Thoughts on life: To act in a way that embraces creativity in order to change the world in a variety of manners is the basis for my life and work. This is what my work has been about and will be about in the future. I believe that using graphic design to better communities is one of the best ways to utilize the power of visual communication.

Through graphic design and art, I plan to use my creativity to have a positive impact on others. I plan to become a leader in the graphic design community and I believe that I am on the right path to doing so through my various projects. Design is about the ability to present messages and to communicate with people, and by learning how to do this through my formal education, I can initiate the use of design for social change.

Specifically, there are two large design projects in which I have taken my creative skills of graphic design and strategic thinking and put them to use. "Green at Chase" is a brand and sign system that I designed to educate and inform my school’s...
community about the environmentally friendly features of the building. “The Historical Town Walk” is a self-guided tour of historical places in my town that starts at a garden where you can obtain a map; this was my Eagle Scout Community Service Project.

Embracing the people around me allows me to contribute to the creative community at the Hartford Art School. This is done by attending exhibits such as the Polling Place Project, a citizen journalism project, and interviewing the curators for the official Hartford Art School blog called "Synthesis" that I started and write. Then there is the gathering students together through my leadership work with the AIGA CT student chapter, or Student Art Council. And my design skills and knowledge in online social media being used to help the student-run college newspaper.

The exploration of ideas, stories and visual culture is the basis of my work and education. Through graphic design, art, writing, multidisciplinary projects and conversations with others in my environment, a dialogue is formed within my mind on what is being learned.

It is the synthesis of these things that forms the meaning of my work, today and tomorrow. The future of my career as a designer and as a person will consist of creativity and art, writing and education, and life and community. The achievement of these goals and this plan is the purpose of my current education and work.
Born and raised in Miami, Florida, I grew up and dedicated myself to the visual arts. During my senior year (2005-06) I hit my peak and began my traffic sign series and applied more conceptual ideas to my work. I broke away from the more traditional art and became interested in the graphic quality of stencil graffiti. I was highly influenced by the art scene in Miami’s Wynwood Art District known for emerging contemporary Hispanic artists. I am currently interested in package design, branding and book layouts. I am a double major in illustration and graphic design at Maryland Institute College of Art. While attending MICA I became interested of design in the 3D form. Currently I am also focusing on plush toys based on characters I’ve illustrated. The experiences I’ve had with different media and style is my biographical time line, where each direction I experiment with is a chapter in my life.
In the future I plan to freelance in several industries and own a toy company. As a freelance graphic designer/corrugated package designer, I will use my skills to effectively promote corporations or nonprofit organizations that go green, fair trade, and market environmental safe products. The corrugated package design industry is rapidly growing because it’s effective, cheap, and approximately 60–80 percent of corrugated material is made from recycled paper. As a product designer I will contribute to the community at large and change the way the world operates by creating designs that solve difficult problems. I am interested in creating designs that will be made of recyclable or biodegradable material that can also be multi-functional, environmentally friendly, and solve real problems such as the issues with food waste, conserving energy, and recyclable or biodegradable material. I specifically desire to establish a toy company because I believe education can significantly change the future of the United States, because education is the long-term solution for progress throughout generations. I am awfully aware how imperfect the public school system is in the states. Unfortunately not every family can afford to send their child to a private school. As a toy designer I will create toys that can aid children in their learning experience by enhancing their interest and knowledge on complex issues. For example: creating a toy that teaches children the importance on recycling, science and geometry.
Early in my life, my creative personality was likened to a mop. They soak up messes that others have spilled and are rung out, but at the end of the day that mop is left waiting for the next spill to soak up. I feel that I absorb techniques, styles and issues, but have never been the one to make the mess. What is the point of soaking up so much and not applying it to anything? My “mop-like” disposition would no longer be acceptable; I had to be more like a paintbrush and have now taken on that identity.

I once read a quote from Massimo Vignelli that stated “If you can design one thing, you can design everything.” That one phrase has pretty much shaped the kind of designer I strive to be.
Through design I have been able to do that, and as a paintbrush I still have the ability to soak up, but I now have the added ability to be able to put down my own “mess” allowing others to soak it up. I want to be the kind of designer who can take one thing and apply it to many mediums, whether it is showing an issue or just creating something dynamic to look at. As a designer I believe I have a duty to not only make things look nice but to also make people really pay attention to what is important. Whether it is to bring attention to an issue like world hunger, being green, or just creating something beautiful, I believe through design I can be a spot in this world waiting for someone to soak it up.

Currently being a student at such a diverse university I can truly achieve my goal of becoming a designer of everything. With the knowledge I soak up from the years at the New School, I believe I will be able to make an imprint on myself as well as others.
When I recognized that I had skills at designing and drawing, I believed I was the only one with those particular talents, setting myself apart from everyone. However, by the time I reached my freshmen year in high school, I found I was wrong. A fellow student, Jordan Gahol, demonstrated the same traits as I had; this started a competitive atmosphere between us, which would last until our last year of high school, when we were assigned projects involving the medium of design and illustration.

When we reached our junior year I became eager to become better than he was. I sometimes felt incompetent when Jordan got awarded for his achievement, excelling with A’s in all his classes. At that point, I became so overwhelmed and frustrated. Why was he being rewarded for taking mediocre classes, when I attempted honors and AP classes? Why would he always take the easy way out; why was it that every time I pushed myself toward recognition for my hard work, he would just get the upper hand at academics by not making his life complicated? The competition between us made me realize that I was not just trying to make him see that I was above his ranking; I was trying to prove to myself that I could do anything, and didn’t need anyone to affirm I was better.
Senior year, I realized how the level of competition between Jordan and me had changed. I began to see him as a reason for me to keep up the hard work I struggled so diligently to accomplish. It eventually paid off as I began to see the results. By applying to Otis: Summer of Art, I now had the upper hand and received a scholarship for my efforts. What I did had proved a point; the AP and honors classes inspired me to dedicate myself to not only academics, but to artistic efforts as well. By competing so much with Jordan, I gained a better sense of why I wanted to be in design. This may not have been possible without the high level of competition between us. For this, I will forever be grateful.

After graduating, I have been given the opportunity to work as an intern at Change Agent Productions at the YMCA of Greater Long Beach in California. This digital media production company has offered me a chance to learn new aspects about my career. They allowed me to contribute to my community, through the after school programs in middle schools and high schools in Long Beach. I taught kids how to work with multimedia, whether it was using Photoshop to make movie posters, storyboarding their movie and filming them with video cameras or teaching them to use a camera to take photographs. By doing so, I gained a better idea of what I wanted to major in. Just by looking at the student’s faces, I become inspired to continue and improve my skills, and influence kids to use technology, as a supplement towards their goals. That way, by knowing these tools they have an opportunity to explore the different careers and get a helping hand in academics. In addition to taking an interest in technology, this prevents them from getting involved in drugs or gangs. With that in mind I want to be able to establish myself in Change Agent Productions and work as a graphic designer full-time. I want to provide students a chance to learn and produce work that exudes creativity, while they maintain the drive to pursue what they want to accomplish in life.
A major experience that has had a great impact on my creative work and career plans was switching schools and majors. After seeing that aerospace engineering wasn’t something that I wanted to do and not making the school baseball team, I wasn’t happy. For some reason I forgot about art and how big an influence it had on my life. So, I began to look at Cal Poly Pomona’s art department to see what kind of jobs I could make a living at in art. I saw that with graphic design you got to make things and it seemed like a relatively stable art career.

As a result, I decided I was going to try graphic design and pursue fine art as well. After this I began emailing different baseball coaches at schools with design programs to see about trying out for their teams. I got feedback from schools in North Dakota, Iowa and Irvine. I tried out for the schools in North Dakota and Iowa and made both teams. I choose to go to the school in North Dakota, Minot State University. Being able to play baseball at the collegiate level was fun and has given me numerous memories. But baseball wasn’t the main reason why I was supposed to switch schools. Looking back it’s pretty easy to see. From the moment I began to write I’ve been drawing and creating things. So it’s obvious that I was meant to do something where I get to use my creativity.
Switching from aerospace engineering to graphic design and California to North Dakota was definitely risky. Cal Poly Pomona is an excellent school for engineering and graduating from there almost guarantees a good paying job. But engineering wasn’t something that I was passionate about. I learned that having a good paying job is nice, but it’s more important to actually like what you do. With design it is something that I can see myself doing for the rest of my life. Going from California to North Dakota is like going to another world. My first winter there it reached -30s in windchill and the way of life there is completely different. Also, I was 2,000 miles away from my family for the first time. Being able to survive all of that showed me that I can make it through a lot more than I previously thought. I learned that you have to go after the things that you want in life.

Design has the power to greatly influence people and society as a whole. I want my work to use this power to contribute or make a difference in the world by having substance to it. There is more to my work than just aesthetics. With all of the different problems that we face in the world, I want my work to help bring the necessary actions to end such problems. My work should cause people to question things that are wrong in the world. One way that I plan on achieving these different goals is by giving back to the community. I want to be able to teach kids about design who other wise would not have access to it. This would mainly include kids in the inner city and urban areas. Growing up I was never told of graphic design and the creativity that makes it up. I would like for kids to know about design sooner than I was told. Even if they don’t end up being designers, I think it would be beneficial for kids to use their creativity in positive ways.
It was during a trip to China, a motherland I’ve never visited, that opened my eyes about self worth. In the summer months China is very humid, usually hot and rainy; my friends and I were in a taxi going towards the city from rural Fuzhao. It was drizzling and the streets were coated with dampness. I was just in awe of the amount of people living in China and maneuvering around us on cars and bikes. Everyone just became a blur around my window and within minutes there was a collision. Our cab hit a cyclist! The cyclist flew off his bicycle and landed in the middle of the street, cars were still rushing past around him. Our cab driver just sat in the car watching but didn’t do anything. I was telling everyone that we should call for help and see if the cyclist was okay. Nobody cared and just watched. Then finally the cyclist got up, and to my surprise he picked his bicycle up and rode away! I was expecting a full confrontation or even some compensation money being paid out, but nothing. That was when I started to question the value of life, and if America was so decadent or if China’s population was the cause of such nonchalant attitudes towards an accident?
I have studied art my whole life. There was a time in my life that I had a falling out with art and was stuck in a depression. The only thing that helped me out of the depression was attending a painting/pastel class at the local neighborhood YMCA. Since then, I have tried many mediums and found an art form that has finally called to me in printmaking.

Graffiti influenced my artwork a lot. Growing up in NYC during the 1980s I was fascinated by the explosion of graffiti culture. That led me to want to paint murals and create posters.

When I had the chance to study abroad during the summer at China’s Nan Jing (Nanking) University last year, I jumped at the chance. I was extremely emotional about the opportunity because Nanking was an unacknowledged historical site during the Japanese invasion of WWII. This opportunity was offered to me by two Chinese scholars who had connections with Nan Jing University. I wanted to know more about the Nan Jing Massacre and why it happened. These scholars have seen some of my work and were excited for me to go, especially since I told them my intentions of painting a mural and donating some of my artwork to the University. Then in May 2008, the earthquake shook China, and my opportunity was delayed. This is what I see in the future for me, to educate myself and travel to places where major incidents and destruction have been forgotten, and educate the community with mural and visual print work.

I am torn between a China that needs to be educated and a China that misused its power and tortured its people. My family was one of these families, ridiculed for being educated and successful. My mother told me stories of what the Red Soldiers did to her and her family when she was 3 years old. Her father, a 23-year-old school principal and business owner, was taken away and tortured. He was not to be seen or heard from ever again. Children were not spared the carnage and inhumane acts of political “justice.”

Questioning how, why, and if it could be prevented from happening in the future led me back to school and to pursue a career in art to educate people visually.
Art has always been a part of me. As a child, I spent my afternoons at the family art gallery. There, I thrived in my own little world, even selling my own artwork in the back-office called Precious Art Gallery, a pun on my name. At that time, my understanding of art was born in beautiful images which captured but a moment in time with a delicate, underlying emotion that only a paintbrush could achieve; I would watch my mother paint her own pieces, and I would aspire to be just like her.

At the age of 10, my artistic sphere broadened when I had my first experience with my future career, architecture. The place was Beaumont, California. My uncle was shopping for a new house, and my mom and I had gone with him to see the home he
had chosen. On the wall there were drawings of the projects being built, and it was here that I fell in love with floor plans. I realized that even something so simple as a floor plan could be a form of art, not merely the placement of rooms on a piece of paper. I was then bitten by the architecture bug. Although I did not know then that my passion was known as architecture, I knew my calling was somehow connected to the arrangement of space. And ever since, architecture has been my passion.

When I first entered the field nearly two years ago, I saw architecture as the opportunity to design engaging spaces for an individual. About to enter my third year at the University of Southern California’s Bachelor of Architecture program, my concept of what architecture can do and become has changed. I have started to immerse myself in the practicality of architecture and am beginning to understand the amount of power an architect can wield. Each person who enters a building comes with their own experiences, and I want my work—my art—to add to those experiences, and to enhance them. I believe that architecture needs to reconnect with the user. Architecture’s greatest asset is its ability to evoke feeling within the user, and this is what I strive for in all my projects.

Furthermore, I have always loved drawing little doll houses, then cutting out little people to play out stories. I have since grown out of cutting out those little people, but I never stopped creating stories and drawing my little houses. My stories are now broadening to those of the world around me. Architecture is the perfect fit for my creative side and my love for impacting others. When I finish my undergraduate degree I will become a leader in my field and help with the advancement of under-developed cities, not just in the United States, but also abroad in Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe. I believe the best way to create significant architecture is to create a building that has meaning to the community by considering its needs and desires. That is when architecture has reached its full potential.
My name is Kuleya Vaniesha Bruce; I am a third year, credit classified senior, majoring in architecture, marketing, management and art history, along with a minor in global studies, at Drury University.

My ultimate goal in life is to become an architect, in the original sense of the word. I want to create strong communities and improve people’s quality of life of who are hard working and ambitious but lack the tools and opportunities needed to reach their goals. After graduation I plan to work for a firm that will contribute to my goal of furthering my education. Also during this time I will hope to gain all the knowledge and experience I can absorb from my superiors. At this period in my life I plan to obtain a masters in entrepreneurship and also complete my IDP, which is a fulfillment of time, exams and experience, to become a licensed architect. Within the first couple of years I would really focus and improve my networking in preparation for fundraising of future endeavors.
From here I would like to start my own business first mainly focusing on architecture and then branching off into full community development, and by community development I mean every sense of the word. I would like the business to expand to having a department focused on housing, jobs, youth services, family counseling, job training, career skills, life skills and more. I feel that for our country to recover and improve from its present state we have to come together more as a community as we have done in past hard times. When you have the support of a community behind you it’s amazing to think of what could be achieved by those who are willing to do what it takes and work hard. The new millennium is so caught up on capitalism; we as Americans have achieved so much individually and encouraged this, with it manifesting into brutal mentality to look out for number one, and lost sight of the power in numbers philosophy. There is so much more we could amount to by joining forces.

I would like to expand my business first by researching and evaluating communities to understand what businesses would be most productive and then implement those establishments. By doing this I hope to enhance the community’s facilities and also provide work, pride and hope in themselves and their neighborhood. I would eventually like to help others start their own businesses, whether individually, or co-owned by the residents, to do this I have to be an entrepreneur myself. I believe that if the community has ownership of the businesses in their community, they would take more pride and responsibility in themselves and their surroundings.

Last I would like to implement multiple programs ranging from childcare, home improvement and construction, job training, life training, scholarships, extracurricular activities and whatever else the community feels they need.

My greatest contribution to my community is service. With collective service anything can be accomplished. Through my service I am able to give back to my community for the luxuries I have been afforded. I can also improve my community for every inhabitant including myself. My service is limitless and boundless; it will never expire.

To progress toward these goals, I have enrolled in a summer 2009 MBA boot camp that would allow me to begin taking classes toward my MBA within the next year and scheduled to study abroad in Volos, Greece for the spring 2010 semester, which would give me great diversity and a chance to immerse myself into a small self-sustaining community.
At a very young age, my mother and I immigrated to the United States from Colombia and together we embarked on a journey in a foreign land with an unfamiliar language and customs. I was raised solely by my mother and remember her constant struggle to get jobs that paid enough to cover the basic necessities. The brutal work hours and relentless desire to thrive were not sufficient. As a child I felt the continuous tension and I knew I had to do something different in my life to improve our situation. As life got harder, my drive to succeed became stronger and I quickly learned to take advantage of the numerous opportunities available to me. My mother’s persistent emphasis that I do well in school became the foundation of my relentless efforts to excel.

I soon realized that decisions about my education would be a direct result of my success. After graduating from high school, I attended Santa Ana Community College, where I initially wanted to pursue a career in electrical engineering. Despite its interesting aspects, I realized that there was something more profound missing with this career; it seemed too technical and lacked a more personal...
interaction with people. Through counselor advice I continued my education at Orange Coast College, where I found an enormous interest in architecture. I began to notice the amazing potential that this profession had to impact people’s lives. I realized that the strategies that we use in design, the use of energy efficient systems, or the materials we use in construction, can begin to set examples to the community and other professions of the importance of sustainable living. These interests led me to complete the two-year architecture program at OCC and encouraged me to continue my education in the impacted architecture program at Cal Poly Pomona University.

I spent four years at Cal Poly taking a variety of courses that enlightened me as a student. A close look at my work demonstrates my continuous attempt to approach each design with new ideologies rather than from traditional ways of thinking. You can also begin to see my constant curiosity in emerging technologies. My latest work, the Traveling Interactive Exhibit, embodies my specific desire and interest to explore new ways of being more environmentally conscious and the importance of communicating the need of collective efforts to reach an ecological balance. This design was one of the many projects for which I received an award. I excelled throughout, remaining at the top of my class and further enriched my architectural education through a one-year study abroad program in Italy. My entire undergraduate experience was more than rewarding. I befriended brilliant professors that have opened my eyes to many novel concepts and exciting perspectives. Today, I am a first generation college graduate, currently awaiting responses of acceptance from the Master of Architecture programs at Columbia, Harvard, MIT and UCLA.

Upon finishing graduate school, I plan to work on acquiring my licensure as an architect. I will obtain my LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification while gaining experience by working for a firm that practices the integration of innovative technologies and sustainable design. I am interested in practicing architecture that has minimal impact on the environment, one which promotes better living for the community while pushing the boundaries of contemporary design and technology. As an architect I will be committed to setting an example for society through sustainable design and hope to convey the importance for society to be sensitive to global issues and to understand the positive impact of practicing it.
Ever since my youth I have been interested in art and design. I have always appreciated the aesthetics of my surroundings and have had a good eye for detail. My father studied both art and architecture, but was never able to finish school and receive his degree. In turn, my sisters and I developed our artistic skills and all chose to study design-based careers.

All throughout my studies, I have had the opportunity to be in advanced art programs. From an early age, I would draw unceasingly and was always looking for the next challenge to test and evolve my skills. In high school, I was in the Visual and Performing Arts High School Program, an advanced studio art course taught at a university. There, I was able to push my limits and develop new skills and ways of thinking and working. I received two full scholarships to study summer courses at the Fashion Institute of Technology and Parsons The New School for Design. In the program, I volunteered organizing events, exhibitions, and being a sketch artist at various musical performances. I used my skills and interests to volunteer my services and give back to the community. This reflects greatly in my designs today.
While in school, I hope to continue to develop new skills and enhance my architectural pursuits with new experiences. I wish to study abroad in order to experience another atmosphere and learn as much as I can from that in order to improve my architecture. I have continued with my artwork and hope to exhibit it on various occasions, including at school. I constantly try to find new ways of enhancing both my scholastic and personal work and integrate them to form aesthetic, functional designs.

I have learned valuable experience interning and working for architects. I have also learned glassblowing and welding techniques, which I hope will enrich my study and practice of architecture. With my work and volunteer experience I hope to give back to the community and offer my services in order to learn new things and help out the people around me. I continue offering my services to the community, using my skills not only as an aesthetic tool but as a helpful tool as well. I have painted and continue to paint large murals, candles and other things for various churches as a service. I gain experience from doing my work but am fulfilled when others can use and enjoy it.

I enjoy using my talents at all scales, whether it is a small piece of art or large scale project. My hopes for the future are to be able to use my architecture as a means to help people. I base my designs on the user and how people will be affected by architecture, making architecture not merely an aesthetic object but a functional space that evokes feeling and becomes an experience for the person. Keeping social needs, green architecture and other aspects of designs in mind, I hope to be able to use my architecture for the benefit of all.

I wish to offer and receive new experiences as a designer. This scholarship will help me to be able to continue my studies and pursue my goals in this time of financial need. People need productive ways to express themselves and use their energy; architecture is mine. As a young aspiring architect and designer, I hope to be able to give back to the community the same amount that I received and offer the youth of tomorrow the same opportunities that I have had.
Affirmations to affect: I’m following a path that will provide me with opportunities for creating tangible forms and articulations of ideals across the collective milieu. By obtaining a graduate degree in architecture and urban planning, I’ll acquire the abilities to achieve my goal of the development of ideal forms, structures, places, functions within the built environment. “Ideal” for combining beauty with integrity: elegance of form imbued with pragmatic function and sustainable construction.

What follows are of some of the details that form the basis of my “personal paradigm”: that which guides my educational directions, projects and vocational choices. The aim is to combine my graduate design education with the anthropological slant of my undergraduate work (psychology and sociology), resulting in the skills needed for sensitive application to the environments we inhabit.

An integral part of my studies will be to obtain a “critical consciousness” of the field, learning as advocated by Paulo Freire in his “critical pedagogy” paradigm. He stated
that prior to undertaking to revitalize a situation, it’s imperative that one become immersed in the history of the current period. Such an erudite literacy enables deep understanding and insights as to what begot the present situation, as well as indicate what needs changing and the best ways to create comprehensive improvements. In architecture this type of immersion is warranted and involves many areas of study to best understand what makes for a success? A failure? I believe that applying this kind of critical consciousness to the study of architecture would serve one exceedingly well as a practitioner of it in the 21st century.

It was through the creation of a project called BikeSecur (2007) that I became aware of how much must be taken into consideration when trying to establish something to benefit people and the environment. Through this project I hoped to encourage the use of an alternative method of transportation by increasing the availability of indoor bicycle parking facilities within urban areas. Though it turned out to be more complicated than originally thought, the complexities served to further my understanding of the people, places and functions of cities and what it takes to invigorate change within these dense environments.

Like a hero of mine, Majora Carter, I want to further increase my knowledge and skills to support my passion for fostering sustainable improvements in the environment. Majora Carter did not set out to become an designer of urban life (her formal training is in cinematic arts), yet that is what she has become by having revitalized her native community of Hunts Point in NYC. What has been accomplished there is a model of urban revitalization that has been heralded around the world. Another source of inspiration is that of Mr. Will Allen, an urban “force of nature.” His “Grow Power” organic urban farming enterprise in Milwaukee is an outstanding role model of urban and ecological revitalization. (Both Allen and Carter are recipients of MacArthur Fellowships.) I hope to replicate some of their efforts in my current AmeriCorps position of “Greenspace” Urban Farming Coordinator with Buffalo Reuse and demonstrate the importance of establishing sustainability and revitalization as priorities in the urban environment.

I am determined to be part of the design programs and teams that are striving to educate individuals with a sort of “renaissance” sensibility. In that they want to implement a multi-faceted approach in the development of the environments that harbor the world’s population in a manner that is progressively egalitarian and sensitive in its affect. This is THE definition of what I, as an architect, will do.
Does a gene exist predetermining why a person gravitates to patterns and fabric? This may explain my appreciation of textiles originating from within my family’s story, first through my grandfather’s coat and later, my mother’s dresses.

The coat is a traditional men’s Chinese coat in rich, emerald-colored wool, lined with long sheep hair and decorated with black embroidery. It was tailor made for my grandfather, at the time a successful businessman in 1930s China. When Japan invaded China in 1937, my grandfather and his family, including my 14-year-old mother, were forced to flee, leaving behind many of their possessions. With no pictures of my grandfather remaining, this precious coat is all we have to remember him. After her exodus, my mother had to work in Macao as a seamstress to support the family. Sometime thereafter, she fashioned my grandfather’s coat into a coat of her own. She also made her own cheongsams beautifully crafted from embroidered silks and wools.
Thus, I began to understand not only how textiles can express identity, but also how by acquiring skills one can transform them into heirlooms of exquisite beauty. These garments represent my history and cultural context, inspiring me to further explore and create my own unique textiles.

While pursuing a marketing career to appease my family’s expectations, five years ago, I finally started taking classes part-time in anything sewing or textile-related. Soon, I was making my own garments, but felt limited by the fabric selections in stores. I began to embroider fabric myself, to quilt together different fabrics, or to hunt for kimonos to repurpose into garments. It became clear that fabric and pattern were inspiration points for my garments.

I found that I gravitate to the muted colors in the natural dyes of historical textile carpets and rugs and to the gold leaf found in the Heike Nokyo’s Japanese paper sutras. I also use red-orange, taking a cue from my surroundings, such as my appreciation of the Golden Gate Bridge at sunset. I am fascinated by the symmetry of Islamic design, the metallic reflective embellishments in Indian patterns, the vibrant texture of Chinese silk brocade, and the contemporary geometry of Japanese hand-block fabric and papers. I also continue to explore fractals in nature and geometric shapes in life forms and architecture.

I have grown in both my technical skills and my ability to express myself creatively through my part-time studies, but I want to continue to push my creative limits and expand my skill-set by entering a full-time program in textile design.

The beauty in traditional hand-made textiles has also inspired me to learn about the history and culture of the people who make them. In addition to the design classes, I have also attended seminars at the Textile Society of America in traditional textiles and have contributed to Aid to Artisans, an organization that helps artisan groups become self-sustaining. I believe that preserving traditional and historical textiles is a responsibility, as they have been so important in my work. By melding my cultural psychology with my marketing and design experience, I plan to work with traditional artisans to help them make their textiles more market-ready. I would like to collaborate with these artisans, while being mindful of preserving their own culture by keeping their aesthetics of their craft untouched by my own aesthetic influences. By attending a full-time graduate program in textile design and taking additional anthropology classes, I hope to hone a sustainable creative process that will encourage me to explore my individual point of view and inform my work with crafting communities.
2009/10 Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships
Microsoft Award

RODAN TECLE
Interactive design
Graduate student
School of Visual Arts

“Identity (= form + content) can be created through magic and mystery. All men and women need to do is get off their asses, accept and live fully within the modern world, no matter how bleak it feels, and shape it using both body and mind. Unearth new myth.”

I was born in Kassala, Sudan the center point of the Bedouin Rashaida nomads, and grew up as one of the few Africans in Walla Walla, Washington. Every morning in the car, on my way to school, I would listen to Eritrean folk music with my single, three-job-working, former-guerrilla fighting mother. At home, MTV was my babysitter and a stack of coloring books my company. At the age of 8 I was lunged away to Sweden, where I attended one of the best high schools, completing the international science program. Playing the violin and drums I applied to study musicology at university. At the age of 20 I was working as a sound editor in NYC and a year later, in Sweden again, backstage at student plays and eventually received a BA in performance art production from Malmö University – a school rich and varied in its approach to visual culture that fundamentally opened up my eyes to light, space and perception in practice and theory.

I’m convinced that SVA will be a good home to bring my technology itch, my aesthetics and my infinite universes within together to create yet another universe inside the urban, post-modern nomad world that I, alongside other young people create for ourselves here in NYC. A universe where nomadism has become a luxury, and mobility is enhanced by technological inventions. Inventions that however don’t
necessarily challenge our comfort zones. This is the great paradox that I actively confront in my daily life—not to be too comfortable in my “freedom.”

I freelance as a video editor and will be contributing with my video experience in Ragnhild Ek’s project to establish a film school for children in Ethiopia. I will go back to research music and visual culture in Kassala, the city in which I was born and not been to since, the capital of the Rashaidas. I am visually very intrigued by their mysterious, independent, geometrical and colorful ways. The triangle especially interests me, as a shape and as a symbol, reoccurring in the fabrics and crafts of many nomadic tribes and also amongst many young fresh NYC artists “reacquainting themselves with long-lost civilizations, fantasy realms and ages yet to exist” (www.littlecakes.org/REessay.html).

The triangle represents three points in my existence: the Horn of Africa, Sweden and USA. I seek to budge the angles and color the spaces in between the lines in the most exciting and fulfilling of ways—like experimenting with the dynamics created between sound, visuals and words. This is, to me, the ultimate form of expression. This is how I will communicate and shed new light on the Eritrean/Sudanese nomads that I feel so deeply connected to, yet also, disconnected from. I feel it is very important to open up dialogues and channels between the people struggling in diaspora and the ones “back home.” Our struggles are obviously fundamentally different but by understanding how I feel we can build more common ground. I have a rich palette to work from and hope that I will find the funding for the Computer Art program at SVA that I have been accepted to. I wish to focus on video and interactive installations, challenging notions of perception and location.
My first sense of a community was in a predominantly Korean-American area of Plano, Texas. I was surrounded by the secure atmosphere of belonging to a community of local shop owners, entrepreneurs and professionals. In the 1990s, many of the former cultural establishments, local Korean-grocery stores, restaurants and community centers were uprooted. Populations shifted accordingly. Entire communities were transplanted, diminished, revived and hybridized. There was an economic disparity between Korean-American business-owners resistant to the change of “character” of their neighborhoods and those more willing to join newly-gentrifying business networks. What were the roots of this community’s evolution?

As a student at Pratt Institute, I have observed more deeply the urban forces that led to one Korean-American group fighting to preserve their grassroots businesses and another desiring the economic benefits that would come with “urban renewal.” These problems were by no means specific to Plano. I became intrigued with tracing the impact of urban forces, immigration and gentrification in particular, on
Marie Park
Industrial Design

ethnic communities in New York, San Francisco and London. I extended my design considerations to fit a broader interest in the evolution of communities through time, population shifts, and the use of more efficient and sustainable materials and technologies.

Yet, I knew that these theoretical interests called for practical application. Fortunately, my professional architectural experience has only continued to fuel my interests in shaping the character of environments on an urban scale. In Brooklyn, at NICHE Design Group, I worked on large and small-scale designs ranging from furniture to yoga centers. While interning at Ballinger in Philadelphia, I assisted the design team in creating the Johns Hopkins Simulation Center, an environment where professionals would be trained by new technology methods. Working at HLW International in New York City as a member of the design team for Google’s offices at the Chelsea Market, I gained nuanced insight into the benefits of sustainable design practice.

Though my academic experiences centered on the cultural evolution of communities, I sought out exposure to the fundamental dimensions of urban planning. This desire led me to a government project with the New York City Police Department. I studied the movement of foot traffic inside the NYPD’s building as part of an interior space-planning project. The flow of policemen and detectives into and out of the building made me realize that work spaces were not confined to the building interiors. Design needed to take into account the continuous movement of workers and their community. I consequently envisioned their workspace as encompassing the entire city.

My project at the NYPD revealed to me that society’s workplace—from policemen in Lower Manhattan to Internet executives in Chelsea and indeed, to Korean business-owners in Plano—has become increasingly interconnected through local urban and global interaction. How do we preserve the character and culture of communities within networked cities? How do we cease to ignore the needs of disadvantaged groups, while still supporting urban operations?

Though my interests may appear varied, I do understand that all large-scale questions need small-scale actions. One of my steps was to become LEED-certified. Also my studies at Pratt Institute immersed me in an interdisciplinary community that has enhanced my ability to collaborate effectively. My childhood in Plano and my professional experience in Philadelphia and New York has shown me that, at its heart, design is about a human element, best integrating populations into their communities.
I have been drawing since my childhood and I became very interested in drawing cars, shoes and things from nature. As a young artist I have always enjoyed creating pictures and other things of beauty for people through drawing, painting, sculpture, etc. Most of the pictures are usually of their loved ones or maybe someone they have lost. To create something beautiful that they will cherish and bring a little more joy into their life, also makes me feel good as a person. Being from a small town in Mississippi, I did not know that I could pursue a career that would allow me to explore and create beautiful designs for everyone to enjoy. While attending Mississippi State University on the path of becoming an engineer I discovered art and design schools. I quickly changed my major and began taking art and design courses. In 2005 I started the College Creative Studies on my path to being the designer I always dreamed of becoming.
My influences are many artists who are not afraid to push the limit of what art and design can be. There are many who have done and are doing great things in art and design, but just to name a few: Chris Bangle, Karim Rashid and Michelangelo. Chris Bangle, the head of design at BMW, completely transformed the company and the design industry by challenging what a car really is, and it made some people uncomfortable, but his design proved to be very successful in the end. His design not only influenced how cars are designed now, but it challenged designers in other fields as well to create more innovative products. I was inspired by designer Karim Rashid when he came to speak at my school. I was intrigued by his vision because with everything he designs he aims to bring more beauty into people’s lives. It also let me know that I do not have to commit to just one area of design. I love to design many different things, so why not do it? Michelangelo was an influence of mine during my earlier years as an artist. I love to draw much of my inspiration from nature, and seeing his work when I was a child really inspired the way I create things today.

I would like my design to not just make an impact in my area of concentration but to inspire people in other fields, as well as people who are not artist or designers. I have always wanted to create art and design that brings beauty and inspiration to the world. When I was younger I believed that life was predestined and what will be, will be. It is not that I do not necessarily believe that anymore, but I have gained more knowledge and insight of the world through my design. It has changed the way I see the world and now I approach everything I do with the knowledge that I can control the end result. I discovered that although I may start to create something like it has always been done before, through my imagination and creativity I have the ability to change the outcome. If I want something in life, I have to pursue it through will and determination. I now know that I can do or become anything, and I control how my life turns out through the decisions I make. Life is too precious to be wasted and I plan on living the best life I can and being a positive influence to as many people as I can through my life and my work.
In the trees I found myself, ice cold streams to sunshine delights, and again I am reminded of still beauty. Alone in the mountains of Montana, I learned to truly accept the life I have been given. In all of those days, something flowered inside of me, a burning lust of broader destruction would eventually lead to a practical application of imagination. As a child I often played by myself, I had many imaginary friends, and I loved to pretend. I remember playing with sticks and leaves and marauding through fields. I inadvertently cultivated a love for the ground that propelled me without holds into the sky. I realize that nature is the ultimate, and truth guides me through it all.

In fashion design I found another part of me, a piece that thrives on vitality and tears through inhibition. Suddenly it is all coming together, the fragments of my past and those old feelings start to make sense. The lights flash; the music starts, and the patterns toss me like purple surf tides, and bewildered treetop sliders.

Because of my first hand experience with nature, I am very wary of the effects of production and the use of non-organic materials on the environment. This is why
at least 75% of the material and product I will employ to the mainstream will be organic. This includes plant-based dyes, organic fibers and recycled goods. The environmental, ethical and social benefits of going green are tremendous. The demand for organic clothing is doubling every year; consumers are becoming educated on “green” material and process. There is no doubt in my mind that by the time I enter the market, organic will not only be a major selling point, but also the precedent.

My designs will be green as well as accessible, and democratic in nature. By this I mean that they will be readily affordable to most consumer demographics. This is very important to me as a person who comes from a financially stressed background. I know how it feels to be without, and I never want anyone to be at a loss with my designs simply because they cannot afford them.

As well as awareness to price, I will, and constantly make a habit of donation. Obviously my standing as an artist will greatly reflect how much I can give materially. But I will never cease to share what I have, and can give. It will be a great day when I can set up a scholarship fund for people like me, who demonstrate need and talent.

In my life I will achieve what I so desire. I will help, I will give, and I will create. I am always ready to solve the problems that face each one of us. The sun is rising, and we must all do our part. Through the practice of creation the true answers steadily unfold themselves. Crossing the way seems so much easier when in your hand is the grip of another, and in your heart is the spirit of love and self.
There are few moments in my life that are more beautifully sublime than the memories of my childhood. Everything from back then was grand and beautiful. The word childhood encompasses an entire world to me; it evokes a particular feeling of unfettered innocence, a familiar melody and a sixth sense. I can’t help but be reminded of the dining room fantasies that arise from the ashes at the sound of the word—the relatives laughing over a few glasses of red wine, the occasional caterwaul from the younger ones who chose to sprawl out on the rug and play hand games, the scent of cilantro wafting from the kitchen’s cauldron of frothing stew.

Things changed very quickly as I developed into a teenager. We suddenly become fixated upon matters that were once foreign to us as children. Now, the whirring of the season’s first snowfall serves only as a reminder for us to shovel the driveway, and the idea of a holiday feast is accompanied by the arduous tasks of shopping and cooking to fulfill your family’s expectations. New material items gain significance as you age into a young adult, and remnants of the past slowly fall between the cracks.
Old jewelry boxes and picture frames of what once was, gather dust and move from the living room to the study to the basement to the garage.

Nowadays, as a young adult, when my parents rebuke me for something I’ve done wrong, I remember my childhood, including all the little whims and creaks that have become so humdrum as time has gone by, and I feel a need to return to my roots—a return to true aboriginality, to the very beginning, beyond early adolescent innocence. The memories of my childhood aren’t ever lucid enough, and the only thing that returns me to that special world is the thought of something more rustic than I have ever experienced, and that something is nature.

Nature has a special quality of divinity that many in our modern human world fail to appreciate. It is the quintessence of everything physical in our lives. I feel most at home in places of undisturbed nature, able to think clearly and calmly.

I hope to create situations and narratives with my work that the entirety of mankind can relate to, work that spurs viewers to remember facets of their own adolescence. It’s not something that comes to mind often for most people, so it’s beautiful to look back and witness the greatness of past memories and the majesty of nature. For this reason, I also focused my portfolio upon a ubiquitous conflict: the one between the self and the family. This is done deliberately so that others who face similar situations can relate. Problems that develop within the household are common and can easily become a great source of distress in one’s life. Personally, most of my family conflicts involve my parents, and thus they stand as a motif that runs through almost all of my work.

To heal others is my ultimate goal, to bring peace to the calamity that exists so frequently in families all over the world. I believe that the tranquility that is synonymous with childhood innocence can be applied to adult lifestyles as well. In my work I will continue to challenge society to reevaluate the adversities of everyday life and to instill in others a passiveness that is often lost in maturity. I hope that those who view my work will contemplate retrospectively upon the hardships in their own lives.
Nineteen years ago, in Tarrytown, NY, I acquired my mother’s vision for the visual arts. As the backdrop changed from village to urban Bogotá, Colombia, to suburban Weston, FL, to multicultural Brooklyn, NY, this inheritance manifested in the following ways: throughout childhood I demonstrated interest in the arts and excelled among my art classmates. As a teenager, art teachers recognized my talent with awards, I got involved in art clubs, and to enhance my passion for art history and the arts community I interned at the Norton Museum of Art. Believing that my potential would make me an outstanding student in the communicative arts, I transferred to Pratt Institute, volunteered at on-campus galleries and studios, did a work-study assistantship at the Jaffe Center for the Book Arts, and contributed with my artwork.

Growing up in an environment supportive of creativity, I always envisioned myself as either a scientist or an artist. My childhood teachers made art and science extremely interesting, and the fact that my parents provided me with materials,
Diego Torres
Illustration

Science books and kits enhanced my curiosity even further. In addition, I have always enjoyed working on projects, doing research and being in laboratories just as much as in the art studio. And through illustration I can merge both occupations as one, even if I don’t have the expertise of a scientist, I still find beauty and wonder in biology, geology, history and nature. In my own personal work I explore anatomy by interchanging it with objects that have a resemblance. Once I graduate and work as an anatomical illustrator, I would like to make the subject fun to younger audiences. Since the real occupation of an artist is to serve as a voice that contributes to society, I have made this a mandatory part of my self-expression. So to further enhance my communication skills, I am majoring in communication design (emphasis in illustration), which will teach me how to be an effective contributor through its integration of three vital fields: design, illustration and advertising. This interrelation will allow me to express ideas through multiple channels, while combining interactive media, either through publishing, editorial or advertising. Such a form of communication is ideal, because I will be facilitating understanding of the greater meaning or, simply put, doing the work of an illustrator: linking images to the written word and serving as the visual aid to the text. I am also motivated by the idea of sharing an accurate image. And lastly, I will be making connections and illustrating what others may not see; this in turn will enlighten them. That is to say, my self-expression will not only be for myself, but for the people as well, for art is about communication.

A community is composed of multiple contributors, each with their own specialty and ability. I landed the role of an artist. This means that, contrary to popular belief, art has societal functions. The field of visual arts and communications requires for a social and environmental awareness, which I am always hungry for, and I continue developing it in my observant, thoughtful and curious approach. Also, being born to Colombian parents, having traveled around the world and having lived overseas, I bring a different perception to the table. And regardless of how diverse art can be, its exploration and practice give me discipline. It is this kind of training, variety, production and contribution that I seek in a career.
“Service is the rent we pay for being—it is the very purpose of life, and not something we do in our spare time.”—Marian Wright Edelman

I read this quote every day as I walk up the stairs to my second period psychology class. I read it, repeat it in my head and focus for a moment on what it means to me. I have read it so many times that I have committed its truth to my heart. Service is not something I do in my spare time, because truth be told, I have no spare time. I make time to volunteer because I love making a difference in other people’s lives and because I believe in using my talents to give back to a world that has given so much to me. As I learned in psychology, I am an Extraverted Sensing Feeling Judging type, otherwise known as “The Caregiver.” For me, service is not a choice. It is a necessity, the very purpose and fulfillment of my existence.
It wasn’t until I started volunteering at Marwen that I realized how much I enjoy it. Marwen is a nonprofit arts organization that is dedicated to providing free art classes for children grades 6-12. In my junior year, I was accepted as a member of Marwen’s Student Advisory Board (SAB). As one of the six members on the SAB, I feel a commitment to the student body to make sure their voices are heard. The SAB plans special events for students every year, such as gallery walks, that allow children to become more involved with art in their communities and other aspects of Marwen. For the past two years, we have hosted a workshop called “de-Construct,” where students come in to Marwen for an entire day and create art on blank gallery walls in response to whatever social issues they are most concerned with. This is my favorite event of the year because although it takes a lot of planning and hard work, it is so rewarding to see children as young as 10 expressing themselves artistically and speaking to an audience of all ages about what’s important to them. This Saturday, I will be speaking about my experiences at Marwen to almost one hundred children and their parents. My greatest hope is to be able express to them the countless opportunities—not only in service but also in art—that Marwen has given me.

In addition to the work I do at Marwen, I have also worked on several murals within my community and neighboring communities. My first mural was at the YMCA in my neighborhood, and I loved it because I got to teach other people about the importance of family, community and our Mexican-American heritage through our art. I volunteered to help finish two other murals as well: one at St. Anthony’s Hospital and one at an elementary school as part of the Urban Gateways program. In the next stages of my life, I plan to get my bachelor’s degree in illustration and to acquire a master’s degree. With these degrees, I will pursue a career in children’s book illustration. I believe in helping others to learn and grow, and I think that teaching children through stories and images is the best way to do that. I will also be heavily involved in nonprofit arts organizations like Marwen that foster in children a desire to think creatively. As long as I can be involved in helping other people in any way that I can, I will be content with my life.
For the first nine years of my education, I went to a private Christian academy; about seventeen miles from my home, where I was taught to be a well-behaved student. My world was enclosed by their red bricks and brown carpet, and I had no other friends in my neighborhood because of how far we lived. Our school was like a cocoon, everybody knew each other. Even junior high students were best friends with seniors, but who could blame us? We had a graduating class of four students; we didn’t have much of a choice.

I tried to fit in. I really did, but it just would not click. I could not spend my precious recess staying in this world to play basketball or to be chased in a game of tag. No, I fell into my own world, where magic, werewolves and sibling rivalry emerged from my head. Only a few understood our game; those that annoyed us with their curiosity or gave us wrinkled noses simply identified our game as Nothing. We named it so others would not disturb our realm when we still had time before the whistle. In the classroom, my teacher would get upset because I used all my notebooks and notebook paper to draw on. The drive of my pencil was shaped by my infatuation of
Japanese anime and my mother’s culture. Without my role model of Sailor Moon I would never have picked up a pencil. My classmates gagged and teacher disapproved of my princess warrior or magic girl drawings. At home I had similar problems. The carpet in my room was no longer visible from all the paper I used for drawings, and my mother screamed about my wasting, but I could not stop.

When my parents decided to let me go to a public school, I was heart-broken and fearful for my life. Here I was, in a four-to-five student class with the same friends my whole life, transferring to a school with over one thousand strangers per a class. The change punched me in the face and I became like stone. I had forgotten how to interact with new people and I was alone for that year. My art was heavily influenced by this change; switching from fantasy and magic to darkness and gore. That year was also the year I had a new beginning; I was free to explore. I discovered the joy of music and had my whole wardrobe changed. It was a time for my rebirth.

Being raised in a Christian environment I had been beaten down with Biblical morals. Early in the next year of high school, I finally broke free from the meaningless bigotry towards homosexuals and opened my mind. I started to soften to others and joined clubs to explore ideas and areas of interest such as Diversity Council, Art Club and Gay-Straight Alliance. I participate in events such as World’s Fair and Day of Silence to spread awareness and tolerance. Again, my art changed to a more eerie, yet whimsical style based on the occurring events. For these past couple years, my work has expressed my changing life and molded all the different styles into me. With my enriched experiences, I plan to become a professional children’s book illustrator after my Illustration major. I want to inspire children just as I was, and nourish their childhood. Along with being a professional illustrator, I am going to master in Illustration and become a professor at a college, again to help spread creativity and help shape this world.
I hate artists. The elitism and arrogance that have characterized so many of the artists I have come to know has lead me to dislike the group as whole. Throughout high school, my art classes have consisted of students and “artists” who like to hold their knowledge over others. They presented elitist ideas and thoroughly believed that the underprivileged and under-educated students at our school were somehow “beneath” them.

I have always considered myself one of the underprivileged. My family often struggles from paycheck to paycheck, and I myself have had to work several jobs throughout my high school career to enjoy the basic comforts my more well-off classmates enjoyed. Yet despite my family’s economic shortcomings, I have still managed to gain a decent education. While we never could afford private tutors or art lessons, I still managed to soak up whatever knowledge I could.
KEVIN BRISCO, JR.
Fine art

My desire for education coupled with my own background lead to a deep concern for community involvement. I have spent many hours volunteering for both national and local political campaigns, and in my ninth grade year I regularly volunteered in the neighborhood soup kitchen. I put forth my greatest effort in my eleventh grade year, when I organized a benefit concert for the local refugees from the Darfur region. I got together the bands, employed my artistic skills to design posters and T-shirts and secured a venue. In the end we raised more than $2,000 that went to buy clothing and household appliances for our local refugees.

Despite my disdain and desire for separation from the general consensus of artists I have come to know, I still consider myself an artist. This paradox has often come up in my artwork. Just last year I centered a concentration around the problems in modern art. I attempted to illustrate how elitist artists are trying to separate art from the common man. I went on to emphasize how the overly conceptualized works of modern artists are ultimately a weapon that will murder the power of the visual arts in the eyes of the people.

This year I visited many art schools and came into contact with many more college level and working artists. I found many of these individuals to be very devoted to the plight of the underprivileged. I would be false to pigeonhole them in with the group of elitists that I had come to dislike so much. I was forced to change my general philosophy from “I hate artists” to “I hate elitist, arrogant people who just so happen to be artists.”

I am certain that should I attend art school (SAIC, in particular) my general philosophy will continue to grow. I am also certain that I will continue to champion the underprivileged, through works that display the underprivileged in our full context. I want to illustrate the humanity of the poor and cast light on the shortcomings of the society that allows people to live in poverty. I will also devote my abilities to the beautification of poorer neighborhoods, through public works, funding and anything else I can do to improve society. I want to show the world that indifference is inhumane and that we are in fact our brothers’ keepers and must act accordingly.
I was born in Colombia 21 years ago, being the second child of a family of five daughters. When I was 15 my father decided that we had to move to the city and live in a small apartment while he started his business. Meanwhile, with his life savings, he started building a summerhouse outside of the city in a little town, but what we did not know was that this town was full of guerrillas. After it was finished, on a Saturday afternoon, more than 20 men with guns surrounded the house, they called my father, took him into a car and left. These days were the worst days that we had ever had, no one could sleep or eat, and the anger and anxiety were consuming us. Days later my father came home and we could not believe it. It was the best thing that could have ever happened to us, but then I realized that life could be very contrasting sometimes.
As soon as my father came back home, my parents decided that we had to move out because these people knew where we used to live and they used to call on the phone harassing my mother. Suddenly my father found a nice house that seemed to be the right place for us. Ten days after we moved, someone knocked on the door and my sister ran to open it up, when five armed men and three women entered into the house and started taking everyone downstairs into a tiny bathroom outside of the house. I just had finished dressing up when someone knocked on my door and ironically asked me very gently to go downstairs and join my mother. After 10 minutes we heard a car leaving and realized that they had left. They sure left but they took everything valuable that we had. The only thing that we could do in that moment was to thank God we were alive. After all, nothing seemed so bad because we still had each other.

On January 20th of 2004, my family and I moved to the United States. I went into college with a concentration in photography, and then I transferred into The School of The Museum of Fine Arts, focusing on painting and drawing. Through art I believe there is a way to approach people and to let them know that there is a lot of us that care about them. In my paintings and drawings I address social issues that concern all of us, and my subject matter is usually manifestations and protests around the world. I am also interested in working with the psychology of the problem and the emotional charges that lead us to certain behaviors as a result of today’s lifestyle. Most of my drawings are part of a personal exploration but not disconnected from others’ emotions, since we all share common anxieties.

Although it can be a very idealistic goal, I believe there can be change. After everything that has happened in my life, which I do not consider unfortunate because it has helped to build up the person I am now, I have a strong need to communicate to others that life can be better if we aim to do so. I also believe that art offers the opportunity to teach young generations how we can contribute to stopping inequality, which is the first factor in a violent society. Finally, my goal before I finish school is to develop a consistent body of work that informs the public and helps them break through ignorance and start change.
In the past, I believed that art was something that follows the artist along his or her life. Almost like a trait or attribute. It seemed superficial and artificial. Most recently, I have come to realize that art is what best describes those who make art. Throughout history, artists of different trades and backgrounds have described themselves and their surroundings through their work. Their art is purely autobiographical. It is a counterbalance between the influence of art on man and vice versa. The power of art in their lives is evident and concrete.

I make art, because it is important, essential and crucial to culture and life. I am very serious about anything I engage in. I am thoughtful and pensive. In my opinion, where would the fervor and passion for knowledge and truth go if I cannot criticize something or analyze it? Every piece I make is a manifestation of these questions.
and through the process of making, I am hoping to receive an answer. As a human being, I strive to be passionate and driven about anything I engage in. Art is my passion, art is what drives and motivates me. If I can’t have it that way, if I cannot be ambitious and motivated, then there is no point in doing anything at all. The inspiration for my pieces derives predominantly from the psychological aspect of human beings. For the most part, I concentrate on drawing, though experimenting with other media is essential to an artist’s learning experience. However, the process and preparation my work goes through are very important to what I make. My goal as an artist is to explore a wide range of emotions and conditions using the human figure as the central subject. In my work, I use representational devices such as facial expressions and the duality of light and dark to portray sentiments and psychological effects on the subjects and their states of being. The use of line, visual displacement and the juxtaposition of imagery are used to demonstrate how the subjects emotionally react to their immediate circumstances and surroundings.

I find that my self-portraits are my most intimate and telling work. Through my self-portraits I impart personal sentiments on my position as a man in society. This allows me to better understand myself and my surroundings. I have seen myself progress through my self-portraits. Lately, I have explored the psychological state of anxiety. Prior to the commencement of these pieces, I became interested in the psychology behind the state of anxiety through Edvard Munch’s “The Scream.” This iconic painting is generally regarded as the symbol of universal anxiety in modern society. Working off of that notion, I sculpted a bust of a screaming head that represented this universal anxiety. The screaming bust has become the representational device used to symbolize anxiety in the self. This series of self-portraits has heightened my realization of myself as part of the society we live in.

Ultimately, I will be an inquisitive artist whose work has a social significance. I want to push art through time by nurturing the next generation of art makers and extend my knowledge to those who have the potential to make an impact in our lives through art. I would like to pass down the knowledge that I was given by my family, my teachers and the artistic community. Art is crucial to every aspect of culture, and I want to be part of helping art grow for its own sake and our own sake as human beings.
I am a reflection of my parents’ past, a product of transgression, and the daughter of yellow plight, derived from two people. My Cambodian father escaped the Killing Fields, the Kissinger bombing campaigns and the Khmer Rouge after seeking refuge at a Thai refugee camp. My Vietnamese mother fled by boat during the Vietnam War and still continues to struggle in the United States. Unlike my father, she never received any formal education and is completely illiterate. Their experiences and courage have influenced me to express myself and interpret their histories through art, education, and social activism. My own experiences and that of my parents’ struggle that has been relegated upon me have influenced the subject of my art, my role as an artist and my responsibility to society.

I have always taken a proactive position in life and feel an obligation to include people and their narratives in both my life and work. Being proactive makes you a member of the community and is my way of giving back to the community. Over the years I have remained active in community projects that further social progress and civic engagement focusing on social responsibility through the proactive role,
or taking action for social justice and equality. At 16 I interned for Congressman Ken Bentsen and State Rep. Martha Wong. I received a bachelor’s in political science and another in studio arts (painting) while interning for the Houston Lesbian, Gay, and Transgender Political Caucus for a year. In addition, I interned for Voices Breaking Boundaries, a literary and visual arts nonprofit, served as board member and also as mentor for the Vietnamese Summer Writing Workshop. I then earned a master’s in education while teaching in DC Public Schools to students who were disadvantaged and who were new to the country and language. Through these experiences I came to the realization that social justice and responsibility were important tenets of equality, and I forged work from mixed media and site-specific installations to convey such values.

My work revolves around people and documenting their histories. My work focuses on civic engagement while using art as a platform for dialogue regarding cultural histories and openness to integration—a foundational step towards activism. I am interested in themes of civic duty, whether innate or conditioned by society, that present constructs dealing with “innocent bystanders,” “victims,” and “perpetrators.” I question these roles in a society where definitions differ, and pluralism and cultural entities exist.

Recent projects include “Intertwined” where interviews with the African-American community allowed them to empower themselves in the Project Row House art house. They contributed their stories, relics, or images of the community around them onto transparencies, note cards, the floor and by hanging photos onto clamps interwoven by string. Another site-specific project, “The Daily Staple,” involved interviews of Vietnamese and Vietnamese Americans and their obstacles with language and cultural barriers in Washington, D.C. These projects helped to empower the interviewees and allow for exposure to the greater community.

I consider myself an artist, activist and educator and am working on collaborations in mixed media dealing with child soldiers, land mines and social responsibility. Major projects include an animated short about the wars in Cambodia and Vietnam and Agent Orange. The purpose of these projects is to empower the individuals and their narratives and bring to light the unresolved issues that still exist today and how these issues have been passed on to the current generations, allowing us to examine solutions and methods that can inform decisions regarding people, social justice and social responsibility.
I am very proud to have recently become a citizen of the United States after living here for five years. My parents have always valued an education. When I was 4 years old, my parents sent me to live with my uncle so that I could have access to more opportunities than in my smaller village. I lived with him until I was 13 and then my parents could come to immigrate to America from my hometown on the coast of Vietnam. Even though my parents did not want to leave their homeland, they saved money, gave up their jobs and left behind their families so that we could move to America. I feel a sense of duty to finish my education and to be successful. This motivates me to be the very best I can be.

Although I have lived in America for five years, I am still learning English, as well as many cultural things. Living in rural, western Kansas is not the most inspiring place for some of my futuristic fashion ideas. Because of my gregarious personality, I
am able to present my ideas and not be discouraged by what others think of a guy that wants to design clothes. Now, I am a freshman in Columbia College Chicago. This will be a beginning place of my journey.

In the future I see many opportunities and successful projects that will change my community. Looking back, I see my parents working hard from sunrise to sunset and barely making it home to tuck me into bed. I also see racial slurs, “Hey, Chink!” yelled in my direction as I walked home from school alone. Though these have caused great strife in my life, they have also inspired me to rise above the obstacles and help others in my previous position. With my fashion design company I will try to help local students with an after-school program revolved around teaching them the business aspect as well as the technical design aspect of the fashion industry. However, fashion might not be for everyone, so the program will be based around art design in the community in addition to important life lessons such as achieving goals. Though fashion is my number one obsession, I feel it is immensely important to give back to my community that has turned me into the man I am today.

I have just barely stepped into the fast-paced high-fashion industry, working part-time as a boutique seamstress. Already, I can’t get enough of the adrenaline rush from working on a deadline. I am just a freshman, but that is not keeping me from applying to numerous internships because I believe it is the key to any successful career. Someday, when I work my way up the fashion hierarchy, I will use my connections wisely to enable my designs to become mass-produced and advertised. There are always obstacles in my way, but I never give up. I think positively and find other ways to solve problems. After finishing a project, I love to hear critiques from my mentors, so I can continue improving and growing. As I continue to grow from the seeds my parents planted so long ago, I begin to see clearly the dreams I set for myself. With pride in my community, my family and myself, I will challenge the boundaries of the fashion industry and cultivate a fresh beginning for the new generation.
My family has never had much money. I am the oldest of five, my mom has schizophrenia and my siblings and I have had to live in foster care or with relatives at times. Before high school I had always lived in areas where the majority of families were economically unstable, and many of my former friends and peers ended up dropping out and getting low-paying jobs answering phones at the local insurance company. I was lucky enough to move into a better school district right before high school, and to have found something I really liked, which gave me the motivation to pursue a college degree and a career in that field. But I often remember that the dropouts people scorn could have just as easily been myself or my sisters if we had not moved.

When my best friend from middle school dropped out, I started to really think about what it was that made some kids give up and some keep going. She was as intelligent as I, her grades were good and she had a lot of friends at school. But at my former school there were no interesting electives, no honors or AP classes and no one telling her not to drop out. At my new school I was finally learning things that really interested me, and so subsequently I was putting a lot more effort into my work.
Mary Adams
Fine art

High school has still been hard for me; my mom is sick often, and my dad works sometimes 60 hours a week at a refinery. For a while I was working 30 hours a week while going to school, but I was still able to do reasonably well in school through the help and support of my school and community. I think if other high school students could have the same opportunities that I had, they would be more likely to find a career that they like and be motivated to do well in school. My plan is to open my own studio/gallery and offer free art lessons to the kids in Southwest Philadelphia, and through the gallery I could help them sell their work.

Last summer some friends and I were looking to possibly rent a home in the southwest section of Philadelphia, and that’s when I got the idea. We were giving ourselves a tour of the neighborhood and we stopped at a playground. I struck up a conversation with a mother of two not much older than I, she told me that the father of her one son was in jail and the other’s dad refused to pay his child support. She said she worried that her sons would turn out the same way, there being nothing around them to inspire them otherwise. I remembered an article I had recently read about a man in the Southwest who had opened up a ceramics studio near an Indian reservation notorious for its number of alcoholics, and started giving free lessons to the children. I thought I could do something similar but even take it a step further—by helping the kids to sell their work, this would offer them motivation to keep working at their art and is also a much more rewarding and legal way of earning money than a lot of the other jobs they may be being offered. I know that something like this would take a lot of work and would require a lot of donations, but it’s definitely possible, and going to college will be the first step in meeting people that can help contribute to this dream.
My Hispanic heritage has influenced the experiences involving my family, our economic status and the art I create. I am very proud to be a Hispanic, and although at times, my culture has somewhat burdened me, I am stronger for it. My background has always influenced my academic and personal goals, and will continue to do so in the future. In terms of how I was raised, our household was under strict patriarchal rule. In the Hispanic culture, males are very concerned with traditional gender roles socially appropriate for one’s specific sex.

My mother was confined to the home, and expected to cater to my dad’s every wish. I was frequently reminded how my gender automatically ranked me lower than a man, without the slightest sympathy—for this is what God intended, as my father would frequently say. I have come to realize that my father was trying to control at home what he could not control elsewhere. It took me awhile to rebuild self-worth due to years of emotional abuse, and set out to realizing my dreams, which is the opportunity for an education and a better life. Even in college, though I still had to deal with the turmoil of my parents’ violent separation, their substance abuse
problems, and playing a mother figure to my siblings, often causing more economic hardships, but I am the eternal optimist, and as a fine arts major, I will continue to delve deep into my personal life, as well as the racial injustices in the world.

As a creator, I have discovered a healthy outlet that fuses my Hispanic culture with my educational, community and career goals. I paint in a very loose and expressive style and am more liberated now than I have ever been; I could not be prouder of my culture and how I was brought up. From what I paint on, to what I paint with, to my subject matter, hopefully my art conveys that sense of liberation and pride. I also enjoy working with found-object pieces, which are unique, economical and a great challenge to work with. Whenever I hear of an art opportunity that involves helping out the community in any way, I take it. I grew up with modest means, so helping others is very important to me.

Last November, I was in a MEChA art auction at Cal State Fullerton displaying art work from local artists to expand equal opportunity for all students. I have also curated many art exhibits at the Mountain Bar in Los Angeles to promote women’s rights, often raising money by auctioning art so that 100 percent of proceeds can fund charities like Amnesty International, a charity supporting human rights globally. I have also raised money for the Jenesse Center, one of the many women’s shelters in Los Angeles aimed at liberating families from domestic abuse. Once a year I also donate toys and feminine products to shelters to aid this difficult transition. I admire tremendously the organizations fighting against issues as diverse and significant as poverty, abuse, hate crimes, war and the environment on a grassroots level. I encourage others to vote, sign petitions and join rallies to help fight the causes dear to them. I wish to continue working with various charities and using my talent as an artist to convey a message of awareness and inspiration, by exhibiting my work as much as possible, and ultimately teaching at the professional level once I obtain my master’s degree.
It was a melancholy November night in my hometown, Kyiv, Ukraine. I stood behind the door of my room looking through a crack, hearing my mother call his name in desperation. I watched him walk quickly through the corridor and out the door, finalizing his exit with a loud door slam, making the paint crush from the ceiling. We lived by the train station and the furniture shook every time a train went by, but this time it felt like an earthquake.

His gray silhouette disappearing into the painful clarity of cracked paint and faded wallpaper that enveloped my front door—this image has become imprinted in my memory forever. A light bulb above his head was flashing frantically as if it were alive and its pulse was about to give—that was exactly how I felt watching my father walk out. The thermometer mark was crawling below zero and I remembered that I still did not have a winter coat.
The difficulty of my childhood and the overwhelming experience of immigration to the United States has strongly affected my choice of career and way of life. Throughout elementary, middle and high school, I had been involved in a strong academic curriculum along with several community programs and art disciplines. I discovered a lot when I volunteered to teach music to young children from difficult backgrounds (http://www.guitarsnotguns.org/Virginia.html). I saw how much pain and anxiety my students were going through and how much music helped them bear and overcome that pain. I had learned about the power of art and the change it can generate.

After practicing several different genres of art I chose one discipline in which I am most flexible and interested. Photography has taught me that the still image serves as a document of a moment that can never exist again in its original form. I became absolutely overwhelmed with the power a single photograph can have over human emotion and awareness.

The focus in my work has drifted through different subject matter. Recently, I found myself taking a great interest and initiative in the exploration of social anxiety and identity crises that my generation is going through. Another topic of mine that awaits deeper exploration is the way young adults exploit sexuality in their quest for identity. I have been working on a series of portraits that have inspired me and allowed me to see through the psychological barriers my subjects are forced to put up in their daily lives.

My focus is inspired by my personal experiences and observations. I’ve gone through a fair amount of abuse along with significant financial difficulty and social anxiety of which I am now fully aware. I’ve learned how much awareness of such things improves peoples communication skills and self-image. I feel truly blessed with the opportunity to generate social awareness with my art.

I am currently in the middle of my second semester at Pratt Institute and soon pursuing my second year in the photography program. I have learned an incredible amount of techniques and skills in the foundation program, which gave me great inspiration for my personal projects. I have also learned about the financial difficulties of going to college. My family is under enormous pressure of financing my and my sisters education. I am ever so grateful for the opportunity that the Worldstudio AIGA Scholarships program has given young artists like me.
I hail from a family of pack rats, and as a child I never had a problem keeping my mind occupied. The day I stumbled upon the Mecca of family photographs in our garage was a significant, life-changing moment. I became obsessed; I searched everywhere and began collecting these treasures long forgotten by my parents, sitting in containers and tucked away drawers that reeked of time. The older I became, the more I began to piece together these little clues of my family’s existence through old letters and photographs. I began to form a quasi-realistic story in my mind about what they were like. I was so curious; my parents have never mentioned anything about the Philippines to me, so I had to seek it out for myself.

In middle school became involved with the Filipino American National Historical Society, I helped to produce two books, which documented the oral histories from the elder Filipinos/Filipinas residing in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and their experiences with coming to America and how they managed to thrive in the
United States. I was also involved in the Filipino American Cultural Society, which educated/taught history through plays, spoken word and poetry. These organizations enabled me to understand my cultural identity at such a young age, as well as to give me a creative and positive outlet to express myself.

A lot of my work deals with my family, culture and history, but most importantly from deep, buried memories of the past in relation to how I confront them today. I first began composing photographs of obvious imagery like documenting my family in a photojournalistic light, where I depicted straightforward images of poverty and of the living conditions they experienced in the Philippines. Although, I translated these sad images into beauty, I wanted my work to become more conceptual and to have more depth. As my knowledge and curiosity grew, I developed a heightened level of critical thinking; that once-skewed story of my family that I formed in my head as a child began to surface and come full circle as I began to fill in the clues. I began to question and in turn understand, why don’t I know my family in the Philippines? Why do we send our old clothes back home? Why are all Filipino mothers nurses? Why doesn’t my father teach grade school anymore? Why am I Catholic? Why America?

I began to take portraits of my direct family members, exploring loneliness, longing and time by shooting portraits of my neighbor, along with creating self-portraits of growing up and living in the South by using my partner as a stand in for myself. I also create videos by appropriating old family movies, and have been experimenting with deconstructing photography as a medium and making collages with film negatives in order to form new images. It is through all the trial and error that I have refined my work continuously.

I have made a conscious decision to make a life committed to the community and the youth. I am currently a member of Filipinas for Rights and Empowerment, and coach gymnastics in public schools and churches around Brooklyn, New York. I hope to show my work in galleries and museums around the world, along with creating programs to teach photography and art to Filipino children in the Philippines/U.S., create books that specifically showcase Filipino/Filipina American contemporary artists, and more. Everything moves in cycles, and it will eventually be my time to pay homage to the ones who have inspired me, and I can think of no other way than to better my community.
I was born into art. My mum always jokes that she played me the Beatles and Beethoven in the womb, so I was destined for the artist's life from the beginning. I found my medium in photography. When I picked up a camera for the first time I was home. Growing up working class, I had been angry most of my life. I attended an upper class school, giving me access to better art programs. But I soon learned that money always matters. When I found photography I finally found a use for my anger. I began taking on projects in my photography relating to class and economic disparity. I was drawn to the Punk community, documenting the scene and photographing shows. My fellow punks taught me to embrace my individuality, and that the greatest crime was not speaking up about what you believed. Looking through the lens I was able to realize my vision, and see beauty in sadness. It was agony and ecstasy to chase that perfect shot, but instead of chasing perfection for a grade, I was hunting it for something I really believed in.

Where I live, things are so narrow. Every community has its own bubble, with no room for difference, new ideas, or anything outside the norm. I want to break out
of that. I want to learn more and be heard. I have been a misfit my whole life, no friends because I didn’t have the patience for juvenile interests, looked down on because of my zip code. I have been invisible to my school peers, but I won’t be invisible to the world. With my photos I make, others care about what I care about. I want to be a photojournalist to make others see. For the past few years I have freelanced for local papers, and I view everything I see as a story. I try to bring a passion and lust for art every time I shoot a new frame. I strive to affect change, and I believe art is the best and most effective way. I want to make people think, to amaze, offend, to make someone laugh or cry. I want to be the best photographer I can be. The worst emotion, to me, is indifference. The best reason I can give for why I deserve this scholarship is: Money has been an obstacle for everything I have ever wanted to do. But it is never the be all, end all. Scholarship or no scholarship, I will make my dreams real. At the end of my bed I have a poster with a quote by Martin Luther King that reads, “The greatest sin of our time is not the few who have destroyed but the vast majority who sat idly by.” That quote reminds me every day to make a difference, and never to commit the crime of blending in.
Virtually everything you do, you buy, you see, has been created. Some thought or idea went into its design by people who dare to take on the tacit leadership of our world. They help create and shape our culture as a whole and without them, our civilization would be nothing more than a grey hub of interconnected beings. These people are our artists, and their existence is the reason why culture, the heart of our civilization, existed and still continues to evolve.

I always grew up thinking I would be at the bottom of the consumer market. Someone whose only purpose was to make the big-buck companies money, whose CEOs spent millions of dollars on simply trying to learn the secret of retaining their attention long enough to properly insert a slogan into their brains, and backtrack society from individualism to mindless consumerism.
I hated to admit it but honestly, it was something I was prepared to accept. Being the fate of almost everyone I seemed to come in contact with, it didn't seem that bad.

After all, most of the world is made up of these individuals. There's no problem with them: they are solid, hardworking folks who try for a respectable life.

But then I found photography.

And along with that discovery came purpose, direction and self-worth. I had found something that I truly loved, but greatest of all I realized that my passion had the potential to append to the social evolution of human beings; even if it could be something so miniscule in relation to human achievement.

As an artist I just want to give back to the society that has raised me. I don't want to be that dead human placeholder in time, the one who sits back and lives off of basic services that other people provide. There have been so many influential people that have done more than simply walking the earth. They used their talents and powers for the greater of the world. To modestly say I attempted to join their ranks would let me die happy.

I have grown up in a different world than my parents. A world full of political correctness and fear of the unknown. Until recently I was worried about the direction of the masses, and where I might find myself amongst them. But this year has brought me hope, we finally have come together to elect someone who I truly believe can unite us for the better good, for a good of what matters.
My name is Nicole Nolan, and I approach my life as I approach my art and my students: with an open mind that explores probabilities and allows possibilities to happen. Most recently, I have been working as a resident artist with the VSA Arts of Colorado and the Denver Public School Star Program, teaching photography to young people with physical and developmental disabilities, how to use and enhance their innate creativity. I use photography as a way to help them explore, understand and control their world, and as a means of showing others their vision and personal reality.

My goal is to instill greater self-esteem, release their creative energy and provide them a way of contributing to society. The creative art experience, found in my classes, helps students communicate more effectively and discover who they are. Many such students have been slated for failure and dependency, and I am certain that my art classes have moved them closer toward a renewed sense of confidence. My students have exhibited their work at the Access Gallery, giving them a feeling of accomplishment and proving to themselves that if they put their minds to it, they
Could achieve anything. Since then, my students have pushed themselves even further to explore concepts and abilities deep within themselves.

Advocating for disabled young people is a mission for me. I instinctively feel the anguish of injustice toward those who are different; this empathy comes from personal experiences of intolerance and isolation as a young child. I was not your ordinary child. I was diagnosed with dyslexia and attention deficit disorder. My differences were noticeable, leading to horrible teasing and being ostracized. Today, my “disabilities” guide my work; I use art to reveal my world and the ways it affects me. The camera has offered me the perfect vehicle to challenge commonly held notions of reality. As Plato suggested, I realized that truth is nothing but the shadow of reality. In this digital era, reality is no longer obvious and can easily be manipulated. The real world and the fabricated world are one; my images are drawn from both worlds. I want to show the universality of things, and how things that are different are really also similar. I am not trying to make a loud statement; I am just trying to create an open dialog. The final piece of artwork is less important than the path I take to get there.

I was just accepted to graduate school at Pratt Institute in New York where I will earn my Master of Fine Arts. I will become involved in VSA of New York. I plan to continue working with young people in order to mentor and inspire a more creative population of human beings. I believe that when people create art, they become more conscious of their own worth and this translates into becoming a more sensitive and justice loving person. I want to help students use their creativity to build a better world. The process of making art is, for me, like life—it evolves, it grows, it changes, and it is about the journey.
Through out my life I have undergone numerous surgeries to repair the cleft-lip and cleft-pallet I was born with. To be exact I’ve had 13 operations between the ages of 1 and 17. These surgeries involved long periods of recovery where I would be stuck in a hospital bed for weeks. It was during these long stretches of time that animation, particularly fairy tales, became my savior. My parents brought me classic Disney movies on video and I watched them over and over again. They managed to simultaneously distract me from the pain as well as inspire me. I would sit with my notebook out, sketching the characters from my favorite films and soon began creating my own characters and stories. These films got me through the toughest parts of my life and brought out a creative side of me that I cherish more than anything.

As I got older I continued to draw as well as develop my characters and story ideas. I took some summer classes and learned to animate on my own. It soon came time to decide what I was going to do for college and I knew I wanted to pursue my art. When I discovered a school merely an hour away from my home that offered animation
as a major, my decision was clear. Today I am a student at the School of Visual Arts, studying the art of stop-motion animation as well as puppetry.

Having experienced the healing powers of storytelling and animation, I plan to explore different methods of using this medium to comfort ailing children around the world. I plan to create films that will be comforting to children who are going through what I went through and much worse. Having experienced the agony of being left in a hospital room for days, I know the agony of daytime television; a compilation of animated shorts made specifically for sick, injured or grieving children would be comforting and hopefully inspiring. While I am in school and surrounded by eager animation students, I am organizing a group of students interested in contributing films to this cause.

I also plan to travel with these films as an international children’s film festival, so children in poverty or war stricken countries, as well as victims of terrorist attacks, can see them as well. I am specifically drawn to Middle-Eastern countries because of my heritage. I have seen the television shows made for Palestinian children and they promote hate and murder. I plan to create children’s programs that do the opposite, teaching children not to be prejudiced but rather to be open to and appreciate other cultures.

I am going to Kazakhstan in August to work with victims of war and I plan to share my films with them. I would also have the festival tour America to raise money to be able to produce the films and donate them to hospitals or directly to families with sick children. For me this would be the most fulfilling and meaningful way to embrace my talents as an artist and animator.
Growing up as the only Korean American in an isolated suburb in New Jersey, I always knew I was the outsider. Perhaps that’s why I’ve always been drawn to outsiders and their stories. After returning from a semester abroad in Kenya, I became passionate about making documentaries about people living on the margins. During my last year of college, I made an experimental documentary about migration and globalization called “Turmeric Border-Marks.” I spent two months in Korea, interviewing illegal migrant workers from Southeast Asia. A couple years later, I traveled to Senegal to make another documentary called “United Nations of Hip Hop.” I spent two months in Senegal interviewing rappers who were part of a hip-hop movement so influential, that during the presidential elections of 2001, many of the rappers convinced the general public to vote in opposition of a dictatorship regime. The film follows the lives of these rappers who use hip-hop as a vehicle, to talk about social issues affecting them, such as African debt dependency, Islam and urban poverty.

In the past, I have used documentary film to express other peoples’ stories. A few years ago I transitioned into narrative film and started writing my first feature-
length screenplay called “Guess Who’s Coming for Kimechee.” The script was inspired by the moment when I told my mom that my boyfriend was black and the three years I kept it a secret. The film deals with cultural taboos of interracial relationships within Korean society against the backdrop of Confucianism, hip hop culture, and performance art.

Since starting my first year at Columbia University’s graduate film program, I have learned an immense amount about writing and directing. At the end of my first semester, I directed, produced and edited my first narrative short film. “The Queen” is about Bobby, a Korean-American teenage outcast, who is working at his parents dry cleaners on prom weekend. When the prom queen and her boyfriend stop by with their dress and tuxedo, Bobby has his own prom to remember. In the film, Bobby experiences a sexual awakening, as he fantasizes about dancing with the prom queen’s boyfriend in the dry cleaners. While writing the film, I imagined a throwback to an 80s John Hughes movie with a twist, this time from the point of view of a closeted gay Korean-American outcast who is invisible at his high school. This experience of directing actors and my own script for the first time was truly the most exhilarating rush I’ve ever experienced, even as a documentary filmmaker. To arrive on set, with a cinematographer, production designer, cast and crew all there to collaborate and achieve my vision, was the most amazing experience. Had I not had received training and feedback from peers and professors at Columbia, I don’t think I could have pulled off the film in such a way.

My first year at Columbia has been an eye-opening experience as a new director, but has also challenged me as a screenwriter. I’m currently working on new screenplay, a post-apocalyptic sci-fi adventure film about the endangerment of our food supply, the ethics of genetic engineering, and a seed bank. In the script, a young woman discovers her mission to save an agricultural Noah’s ark, and embarks on a dangerous quest to save humanity. It’s my hope that with the help of a Worldstudio AIGA Scholarship I can continue to learn and grow as a filmmaker. Whether it’s using sci-fi, comedy or hip-hop in my films, my aim is to leave a social footprint.
Film is a medium through which sustainable social as well as artistic change can be made. It is a medium that has been used to a certain extent, to produce and promote diversity on an international level, not to mention the power it has to challenge existing institutional systems. Although, film cannot go without criticism, since traditionally, mostly privileged or extremely lucky individuals have had the chance to reach the level of filmmaker. This has to do with how the social contracts we live under delineate specific statuses to those termed “whites” and those termed “non-whites.” “Whites” obviously occupy spaces of privilege—socially, economically, and politically—whereas “non-whites” are relegated to the existence of living as the “under-class.” However, we must keep in mind that these beings which occupy these specific spaces have a transitory characteristic that at times allows them to be brought in as “honorary whites” (Japanese business men in South Africa under apartheid compared to Chinese who were also considered part of the underclass along with black South Africans). This notion has real social, political and economic consequences. This also has to deal with the historical perception of how Western civilization views itself in light of its willful creation of an antithesis.
embodied historically by the “barbaric Sub-Saharan African,” and currently by “Islamic fundamentalism.” Hence, if these social contracts exist and permeate public and private institutions, they will also carry over into artistic institutions. The most prominent examples include, but not exclusive to: the vilification of Islam and Muslim people, post-9/11, in Western-produced films.

Being born in a so-called “developing” country (Dominican Republic) taught me how to conceptualize the problems of the global south in relation to my experiences in the “developed world.” It showed me how historical memory is necessary to the understanding of certain systemic processes which plague “under-developed” countries. Film, like education, is an extremely important agent for advancing and creating historical memory, especially in societies where revisionism is popular. In colonial terms, revisionism consciously rewrites history in the image of itself.

Some filmmakers make movies about the oppressed and the other as an extension of a gaze that is more or less imperialist. Thus, the medium of film posits an almost annihilating quality in terms of how it can socialize or dissocialize.

My reason for getting into filmmaking is not make political commentary aimed at the West and its cohorts. Even if I do speak of them often, “I do not speak to them.” I would like to at least take part in the discourse on ways to create sustainable economic communities for the people who are extremely marginalized on a political, social and economic level. The modern capitalist system commodifies people on a physical as well spiritual level. Predictability, efficiency and control are the current models by which fast-food chains operate. It is sad to say that this model has been willfully permeated into most contemporary aspects of society including the criminal justice system (racial profiling), religion and war. The images that are churned out leave a lasting imprint on the psyche which therefore uses the same pervasive Eurocentric dialogue to analyze works ranging from art to literature to culture. Diversification takes time, and time is not a characteristic which exploitative capitalism wishes to nurture. I understand that my contributions might actually be a detriment since transcribing reality to film may sometimes seem like a futile attempt. Nevertheless, I will seek to do this through whichever medium seems appropriate. I wish to concentrate in directing and hopefully go on to make films.
I had a red nose, white face, black hands and a blue blazer with vibrant, loud, multi-colored patches. The blazer tightly hugged my triceps and was kept from dragging on the ground by robust shoulder pads. Nobody looked like me for Halloween; I was truly a unique kindergartner. As a child, my mother could never afford the luxury of buying me a costume. She said I could be whatever I wanted to be as long as I could create it: that is when I got the idea to be a hobo clown. I rummaged around my room for pieces for my costume, finding a squeaky red nose from a previous Halloween and my mother’s face powder to give me that clown complexion. My giant Jamaican nanny, Lorene, collaborated with me and together we found that blue blazer that had been lurking in my closet. It looked plain, dull and dusty, but after Larine applied a myriad of patches, it became like Joseph’s Technicolor dream coat. Each patch was truly unique. Every stitch was made with love. That coat is me.

In retrospect, I realize I was never normal. Born half Black and half Puerto Rican while being taught in a predominantly Anglo elementary school, it was a cyclical challenge to find where I belonged. I was a child of the world, yet not one culture
claimed me as theirs. Instead of caving to this hardship, I overcame it and made myself universal. I spoke to everyone in their own style in their own way. Instead of having my own culture, I embraced everyone equally. My initial difficulties with my cultural identity actually served as a blessing in my career dream of being a filmmaker for it allowed me the gift to write, cast and film based on talent and not color.

I am the patches. I do not come from a “traditional” family. My father has never been a big part; instead, my family consists of actors, dancer, singers, writers and painters. I have been predominantly raised by a pack of rowdy, boisterous, lively female stand-up comics, who taught me how to laugh and tell a good joke. From them I learned that femininity does not equal weakness. They inspired me to write stories where women are not trapped doing “chick flicks,” but are allowed to be strong, motivating leading ladies, someone that the next generation can look up to.

I am the thread. I have always tried to make people feel better by getting them to laugh. It was actually the laugh of a friend that inspired me to become a filmmaker. When I was 9, my friend was hospitalized with leukemia. I felt powerless in her pain but thinking quickly, I started to tell an outrageous story, which made her burst into uncontrollable laughter. In that split second her pain lifted as she enjoyed the world that I had created. I want to be a professional filmmaker, to transport people to happier places. I uncover very difficult issues not by pointing the finger in my films but by using the method of satire, I find more people are likely to listen to jokes, then listen to stern reprimands. Humor especially has the ability to bond people from different stages of life. In the future, I see myself contributing to my community by creating strong media awareness about such issues relating to sex, health, drugs and racism, but also by inventing strong models for society.

That coat is me. I am proud of my past patches and ready for my next patch…hope you know how to sew.
I have always been a storyteller, a writer, a weaver of tales. When my family immigrated to the United States in 1983, escaping the bloody civil war in Sri Lanka, storytelling and my imagination helped me to cope with the strange world of suburban Pennsylvania, where, as a foreigner and minority, I felt isolated. I devoured literature, history and film, which enabled me to see worlds where people transcend their differences to build a better world. My personal story has been about realizing these worlds and turning the beauty of human difference into a shared understanding of humanity.

Working with children has forced me to hone my storytelling skills with wit, whimsy and spontaneity. In 2005, I cofounded Regeneración Childcare NYC, a volunteer group that provides childcare for low-income families involved in grassroots community organizations. While their parents work on local campaigns for social change, Regeneracion provides an environment where children feel safe, supported and free to explore and imagine. The kids around me have taught me about inventing stories that charm, engage and elicit emotion in audiences with brutally short attention spans. I’ve learned to tell stories that incorporate the experiences of children who come from rich cultures and diverse but sometimes difficult backgrounds.
My experiences as a community organizer and storyteller led me to return to filmmaking as a career. I’ve always been passionate about cinema, and have used film and video to tell fictional and nonfictional stories. Now, my goal is to create age-appropriate films to inspire, educate and entertain young people.

I recently began the graduate film program at Columbia University. Columbia is known for its focus on narrative filmmaking and strongly supports my interest in creating socially aware films. With Columbia’s support, I am combining my work in the community with my filmmaking. I am currently developing a film called “Exile Generation”—a story of five unique kids with amazing powers who overcome injustice and change the world. Last semester, I developed the story, using the tools I gained in the classroom, and performed it as an episodic children’s program at the Critical Resistance 10 Conference in California. It was a huge hit with kids and adults alike.

This summer, I am producing a film called “Domestic,” about a little girl who creates a fantasy world inspired by stories her grandmother tells her. The film follows Luna, a 7-year-old girl born in New York to immigrant parents, and her grandmother, a Guatemalan house cleaner in New York. My inspiration for this film came from Regeneración’s work with the nonprofit Domestic Workers United. I am also directing a film called “27 Days,” a romantic story about an Asian-American telemarketer who falls in love with a magical multiracial New York artist. This film shows my commitment to featuring characters that represent the beauty and diversity of America.

My intent as a filmmaker and a community activist is to translate the beauty, wonder and mystery of today’s world into language and imagery that all people can understand, while simultaneously manifesting visions of our hopes and dreams. In short—I see the imagination as magic and storytelling as a way of creating magic in our mundane world. Films are the means through which I tell the stories of struggle, and through which I hope to inspire magic in the adults and children around me. As a community activist and a filmmaker, I am in a unique position to create visions of our better future—humanity, dignity and peace—and project them to the world.