



Vanderbilt Undergraduate Creative Writing Symposium & Arts Showcase

APRIL 10, 2024



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Writing Studio



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WELCOME

Welcome to the Spring 2024 Vanderbilt Undergraduate Creative Writing Symposium and Arts Showcase!



The symposium and showcase are a partnership between the Vanderbilt Writing Studio and the Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion Vanderbilt. This event celebrates the creative endeavors of undergraduate students across the university.

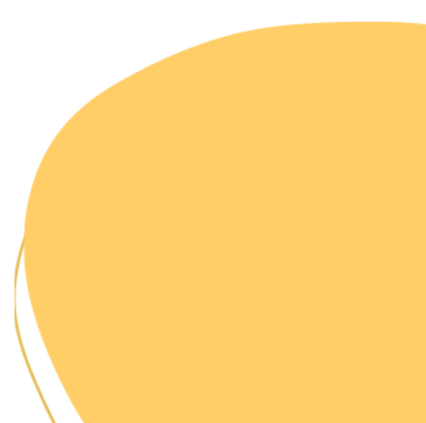
This event is open to all undergraduate students who wish to showcase the creative works they have completed during their time at Vanderbilt and share more about their creative process.

The Spring 2024 Vanderbilt Undergraduate Creative Writing Symposium and Arts Showcase will be held on Wednesday, April 10, in Alumni Hall from 3 to 6 p.m. CT. Virtual galleries of student works will also be viewable at the following links:

Creative Writing Symposium Submissions

<https://2024ucws.myportfolio.com/>

Passcode: 24ucws



Schedule

When: Thursday, April 13, 3-6 p.m. CT

Where: Alumni Hall, 2nd Floor

3:00..... Arts Showcase Open (*Memorial Hall*)

3:00–3:15..... Opening Remarks by Major Jackson, *Professor of English & Director of Creative Writing Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Chair in the Humanities*

3:15–4:10..... Spotlight Panel (Fiction and Nonfiction)

4:15–5:00..... Session 1: Concurrent Panel A (Fiction) + B (Nonfiction)

5:15–6:00..... Session 2: Panel C (Poetry)

PANELS

Spotlight Panel (3:15–4:10) – Alumni Hall, Room 206

Panelists: Liam Betts '24 (Fiction), Elyse Sparks '24 (Nonfiction),
Avery Fortier '24 (Fiction)

Panel Chair: Justin Quarry (English)

SESSION 1 (4:15–5:00)

Panel A (Fiction) – Alumni Hall, Memorial Hall

Panelists: Sawyer Sussner '24, Shadhvika Nandhakumar '24, Claire Marie Tate '24,
Sanat Malik '24

Panel Chair: Fatima Kola (Medicine, Health, and Society)

Panel B (Nonfiction) – Alumni Hall, Room 206

Panelists: Molly Buffenbarger '24, Franklin Udensi '27, Sarah Wermuth '27,
TaMyra Johnson '27

Panel Chair: Sandy Solomon (English)

15-minute Break

SESSION 2 (5:15–6:00) – Alumni Hall, Room 206

Panel C (Poetry)

Panelists: David Lemper '27, Nicole Reynaga '26, Ilana Drake '25, and Eli Apple '24

Panel Chair: Mark Schoenfield (English)



*All times are Central time.

PARTICIPANTS

ABSTRACTS & BIOS

ELI APPLE

AUTOIMMUNE (SELECTED POEMS)

My submission includes eight poems that will appear in my English Honors thesis. My thesis, entitled "Autoimmune", is a poetry collection that investigates literal and metaphorical illnesses and their effects on the body. These poems belong in "Part Two" of the collection, which examines homosexuality and internalized homophobia as illnesses together with the continuing effects of the AIDS epidemic on American society.

Eli Apple is a writer of fiction and poetry. He has lived his whole life in Tennessee and is currently a senior at Vanderbilt University, where he is studying English, Spanish, and Portuguese. In addition to writing, he loves reading, traveling, and going on walks with his dog.

LIAM BETTS

The Waves of Light

"The Waves of Light" is a neo-Victorian story that reimagines Charles Darwin's voyage aboard The Beagle to include his two young children, William and Anne. When circumstances thrust both siblings into an odyssey from the Atlantic to London, Anne is forced to reckon with a strange metamorphosis. While William performs street magic to keep them alive, Anne studies and experiments, dreaming of becoming a natural philosopher in nineteenth century England, a world where every door is closed to her. The story is told in the form of a letter from Anne to her father.

Liam Betts is a senior double majoring in computer science and english. He is originally from Portugal, but now lives in Pleasanton, California. He is the president of VandyWrites and prose editor for The Vanderbilt Review. His story The Waves of Light was selected as First Runner-Up for The Dell Magazines Award for Undergraduate Excellence in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing in 2024.

MOLLY BUTTENBARGER

Night Watch

I wrote this memoir about the night I spent alone in the hospital with my mother, when I was in sixth grade. After my mother completed chemotherapy for breast cancer, she underwent a double mastectomy and reconstruction. However, her reconstructed implant got infected, which meant she ended up hospitalized after emergency surgery.

Molly is a member of the class of 2024.

ILANA DRAKE

On Rapid Decline

This poem is about the importance of time and health. I wrote this piece following my grandmother's death in November 2023.

Ilana Drake is a junior studying Public Policy and English, and she is a student activist and writer. She serves as a United Nations UNA-USA Global Goals Ambassador for SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and she was selected as a Clinton Global Initiative University Fellow in 2023. This year, Ilana was appointed to the Inaugural Student Advisory Board for the Vanderbilt Project on Unity and American Democracy. Ilana was recognized as one of the forty undergraduate changemakers on Vanderbilt's campus last year, and she is a Delegate for the 68th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Ilana's writing has been published in Insider, Ms. Magazine, and The Tennessean, among others, and she has been quoted in The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Teen Vogue. Her poetry has been published internationally in literary magazines and zines. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, exploring Nashville with friends, and searching for the best iced coffee.

AVERY FORTIER

A Clean Mind

This is a piece of fictional prose meant to prompt consideration of mental health experiences across contexts and roles. I wanted to reflect the importance of protecting those responsible for treating others' health as well as those who more obviously fall into the role of "patient."

Avery is a member of the class of 2024.

TAMYRA JOHNSON

Racial Imposter Syndrome: Personal Experience + Interviews

This piece talks about my personal experience with racial imposter syndrome. Racial imposter syndrome can be described as being unconnected or feeling inauthentic to parts of their racial identity and culture or as when a person feels internally connected to a racial identity that is not perceived by others which causes doubt in their racial self perception.

TaMyra Johnson is a part of the class of 2027 from Louisville, Kentucky. She plans on double majoring in Communications and Culture Advocacy Leadership with a minor in film.

DAVID LEMPER

Shakespeare Rap

This rap was written for an assignment in which students had to cast a scene of a Shakespeare play into rap lyrics. The concept was inspired by Shakespearean rap lyrics from Margaret Atwood's "Hagseed," a modern retelling of Shakespeare's "The Tempest." Rap as a genre—specifically an African-American born genre—calls back to the theme of freedom, which is a very prominent theme within both Shakespeare's "The Tempest" and "Romeo and Juliet," so using this genre to express these narratives evokes the theme of freedom.

David is a member of the class of 2027.

SANAT MALIK

Ishak's

"Ishak's" is a fictional piece about Ishak, an Indian Immigrant who has recently moved to New York to start an Indian fine-dining restaurant with his friend, Jai. Vying to win customers, Ishak creates an open kitchen in hopes that the smells spill onto the streets and draw in customers. In exploring Ishak and Jai's pursuit of success in the culinary world, the story explores themes of immigration, assimilation, the pursuit of excellence, and the relationship between meticulous Ishak and laid-back Jai.

Sanat Malik is a Senior at Vanderbilt University. He was born in Hong Kong, spent some years in his native India, but primarily grew up in Singapore. Sanat is an Economics and English double major who has a passion for short story writing and journalism. He writes mainly about cultural topics with which he has personal experiences and perspectives. After college, Sanat will be working in an Investment Bank as a Risk Defense Consultant. He hopes to continue to grow in his career as a writer beyond college, and ideally would like to pursue investigative journalism in the future.

SHADHVIKA NANDAKUMAR

Circles

This realistic fiction short story discusses the experiences of a young girl who finds out that her dad has had a heart attack. Told from the perspective of someone looking back over time, it is filled with various musings about the nature of life and relationships.

Shadhvika is a member of the class of 2024.

NICOLE REYNAGA

In One Breath, We Escaped Together

For this workshop's penultimate poem, we were tasked with writing a prose poem (a poem not split into verse lines). As prose poems typically lack any rules of poetic form and do not visually appear as poetry, they heavily rely on the use of other poetic elements and metaphorical language. The theme of my piece falls into a more personal/self-aware realm.

Nicole is a member of the class of 2026.

ELYSE SPARKS

The Golden Child

"The Golden Child" is centered around my mental health struggles, sexuality, and my relationship with my pastor parents. I explore how my mom, despite her religious views that seemingly contradict loving a gay child, has stood by my side in a decade-long fight with major depression. Through coming out and hospitalizations and hard conversations, I have watched my mother grow into my biggest advocate.

Elyse Sparks is a member of the class of 2024.

SAWYER SUSSNER

Power to the Players

On her last shift as an employee at the failing gaming giant Game Stop, seventeen year old Twitch streamer Cass must navigate uncomfortable conversations with leering customers along with the impossible expectations of her boss, the washed up manager known to customers only as "The Bobcat," determined to save his failing store. In a reflection of the gaming world's treatment of women, "Power to the Players" explores misogynistic cycles of behavior and how to leave them behind.

Sawyer is a member of the class of 2024.

CLAIRE MARIE TATE

Ocular Mistrust

"Ocular Mistrust" is a short piece which was inspired by the notion of the eye as the window to the soul and the unreliable nature of the visual pathway. This piece puts artistic themes of eyes in conversation with the physiology of visual processing.

Claire Marie Tate is a member of the class of 2024 from Baton Rouge, LA. She is studying Neuroscience and Medicine, Health, and Society and will begin medical school this fall. In her free time, she enjoys running, dancing, discovering new music, reading, and, more recently, writing as a creative outlet.

FRANKLIN UDENSI

The Igbo Anglican Church

"The Igbo Anglican Church" is a story of my first encounter with a Nigerian diaspora community in the US. It's a story that captures the feeling of seeking connection in unfamiliar places as an immigrant, the awkwardness of not fully fitting in within your culture, and the humorous yet poignant contradictions that define immigrant community attempts to hold onto their "roots" in a place far from home. This piece invites a personal reflection on the nuances of identity, belonging, and the eternal dance between tradition, defiance, and assimilation in a new society.

Franklin Udensi, a budding author from Lagos, Nigeria, finds deep inspiration in the works of his favorite author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and his piece, "The Igbo Anglican Church," reflects this influence. Beyond literature, Franklin enjoys diving into the immersive worlds of anime and manga, getting swept in the melodies of Jon Bellion, and delighting in the ever-changing landscape of construction sites, where the promise of unfinished structures sparks his imagination. With each stroke of his pen, he blends his varied influences into narratives that speak to the human experience.

SARAH WERMUTH

I'm Not (Wilmeth) Smart

In 2023, I took a creative nonfiction English class at Vanderbilt, and an essay prompt was: "Write a personal essay exploring one way your identity has developed in opposition to your family of origin." As a result, I wrote "I'm Not (Wilmeth) Smart." It tells the story of how growing up in a family of brilliant individuals while simultaneously struggling in school made it hard for me to see myself as smart despite getting into Vanderbilt, one of the top universities in America.

Sarah is a member of the class of 2026 majoring in Political Science with minors in Gender Studies and Creative Writing.

SHOWCASE

PARTICIPANTS

SOPHIA WANG '24

Philosophy

Sophia Wang is a third year student studying Philosophy. With over a decade of experience in various forms of art, she's found herself most drawn to acrylic painting and ink drawings. As a painter, her style is characterized by the utilization of bright colors and vivid portraiture. Her painted portraits are almost exclusively of women, in her life and from her culture. Her ink drawings have a boarder range of subjects, from street scenes to live models.

Memories of a Dance, Acrylic painting on canvas

Mentor: Alexandra Blau, Art
ARTS 2300 | Painting II

I have an affinity for highlighting Asian traditions and culture through art. I've always been fascinated with traditional performances, clothing and accessories. Fans, in particular, are used everywhere in Chinese and Japanese cultural dances. "Memories of a Dance" aims to capture the unique value fans bring to traditional dances, juxtaposing the motion and vividness of the red fan with the stillness of the dancers face. This project references Chinese Actress Ziyi Zhang's performance in "Memoirs of a Geisha". While the movie has seen controversy for it's misrepresentation of Geisha culture, the interest in it is purely aesthetic.

DOMINIQUE GREENE '24

Studio Art

Dominique Greene is a senior Studio Art major specializing in photography, video art, and graphic design. Her work is fixed on the rich tapestry of Black womanhood and Black girlhood, and each composition serves as a celebration and an invitation, sparking conversations and illuminating narratives often overlooked in mainstream discourse.

Black Women Running, Video

Mentor: Jana Harper, Associate Professor of the Practice

Through the incorporation of found footage, this piece portrays Black women engaged in running activities for various purposes, spanning safety, leisure, and sport. Running, traditionally considered antithetical to the expected behavior of Black women, becomes a symbol within this narrative. Thus, the project serves not only as a tribute to the experiences of Black womanhood but also as an act of resistance against the systemic challenges imposed upon Black women in American society.

LIN MORALES '26

Political Science; Studio Art

Lin Morales (he/him) is a sophomore studying Political Science and Art Studio, with a minor in Religious Studies. Although he practices multiple art mediums, ceramics has always been the most special to him. In the past, he has been involved with several art shows and exhibitions, and has had some amazing opportunities to work with artists he looks up to. Currently, his focus is more on sculptural works than wheel-throwing. His primary experience has been with red clay; however, he was recently given the opportunity to work with Raku clay. Overall, he wants to expand his horizons in the field of ceramics and meet more amazing artists.

4 Years of Trauma and Identity Encapsulated, Ceramic sculpture

Mentor: John Donovan, Art
ARTS 2400 | Ceramics II

These sculptures are un-glazed works that are still in the creation process. They are a series showcasing a time period of 4 years (2020-2024 to be exact). Each sculpture aims to represent their one particular year. My first project started with the present (2024) and worked backwards to the past (2020) - each new project I took on required a new level of internal depth and introspection.





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The Vanderbilt Undergraduate Creative Writing Symposium and Arts Showcase are sponsored by the Vanderbilt Writing Studio and Office of Experiential Learning and Immersion Vanderbilt; and, co-sponsored by the Jean and Alexander Heard Librarians and the Martha Rivers Ingram Commons

For more information on future showcases or symposiums, please contact:

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