the week, I'm free to do anything. You could leave early, too, if you just let the Ambient Scribe write your charts.”

“I do a lot more than just paperwork.”

“Well. There's ways around that, too.” His wife was pulling on his arm now. “Especially now that everyone's on the Surge platform.”

“That old soft drink?”

“Nah, the automated operation companion.”

“Ah, well. That robot nonsense isn't my style.”

Flint shrugged. “My partner and I just got back from Japan. We had a cabin outside of Sapporo. I was doing remote work through Surge the entire time. Full salary. I just thought I'd clue you in. With the way you were looking at Sabrina, I thought you might be interested in coming to more of these shows, at least.”

“Her name's Sarah.”

He raised an eyebrow. “I could give you a demo. It's really something.”

“I'll have to pass. Thanks, though.”

But when he got home, it was past midnight. He'd have to be up in another five hours—then he'd really be feeling those four beers he opted for to escape his feelings of alienation in that crowd. He stomped up the steps and opened his back door to the basement. Lights were out throughout the house, save the upstairs living room which rang with sitcom laughter and flashed lights down the stairs towards where he entered. They dimly lit his wall of treasures as he crept by. He took the moment to admire it, some twenty thousand dollars of instrumentation, gathering dust.

“She shut it off, plunging them both into darkness.”

Five years ago, a midlife-crisis attempt at starting another band had placed them into his hands. That plan went nowhere, and instead, instrument collection became another ego project. Step one, own the same model guitar as Hendrix. Next, hold the domain over the McCartney bass. Get every piece from the Peart drum kit. It was as if those mementos linked him to their music.

The laugh tracks grew louder as he ascended the stairs, emerging to the noise of *How I Met Your Mother*, a show that might as well have been a binky to his teenage daughter Emma. She was still awake, sitting in the otherwise dark in an armchair, turned away so he could only see her long hair streaked with red dye.

It would kill her to find out, but he once styled his the same. As if a reflex, she snatched up the remote and paused it upon seeing him, Neil Patrick Harris' mouth now hanging open like the *Scream* mask.

Damien said the predictable thing first. "Bed-time, kiddo."

"You're the one up late."

"Us adults have shrinking brains. We have to take these liberties while we can."

"You told mom you weren't taking any more late-night calls."

He swallowed, his head hanging lower as he played into this lie. "Hey, but duty calls, right?"

She scowled, reaching for the remote and letting Neil Patrick Harris finish his joke. Damien watched him trade quips with Jason Segel for a few minutes.

"Emma, you're not using that chat-gee-pee-tee thing in any of your school assignments, are you?"

"No. Why would I do that?"

"I don't know. You always seemed to spend copious amounts of time on the computer or watching this..." he gestured to the TV, "...or on that tik-tok thing. I just wanted to make sure you're not..."

"Dad, what are you talking about? I barely watch Netflix anymore. Not like you would know."

She shut it off, plunging them both into darkness. As his night vision struggled to adjust, he could hear her slink away. Upstairs, where she would surely be on her phone for another hour. Studious as she was, she had endless time, and this is how she wasted it. Just like him, she never knew what she had, and wasted it.

The full story can be read online at trabeculae.org

Mutual Observation

BY ROB KRANZ '29

Digital illustration

"The human researcher observes the microbe through the microscope, but the microbe also 'observes' the human in a way, shaping itself in response to our interventions with its use of plasmids, sporulation, cell wall mutations, and many other adaptive mechanisms."



***"Studious as she was,
she had endless time,
and this is how she wasted it."***



[Untitled]

BY SIERRA BERMUDEZ '29

Acrylic on canvas

"Feminism and reproductive rights for all."



The Interview: Ming Shen '28

Trabeculae: Hi, Ming! Thanks for taking the time to chat with us. Let's start with what type of art you do.

Ming: Hello! My primary art form is dancing. I grew up doing ballet and expanded to contemporary dance, since ballet felt a little restrictive.

Trabeculae: How long have you been dancing?

Ming: Well, I started off in rhythmic gymnastics. I got a lot of injuries from that and then switched to dance when I was 10. So it's been roughly 15 years.

Trabeculae: That's a long time! What type of dance do you do now?

Ming: Right now it's whatever my body can handle. I don't do as much ballet anymore since it's pretty hard on your body, so I stick more with contemporary. I've dabbled in hip-hop, too. I try to go to some dance classes but it's very occasional because school is so busy. Otherwise, I like going to RecWell or the gym in my apartment. We have a little yoga studio and I can move around in there.

Trabeculae: Tell me about your performance at the Arts and Medicine spring showcase last year. What was your creative process like?

Ming: That was choreographed just two weeks before the showcase! It was similar to choreography that I've

done in the past. I like more whimsical and flowy types of dance.

Trabeculae: Was there any specific inspiration behind that piece?

Ming: Honestly, no. My favorite thing to do is listen to music and the choreography will often pop into my head. It starts with that and then I follow it where it goes.

Trabeculae: I remember watching it and thinking that there were classical elements, but something about the expressiveness of your movements and transitions also made it feel modern.

Ming: Oh, definitely. Most of my past choreography has combined ballet and contemporary. I've been told that some of my movement quality comes from rhythmic gymnastics, since those movements tend to be a little sharper.

Trabeculae: It does seem like a balletic sport in terms of the gracefulness and strength that's required. Which apparatus did you specialize in?

Ming: I did them all, but ribbon was my favorite. I was a bit scared of the other ones! I've been hit in the head by a club before, and it's not fun.

Trabeculae: Speaking of balancing acts: how do you balance your art with the demands of medical school?

Ming: It's a lot harder now than it was in college, especially since there's no established dance group here. Right now, dance is more of a spontaneous and cathartic thing for me rather than a stable hobby. When I'm stressed, sometimes I'll turn on music and just start wiggling. I had a dance teacher at Carleton who told me that was a great way to reduce stress.

Trabeculae: Have you found that when you do have time to dance, that the product or process is different from how it was before medical school?

Ming: I would say yes, partly because I have more physical limitations now. For the showcase performance, it was a little jarring to realize that, wow, I can't do half of the things I used to be able to do, plus I don't

have the energy that I used to have. Halfway through that dance, I was really tired. Those physical limitations feel a lot more apparent now. But in terms of creative process, I'd say it's similar to how it was before. I go wherever my choreography impulses take me.

Trabeculae: You mentioned dancing at Carleton. What was that like?

Ming: I ran a dance company called Experimental Dance Board. We emphasized that you don't need formal experience in order to dance. I didn't come from an affluent family, but many dancers do, and I think that people often feel barred from dance or performing arts in general based on their socioeconomic background. I got very lucky that I had a ballet teacher who had her own school and did not have tuition fees as high as those of traditional ballet schools. So, our guiding principle for Experimental Dance Board was that anyone can dance and anyone can choreograph.

Trabeculae: That sounds very welcoming. Did you prefer the creative or managerial aspects of that role?



Ming: It can be hard to organize a group. Everyone interprets things so differently, but that's what I love about dance. At the same time, you have this vision in your head that you want executed a certain way. I see choreography as trying to make harmony out of chaos. But when I dance solo, whether I'm performing in front of people or in my own private space, I tell myself that it's okay to improvise. That's what I did on stage at the showcase! I forgot the choreography halfway through.

Trabeculae: That's a big admission! I really couldn't tell that you were improvising.

Ming: That actually happens quite often. Improvising is a skill that dancers are expected to have. Do you know *Dance Moms*, where the poor little girl will freeze on stage and then run off? Dance 101 is: don't do that.

Trabeculae: Related to that, do you think about the audience when you're dancing or choreographing?

Ming: It's changed over time. At Carleton, people would often choreograph to get a reaction from the audience. Say you do a fun jump or turn, and everyone oohs and aahs. That's a nice feeling. But now, I'm not trying to incorporate, say, six turns into a front flip. First of all, I can't do that anymore; and second, it's not the goal. The goal is to create a piece that I'm proud of, that I feel good doing, and where I'm able to express my emotions. I feel this especially when dancing solo.

Trabeculae: Thanks for letting us get to know you, Ming. You've mentioned creative freedom a few times now, so I wanted to give you the last word to expound on that or to share any other thoughts.

Ming: One of the things that I appreciate most about dance is its capacity for self-expression. It's an intimate thing because you are, at least in part, your body. Your body and how it moves *is* the art. And I've always really valued that everyone has a chance to express themselves. Dance has been my way of getting my emotions out and reducing stress, and I want other people to have that experience through dance or another art form.

Our full interview with Ming can be read online at trabeculae.org

“State of Languor”

BY HASSAN AHAD ‘28

“Music has long been my primary art form: I began playing trumpet at 11 years old and later picked up guitar and piano. I have always been enthralled by the immense tranquility that music can induce. This is the first piece I have ever composed and written as sheet music. Languor describes a familiar feeling: the pleasant mental and physical tiredness that washes over everyone in due time, a nostalgic gratitude combined with a daydream-like state. The instrumentation (violin and cello) evokes a classic feel of a simpler time.”

Recorded by Sophie Gao ‘28 (violin) and Matthew Jeon ‘28 (cello)

The image shows two pages of handwritten sheet music for the piece "State of Languor". The left page is for Violin and the right page is for Cello. Both pages are in 3/4 time and marked "Moderato". The music is written on five-line staves with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The handwriting is clear and legible.

LISTEN NOW



The Interview: Sophie Rewey ‘28

Trabeculae: Hello Sophie! It’s currently early in the fall and I know you recently got back from an art residency in France. Could you tell us about that?

Sophie: Hello! So, I applied to this art residency wanting to figure out how to be an artist in graphic medicine. I wanted to see what that looks like for me because most graphic medicine is comics, but comic art is not my favorite thing. I just like making fine art more than I like making comics, although comics can be fine art, too. But then I got there—and graphic medicine was the last thing I wanted to be doing. Instead, I was really inspired by the nature of rural France that was all around me, plus I was reminiscing about art from my childhood.

Trabeculae: How did you end up in rural France?

Sophie: I lived in Paris during my gap year after college. Actually, I initially looked at an art residency in Argentina, but I didn’t get accepted. So, I applied to this one in a small town called Marnay-sur-Seine, which is right on the Seine and about an hour’s train ride outside of Paris. I’m not a small-town kind of person, but there were just such wonderful characters there that it ended up being a surprisingly social experience. I learned that artists have been traveling there for residencies for over a 100 years.

Trabeculae: That’s a very cool tradition to become a part of. What does an art residency look like?

Sophie: I had a studio space and a little apartment down the street from each other, and I was free to make art in the studio space as well as out in nature. There

were farms all around and I’d go on lots of walks. But what’s so charming about small towns like this is that you’re a new person there and everyone wants to know who you are and what you’re doing there. Plus, I speak French, so I feel like I got to really connect with people, compared to living in Paris where I felt anonymous. I felt a lot more inspired by that setting than I thought I would, partly because I could slow down and appreciate my environment.

Trabeculae: Finding time during medical school to slow down and appreciate art and creativity was one of our guiding ideas for this magazine. Did you make any memorable connections during your time there?

Sophie: Yes! There was one other artist there, a woman named Silvina who is originally from Argentina but lives in Texas now. She works in textiles and recycled materials. We’d go on a walk or bike ride together almost every single morning. I felt grounded in her presence and those interactions made me think about how everything is so much more fluid and in flux than we see it, and you can really bond with and learn a lot from someone whom you may not have expected to have much in common with due to differences in age or life experience. That fluidity also encapsulated how the theme of this residency changed for me over time.

Trabeculae: It sounds like a really lovely experience. How about a final word of wisdom for our readers?

Sophie: I’ve been thinking about how we have all these expectations, or we like to put things in our nice little boxes—this is medicine, that is life—and that’s not actually how the world works. I think the reason why art has persisted for me so strongly is because if I didn’t have it, life would be so bland. Ignoring the creative drive can be detrimental to your humanity, which is something that we need to work hard to preserve in medicine. It’s very easy to get lost and lose sight of that. Art has ended up being the thing that lets me challenge myself, be ready for the unexpected, and remain flexible in my expectations.

Our full interview with Sophie can be read online at trabeculae.org

Her paintings are presented on pages 1, 5, and 28 of the magazine.



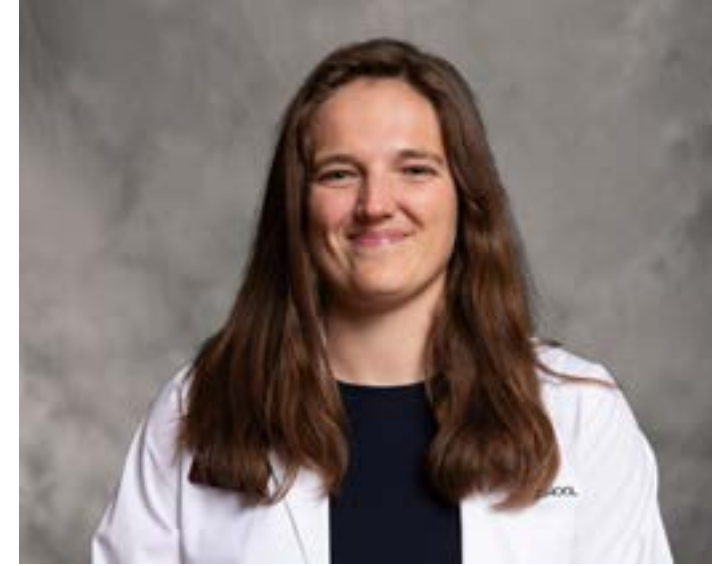
**Medical Student Series:
Lana, Pablo, Sophie**

BY SOPHIE REWEY '28

Acrylic on canvas

Marnay-sur-Seine, France

July 2025



The Interview: Megan Mensinger '28

Trabeculae: Hi Megan! I'm glad to be able to keep doing these interviews outside on these warm fall days. Why don't you tell us a bit about yourself?

Megan: Hello! I'm a 2nd-year medical student from northern Minnesota. I'm a big fan of large bodies of water: I grew up not far from Lake Superior and would spend summers on the East Coast in Cape Cod because my dad is a marine biologist who did research out there. So, I consider the North Atlantic to also be part of my home.

Trabeculae: We will absolutely get into the topic of water and artistic inspiration. But first, what kind of art do you do?

Megan: My main form of art is writing, usually poems and short stories. I've been getting more into essays and narrative writing, especially narrative medicine and medical storytelling.

Trabeculae: Have you done creative writing for a long time?

Megan: I've always loved reading and writing, but the big catalyst for my writing was deciding to go to New York University for college. I quickly figured out that Manhattan wasn't the right fit for me and I ended up transferring schools. When I started at Truman State, a lovely little university in Northern Missouri, I was still recovering from New York and wanted to take a

creative writing class and just do something that I really enjoy. I had a professor there who was supportive of me processing my experience through writing, and from there on I got the support and mentorship I needed to take my writing more seriously.

Trabeculae: Processing real-world events through writing can be so good for catharsis. Is that a function that writing still serves for you?

Megan: For sure. If there's something I'm thinking about or trying to process, I'll open the Notes app on my phone and write down pieces of phrases that come to mind, perhaps the beginning of a poem or story. But some of the stuff I write is really just for fun.

Trabeculae: Tell me a little bit more about your creative process and how that might look different now that you're in medical school compared to before.

Megan: A big part of my process—or my muse, if you believe in muses—relates to swimming. I was a distance swimmer in college and swimming is still a huge part of my life. The connection to water and the intensity of competing in a sport that I love, all while being intellectually stimulated by my classes, was the perfect setting in which to write. I would show up to class and write in my notebook during the 10 minutes before class started. After I graduated, I took a medical scribing job that ended up being incredibly draining. Ironically, I developed writer's block during that job, even though I was writing medical notes all day.

Trabeculae: That must have felt very frustrating. Were you able to find any relief from that?

Megan: Well, I knew that with some of the horrific things I was seeing every day, as well as the passivity of my role as essentially a fly on the wall, that eventually I would need to process some of what I'd seen. Once I left that job, I was able to start writing again. And now in medical school, I prioritize going to the pool and swimming, plus I have that intellectual stimulation from our coursework. Although I don't have as much time to write as I did in college, I do find myself able to write here and there.

Trabeculae: Do you ever force yourself to write? Say, you're going to write a certain number of words or



pages each day, regardless of inspiration?

Megan: I've never done anything like NaNoWriMo [an annual creative writing challenge involving writing a 50,000-word novel draft in one month], if that's what you mean. I usually have multiple pieces I'm working on that I jump between. I never give myself word count requirements. It doesn't work for me.

Trabeculae: How do you handle having multiple works in progress?

Megan: If I get stuck on one piece, I just go to a different piece. I'm also the sort of person who can read multiple books at once, although I'm haunted by the list of books I've started and never finished. I should probably just let that go. This is kind of egotistical, but I usually read through my own work when I'm preparing to write, and sometimes I'll think, ah, I like where this one was going but it needs work.

Trabeculae: Let's go back to your inspiration. Besides water and coastal life, are there other themes or ideas that you like to explore?

Megan: That's a really good question. I used to think

that I was eventually going to get a PhD on some obscure organism, because I grew up around science. But ultimately, what has always held my attention is the human experience. People fascinate me, as do deep ethical questions about humanity. Medicine is full of those questions, so a lot of the themes in my writing have to do with that intersection of science and humanity.

Trabeculae: That reminds me of classic science fiction, at the core of which is that messy and beautiful (and often terrifying) human element.

Megan: Right. Some of my own pieces lean a little bit in that direction, and I've been inspired by magical realism and New Fabulism, too. In my short stories, I might try to come up with some interesting premise. Say, a futuristic aquarium—I love marine creatures, after all—but the whole point of it is to frame the interaction between characters. Bringing in these themes of science or medicine ultimately helps me explore human relationships and how we interact with the world.

Trabeculae: How does your process differ in writing short stories versus poetry?

Megan: I don't feel that writing poems takes me very much time. I'm not saying they're all good, but to spit out a poem, and then play around with it like it's a jigsaw puzzle? That's not too time-consuming. I don't persevere much on my poems once they're written, but I do think about them a lot before I write them down. Poems are great for my commitment issues.

Trabeculae: Commitment issues?

Megan: Yeah. I would love to write a novel, but I haven't found a story I want to sit with for months or years. Poetry feels like a more contained moment. I'm also really bad at transitions when I write prose, whereas in poetry I think I can get away with that more.

Trabeculae: Right. In prose, your reader is more likely to get lost if you don't use transitions.

Megan: That's a great point. Sometimes I just don't want to do the telling, because I already know the story in my head and I don't want to sacrifice, say, descriptive imagery. That's one trade-off you have to make.

Trabeculae: Do you adopt any sort of authorial persona in your writing?

Megan: Not really, although now I think about how any published work would reflect the profession and myself. I want to make sure I'm always respecting my patients and colleagues, but that should be true regardless of what field you're in. Part of that is not telling other people's stories unless you have explicit permission from them. But in terms of authorial persona, I still feel like I'm writing as myself. My poems tend to be about my own thoughts and experiences and help me work through things stuck in my mind.

Trabeculae: I was hoping you could talk a bit about the poem you submitted to the magazine.

Megan: Sure! I've been really intrigued by this idea of us being expected to learn a ton of medical information while all of our minds work in different ways. The poem deals with mnemonics. In clinic, the stakes are going to be so different compared to studying for exams. I'm fascinated by the idea of memory.

Trabeculae: Are you inspired by any poets who work with the theme of memory?

Megan: In general, I get a ton of inspiration from the spoken word community. That was my way into poetry because it felt accessible. Button Poetry, based in Minneapolis, supports a lot of spoken word poets. One of my favorite poets, Andrea Gibson, sadly passed away this past summer from ovarian cancer, but they were a queer poet and were a huge inspiration to me. I am also queer. Toward the end of their life, when they knew they had a terminal diagnosis, they engaged with memory and the idea of what they'll leave behind. It's just beautiful work about the human condition.

Trabeculae: What about inspiration from the world of physician writers?

Megan: Atul Gawande and Paul Kalanithi, for sure. *When Breath Becomes Air* was a huge catalyst for me pursuing medicine. Rafael Campo is a doctor poet who has some beautiful work about the AIDS crisis and his perspective on it as a gay man in the medical profession. But I get a lot of inspiration as well from reading the work of Center for the Art of Medicine faculty and

physicians who publish their creative writing in *JAMA* and other medical journals.

Trabeculae: Thanks so much for this in-depth conversation, Megan. I think we've really gotten to know about your creative process and inspiration. I'd like to give you the last word, in case there's anything else you'd like to impart to our readers.

Megan: I believe that creative outlets are an antidote to burn out. It might not work every time—there are periods of life with lulls in creativity—but I do think that's one way of getting through. For me, that creative outlet is writing, but it doesn't have to be writing for everyone. We need ways of processing both the beautiful and horrific things we'll see on the way to becoming doctors. Without that, it's really easy to lose sight of who we are.

Our full interview with Megan can be read online at trabeculae.org

Her poem, "Where the Textbook Ends", is presented on page 32 of the magazine.

Images courtesy of Megan Mensinger: Nobska Light, Woods Hole, Massachusetts [page 30]; Cousteau (the dog, not the famed French oceanographer) [below]



Where the Textbook Ends

BY MEGAN MENSINGER '28

My memory isn't much for tricks
I filed flashbulbs without meaning to
next to too many conversations
only my mind keeps alive.

I love counting on the minutiae
of my synapses
my hippocampal hindsight
to stop the extinction
of moments only I know.

But med school wants
me to use mnemonics
to memorize the material
catchy phrases
absurd acronyms
every topic needs
a good hook
that we hold like lifelines.

When I am old
I hope the mnemonics
no longer materialize
Those ghosts can't save me anyway
Let my recall be left
to my own devices.

At the end
Let my neurons remember to hit play
so I can watch the chain reaction
of a thousand flashbulbs explode
Let me sink into the luminescent tide
of a life lived.



Light at the End [top], Where You Always Wanted to Be [bottom]

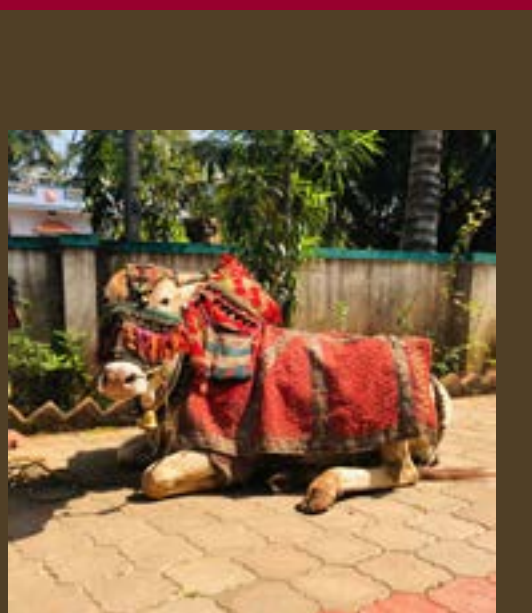
BY CASSANDRA SUNDARAM '26

Film photography

"The Irene Hixon Whitney Bridge in Minneapolis features an excerpt from John Ashbery's poem 'Where You Stand', which was written for the opening of the bridge in 1988. I took these film photos in 2015, shortly after graduating undergrad and feeling a little bit lost. Looking back on these photos now, I feel even more connected to the words, which for me mean that my circuitous journey to medicine not only couldn't have gone another way, but that it was the best and right way for me. Here I am now, right where I am supposed to be."



TRABECULAE
A Journal of Arts and Literature



Glimpses of Home
BY RASHIKA SHETTY '27
Film photography
*"The colors, textures, and serenity
of my life back in India"*