

THE HARVARD  
**independent**  
02.22.18 THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



Inside: Blocking, Battles, and Ballads

# 02.22.2018

## Vol. XLVIV, No. 14

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Inside: Blocking, Battles, and Ballads

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As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, the Harvard Independent provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The Independent has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

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# INDY FORUM

## BLOTK

### A guide to preparing for Housing Day

By HUNTER RICHARDS

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**B**locking groups in the week before Housing Day can feel more competitive than the application process to Harvard. There's always a blocking group with an acceptance rate lower than Harvard's. Whether your blocking group is configured like you've recruited the perfect group, or you're floating because the thought of having a conversation about blocking gives you hives (it be like that sometimes), it's gotta get done.

When choosing the ideal block mates, let the Indy help you figure out how well your blocking group is prepared for Housing Day:

#### **When is your alarm set for?**

In an ideal world, you actually would wake up at 7 am and finish that problem set, go to the gym, and get breakfast before class. But when you don't even make it back to your room to pass out until after 3 am, it feels pretty evident to everyone involved that that alarm is going to be waking up everyone but you. You thought that your roommate playing sad break-up songs for an entire month after their Turkey Drop was bad, but nothing really tests a relationship like interrupting each other's sleep with ambitious alarms. Even if you end up in a house where you won't be living a foot from one another in a crowded River double/triple (but you'd rather share that 100 square footage with 2 roommates and a couple mice than have to learn how to navigate the quad shuttle, amirite??), the truth is that upperclassmen houses have walls thinner than you were before the freshman fifteen hit.

#### **Are you dating?**

It might sound tempting to block with your significant other but so was getting Jefe's at 3 am and the food poisoning from that would still be better than this block up turning into a break up. Being forced into the dining hall making eye contact with the person whose genitals were once in your mouth is the quickest way to have no appetite. The inevitable break up and sneaking around because your roommates don't approve will only add more stress to your life. Taking the elevator while you force them to take the stairs so that nobody will realize you both came from the same room when you get to brunch is an art that takes a lot of self-disgust to master.

#### **How likely are you to ask your roommates to get out so that you can get off?**

It never seems to be the case that you know more than two hours in advance whether you'll be commandeering the room that night. You don't want to be the one that's always sexiling your roommate, especially because you have to step it up with taking the trash out to make up for your trash personality.

#### **How did you meet?**

Are you freshman roommates? Was meeting other people after orientation week really that disinteresting?

Did you take a class together and only text one another the night before a problem set was due to ask for help? Did you only block together because you spent all your

time in office hours and didn't go out on the weekends because Saturday and Sunday are for making up the sleep debt for the all-nighters you pulled all week?

Are you making out? I really cannot stress enough what a sloppy ho you're gonna feel like when this goes sour and you're stuck waiting for the elevator in a tense silence with them. But you do you, I'm sure you are the exception. And when you aren't, every other person who blocked with an S.O. will be there to complain about it with.

#### **Are you going to be River Running?**

This isn't so much a judgment of character as it is an estimate of the strength of your relationship. If only one person in the group is going to be River Running, how exactly are the next three years about to look? Did you do Primal Scream together, or did you bring in that guy who was kind enough to hold the rest of your group's clothing out of duty? Contrary to popular belief, every blocking group doesn't need a designated baby-sitter, and that's what it'll start to feel like if you all have entirely different social lives and styles.

#### **How many incriminating photos of you does the other have that could potentially be used for blackmail if you ever ran for public office?**

You aren't really ride-or-die until you have screenshots of those ugly drunk snapchats they sent to you in confidence, or a video of them trying to pee on the John Harvard

# INDY FORUM

Blokt,  
continued.

statue except it was actually the Abe Lincoln monument in Cambridge Common and they didn't pull their pants down. If you don't know exactly which libraries, common rooms, and other public spaces they've hooked up on campus during their regret-filled and reckless Freshman Fall, you still have a lot to learn about each other before taking this big step of blocking with one another.

The bottom line is that blocking is a social construct and about as important as showing up to class during shopping week-

yeah, it'll help you start off on the right foot but you won't remember anything from it anyways. Blocking can be one of the most drama-filled times of college, and then a year later you might've only run into your block mates a few times during brunch over sophomore year.

You don't have to block with your best friends - just because you don't block together doesn't mean that it's all over. If you could make it through Ec10 together, I don't know why you think figuring out the shuttle is going to kill your vibe. Knowing that you can live with the people you've

block with is reassuring, but once you're placed into a house you end up meeting a hundred other freshman equally as shocked at how fast housing day goes by and it feels like Opening Days all over again, except with a better sense of how to get home.

tl;dr chill fam, it's not that deep

Hunter Richards '18 (hrichards@college.harvard.edu) prepares for her last Housing Day.



## Sonic States

By MARISSA GARCIA

Harvard-based indie-folk-pop band The New Dakotas is plenty fortified for the Battle for Yardfest.

Refashioning a recycling bin into percussion, Alasdair Mackenzie '19 of Harvard College and then-band-member Charles Winston '19 of Tufts University performed the New Dakotas' song, "Roll It Later," for Kelsey O'Connor '18, the previous Podcast Editor, as she interviewed them on Episode 1.4 Classic Artists and New Dakotas. With the accompaniment of vocals, tambourine, and guitar, the recycling bin distinctively kept the pulse — and this all seemed felicitous, as the New Dakotas inherently have a recycled sound: derivative of their inspiration of the Beach Boys, but, nevertheless, new.

When O'Connor asked the season's question of "Who inspires you?" their response was instant: Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys, who notably "created revolutionary recordings in the 60s using soundscapes."

Mackenzie enthused, "[The Beach Boys] brought to pop music some sounds that are outside the realm of the rock combo... there are crazy vocal arrangements of course, but there's also like a bicycle horn in one of my favorite songs, or there's horse hooves... or there are unusual combinations of things..."

And though the New Dakotas have yet to percussively reinvent the horse hoof, they — in a nod to the Beach Boys — certainly have retained equestrian eccentricities, as "Hold That Pose" — their most recent release — chimes, "Well, I was sitting on the fence / I was talking to my pony / The pony said, 'Hey man!'"

When I interrupted a New Dakotas' rehearsal — in a room neighboring the Queen's Head Pub — for an interview, I just had to admit to the primary singer-songwriter, Mackenzie, that I had the tune of "Hold That Pose" incessantly and uncontrollably galloping through my mind — unbridled.

When asked where such a volition to sing about ponies came from, Mackenzie divulged, "'Talking to my pony' just sounds

nice phonetically... and it's kind of striking, right? Like, we're talking about it, right? And we're not talking about any of the other lyrics..."

The Beach Boys effectively diversified the palette of percussion, mastering the art of unexpected instrumentation, and the New Dakotas have successfully reincarnated this method, by the medium of words, mastering the art of unexpected lyricism — both undeniably indelible. The New Dakotas, reminiscent of The Beach Boys, have become the savants of, as in Alasdair's words, "unusual combinations of things," an epithet correlative to even the band itself. No longer the duo as captured by Tell Me More a year ago, the New Dakotas have evolved into a four-man lineup comprised of Harvard students from a melange of musical backgrounds. Scott Roberts '19 (synthesizer) had been a jazz pianist, whereas Juan Carlos Fernandez del Castillo '20 (keyboard) had dabbled in the classical. Chris Haley '19 (vocals + guitar) recalls his dad listening to U2's All That You Can't Leave Behind album, the soundtrack of his first three years of memory, while Mackenzie (vocals + drums) recalls his mom revealing, "[Your aunt and uncle] wrote that song, you know!" as he listened to music only made by his family members, his soundtrack ever since "[he] could move his arms."

The New Dakotas will be auditioning to compete in Battle for Yardfest, a Queen's Head-based set of performances given by five different acts. Based off of the popular vote of the students, two of these acts are chosen to perform at Yardfest.

In a battle between appealing to an audience and honoring artistic authenticity, I inquired about the judicial process of selecting the song to be performed, pondering whether the two tasks could be reconciled or if one must be compromised. Though they admitted to there being a pressure to answer yes to the litmus of "Does [the song] get the kids tapping their

toes?"; there does not need to be a disparity between appeal and authenticity. MacKenzie addressed other points of evaluation, such as "Can [we] fit danceability and something more classically aesthetic into one song?... a danceable beat is probably necessary but not sufficient to make an impression."

Haley, having played keys in a different band in the Battle for Yardfest last year, noted a change in structure for the auditions. He remarked, "When they said that they were going to have ten bands, I was, like... who's going to apply?" Roberts interjected, "Are there even five bands at Harvard?"; galvanizing laughter amongst his bandmates — albeit laughter somewhat solemn, in submission to the truth of the scarce "band scene" at Harvard College, as Haley disclosed.

It seems plausible that the offer of ten audition spots this year — instead of the traditional five — may be a move to remedy the challenge of convincing Harvard students to engage in creative expression not so institutionalized or structured — a revitalization of musical recreation.

They will be performing Friday, February 23rd at 8pm in the Queen's Head Pub, whereat the audience may be fortuitous enough to experience their cover of "I'm Waiting For The Day" by the Beach Boys — a song off Pet Sounds, the album inspiring it all — which has a tempo that admittedly ceases the toe-tapping but also a musical moment that ceases any qualms about performing it: sung seamlessly by Haley is a high note no one sees coming.

Marissa Garcia '21 (marissagarcia@college.harvard.edu) very well might be talking to a pony on the next episode of Tell Me More, in her first season as Podcast Editor.

# INDY FORUM

## Carmen Americanum Invocation

Francesca Cornero '19

By C.

Love—play the tune of that summer  
And the tune of many summers before  
Tune of cool English summer turning into fall  
Ominous tune of metaphorical Italy—

Is that where my love began? Is that where  
I made it? For this love, my love, it did not  
Pierce me like the angel's arrow maiming  
The soft skin of St. Theresa's bosom

No—I was the angel, I held the arrow,  
I turned its poisoned tip against my own  
Pubescent chest, I thrust it in to the hilt—  
I bled in the incarnadine Roman sunset.

That same July I bled to death I gave birth  
A tropical, wintry birth of melancholy  
A genesis of pregnant wish unattended  
Of desire bursting out of my fingers

And into the page. And so that god was born  
Out of the sea foam of the stormy Pacific  
Crashing against Californian cliffs  
And the orange of western sunsets.

And powerless face such beauty and rage  
I wrote on, I sang the Theogony of love  
A mythology of American proportions  
Of red hair, white skin, blue eye



A colossus, a giant, a hero, a god—  
A fiction that filled my bleeding heart,  
A song whose melody matched the tune  
Of that summer and many more

For how could I have known that I was to be  
My own Pythia? Human that I am, how  
Was I to guess that I was writing my story,  
My myth, my fate, my future?

That summer I sang the story of another  
Summer that turned into fall  
Summer when reality turned into dream  
Into story, song, epic, myth.

I play the tune of that summer now,  
I who was given the gift (or is it a curse?)  
Of sight, I who became tropical muse—  
I who fell for the American god.

The Indy Forum Board proudly presents this poem as the first in an original series titled, Carmen Americanum. Please contact [forum@harvardindependent.com](mailto:forum@harvardindependent.com) with any comments or questions!

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# INDY NEWS

## Union & Students Stand With Mayli Shang

Workers and students protest after UHS employee complains of harassment and is terminated

By SEGAN HELLE

Students and union members protested in front of the Smith Campus Center on February 15 in response to the termination of former University Health Services (UHS) employee Mayli Shang. Shang has brought allegations of discrimination and unjust termination against the University, believing that she was taken off of payroll in retaliation for complaints she filed against her former supervisor. Protestors are urging Harvard administration to rehire Shang immediately.

"The picket we did yesterday was one of the biggest ones we've ever been able to do for just one person. The fact that we were able to put it together less than two weeks tells me that with more planning and building our alliances, the next one is going to be bigger," Geoffrey Carens, Shang's representative from the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW), said.

Shang, a first generation immigrant and mother of two, received a termination letter on February 6 after over ten years of working at Harvard. The letter references the fact that Shang, who took public transportation to work each day, often arrived before her scheduled hours. The letter states that following "numerous warnings," Shang was terminated after "sitting at [her] desk at 8:30 a.m., well before [her] scheduled 9 a.m. starting time," labeling her actions as "insubordinate conduct."

"I've never seen anything like that. I've been a rep for almost 30 years now, and I've never seen such a fragile basis for discipline," Carens said.

Leading up to Shang's termination was a series of events that Carens describes as creating "a really difficult situation for

her," including shortening Shang's work hours from 35 to 17.5 after she returned from disability leave and enforcing strict regulations regarding times that Shang had to complete certain tasks by. As a result, Shang, who worked to resolve issues regarding employee paychecks, had trouble finishing her work in the allotted time frame. Carens asserts that she was being treated disparate to her coworkers.

"They weren't making any allowances for what her job is really like," Carens said. "It seemed like they were trying to coerce her into either leaving or put her into this tight little box, so, like she said, it felt like she was being set up to fail."

Shang reportedly filed complaints against her supervisor regarding accusations of sexual harassment, racial comments, and the working conditions she was put under. Carens alleges that management responded by putting a letter in her file that threatened her with termination.

"They put a letter in her file basically saying, 'if you ever do that again, we will terminate you,' and that really cuts across the workers right to complain about their working conditions," Carens said. "There's been so many mistakes that they made in the way that they handled this."

Protests last Thursday were headed by members of the HUCTW as a part of the the Harvard No Layoffs Campaign, alongside students from the Student Labor Action Movement (SLAM). The two groups were joined by members of other university unions like the Harvard University Dining Services Union. Shang has also received official support from the Boston School Bus Drivers' Union.

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"Time is up on remaining silent when we are harassed or see others harassed. Let's support our sister, Mayli. Let's lift ourselves up by lifting other up," Desiree Goodwin of HUCTW said while leading a chant at the picket.

According to Carens, Shang is in the process of finding a new job. The two are currently working towards filing a complaint at the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination. A lawsuit against the University is also pending.

When asked to comment on Shang's case, Harvard representative Tania deLuzuriaga wrote, "As a matter of policy, we do not comment on individual personnel matters, but all complaints of discrimination and sexual harassment are investigated thoroughly and fairly. Harvard is committed to maintaining a safe, comfortable, and diverse working environment for all of its employees. We value the contributions of our employees, and have enjoyed a long and productive relationship with our campus unions."

Carens is hopeful that public pressure will help resolve the matter more quickly.

"I think it's going to take a combination of public pressure, legal pressures, and media, to get a good result, unless Harvard gets smarter and realizes that this has legs and people are upset."

Segan Helle '20 (shelle@college.harvard.edu) and the rest of staff will provide updates on Mayli's story as events unfold.

# INDY ARTS

# Untitled

## A Short Story

By COURTNEY DELONG

Nora figured that if she could inspire a single kid to try in school then she'd have done her job for the day. Even the small goal felt impossible.

They squinted at her angrily. Young beady eyes, full of something that might have resembled resentment, followed her as she walked from the back of the library. She swore one of the high-school-aged counselor's glance grazed her ass. Seriously. These are a size 8. You can't even see anything.

The same stale bleach and tuna salad scent was still entrenched in the library. The fabric in the carpet, chairs, and curtains retained smells.

Last week Nora had begged the janitors to better clean the place. "In order to help these kids, succeed academically we need them to be passionate about their future and their educations. If we want them to love school in September, we need them to love learning. Let's make them love it right now at this camp and in this space. It can't be grimy in here. They need to want to be here. I can't teach them when they don't want to be here. It isn't fair to them if this place isn't perfect. I'll wash the cushions myself if you tell me to. But it needs to be clean and nice."

The janitors had looked at her and nodded along. They had said they'd try harder, but it was clear now that they hadn't.

She got to the front of the room and waved at the kids. Violette, a nine-year old with big eyes and big hair, waved back at her. Nora gave her a special smile, she believed in Violette. Perky happy education lady. Perky happy education lady. School is good. School is great. You want to be here. They want to be here. Make them want to be here. It does not smell bad. Smile. Smile. Smile. Smile. Fucking Smile. Nora. Smile.

She started reading the story of the day, some Cinderella parody. She had spent hours the day before rifling through donation boxes. Maybe if the kids liked the story, they'd want to learn to read. She couldn't take another complaint during the phonics lesson.

Three pages in one of the boys yanked Violette's hair. Nora jerked her head towards the counselors, signaling the incident. They didn't notice. She jerked her head again. Aggressively. Finally, one of her acne marked, bored teen counterparts (she thought his name was Joey or maybe Joel) ran over. Maybe we should stop giving hiring preference to locals and just recruit kids from Canterbury. She knew the prep school kids would give anything for a college recommendation.

Nora threw her annoyance into the reading. "The Prince was stunned!" She clasped her face and dropped her jaw. Big emotions, keep them engaged. "Who could this beautiful lady be?" Make them listen. Make them listen. Two boys started grabbing at the metal book shelves behind them.

Joey snatched the books and slammed them back on the shelf before any other children could see. Finally, a counselor fixing a disruption. As Joey desperately tried to reorganize, Nora, still holding up the Cinderella-derivative, scanned the room.

Laminated light yellow "Biographies!" sign, squirming kid, sitting kid, doorway. Some empty space. Pale blue "Science!" sign Violette, kid trying to grab a book back from Joey, and boobs; A woman's bare chest stared at her from the cover of the books in Joey's hand. Right above him was a, "Mature Fiction" sign. He had placed the kids in the Erotica section.

He looked at her apologetically as he continued to wrestle soft-core porn from the disruptive 7 and eight-year olds. Nora glared back.

By the time the story finished, Joey had taken the contraband-obsessed boys to get water and keep the other kids from noticing their adult surroundings. Nora suggested a snack break and shuttled the kids to another room. She dragged the heavy erotic shelf into a closet before their return.

Her job felt impossible. She just wanted the kids to be excited about reading. As long as they had passion they could pull themselves up by their bootstraps, read and educate themselves, and go to college. It would have been simple if it wasn't so impossible. The kids wouldn't sit still. They were poorly behaved. The teen staff was unenthusiastic and incompetent. She'd hired them to satisfy a, "community engagement" requirement on a grant. The library janitors couldn't clean properly. She'd had to buy Target button downs to wear to work because she didn't want to embed the lingering bleach-tuna in her J. Crew cardigans.

She'd spent much of the summer wondering if she should just suck it up and clean the room herself. It might be worth staying the extra hour, even if she'd have to bring the cushions home to launder them. The day of the porn incident she entertained the idea for fifteen minutes before remembering her phone interview.

She'd spent months petitioning the Yale Alumni Gazette for a feature about her camp. An inspiring story about an ambitious comp-lit major who started a charity to help inner-city youth find academic passion would likely solicit donations. Maybe she could use the money to hire the Canterbury kids or persuade the library to increase salary and get new janitors.

Courtney Delong '21 (cdelong@college.harvard.edu) is a fan of good early education.

## Quiet Girl



Isabelle Blair '21

### A Poem

By REMEDY RYANS

---

The girls are teasing you  
about a boy they saw  
you dancing with once upon a time you might have laughed,  
but right now you don't want to think  
about some boy  
trying to stick himself inside your head  
If he did what would he see?  
Everything you think you are  
or everything you could be?  
Would he hear anything over the music?  
most days you play so hard you drown  
it all out side it's Quiet  
Girl who never speaks the way she used to  
think she was the smartest one in the room,  
butted into conversations because everything was about Her  
body is all he cares about anyway.  
Maybe that's what scares you the most,  
not that you'll speak too loudly,  
but that no one wants to hear anything but the music,  
you dancing to it,  
except it's never really been about the boy  
It's always been the girl staring back at you in the mirror  
selfie always editing.

Remedy Ryan '21 (remedyryan@college.harvard.edu)  
wants to know if you can hear over the music...

# INDY ARTS

## "The Shape of Water" & the Reality-Warping Magic of Love

A late take on Guillermo del Toro's "The Shape of Water" in a pre-Oscars review series.

Francesca Cornero '19

By CLAIRE PARK

In "The Shape of Water," we are plunged into the green netherworld of early 1960's Baltimore. Elisa Esposito (Sally Hawkins) is a cleaning woman at a government research facility. She falls in love with the newly imported "Asset," a hulking blue-green amphibious creature (Doug Jones) plucked from South American waters, whose superhuman physicality might aid the United States in the space race against the Soviets and who the grittily vicious project supervisor Richard Strickland (Michael Shannon) tortures senselessly with a cattle prod. Elisa is mute, a "princess without a voice," and gestures her valiant defiance with sign language, taunting Strickland at one point with "F-U-C-K-Y-O-U" and a gleam in her eyes. While Shannon's villain is impeccably wicked, Hawkins effervesces in silence, with her tremulous smile, with those disarmingly kind eyes, with sensuality that glimmers beneath her unassuming surface, just as she conjures the creature's reciprocating blue sparks with her touch.

Elisa, during secret visits, woos the creature with music and her shy dancing, and teaches him sign language. "You...and me," he later knows to express. Enlisting the help of her best friend Giles in masterminding the creature's escape, she signs furiously, "When he looks at me, he does not know what I lack or how I am incomplete." We are privy to charades of monstrous masculinity, manifestations of incompleteness that have nothing to do with being incapable of speech. All Zelda's (Octavia Spencer) passive husband had back in the day was an "animal magnetism" and she, Elisa's strong-willed, biting witty and warm-hearted co-worker, is now mired in a unfeeling marriage. It's a film about bodies

being treated like animals, like specimens, as Elisa's muteness becomes tantalizing to the rapacious Strickland. Dr. Robert Hoffstetler (Michael Stuhlbarg), a Soviet spy and scientist at the facility who eventually aids the creature's escape, protests his euthanization in the name of science, calling him an "intricate, beautiful thing." But anyone can experience the loneliness of living like a thing. Giles, gay in an era of vicious bigotry, commiserates with the creature: "I was either born too early or too late for my life...maybe we're both just relics."

The film is a viscerally material experience in the formless made terrifying, from the green gelatin parfait that Strickland's wife perkily presents to him to the green goo of key lime pie, which Giles purchases in order to schmooze with his crush at the local diner. Guillermo del Toro makes this world look like a place beneath some surface, imbued with a green hue that evokes both decay and the fertile promise of the future. "That's the future now—green," proclaims Giles's boss. Strickland's slick green Cadillac epitomizes the era's crude impulse toward progress, but there is also something primeval about this world that makes it truly fairytale-esque, that pulls us into a magical time of creation. Elisa feeds the creature boiled eggs, which are strangely alienating in their roundness and simplicity in spaces filled with shadows and slime and brine. And after they make love for the first time, she dreamily runs her finger along the window on the way to work and watches water droplets do a primordial dance.



del Toro's aesthetic is a fantastical amalgamation of styles and realities: Elisa expresses her love in an enchanting black and white musical number, an abandoned lot in the midst of sand dunes, used as a meeting place for the Russian spies, affects Dali's "The Persistence of Memory," and the shots in which the camera pans up to Strickland's shadow-riddled face borrow from film noir. The story's authority figures are predictably villainous and could be glaringly reductive if the other characters weren't so uniquely lonely, and if their world wasn't so delightfully weird. The film's plot unfolds predictably, but treasure is to be found in the details of every scene. And if you indulge the allegorical mythmaking, you'll gladly submerge yourself in the aquatic performance of a happily-ever-after ending as well.

Claire Park '20 (claire\_park@college.harvard.edu) ranks this breathtaking film as her second favorite among the Best Picture nominees so far, behind "Call Me by Your Name," of course.

## work of the week



### "November 8th, 2016" by Sophie Benson '19

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For more information on the Indy's Work of the Week, contact our Arts Board at [arts@harvardindependent.com](mailto:arts@harvardindependent.com).

We stand here more than a year removed from the election of our 45th president and yet I still struggle to express the progression of emotions I felt that day in a coherent and linear manner. In my piece, titled "November 8th, 2016", I turned to faces from across America, as captured through the lens of a news camera, to convey those reactions I most related to and immortalize them for future reference. For all the party rhetoric and hyperbole pumped out through the mass media day in and day out, these simple and honest facial contortions from average citizens best encapsulates what I have failed to communicate for a year.

The portraits were painted in black and white to narrow their focus down to the tension and etched lines of inherently human facial expressions.

### about the artist

Sophie Benson is a junior in Quincy house. She studies human evolutionary biology with a secondary in astrophysics. She loves creating things and going skiing.

# captured and shot



FEBRUARY IN GLOUCESTER, MA

By FRANCESCA CORNERO