

CRINGE

A brief look into Cringe Magazine

Annika Loebig

Editor-In-Chief

Why did we found Cringe?

01

We started Cringe out of love for the personal essay and a desire to confront uncomfortable experiences.

02

We felt the genre had potential to provide more room dedicated to interrogating cringe and how both individuals, groups and society trigger cringe as a response.

03

We wanted to open a space that allows us to confront our self-consciousness, while intellectually engaging with our own shortcomings without judgement or shame.

What is our mission?

Cringe believes in radical compassion.

Our mission is to replace the often punitive mechanisms of shame with humility, emotional interrogation and curious honesty.

We want to provide a platform to discuss uncomfortable experiences often involving shame, guilt, awkwardness, alienation and self-consciousness and take ownership of it all through the written word and art.

Crucially, Cringe is also interested in how larger systems put in place trigger those feelings for groups and individuals.

Examples of topics we have explored so far include:

- The role of shame during the AIDS crisis
- Green guilt & eco-shaming
- The science behind second-hand embarrassment
- Parasocial relationships
- Queer shame
- Queer horror as literary genre and tool for liberation
- Growing out of the New Atheism movement

Issue #2

Perception

CRINGE







**Water,
surveillance,
and the
human body**

**In conversation
with LA
based artist
Rollin Leonard**

On the surface, it sounds like a harmless – if slightly hokey – team-building exercise, until he adds, “this was to reduce the chatter in our heads. When we joined that classroom, it meant leaving everything behind.” He describes an episode of this exercise during which his partner, unable to take the silence any longer, broke down and started talking about his past. A shadow of guilt passes over Sawyer’s face as he says, “and I did it also.” The ringleaders of Heaven’s Gate are long dead, and it is terrible to see how even the idea of their disapproval upsets him still.

Sawyer is quick to note that there were never any punishments for these transgressions, but he does add that eventually ‘discipline was relaxed,’ which rather raises more questions than it answers. The worst is still to come, however. Sawyer says that after completing the exercises, “we didn’t want to chit-chat about something that was meaningless.” Meaning anything not related to the group’s stated aim of achieving The Evolutionary Level Above Human. Meaning anything concerning love, family, passions, beliefs, or anything else that might constitute a personality. I want to reach through the screen and across the time zones and embrace him. I think of what he said about members being able to leave whenever they liked, and it occurs to me that guards and locks are not required in prisons where the inmates have been taught to love their cells.

As our conversation goes on, I notice that Cathy and Sawyer’s talk is peppered with euphemisms. They never refer to Heaven’s Gate as a cult or sect, for example, only ever as ‘The Class,’ and, correspondingly, to the ‘classroom experience.’ It gave me a jolt to realise that when Sawyer talks about his classmates ‘exiting their vehicles,’ he does not refer to them stepping out of their cars, but rather to the mass suicides that made the group infamous. We’re used to using euphemistic language to discuss death, but something about this phrase feels very different to the usual ‘passing on’ or ‘passing away.’ The lexicographer Eric Partridge asserts that while euphemistic language can be used as a cover for uncomfortable subjects, it has its religious dimensions too. ‘The word is God,’ he writes, ‘the name evokes the thing.’ With this in mind, it’s possible to see Cathy and Sawyer’s verbal contortions not as an attempt

to protect themselves (or me) from the horror of confronting the mass suicides, but rather as verbal markers of respect for the dead. Partridge traces the religious function of euphemism to the superstition that one must always be careful when speaking of the dead and argues that euphemism also has a role to play in the vocabulary of intimacy. Both functions seem to be relevant here, as Cathy and Sawyer’s linguistic tics both confer a sense of purpose on the suicides and also seem to give the victims some kind of posthumous agency. Exiting a vehicle, after all, is not something one does accidentally.

I should make clear at this point that both Cathy and Sawyer are passionately anti-suicide, though this is not without its own contradictions. They begin their vlogs and livestreams with a message encouraging their viewers to seek help if they are struggling, and the description section of their videos contains mental health crisis helplines. Sawyer describes a recent meeting with two people who were fully onboard with the Heaven’s Gate programme, except for the suicide parts. “It’s challenging to me to answer that,” Sawyer says, “it’s a hard thing to wrap your head around, like, why was it ok for [the class] but not for everybody else?” The shadow flickers across his face again, and I wonder if he has been able to answer that question even to his own satisfaction – why was it ok for the class, but not for me? It’s important to note that Cathy and Sawyer’s opposition to suicide is always couched in strictly Pro-Heaven’s Gate language.

So, for example, they say that we need our vehicles to learn our lessons, and that ‘we’re all in different grades in school.’ It’s easy to ridicule this as disingenuous hair-splitting, but it’s worth remembering that that cognitive dissonance is a powerful motivator. Sawyer is initially adamant that he’s never had any doubts about Heaven’s Gate, before immediately contradicting himself and saying, “it wasn’t like I never had doubts, it’s choosing to work through them that’s the challenge.” I sense that on this most uncomfortable of points, when faced with the undeniable horror of 39 dead, Sawyer can only redouble his efforts at absolute faith. “We’re not just these bags of bones, we need these bags of bones,” he says, and this time the euphemisms do seem to serve a soothing and protective purpose.



I've danced

with the idea of death.

It comes to mind so naturally, like an old friend coming to visit. We have flirtatious and easy conversations. He tempts me with the promise of eternal rest and peace of mind. I've imagined endless lovesick scenarios of how it would happen. I've had visions of water filling my lungs while I peacefully sink in slow motion to my soul's final resting stop. Where the vast waters of the earth and I become one. Where my flesh gently peels from my bones, an empty house that often felt more like the prison of my soul. My body finally fulfilling a more useful purpose, providing nutrients for new life. Hopefully a thousand more lives more just to redeem the waste of mine.

I have often wondered how my soul could float away, up into space, finally free of this hell on earth. Free of the lifetimes my soul has endured in just one. Free to exist for the purpose of existing. Free to have the option to not exist at all. Free to remain timeless and pure, and free to transform into infinities across the universe. Free to be a black hole, a destroyer of light, free to be creation, the creation of light and life.

I've asked to be taken most days of my life; no death doesn't scare me much. What frightens me is more suffering, and with my suffering causing the suffering of others. What scares me is the wasted potential, the dreams that I had that never came to fruition. The time lost as I, held back by fear and self-doubt, contemplated which ripe and juicy fig I would pick. The rotten and decaying flesh of the figs surrounding and engulfing me, not one alive with the promise of no regrets. The figs fill my nightmares and daydreams. What scares me even now is that I haven't even gone to grasp any of them.

I would endure all that though, in order for my greatest fear to not come true. I am not scared of death, but my worst fear that sneaks in mind at night like an earwig and keeps me up all night is leaving my loved ones behind.

Mostly just one loved one. My most cherished and precious love. The one who knows all my hopes, dreams, fears and flaws, and kisses every last one. He taught me to love myself, and made

me end my toxic affair with death. Instead, he showed me true unconditional love and what it means to be the best of humanity. He challenges me in every way and argues about everything. He is stubborn yet selfless. He has dark yet kind eyes; eyes I can stare at and get lost in. Eyes that could swallow me whole and I wouldn't dare object. He is determined, strong, motivated. He is witty and sassy. He makes me laugh and smile until my cheeks hurt. Every single day for seven years. He makes me know myself better because sometimes he knows me best. He is simultaneously filled with a quiet rage and a deep compassion for people.

His superpower is judging someone's character before they've even had a chance to speak. He is all of this but most of all, Rigo my love, is someone who has taught me what it means to want to live. He is the reason I've stayed. He and he alone is the reason I remain, and the cause of death and I's slow departure. He is the reason why I started to believe in myself because Rigo believed in me when I was ripe with self-hate, disgust, shame and loathing. He let me cry and made me remember to smile. With him around I am free to be myself, the best and the worst parts. Rigo's love is all-encompassing and is everything at once.

So, no, I'm not afraid of death. I am afraid of suffering through any moment of time without my other half. I don't want to part with my twin flame too soon. I am angry that I waited for so long for him to come into my life.

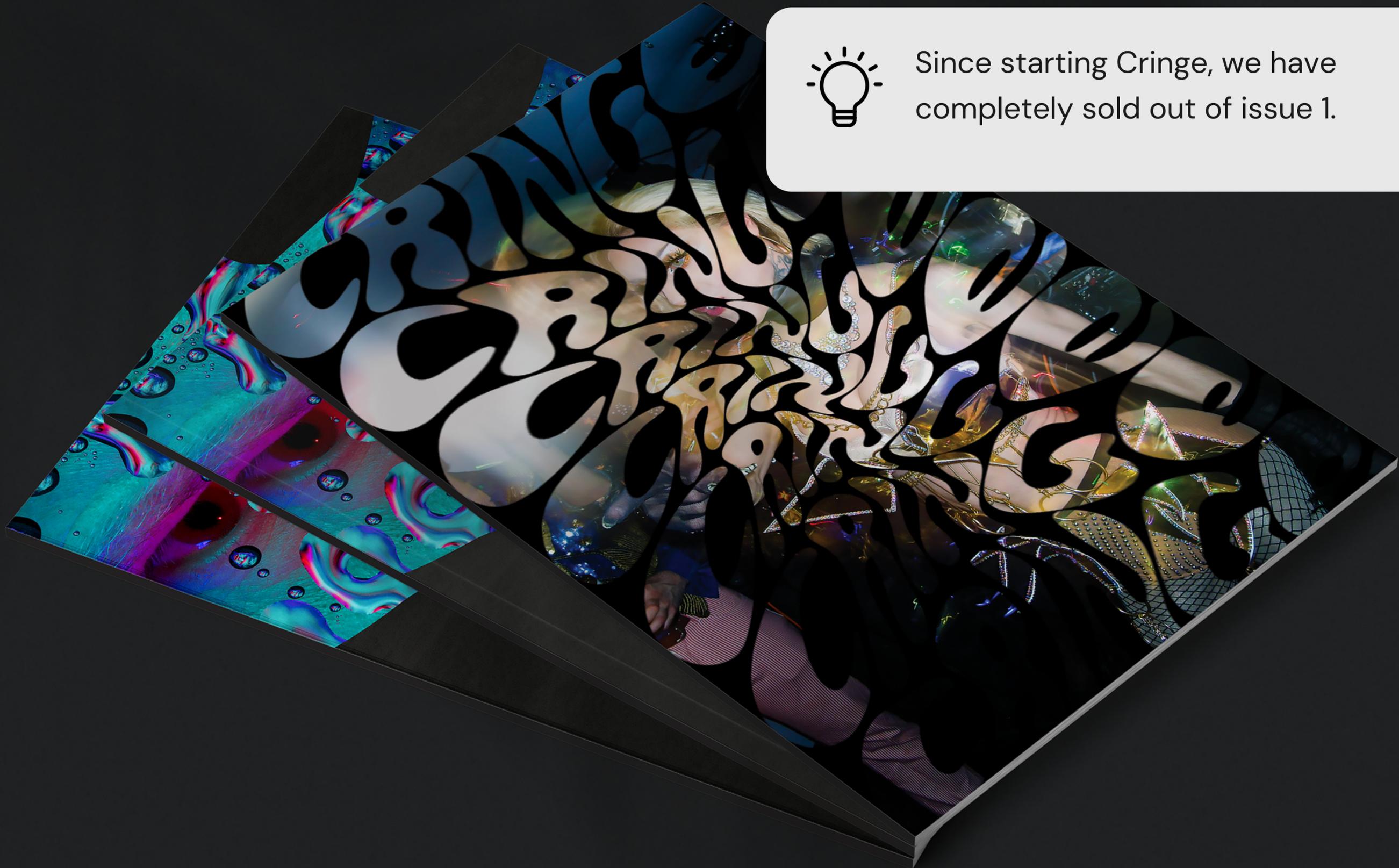
I'm not scared of death because I am too angry at the inevitability of death, rather that he comes under the guise and empty promise of rest and peace, that he is a thief. He steals the most beautiful people and breaks the purest of hearts, tainting their perspective forever. It steals time, precious time that could be used for true love. It creates chasms in people's lives, an eternal separation. When I said I wanted to die, I wanted to end my suffering. I wasn't asking to die slowly, suffering in a new multitude of ways.

I wasn't asking to love and then to lose one day.





Since starting Cringe, we have completely sold out of issue 1.

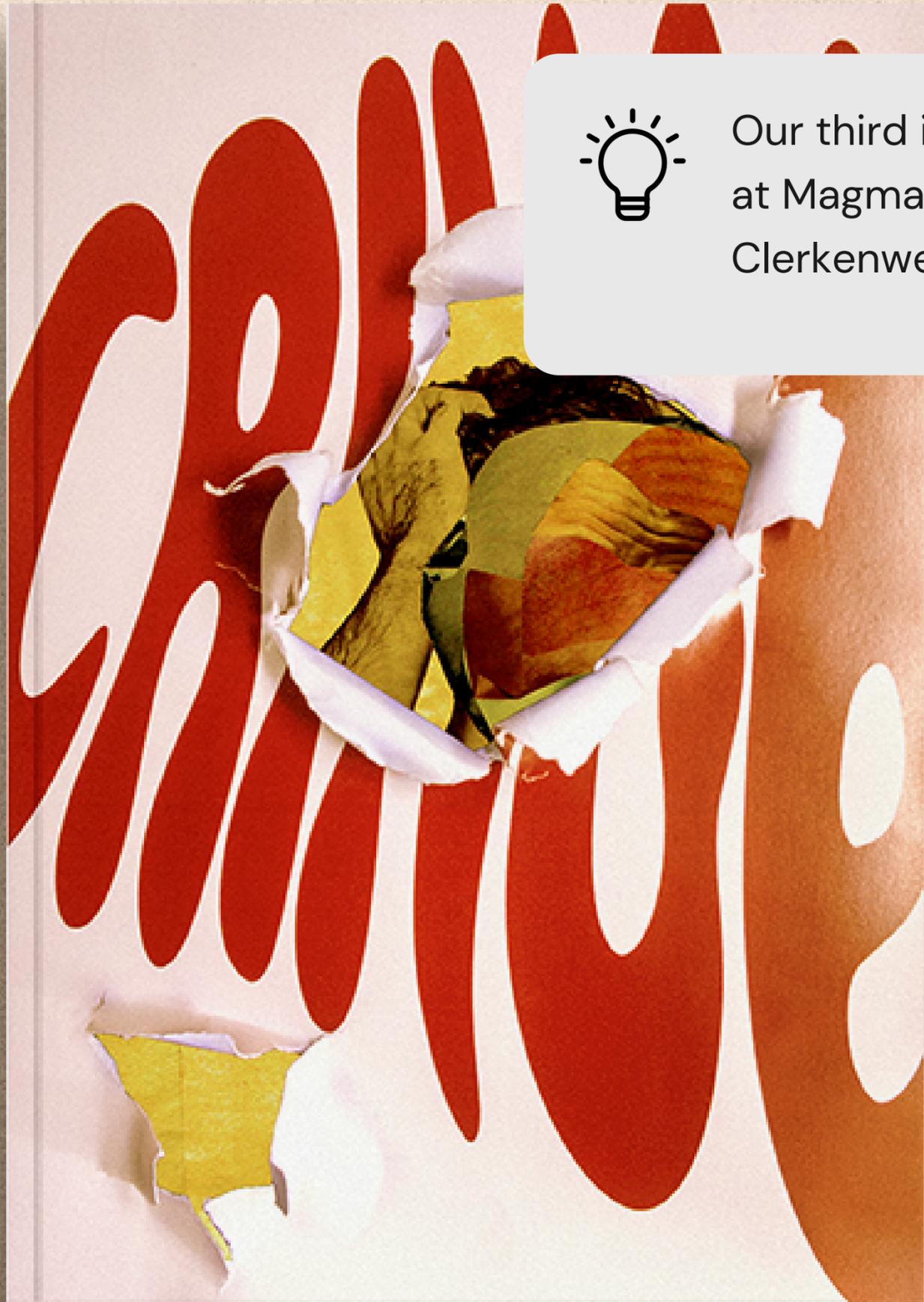


Issue #3

Friction



Our third issue of Cringe is now stocked at Magma in Covent Garden and Clerkenwell.



MOSQUITOES & GLASS



"I ask this one thing: let me go mad in
my own way."

— Elektra by Sophocles

- 17 -

You find this particular
tattoo on my body enticing
and yet have made no
efforts to know about it, or
the story.

I remember the first time
I met you, in Texas; at
your ranch, wearing a suit
in the heat. I remember
a mosquito buzzing, I
remember that it ends up
under your boot.

Next time, I wake up in
Cancun. We're here for
'vacation'.

I am going down on you
when I feel glass cracking
around our waterbed. It's
like the abashed intimacy
that is created when it
is violated by somebody
opening the curtain of the
trial room not knowing
you're inside.

At breakfast, I'm still
wondering about the
identity of the cracked
glass—was it me, or you, or
the bed, maybe both of us?

Your hand doesn't linger
on my thigh, the harsh
sunlight burns my skin.
I drop my coffee cup
by mistake, more glass
shattering. Did you know
that it is considered a sign
of bad luck in India when
glass breaks?

Anyhow, we can discuss
that later, I'm currently
busy dealing with the
innumerable mosquitoes
here... feeling bloody and
choked. Raw, so raw.

You pay me to go to the
flea market. I go to the flea
market. I buy flimsy plants
and expensive trinkets,
things to liven up the
(your) 'lair' in New York.
I let myself lie down on a
riverbed of annihilating
love while I continue to
peruse the streets.

I find a T-shirt that says,
a man is known by the
company he keeps.
Stupidly, I don't buy it
for myself despite its
affordability. Because I'm
not a man, I'm a mistress;
and (un)fortunately, you're
my only company.

It's almost sundown. I
wished you'd want to see
me. Rounding up to the
beach with sweat rolling
down my back, I see the
dinner table, round and
wide: two children and a
couple seated around it. I
watch you drink whiskey,
your wife reapply her
makeup, your son spill his
beans, your daughter fall
asleep.

I see your hand creep up
your wife's skirt. I watch
it move while she finishes
her red wine. As her lips
part, the glass falls and
shatters. It's becoming
a pattern, isn't it, the
quick disintegration?
The explosion breaks
through the gravitation of
my atmosphere and the
sudden wind that blows
makes my hair fly behind
my back.

begin? Why does she like
this man? What's keeping
her in this relationship?
And the answer remains, "I
don't know, I don't know, I
don't know."

**Q&A with
cover artist
Gemica
Beila
Rosenberg**



Somewhere across the pond in New York, Gem is working away on her collages and performances which explore healing, gender, and ecosystems.

With a BFA from California College of the Arts under her belt, she is also a curator and grant recipient of the Culture and Animals Foundation.

We spoke to Gem about what it means to be an ecofeminist, how she relates to cringe, and why she's particularly drawn to collages as a medium to create art.

Cringe: Hi Gem! Thanks so much for letting your art grace the cover of our third issue. First of all, we're interested in learning about your relationship with cringe, both as a personal feeling and in what ways it might appear in your arts practice?

Gem: In my daily life, I mostly cringe at lack of self-awareness or when acts are done without intention or integrity. Although it's not a feeling I explore directly in my work, I do sometimes explore the body or body dysmorphia which can bring up some cringey feelings. Using art to process some of that can be restorative.

C: I noticed that in your work, the body or face of the subjects in your collages are often covered up or distorted: why or does this happen intuitively?

G: Faces can reveal a lot, but can also be superficial, especially with a static image. By distorting the face, I can show what a character may be feeling or experiencing inside their head.

C: What are the main themes you're interested in exploring through your work? And how has this evolved over time?

G: In the early days of making work, I explored the theme of animal rights and human/animal relationships a lot. I usually had an idea or intention with a specific message I wanted to convey from the get go.

Overtime, I decided to just let myself go and make work more intuitively, trusting that it would still be meaningful. Now, I make work that is ecofeminist exploring relationships to nature and spiritual connection. There has always been an ecological ethic to my work though because I've always reused materials.

C: Speaking of ecofeminism - what does this mean to you both as a world citizen and artist?

G: To me, ecofeminism is a form of intersectionality or recognising how different issues connect. There are many valid forms of this. With ecofeminism, there is so much degradation of women and gender nonconforming people in our society and the earth is also being destroyed. I feel that if humans saw themselves as part of nature rather than separate and even part of one another, these pressing issues could be remedied.

C: Why are you drawn to the medium of collaging in the first place? And what other art mediums are you exploring besides collaging?

G: I consider myself an interdisciplinary artist. Sometimes I do mixed media combining collage with drawing or painting. I'm also a poet with a book out through Free Witch Press called Sticks, Stones. There is a lot of overlap between my collage and poetry process. I've also done some performance and modeling/styling for photography.

I make collage specifically because I enjoy the adventure of collecting and searching for materials and the fact that images have history already imbued with meaning. This makes for rich material, conceptually. I also appreciate how collage lends itself towards the surreal with its tendency towards distortion.

C: What is one thing you're embarrassed about that you're either at peace with or are still trying to accept?

G: I've had really bad social anxiety my entire life. Sometimes it makes me act awkwardly and I'm eternally embarrassed about this (laughs).

You can find many of Gem's original artworks, including in print form, for sale on her Instagram @gemica.rosenberg.

She's also currently taking commissions.

Simply DM her on Instagram or buy her poetry book with cover collage by visiting www.freewitch.square.site or check out her website at www.gemrosenberg.com!

**“Punishment,
denouncing,
excluding, threatening,
and shunning
often create a
worse society.
It divides people,
causes great pain,
compromises
individual
integrity, and obscures
truths
in the name of falsely
shoring up
group reputation.**

Conflict Is Not Abuse by Sarah Schulman

**Similarly,
there is no correlation
between having
the ability to punish
and being right.
More often than not,
the wrong people
get punished.
And the punishers
use their power
to keep from
being accountable.”**

6-2, 6-1: An Evening with The Old Tennis Guys



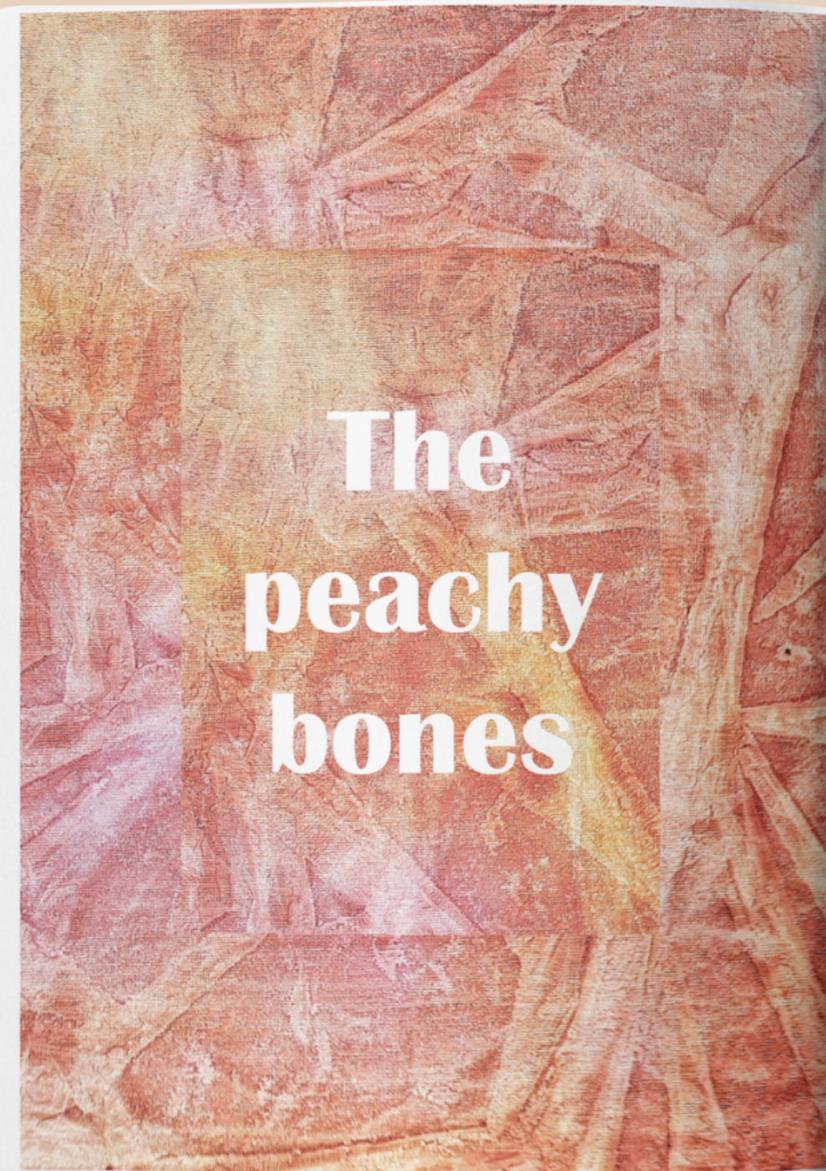
The sun is low and irresistible, and I regret my choice of shirt. Rashly, I have opted for a skin-tight maroon crewneck made of a material that's supposed to wick sweat away from my body and keep me cool and dry during sport. I can feel the heat rising through my trainers as I approach the courts, and the veracity of the shirt's claim is already being severely tested. It is the last day of the tennis season. As my local club's newest and greenest member, I have been invited along to get my first taste of league play, and (I suspect) to make up the numbers. In the air, there's the distinctive thpack of new tennis balls being hit extremely hard, followed a second later by the shudder of a chain link fence. The sun beats down and I think longingly of the white shirts and shorts I left in the wardrobe. I now understand why Wimbledon makes them compulsory.

Andrew, our Club Captain and Committee Chair, looks up from his clipboard and gives me a nod and a smile as I reach the bench that serves as our Team Headquarters / Audience Grandstand. "Great to see you, so glad you could make it," he says, putting a tick next to my initials in the corner of his notes. The phrases you're welcome and thank you collide in my brain, and the words you're you come out of my mouth. Andrew is very kind and pretends not to hear this. "You'll be playing doubles with Harry," he says, and points with the unchewed end of his ballpoint to a young man on the far court who trembles through a thick choke of heat haze.

Harry is lean and rangy with quick feet, and a sandy fringe that he fusses with between points. We knock racquets together in the government-approved COVID-safe fashion, and I wonder how long it has been since I shook anyone's hand. "First time?" he says. "I've not seen you around?" I gabble something about being pretty new to the area, and how it's nice to be invited to play for the team. "Well, it's great to have you," he says with a grin,

and skips off to the baseline, twirling his racquet carelessly in his hand. During our warm-up, it becomes clear that Harry is much the better player. He hits his backhand one-handed, with a delightful flourish that recalls the tah-dah! of a carnival magician. I struggle to stay in the rallies and feel my face burn from within as well as from without. After a short exchange, I miscue a forehand and send the ball sailing up into the air. Harry catches it on the baseline and gestures to his right. "Look out," he says, "it's The Old Tennis Guys."

Ambling towards us are two men who look as though they could give a decent first-hand account of The Norman Conquest. Stan is the taller one, and he lopes onto court with the easy confidence of someone with nothing left to prove. Roland is broad and muscular, with a military-style buzz cut, and a complicated-looking medical device plumbed into his upper arm. The device boops softly and displays incomprehensible data on a small liquid crystal display. We bump elbows and exchange pleasantries about the punishing heat



The peachy bones

TW: domestic abuse

Bodies.

My body.

The idea of talking about my body, the fact that I have a body, makes me sweat.

It stresses me out. I sit down to start writing. I get up again. I walk to the window and have a look at the nightly street. Rain falls quietly and nothing is out there that could be an excuse to not start writing this essay. I sit down again, just to get up, only seconds later, to fix myself a drink. I feel like I want to start a new painting but I planned to write this essay to go along with my latest artwork and the urge to speak about these things is just as strong as the wish to not speak about it.



I love my body. But my body is also my enemy.

For roughly half of my life I have been abused. Sexually, physically, and mentally. For the other half of my life, I have been suffering from severe, complex PTSD.

In the years of abuse, I didn't have a body.

I was living in a body, the way one lives in an empty room, but it didn't belong to me. It belonged to an adult who knew the body I was living in from the day I was born.

I don't know what he thought the day he saw me for the first time, just hours after my birth, presented on a white linen cushion. A cushion he had been laying on himself the day he was born.

I'm sure he didn't think 'I want to hit and squish that face', he didn't think 'I want to rip out a fistful of that hair'. I'm sure he didn't think about beating me, slapping, scratching, biting me. I'm sure he didn't think about putting his hands around my throat and pressing it shut till I would get limp and soft like a doll.

The World Above the Blue

I am yours.
 I am scales of rusted rainbows and iridescent hues.
 I am scar tissue.
 Will you take me or leave me be?

For at any given time, by body will not be mine.
 I have no chance to fight you.
 I surrender to, The World Above the Blue.

Your safety net is of no comfort
 when cold metallic sharps my lip,
 full body pressure pull, migraine through the (w)
 hole,
 a propeller
 pedal thrust
 to the parting surface
 where white shards cut gleams of greenish gold.

I meet callousness, a face flat and dry,
 a colossal form too heavy to swim
 accompanied by a curious boat,
 casting shadow over shallows;
 It's eyes that scrutinize flash like shoreline
 stones.

I writhe.

Compression. Flailing. Withered gasp.
 I am life! Can't you see?
 My roses insides glow through filmy walls.
 I squirm like sea worm,

And then you let me go.





**From arts graduate
to barista to life
drawing model:
Cringe in
c o n v e r s a t i o n
with Allie**

Sometimes-an-artist/sometimes-a-muse life drawing model Allie was a long-time barista, who had just started working in the corporate side of a coffee company, when COVID hit and changed her life forever. After DM'ing @fatlifedrawing and other groups on Instagram when she couldn't sleep at night, delirious on her medication, she eventually found herself setting up a camera and a backdrop for one of many life drawing sessions to come. Fast forward a few lockdowns, and she's now got 25.4 thousand followers on Instagram and countless drawings of herself online.

We had a chat with Allie to talk about her experience as a life drawing model, how this inspires her own creative practice, and what it's like to be nude on the internet.

Cringe: Could you tell us a little bit about yourself in general and as an artist, and how you got into life modelling?

Allie: When I got laid off because of COVID, I had to move in with my mum, and I got into this super deep depression, which, I mean, everyone did. But I have a history of OCD, and the pandemic really, really triggered it. When I eventually got on medication, I was not really sleeping at night, and I was doing this weird thing where I would just DM people on Instagram when I was half asleep, but not really remember the next day. That's how I actually started to reach out to companies on Instagram, and that's when my Instagram started growing.

One of those DMs was @fatlifedrawing on Instagram. I had been following them for as long as they'd been around, and I always wanted to model for them, but for some reason, maybe because I hadn't been sleeping, and had no inhibitions, I just DM'ed them: Do you need a model? Because I went to school for art, so I've always been around models, and I've always wanted to do it. I just never really felt super comfortable doing it. But COVID happened, and I was like, whatever, fuck it, I should just do it. They didn't need models at the time, but I DMed a different group, and I was like: Do you need any models? And they were like, 'Fuck yeah, you can be the model for us'. So I was like, OK, I've never done it before, and they just kind of let me do it. So I don't have any in-person experience. But they let me pose for them and at the end of that class, everyone was like, 'you've never modelled before? But you're so comfortable with it!' So then people kept DMing me because they saw that I had posed for this one class, because the

artists tagged me. So it kind of just happened naturally. I didn't even know you got paid for it at the time, honestly, like, I knew that in-person models got paid. I was just doing it because I had the extra time, and people just kept reaching out. And here we are!

C: I wonder what your perspective is on life modelling now that you've done it a few times? Do you ever get self-conscious about the fact that people are going to be looking at every single inch of your body? Or do you just see yourself as an object to be transferred onto paper?

A: It's funny, because I do think of it differently. All through college, I was taking life drawing classes. When I was around 18, I remember being like, oh my god, this is gonna be so weird. And then it just becomes so normalised that you just forget there's even a nude body in front of you. So I think when I'm modelling, I'm more aware of what I would want to see, so if I was drawing me what I would want to see and what shapes would I want to pay attention to? I don't really feel any kind of self-consciousness. There's this level of comfort when you're posing for artists, because they're just seeing you for what you are. There's no judgement. It's just fat, this is a body. This is what it looks like. And I'm gonna draw it as it is. So I don't really feel very self-conscious at all.

I'm very heavily mocked on social media because I don't meet 'traditional beauty standards'. Usually it's making fun of my unibrow or belly hair. It's interesting though to think about how in the art world those things are seen as unique but in a good and interesting way. I log into TikTok some days and I'll see comments like 'ew you

Platforms

01

Our bi-annual print magazine is our main platform to express and engage with Cringe's mission. Some articles published in sold-out issues can be read on our website.

02

Our Substack newsletter offers a more light-hearted side of Cringe with references to pop culture, weekly 'Would You Rather's, and updates about Cringe.

03

In the future, we'd like to strengthen our community engagement by launching a podcast and opening a Discord channel for Cringe readers to meet each other and exchange thoughts on all things Cringe.

Funding

Self-funded



Since starting Cringe, all of our resources have gone towards the production of the magazine and website.

Kickstarter



Before we launched our first issue, we managed to raise £300 to finance the first print run and 50 tote bags.

Sales



Each print run has predominantly been financed through sales of the previous issue.

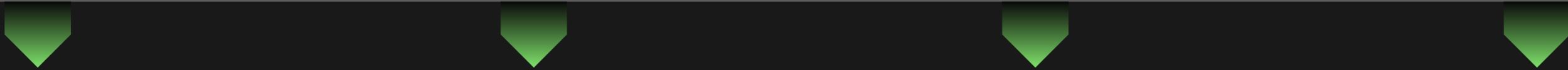
Funding

Journalism and Publishing Student Collaboration & Employability Fund

We're delighted and grateful to share that we successfully applied for the **Journalism and Publishing Student Collaboration & Employability Fund**, made possible through the media department at the University of the Arts, London.

The funding allowed us to finance the production of issue #4 and give a small compensation fee to our returning contributors. We also set up a panel event about independent publishing where we invited Clem MacLeod, founder of literary magazine Worms Magazine, Hope Ndaba, Communications Executive at Picador and Macmillan Collector's Library, and artist Stephanie Francis-Shanahan to share their knowledge. The recording of the event is publicly available as we do not want to gatekeep any knowledge that might be beneficial to our readers and wider community. All speakers were paid a small speaker's fee of £70 and had the chance to sell their work after the event.

Accomplishments and future goals



We were approached by Tedx University of Essex to give a talk about the philosophy that drives Cringe Magazine.

We'd like to expand our newsletter and other avenues to connect with Cringe readers to offer places for dialogue in-between issues.

Our next funding goals include making the running and production of Cringe self-sufficient and offering contributors a flat submission fee.

So far, we are stocked in Magma (Covent Garden & Clerkenwell sites), BOOKS Peckham, and the archive of Photobook Cafe.

Founders



Annika Loebig

Editor-In-Chief



Georjia Asleigh
Cross

Sub-editor and social
media marketer



Klaidas Salickas

Creative director &
marketer



cringemag.co.uk

cringe.editorial@gmail.com

[@cringe_mag](#)