

# UC Irvine

## Plexus

### Title

Plexus 2009

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/094321r2>

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### Publication Date

2009-04-01

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Peer reviewed

# PLEXUS

Journal of Arts and Humanities





*Last Boat to Paradise*, photograph  
Justin Tilan, Class of 2012

### **Front Cover**

*Buket chudesnyh roz*, india ink  
Marina Planoutene, Hematology/Oncology

### **Back Cover**

*cold as ice*, photograph  
Tanni Thai, Financial Analyst

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# PLEXUS

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Asheen Rama, Class of 2012

*Mother*, oil on canvas

## Corazón

She waits.  
Yellow dress, too tight over her  
growing belly  
Skinny legs dangling awkwardly  
over the edge of the table.  
One month younger than me, first  
baby on the way  
She greets me with a nervous smile.  
"English o Español?" I ask  
Español, por favor  
And so we begin.

More than a decade ago  
Hectically patterned posters  
on the wall  
Dry erase markers running  
low on ink  
Gato cat Perro dog  
The first tentative steps of a  
new language.

Now  
A lifetime has passed since those  
workbooks  
Verbs and adjectives faded out of  
memory long ago  
I move the doppler over her navel  
Changing direction  
Waiting to hear a steady  
whoosh-whoosh through the static.  
And then...there it is.  
Heartbeat.  
Our eyes meet. My smile is mirrored  
on her face  
Joyous, I find the words -  
"Corazón de bebe."

Neera Sodhi, Class of 2010



Rock, photograph

Christina Umber, Class of 2010



Catedral de los Mexicanos, photograph

Anna Morgan, Class of 2011



*Houdini*, oil and acrylic  
Chase Warren, Class of 2012

## Loss of Dignity

We patients are very protective  
of our dignity

We may lose our battle against  
cholesterol

or even lose a leg

But we want to emerge from our  
medical encounters with  
dignity intact.

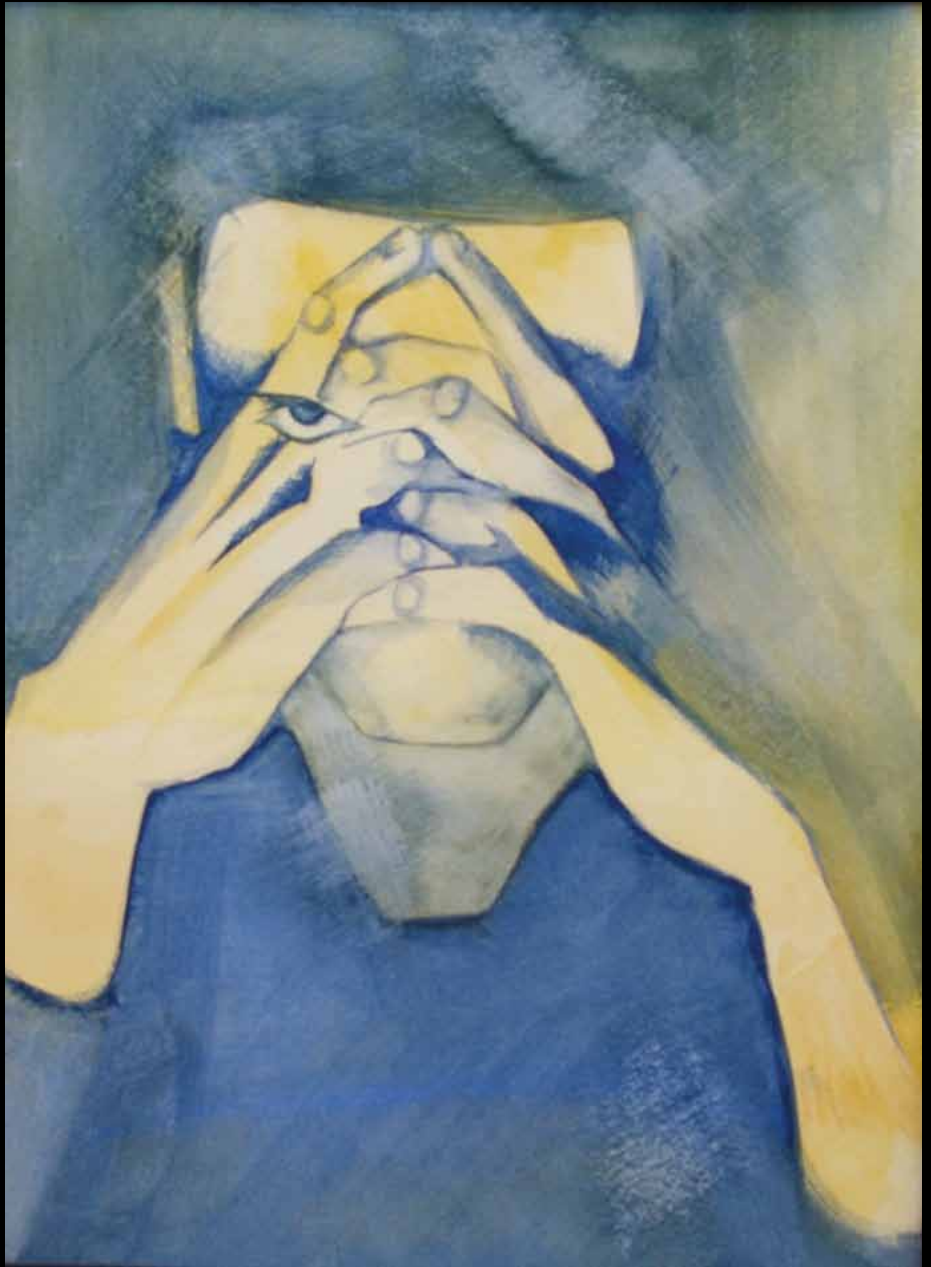
Of course, it simply is not to be.  
From the ubiquitous open-back  
hospital gown displaying your  
gluteus maximus  
to all and sundry  
to peeing in the bed because  
the nurse can't get there quickly enough  
to having your surgeon  
round on you while you are  
ensconced on the commode  
to crying through your entire

physical therapy session  
to being discussed in detail as though  
you don't actually exist -

clinging to one's dignity  
goes to hell in a handbasket  
pretty quickly

Yet here's a funny thing  
Stripped of dignity  
stripped bare  
you may discover  
a peculiar kind of grace  
There is nothing left to hide  
nothing left to protect  
You are down to essence  
And suddenly  
dignity seems overrated

Johanna Shapiro, PhD  
Family Medicine



*Covert*, watercolor  
Neera Sodhi, Class of 2010





## Tonight

Tonight, life is rioting within me  
And it's my soul that is going to be free

Tonight I am deep in the skies  
And I am dancing among stars without any disguise

Tonight I am far away from all humanity  
And there is battle with me and sanity

Tonight I float through the ocean breeze  
And it's all the pain I have ever felt that is being released

Tonight I am skipping through the wheat grass  
And I am free, dancing like gazelles

Tonight I am immersed within earth  
And I am feeling my own rebirth

Tonight I am me  
And I am happy to just be

Pouneh Nasserri, Class of 2011



*Surgerië*, gouache, watercolor, and digital  
Chase Warren, Class of 2012

## ICU Anthology

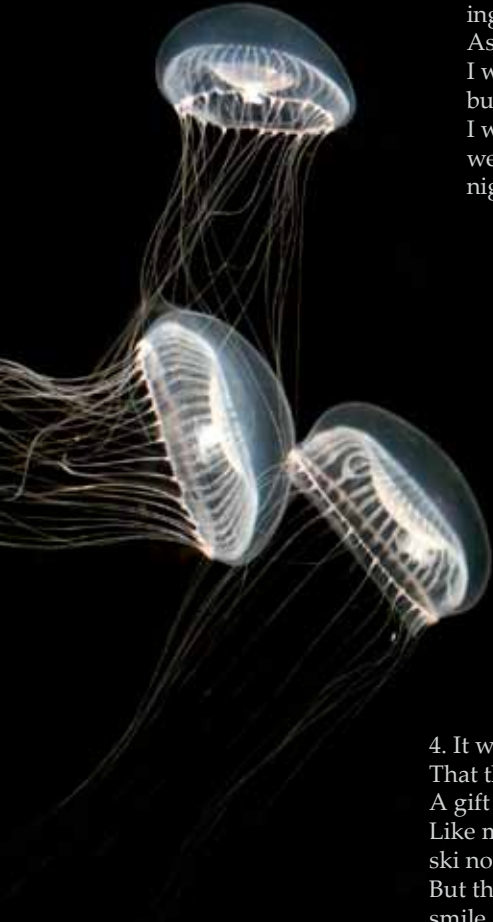
1. You stand over my bed crying,  
but my dear, death is an inevitable thing  
and I was 89 for goodness sake.  
Look at you, still so young  
When I was your age, we would go for  
long drives  
The picture of me in front of the Grand  
Canyon still sits on my dresser.

2. I am laying here, my feet sticking  
over the end of this bed.  
As the tall one, when we were 16,  
I was the one who went inside to  
buy the whiskey,  
I was showing off when my cycle  
went down on the highway last  
night.

3. You of this country have things  
we did not,  
Like doctors to prevent bad illness.  
This ICU is my first doctor visit  
since I was three years old,  
When my fever ran high for five  
days  
And my mother tried everything.  
I arrived only 9 years ago,  
But my children will have a better  
chance here.

4. It was always not if but when  
That thing near my heart would burst,  
A gift from my parents  
Like my long blond hair and the Jablonski  
nose,  
But they also gave me my disarming  
smile  
And taught me kindness to strangers,  
And for that I am grateful.

Stephen Cramer, MD  
Neurology



## Entrenched first year

We soak up advice of the Second Years  
for they too have put their hands in the dead,  
battled the cadaver juice and its smell,  
that lingering stench we have all detested, protested.

Lemon juice, Vick's vapo-rub, menthol chapstick,  
Nitrile gloves are better,  
Did you double glove? Change them every hour?  
T-gel shampoo, baking soda, baby powder, have all been suggested, tested.

But all the lemons in an orchard and ten vats of vapo-rub,  
latex gloves, nitrile gloves, double gloving, triple gloving,  
are no match for cadaver juice,  
the stubborn stench clinging to our hands remains uncontested, unarrested.

The wretched stench on my hands proves to be unbearable.  
Finger food is no longer an option  
and when a whiff of cadaver juice escapes past the longest utensil I own,  
or heaven's forbid I absentmindedly scratch anywhere in the vicinity of my nose with  
the other tainted hand,  
food can no longer be requested, ingested.

It is clear that second year advice cannot help us here,  
perhaps a Third Year on surgery rotation can help instead  
for amputation of the offending hands is the only solution, resolution.



*Raggedy Handy, gouche*  
Chase Warren, Class of 2012



VII.

¡Ay mango!  
Yo no sé de qué lejanías vienes  
Ni de qué paraíso abrasador  
Ni de qué selva amarilla y alucinante.  
Tampoco sé qué viaje has embarcado  
Ni qué charco invencible has saltado  
Ni qué manos te han manoseado  
Para que puedas caber ahora en mis  
palmas.

Pero todo esto no importa;  
Sé y reconozco tu beso pequeño de  
miel,  
Tu cuerpo dorado,  
Y tu encarnación de sol.  
Tu destino final y único es mi boca,  
Y la obra maestra de tu vida es pura  
dulzura.

¡Que tu piel se desprenda de la mía  
En una caricia espiral!

¡Que esta prenda tuya caiga  
Como una sinfonía de una sola nota  
Para anunciar tu desnudez!

¡Ay mango!  
Tu amor no abandona,  
Sino que se come.



Tan Nguyen MD, Family Medicine

G1P0: *Expectant Mother*, photograph



Peter McQueen, Class of 2010

*Turbulence, Laguna Beach, CA*, photograph



Shaun Chung, Class of 2010

*Paint the Seconds, Amazon, photograph*



Pamela Swan, Class of 2010

*Running Off to Get Married, Vatican, Italy, photograph*

## VII.

Ay mango!  
I do not know the remoteness from which  
you come from  
Nor which burning paradise  
Nor which yellow and hallucinating jungle.  
Nor do I know the journey you have em-  
barked upon,  
Nor what invincible puddle you have  
jumped,  
Nor what hands have handled you,  
So that you now can fit in my palms.

But all this does not matter;  
I know and recognize your tiny honey kiss,  
Your golden body,  
Your incarnation of sun.  
Your ultimate and unique destiny is my  
mouth,  
And the masterpiece of your life is pure  
sweetness.

May your skin come away from mine  
In a spiral caress!

May this article of yours fall  
Like a symphony of a single note  
To announce your nudity!

Ay mango!  
Your love does not abandon,  
But rather is eaten.





Justin Tilan, Class of 2012

*Unlikely friendships*, photograph



Stephanie Channal, Class of 2010

*Lychee-oid*, photograph

### Untitled

*vāsāmsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya  
navāni grhṇāti naro 'parāni  
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇāny  
anyāni sarṇyāti navāni dehī*

*Nay, but as when one layeth  
His worn-out robes away,  
And taking new ones, sayeth,  
"These will I wear to-day!"  
So putteth by the spirit  
Lightly its garb of flesh,  
And passeth to inherit  
A residence afresh.*

– *Bhagavad Gita* 2.22  
(trans. Sir Edwin Arnold, 1900)

It is in this verse from Krishna on the fields of Kurukshetra that man receives one of the great precepts that form the basis of all his religions; that the physical body is merely a vessel for something infinite and divine. Once the principle is accepted, an individual can embark on the path of spiritual growth by freeing himself from the desires and limitations of the flesh. Indeed, it is the realization of the body's fragility and evanescence that stimulates spiritual inquiry. It was only after witnessing the ravages of disease and old age that Prince Siddhartha embarked on the path to enlightenment.

The idea that there is something within each of us that transcends the physical body is easy to accept in abstract terms. Having been raised in a Hindu family, the concept has been espoused by nearly every spiritual teacher I have encountered. Naturally, I attempted to keep it in mind when preparing to take part in the first dissection exercise of the year. I tried to see the task as merely an exploration of the mechanistic workings of matter and energy that drive a human body during its lifespan. If the individual essences that inhabited these vessels were now on an entirely different plane, then the act of dissection becomes a purely pedagogical act.

At first, this worked very well. In my initial eagerness to do well in the course and learn as much as possible, I reflected very little on anything beyond the contents of the generalized human thorax. It was only later, while other students were presenting the anatomy of the heart, that the gravity of the anatomy lab struck me. For a moment, the cloth covering one of the female cadavers receded, revealing painted fingernails. They were bright pink, and looked as if they had been done recently. In that moment, I understood the enormity of the gift given by those whose anatomy we are studying. It also brought to mind one of the great contradictions between spiritual philosophy and religious practice. Even though all that is divine and eternal in us will survive the body, we treat the body with reverence. Even after death, we recognize that there is much about an individual that is inextricably tied to the body. No amount of spiritual wisdom or logic can obscure this fact. I would also imagine that no amount of practiced clinical detachment could liberate a physician from the reality of death.

Goutham Ganesan, Class of 2012



*Shelter*, photograph



*Christina Aguilera*, pencil



*Wet petals*, photograph

Christina Umber, Class of 2010

Jerry Ngo, Class of 2011

Justin Tian, Class of 2012



Betty Wong, Neonatology

*Peony in Bloom*, oil on canvas

### Too soon

Too soon after my surgery  
we sneak out to breakfast  
truant school kids  
in search of guilty pleasures  
But we are grandparents  
respectable if rickety

The tang of sea-stroked breeze  
is only made keener  
and the succulence of the  
fruit and yogurt sweeter  
by the knowledge of risk

We glance about  
surreptitiously  
and giggle at our own mischief  
Who do we think is watching?  
God, with His infinite storehouse  
of plagues and vermin?

Or my physical therapist  
who has her own commandments  
and is likely the sterner taskmaster

**Johanna Shapiro, PhD**  
Family Medicine



*Shanbrom Hall 55*, photograph

Cipriano Hurtado, Security



*Burnt Pink*, photograph

Cipriano Hurtado, Security



*Order*, photograph

Julie Hui, Class of 2010



Venezia, nello scuro, photograph  
Justin Tlian, Class of 2012



*hoa-sen-web*, photograph  
Tonya Huang, Revenue Audit



*In Due Time*, photograph  
Julie Hui, Class of 2010



*Pink*, photograph  
Rod Mortazavi, Class of 2010



*Mono Lake pastel sunset*, photograph  
Ian Parker, PhD, Neurobiology

## Smoldering Sun

Her eyes glistened as she spoke in a hoarse whisper,  
"Thanks Doc, feels much better,"  
And her sister pushed her out the door.  
She's a smiling, grey Southern Belle,  
Weathered by the winds and sun of desert Texas.

Each time she pulls on a cigarette,  
The glowing cherry becomes the setting sun  
Shimmering near the sand.  
And then her husband would joke,  
"the night never arrives so long as the sun  
is 'tween your fingers"  
And he was right, because they would stay  
up late on their back porch,  
Holding hands and exhaling clouds.

"This one's a sandstorm!"

The smoke curled from her dry lips and  
enveloped his face,  
eroding it to the bone.  
She pulls again and her cheeks expand,  
Her husband can't resist and pokes them flat.  
A thick cloud and spattering of drops  
envelop him.  
"A rainstorm, in the desert?"  
And they would laugh.

After thousands of nights  
With desert rain and sandstorms  
Her husband truly eroded into dust.  
She was shaking when her sister took her  
from the back porch,  
Memories, thick and choking,  
Obscured the once familiar path to the  
driveway.

"Back again so soon?  
Is the oxygen tank working fine?"  
The Southern Belle gently pulled a ker-



chief from her purse,  
It shimmered under the hospital lights  
As she handed it with wooden fingers to  
the physician.  
"Ahhh," he sighed, recognizing blood spots  
Like brown pebbles on yellow dunes.

The doctor knew,  
She knew,  
Every  
Setting  
Sun  
Between  
Her  
Fingers  
Had  
Taken  
More  
Of  
Her  
Life  
Away.

Even as it brought happiness through long  
nights with her husband,  
Smoking had destroyed her lungs.

He returned the kerchief to her  
And appealed to her  
Instincts for life:  
"if you don't stop smoking..."

Her eyes twinkled immediately as she  
shifted  
Her focus to the package  
Of cigarettes in her purse,  
Twenty setting suns  
On a barren  
Desert  
Landscape,  
To share with her husband.

Priel Scmalbach, Class of 2012



*Panoramic Bay*, photograph  
Kirellos Zamarly, Class of 2011





Robert Detrano MD, PhD, Radiological Sciences

*Untitled*, photograph

## If You Knew

If you knew what my life has been like, you wouldn't look at me this way when I ask you for a thousand more shillings, call you three times to see if you got my email, take up half an hour of your time outside your hotel even though I wasn't on the list of "accepted students" you posted outside the office with the note saying how hard it was to choose, how you wished us all well in our pursuit of education.

If you knew I only eat a meal a day, and that's why I called you to ask for more money, after you'd already made a check out to my school to pay my fees, you wouldn't lose your patience with me.

If you knew the only motivators I've ever known are fear and hunger, maybe you

would understand why I didn't tell you in the interview I had an outstanding balance at my school.

If you knew this scholarship means I'll finally be able to go to boarding school and get out of my uncle's house where I work all day to earn my keep, with no time to study, maybe you'd pick me even though I get C's and D's.

If you knew I could get 3 masters degrees for the price of your 1, maybe you'd see it's worth it to put me through medical school.

If you knew I have no idea where my parents are, whether they're dead or alive, maybe you'd be as shocked as I am to see how you talk to your mom sometimes.

If you knew I've seen a man almost shot over a jerry can of water in the refugee camp, you'd see that it's not just a bottle of water to me.

If you knew that my features are typical Southern Sudanese, and that this fact is grounds for a life of discrimination, both in Kenya and in my own country, you'd understand how much more fighting needs to be done for you to be able to declare that "everyone is equal."

If you knew I've seen hyenas too, eating dead bodies while I was fleeing civil war, you'd realize wild animals are not as beautiful and peaceful as they look on safari.

If you knew the only reason I showed up was not to bother you, but to say it's okay you didn't pick me, I'm happy for those you did pick—they're my brothers.

If you knew that if you don't pay my school fees now, my mom says I have to go back to the cattle camp in Sudan next month.

If you knew my ulcers make it impossible to eat whatever food is available to me, let alone study.

If you knew I look "well-off" because I wore my very best clothes to come meet you.

If you knew this chance to study means the difference between a wasted life and a future full of hope.

If you knew. If you knew. If you knew.

Farah Karipineni, Class of 2011

Robert Detrano MD, PhD, Radiological Sciences



Untitled, photograph

## And Yet Life Continues

They told us from the first day of medical school that this would be it:

The Last Summer of Our Lives.

Organize weddings, plan holidays now.

I refuse to subscribe to this Fear -- the end of Joy.

Live every day as the Blessing that it is.

So I plan a grand adventure – there's much to experience in this Life

Take advantage of time: explore, learn, grow.

My first and only day in Quito with three friendly local women.

A personalized tour of the city leads to a small bar

Where a boy slips a drug in my drink and rapes me in my hostel room.

I was strong, confident and curious,

How had I been stripped down by someone weaker than I?

In a "developing county" first-rate anti-viral medication is \$5.

In this country, it is almost \$1,000.

Physicians blame and belittle "noncompliant" patients.

How many have had to take medication at specific times of the day for months on end?

Feeling confused, angry, alone . . .

How can 1 in 6 women in the U.S. be raped? One woman every 2 minutes.

Survivors of a hidden war.

And Yet Life Continues.

To everyone who helped me find peace, light, sanity,

I will be true to myself; continue to fight and love.

To all the health care providers: doctors, nurses, social workers, therapists,

I will continue to learn to Heal and Serve those in need.

To all who share their own stories, support a survivor, stop the violence,

I thank you.

Aislinn Bird, Class of 2011





Daniel Nagasawa, Class of 2011

*Escaping the Storm, Turks and Caicos*, photograph



Ashkan Akasheh, Class of 2011

*Flight in Ancient City*, photograph

(left to right)  
*Untitled*, photograph,  
PK Fonsworth, Class of 2012

*The Long Wait for AAA*, photograph,  
Joe Treister, Class of 2011

*Road to Yao Zhang*, photograph,  
Clifford Lau, Class of 2011

## El Poeta (Oda a Neruda)

Antes anduve por la vida, en medio de  
papeles teñidos de rojo; antes retuve hojas mojadas por la nostalgia,  
por "pequeñas muertes" que pican y muerden  
pero fortalecen como el árbol, como el viento, como la espuma.  
A través de la repentina ternura, cristalizada, de pétalos  
atravesando tormentas,  
me enamoré de una cruda, húmeda dulzura  
que viene del tiempo en que todo era crudo, real y sagrado.  
Reconocí un cuadro frágil colgado en una pared de carbono,  
con el vestigio de un verano cálido y sucio,  
sus cicatrices profundas de madera rompiendo la superficie,  
como venas de una mano humana.  
Viví la muerte de una nación entera, igual la semilla de solidaridad.  
Así nació mi poesía, arrancada del alma,  
extirpada del corazón,  
bañada en sangre como la vida misma que destella en sus arterias.  
Así se formó, plenamente,  
en páginas de dolor, luz, energía terrestre.  
En letras doradas partícipe del nacimiento nítido de un hombre.  
La vida conociendo por primera vez la redondez de su conciencia.  
La vida, mía, encarnando sal, corazón, y universo.





### The Poet (Ode to Neruda)

I once walked in life, between  
papers tinged with red; I once held pages dampened by nostalgia,  
by “little deaths” that sting and bite  
but fortify like the tree, like the wind, like foam.  
Through the sudden tenderness, crystallized, of petals  
passing through storms,  
I fell for a raw, humid sweetness  
that comes from a time when everything was raw, real and sacred.  
I recognized a fragile portrait hanging on a carbon wall,  
with the vestige of a warm, dirty night,  
its deep wood scars breaking the surface,  
like veins of a human hand.  
I lived the death of an entire nation, so the seed of solidarity.  
This is how my poetry was born, torn from soul,  
ripped from heart,  
bathed in blood like life itself that glistens in its arteries.  
This is how it formed, fully,  
in pages of pain, light, terrestrial energy.  
In golden letters participant in the sharp birth of a man.  
Life knowing for the first time the roundness of its consciousness.  
Life, mine, incarnating salt, heart, and universe.



Kirellos Zamary, Class of 2011

Untitled, photograph



Wishes, watercolor  
Virginia Liu, Class of 2012



Sherry Reece, Office of Research Oversight

*Untitled, oil on canvas*



*El Guerrero Shuar, Ecuador, photograph*





Antonio San Nicolas, Patient

Untitled, acrylic on canvas



Kim Ramirez, Class of 2012

True Anatomy of the Heart, collage



*Social Hour in Jhodpur, photograph*

Janos K. Lanyi, PhD, Physiology & Biophysics



*Flight, oil on canvas*

Betty Wong, Neonatology



*Feuer! (Black Gold Golf Course Burns)*, photograph  
Reuben Paul, Class of 2010

## Benazir Bhutto's Assassination: Day 1

Thursday, December 27, 2007  
Karachi, Pakistan

6:30pm

We arrive at Tariq Road to finish our last minute shopping. We look around and people are running and rushing to close their stores and get away. Someone screams, "Benazir is dead!" which means all Hell is about to break loose in Pakistan. We start to head home, but traffic is backed up. On the radio, there was a shooting, 7 people killed, 12 cars have been lit on fire.

7:30pm

We keep driving. We want to take St. A, but traffic is completely stopped; we take a detour. On the radio, cars are being burned on St. A.

8:30pm

On the radio, 20 cars have been lit on fire. Gas stations are all closed and people keep running out of gas, making traffic even worse. We want to take St. B, but it's completely backed up; we take a detour. On the radio, cars are being burned on St. B.

**9:30pm**

We are almost out of gas. On the radio, more than 50 cars have been lit on fire, and the police are doing nothing. We want to take St. C. A man stops us, "If you want your car to be lit on fire and all the women and children in your car to be stranded then go ahead, otherwise take St. D." We take St. D, but it's blocked. We're stuck with nowhere else to go and almost no gas left. Then we remember we have friends who live around the corner. We go to their house and think we are safe. Ten minutes later, we hear people being robbed right outside the gate.

On the news, it's announced that a strike starts tomorrow. No cars are allowed on the streets and any cars found outside will be burned. There will be three days of mourning during which no businesses will be allowed to open, including gas stations. Our flight back to California is on the third day of the strike. With no gas, we can't get to the airport and we can't get home. We are stuck.

**10:30pm**

My uncle arrives. On his way, there are shootings in the area, the streets are blocked by buses, and cars are being lit on fire. He has to drive over the side walk to rush past the fires. Right when he thinks he's safe, he gets pulled over. The rioters want him to get out of his car so they can light it on fire. All of a sudden, a nicer car drives by and the rioters get distracted, allowing my uncle to get away. He finally reaches us.

**11:30pm**

Everyone is uneasy but we know we have to make it home before the strike. Our driver is too scared to drive us, so my uncle drives us instead. We set off for the alley that my uncle heard was safe but it's now having problems too. We see police officers and they tell us, "The street is clear for 2 blocks, but after that you're on your own."

The streets are completely deserted. There is broken glass on the streets and burnt cars and buses everywhere. It smells like burnt rubber. We don't know which way to go. If we make a wrong turn, people will come at our car with bats, rob us, and light our tires on fire. At every other corner, young men are calling us in their direction. We don't know if they are calling us to help or because we are their next victims. Everyone looks the same.

We get to the end of one street and it's blocked by a burnt bus and car so we turn. Straight ahead we see a group of men walking past a burning car with bats in their hands and sinister smiles on their faces, waving at us and telling for us to come to them. My uncle freezes, not sure what to do. All of a sudden a man is yelling, "Hurry, turn around, turn your lights off, drive over the sidewalk and head that way!" We make the turn, my uncle takes the car as fast as it will go, dodging the remains of the burnt cars and buses that are all over the streets. We keep driving, through the deserted streets, with the horrible smell, scared that at any moment our car could be attacked.

**12:30am**

We make it home, we get inside the gate, and lock all the doors. I give my uncle a huge hug; he was so brave. I do my night time prayer, and at the end, in my duah, all I have to say is, "Thank you Allah, thank you."



*Singer, photograph*

Joe Treister, Class of 2011



*Passionate Color, photograph*

Trung Minh Thai, MD, Psychiatry



*#1 Fan, photograph*

Joe Treister, Class of 2011



Stefano Sensi, MD, PhD, Neurology

*Bauhuas, photograph*



Peter McQueen, Class of 2010

*Pipers, Isle of Skye, Scotland, photograph*

## Life Support (for V.R.)

Old men exhale and wind up like this,  
Crusted lips littered with whiskers  
Gaping, gutted eyes  
Bodies like the medusa's head  
Tubes lurching out in every direction--

Old women clutching photographs of full-bearded  
grandfathers  
Make liars of us all.

Meghann Kaiser, MD, General Surgery



Janet Ho, Class of 2010

*To anyone who has ever been told, "Be quiet and drink your tea," acrylic on wood*



Daniel Nagasawa, Class of 2011

*Butterfly at Night*, photograph



Janet Ho, Class of 2010

*Because you shouldn't be quiet. And coffee tastes better,*  
acrylic on wood





Charitha Reddy, Class of 2011

*Flooding Fluorescence*, oil on canvas



Charitha Reddy, Class of 2011

*Bodies Apart*, oil on canvas



Victoria Millay, Class of 2009

*Summertime*, photograph



Mariam Naqvi, Class of 2009

*Shattered Glass*, oil on canvas



Jason Kang, Class of 2012  
*Train*, photograph



*Embroidery*  
Daphne Gallagher  
Marketing



*Untitled, painting*  
Stephanie Mooney, Class of 2012



# UCI School of Medicine

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