

CULTURE

Designing for the future

Yale's Computing and the Arts major

// BY LEONARDO CHUNG

At 12:52 a.m. on the fourth floor of Stoeckel Hall, Mandy Chen '28 is hunched over a sound board, trying to elicit a feeling.

She's not working on a melody, exactly, but more of the aftertaste of a scene. She'd never used the Ableton or Max music composition softwares before this class, but there she was anyway, "trying to communicate emotion using audio alone." It's a very Computing and the Arts sentence — allergic to staying in one lane.

Computing and the Arts is the Yale major that makes people squint at you like you just said you're majoring in "Left and Right Brain." It's a joint major that combines computer science with an arts track: architecture, fine arts, history of art, music or theater. This range of arts tracks is what makes the major so applicable and diverse.

"Because the arts side spans five tracks, people approach the major differently," Chen said. Some students tinker in creative coding, while others use computing to strengthen or augment their work in design, research, performance or visual systems. Either way, people that major in Computing and the Arts are able to connect fields that — at first glance — don't have a shared language.

If you're trying to picture the average Computing and the Arts major, imagine someone who can lecture you on C++ and has strong opinions about jazz. Or perhaps someone who keeps their sketchbook next to their laptop.

Miffy Wang '28, another student in the major, describes it more simply, as "basically half arts ... and half computer science. In my opinion, it's the perfect intersection of both." For her, it was less a "strange major" and more a name for something she had already been doing. She came into Yale loving digital design, but without any formal training. "CPAR felt like the natural and perfect choice for me," she said, "as someone who wants to be between Science Hill and Green Hall."

This area of "between" well characterizes the activities of those majoring in Computing and the Arts. The major isn't a fully blended smoothie where everything tastes the same. Instead, Wang says, even the day-to-day experience of the major can be wildly diverse: standard computer science courses on one hand, and painting and photography classes on the other. Meanwhile, the magic of CPAR shows up in the courses that reject the split — like "Introduction to Human-Computer Interaction" and "Interactive Design and the Internet: Software for People." In these classrooms, the assignment is more than just making something work — it's making it work for someone in particular.

That philosophy is essentially the mission statement of Design for America at Yale, a student-led design studio and community that Wang and Chen re-founded and now co-head. Computing and the Arts majors, Wang said, show up to the group in disproportionate numbers — which makes sense, because Design for America is where Computing and the Arts can shine.

"It's not just making posters, and it's not just doing research," Wang said. "You get to think creatively, use human-centered design and then actually make something: to engineer it, code it, build it from scratch."

Design for America's projects sound like wild concepts until you realize they are all around you. The group has collaborated with Schwarzman Engineering to design and build an art postcard vending machine "from concept to physical product," Wang said. It is an object that is simultaneously a sculpture, a system and a user experience. The club has also expanded to professional work: Felix Lee '28 launched Design for America Pro for students to actively work with companies to ideate and test product solutions, including work on LinkedIn's student portal, according to Wang.

Part of what Design for America is doing, Wang and Chen emphasized, is building out the missing middle part of the Computing and the Arts major: the practical craft skills that create the intersection. Wang noted that tools and workflows like Figma, Adobe and product design aren't always formally taught, but these educational deserts gatekeep a whole world of creative technological work. Computing and the Arts majors are those who want the studio culture and the technical confidence — and Design for America is trying to be the place where these people can thrive.

Chen describes the "art" side of her work as "Illustrator, sketching, the storytelling portion ... composition, tone, clarity and making something feel intentional." The "computing" part, on the other hand, is clear in her implementations of her designs. Chen codes websites, prototypes interactive experiences and even builds small creative tech projects out of curiosity, like a Pokémon GO-like game in JavaScript that maps art opportunities on Yale's campus.

Zoom out, and Computing and the Arts is less of a quirky major and more of a backbone of many of our everyday convenient technologies. Art lives inside technology, and technology shapes what art can be. Your camera roll is curated. Your playlists are designed. Your favorite museum probably has some sort of interface. Instead of questioning whether technology and art can integrate, we must ask how those building technological tools can begin to think like artists.

Or, as Chen put it, Computing and the Arts trains "visionaries and executioners." Slightly intense phrasing? Sure. But if you're ever had a beautiful idea and then watched it die because you couldn't build it, you understand what she means. So maybe the weird part isn't the major. It's pretending everything else isn't Computing and the Arts.

Contact **LEONARDO CHUNG** *at leonardo.chung@yale.edu.*

CULTURE

The 'I'm busy' Olympics

When it comes to being busy, why do Yalies keep score?

// BY LEONARDO CHUNG

At Yale, busyness is a competitive sport. No officials watch and no prizes are given out — but everyone is racing anyway. Before you see it, you hear whispers of it in the rooms of Bass and Sterling: "I didn't sleep at all last night." "I'm so behind on my work." "I literally have no time!"

The sentences come out as grumbles, yet there is a twinge of pride, too. No one spells it out, yet everyone understands the rules: The more blocks on your Google Calendar, the higher you rank. The colored rectangles just highlight how much you pack into each day. Classes are blue, meetings are green, labs are red, peer tutoring is yellow, meals are orange. Some snap screenshots of their weekly layout like Olympic runners sharing victory photos on Instagram.

Unlike Alysa Liu's time on the ice, however, Yale's "I'm busy" Olympics runs year-round.

The Scheduling Event is first. Midway through organizing dinner with four others, you notice the only shared free time lands twelve days away, squeezed between a lab and a review at 4:30. The Endurance Round comes next — how many extracurriculars fit into your week before you visibly collapse? There's even a linguistic category. Phrases like "this week is crazy" might gain you a few extra points.

At Yale, rushing around has become a kind of proof of your competitiveness. Being stretched thin means people count on you. Free time by midday seems wrong somehow — did you skip out on someone who reached out? Each quiet moment begs the question: When things are going smoothly, am I even trying hard enough?

Many of us genuinely are overwhelmed. Tough coursework piles up. Opportunities are endless. The fear of falling behind is very, very real. But somewhere along the way, our exhaustion becomes a credential we can exchange. Late hours get tossed around like war tales from past decades. Then again, sometimes even loud arenas fall still.

A clock reads 11:43 p.m. in Sterling. The loud study groups have left. A page flips quietly. Zippers close on bags nearby. The fluorescent lights buzz softly overhead. For a brief stretch of time, no one is narrating their workload. No one is announcing how much — or more likely, how little — they've slept. Instead, everyone is leaning over notebooks, staring at glowing displays, or just sitting quietly and taking a breath. Pressure lingers, yes, though it no longer needs an audience. The competition begins to dissolve, and what remains is ... a room full of students just trying to get through.

Contemplation strikes when you least expect it. Maybe it's during that stretch of pavement leading toward your dorm once things wind down — could've been a meeting, maybe a study note swap, perhaps just a chat stretching longer than planned. You're walking through Cross Campus, and it's cold enough that your face stings a little. The bricks are shiny, and lights in the dorm windows look warm and distant. For five minutes, you're not talking about your workload with anyone. You're just walking.

Midway through the week, gaps appear as half-hour slots left blank by accident. Instead of rushing to patch it with tasks — maybe you can squeeze in that English reading! — to feel like the day is "used," you pause. Whether you're sitting in the dining hall and eating without scrolling or staring at nothing for a while, you let yourself be unimpressive. These are the moments of quiet — not a glamorous self-care montage or "romanticized rest." This stillness resists the pressure that your life has to look maximized from the outside.

I don't think the answer is to stop being ambitious. Most Yalies didn't come here to coast. Yet it gives me pause when tiredness becomes something we wear proudly. Running nonstop is contagious, whether we want it to be or not. Maybe "I'm busy" could stay a fact, without that extra implication stuck to it. Chasing races without purpose wears anyone down. Only then do we wonder why energy fades so fast.

Perhaps nothing screams Yale quite like snagging Olympic gold. But the most human thing you can do, every once in a while, is stop keeping score.

Contact **LEONARDO CHUNG** *at leonardo.chung@yale.edu.*

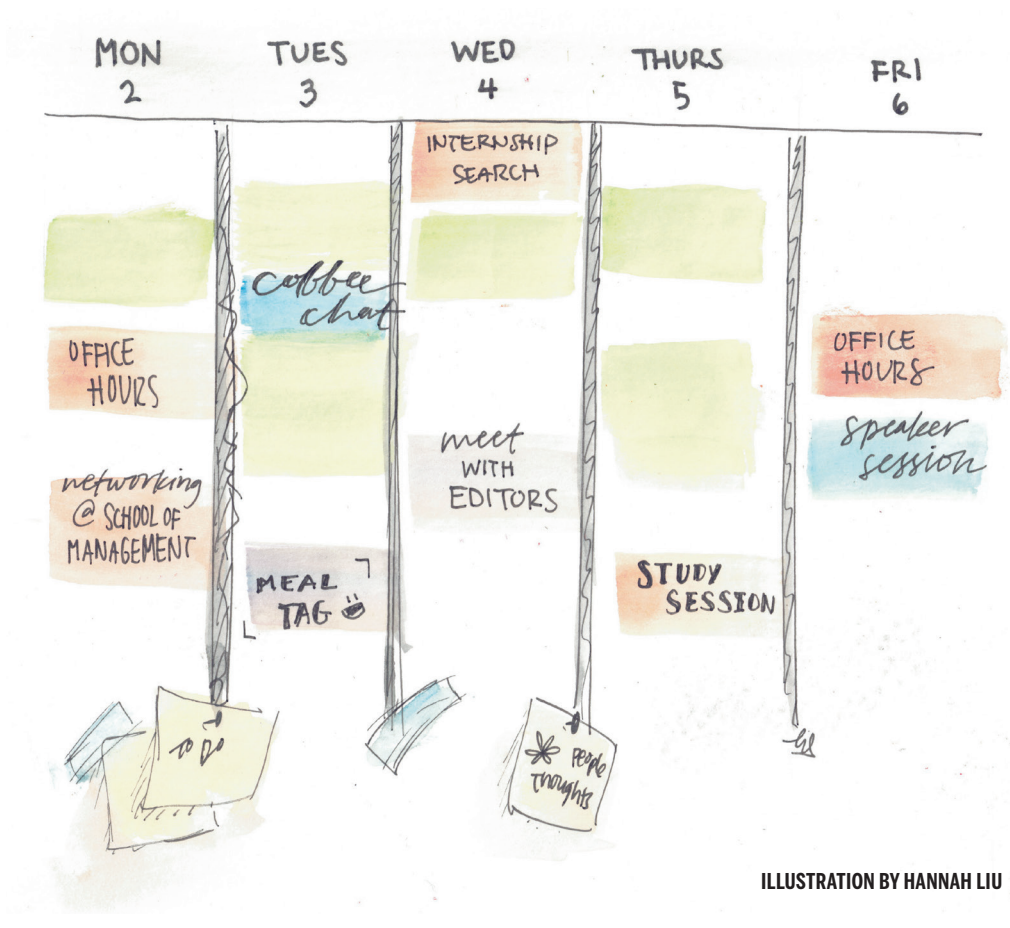

ILLUSTRATION BY HANNAH LIU

WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

LUSH LIFE