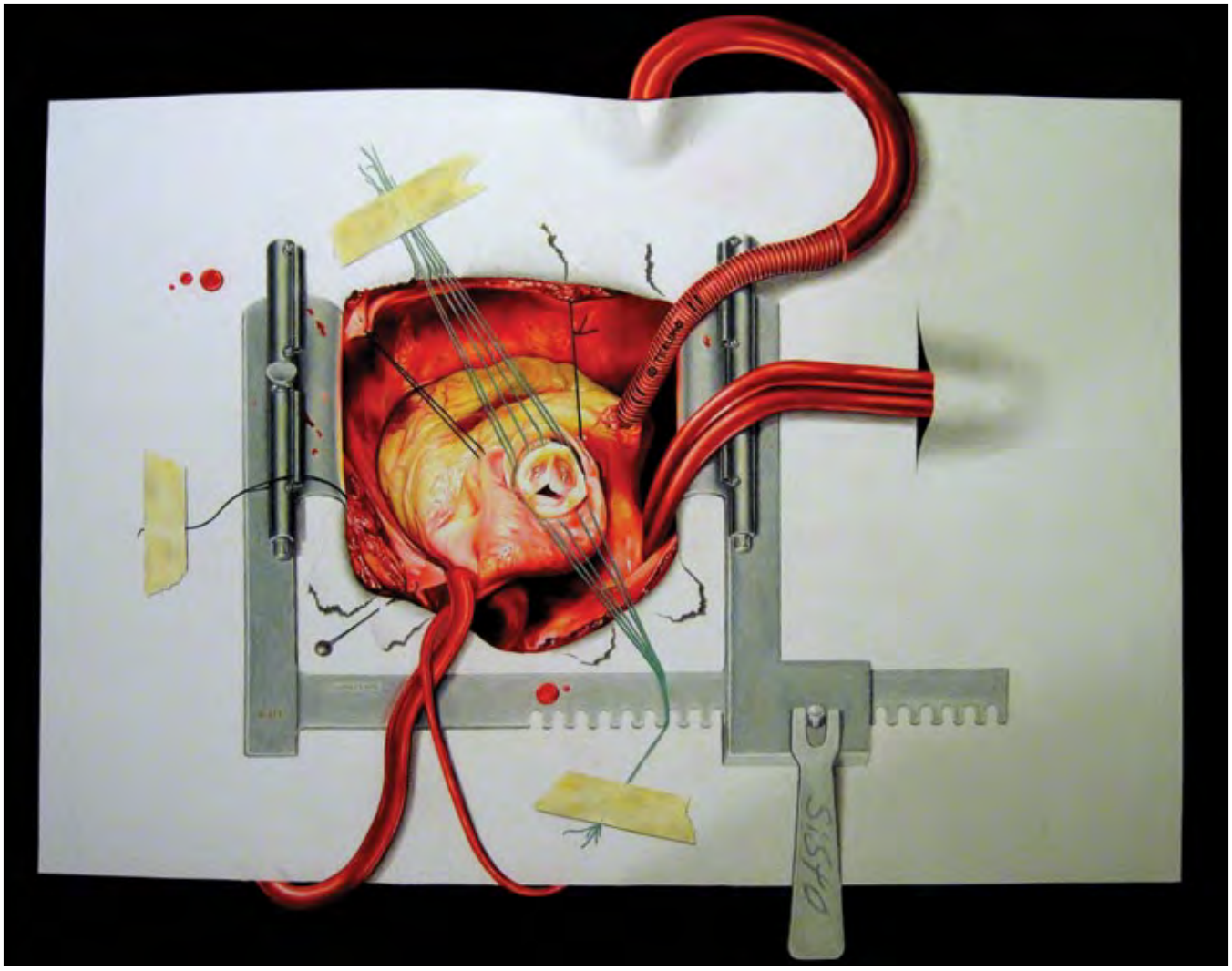

"A New Lease"
Colored pencil, 17 inches by 24 inches
By Benjamin Blais, Geisel '15

For a WEB EXTRA with more from the interview with Blais, see dartmed.dartmouth.edu/sp12/we03

First-year medical student Benjamin Blais loves realism. It "requires attention to detail and a great deal of problem solving," both useful skills that help him at Geisel. "As a first-year medical student, I have noticed I tend to be very patient and receptive when thinking through cases. I find I am also able to be present in the moment and more mindful when talking with patients, possibly because I am so attentive to detail," he says. In high school, Blais "preferred the control of charcoal and graphite pencils." At Vanderbilt University, where he graduated in 2010 with a dual degree in cell and molecular biology and studio art, he took a course on drawing with color media and explored watercolors, pastels, and colored pencils. Soft colored pencils became his favorite. "They are very 'blendable,' much like paints. . . . I really enjoy punching up the hues beyond what the viewer would expect."

Blais's drawing "depicts an aortic valve replacement [in a heart], in which the existing valve could not be repaired. It has been removed entirely and is being replaced with a bovine tissue valve." The bright colors make the work "more visceral and real" and not confined to the page. The piece, says Blais, shows that "just as parts of our body can fail, they can also be fixed or replaced. . . . I like to wonder, if even one of the most crucial organs in our body can be repaired or replaced, what is in our future? What parts of us give us our identity in a world where heart transplants, and even successful face transplants, are a reality?"

To research this piece Blais shadowed Dr. Donato Sisto, a cardiothoracic surgeon in Portsmouth, N.H. To thank Sisto, Blais included the doctor's name on the retractor at the lower right. Blais says that Sisto has pointed out that his depiction is missing a hemostat clamp and "has an extraneous blood supply tube, to which I plead artistic license," says Blais. ■