

Shadows of Racism: Voices Unheard

Final Gr 10 and 11 Student Works
Markham District High School
2024

Shadows of Racism Statement

As students look to the past to understand the present and dream of the future, they become aware of the challenges that fuel a desire to overcome and achieve. Racism has affected and continues to have an impact on the lives of students, their families and communities. This project showcases the resilience of humans to persevere towards a future that is more inclusive and identity affirming where all people can thrive. Through a shared purpose, the grade 10 and 11 art students from Markham District HS have deepened their understanding and appreciation for all people. The artworks assembled in this cubical structure exist as both individual art pieces and one harmonious creation simultaneously. Each artwork representing a specific understanding and message of the impacts of racism, is strung together with the other artworks. Displayed in this manner, the art piece as a whole highlights and celebrates the achievements of people from diverse backgrounds through the acknowledgement of past generational lived experiences showcasing the interconnectedness of human lives. At one end of the cubical structure is an opening revealing an additional artwork inside the cube. In the center of the external structure is a representation of the multiple singular awareness's merging to form a collective hope where humans are propelled towards a brighter and more harmonious future. In its entirety the students have presented a collaborative artwork that illustrates the importance of knowing and remembering the past, while acknowledging the determination and achievements of humans along the way.

Catherine An

Dandelion, Diversity, and Dreams

Mixed Media

2024

When people encounter the theme of Shadows of Racism, I believe many have their own narratives to share. Racism is something we must all stand against, and in opposition to it, I created this piece to highlight the beauty of diversity, drawing inspiration from my own story and experiences.

Dandelion, Diversity, and Dreams is an artwork created using three different mediums--- acrylic, colored pencils, and watercolor. Using three different mediums allows me to add layers and texture to my artwork. As it carries wishes and expectations, I decided to go with bright and vibrant colors. The artwork's main focus is a young girl, symbolizing myself, holding a dandelion with three ribbons extending outwards. Each ribbon represents the three countries and cultures that I am associated with— China, Korea, and Canada. Beneath these hands rests the earth, the world that I wholeheartedly long for. I come from a richly diverse background, as my parents hail from different cultural heritages. My mother, with her Chinese heritage, and my father, with his Korean roots, crossed paths in Canada, a nation celebrated for its cultural diversity, despite the unlikelihood of their meeting. Having grown up surrounded by individuals from various racial and cultural backgrounds, I am genuinely captivated by the richness and beauty of diversity. However, racism has always greatly impacted my community, even in Canada. Asian communities have been an integral part of Canadian society since the 18th century. Despite their significant contributions, they have endured discrimination and prejudice due to their differences in appearance and culture from the white majority. Racism against Asian Canadians has taken shape through discriminatory voting laws, exclusionary immigration policies, and forced relocation and internment. Regrettably, hate crimes against Asian Canadians persist to this day. My parents could never forget the discrimination they had to face when they first came to Canada. I long for a world that celebrates the beauty of diversity and stands free from the shadow of racism.

Just below the main subject, there is another figure planting the seeds of dandelions. Dandelions play a crucial role in my artwork, adding a touch of natural beauty and symbolism to the piece. The sight of dandelions has always evoked a sense of home within me. The rolling hills near my childhood home would be blanketed with thousands of dandelions, painting a picturesque scene of vibrant yellow blooms during the spring and summer months. The bright yellow dandelion flower symbolizes growth, hope, and healing, representing the ability to overcome adversity, pursue dreams, and embrace change. Using this symbolism, I honor the strength and resilience of the people in my community who left their homes overcoming challenges in search of a better future and those who are able to embrace diversity. At the same time, I hope that those who faced discrimination will find healing. Dandelion seeds are believed to carry our wishes and dreams to the universe, making them a powerful symbol of hope and possibility. They inspire us to dream big and believe that anything is achievable. In my artwork, I aim to capture the essence of every stage of the dandelion, from its growth and thriving to its beautiful bloom and transformation into seeds. These seeds carry my heartfelt wishes and dreams for a world free from racism.

The beauty of the world lies in the diversity of its people. While journeying along the right path, we tenderly plant dandelion seeds, entrusting them to carry our heartfelt wishes for a brighter and more harmonious world. Together, we embrace the richness of diversity and stand united against racism.



Aarushi Chowdhury
Embracing My Vibrant Threads
Mixed Media
2024

Growing up I lived in a typical suburban area, most of the people who attended my elementary school and lived in my neighborhood were not very diverse. The experiences that were being celebrated in my school and among my peers were not very inclusive to what I was experiencing with my family. For example, during Easter, my peers would all talk about egg hunts, and Easter dinners, while on Easter my family would use it as a day off. My friends took for granted that I knew what they were experiencing. In reality, it made me feel left out and excluded. The feeling of being excluded led to me being ashamed of my own culture and identity. This difference of ideas has also influenced how I view the future events in my life.

My peers and the media always depict a traditional westernized wedding with a white dress. This diminished my feelings towards my cultural wedding traditions and replaced them with a more western, white dress image. Resulting from the unintentional discrimination by my friends, grew my own internalized discomfort. As a result, I changed my personality and interests to better match my peers. I wished that my family celebrated Thanksgiving or Easter like my peers and was not content with the celebrations that we do celebrate such as Diwali or Holi. Over time, I met people who did celebrate the same things as my family, and I started to feel more accepted. I started to feel comfortable blending the two identities together. I was happy to embrace my own culture while also learning about others. The two hands symbolize the two identities that I have struggled to combine together. The POC hand symbolizes my culture and identity while the other symbolizes the culture I have been normalized to. The dress in the middle symbolizes how I am starting to shed the embarrassment of my culture and how it is starting to become a part of me rather than hiding it. Finally, the flowers represent an important part of both cultures and are an object that is of similar importance to both cultures but used in different ways.



Lavina Dong
‘Summer And Fall School Bus’
Mixed Media
2024

This artwork represents the symbols of two countries, China and Canada, that I have come to understand and appreciate. The symbols within the artwork are placed in two halves. The lotus and auspicious clouds on the left represent China, where I am from, while the maple leaves and school bus on the right are representative of Canada, the place I inhabit currently. The lotus flower in China symbolizes vitality, and they bloom in the summer every year, symbolizing the cycle of life and the continuous development of power and harmony. The growth environment of lotus needs calm water and appropriate temperature, which also implies that a harmonious environment is essential for people's growth and development. Auspicious clouds are also a symbol of harmony in China through the soft smooth form with warm harmonious colours. These clouds symbolize good fortune, good luck and smooth sailing. It symbolizes happiness, prosperity and success, and is people's yearning and pursuit of a better life. The image of Xiangyun has widely appeared in various fields of Chinese painting and calligraphy, folk art, architecture, clothing, utensils and so on, and has become one of the important symbols of Chinese culture.

When it comes to Canada, the first thing that comes to my mind is the iconic element of the flag, the maple leaf. It occupies a central place in Canadian culture and is a symbol of Canadian identity. The maple leaf is widely used in art, music and literature and has become an important element of Canadian culture. Maple leaves are also an important element in Canadian folk culture, and many Canadian folk songs and ballads are associated with maple leaves. Maple leaf is also a representative of Canada's natural environment, it is widely distributed in various regions of Canada, especially in autumn, the bright colors of maple leaf decorate the earth, becoming a unique natural landscape of Canada. Maple leaves also reflect the Canadian people's respect and protection of nature. The school bus in Canada is something that I find very novel. All school buses are yellow in uniform shape. There is no such public-school bus in China except for some private schools.

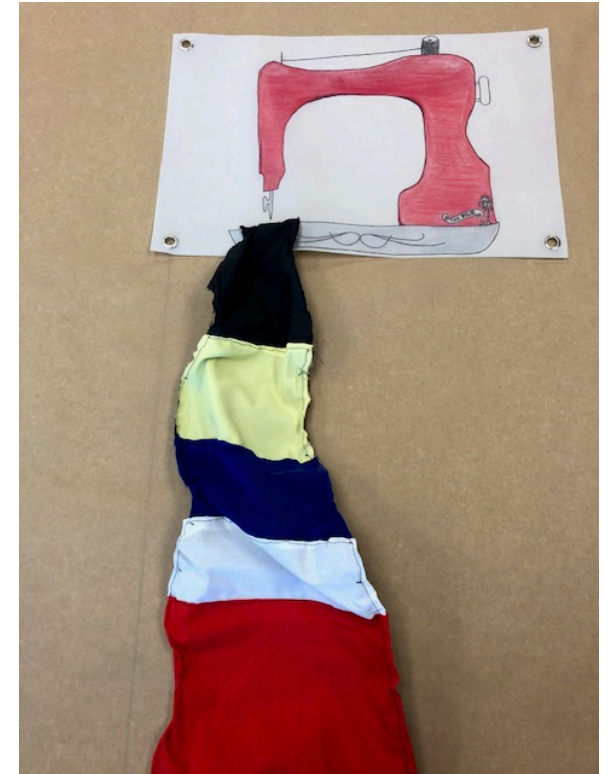
Through this project I hope to show the beautiful aspects of both countries that I have called home. Both are rich in culture and have had a profound impact on me.



Sydney Laville
“The Tailor”
Mixed Media
2024

I used this opportunity to represent the journey my family took to get where they are today. The main idea for my piece was to represent my grandfather who moved to Canada from Antigua for new opportunities. When he came to Canada he started a business as a tailor. The colours of the fabric are representing where we came from using the colours of the flag. The fabric is also used to represent a path going both ways as my mother returned to Antigua and started her own business now known as The Tailor’s Daughter. Some components of this piece such as the design on the bottom of the machine as well as the label “THE TAILOR” and the sugar cane next to the label were symbols which I have taken from the logo of my mother’s shop. I grew up in Antigua and was able to keep in touch with my culture. However, after I moved to Canada for school and was introduced to a new environment which was very different from where I was raised, I have had the chance to reflect on the sacrifices and triumphs of my family.

I deeply appreciate the chance to share my family’s journey to where we are today and all that my grandfather did in his life to help us be where we are. Despite all the struggles my grandfather went through moving to Canada by himself as a black man he still persevered and successfully started his career paving the way for the future generations of our family.



Anzi Li
Animal Crossing
Mixed Media
2024

This mixed media artwork symbolizes the importance of cross-cultural communication and understanding. Each animal represents a different culture and values, but they coexist harmoniously in the picture, symbolizing integration and tolerance between cultures. Through this symbolic meaning, I hope the audience can reflect on their own prejudices and misunderstandings about other people's cultures and encourage them to actively participate in cross-cultural exchanges to promote world peace and progress.

In my work, I have combined my country's symbolic animals, the most prominent of which is the dragon, with Canadian animals. When I was a child, my elders always told me some mythical stories about the dragon. In the stories, the dragon represents the sacred, and where there is a dragon, there will be no monsters. When I was a child, my grandmother sewed me a coat with a Chinese dragon icon, and she said that the dragon is auspicious. I've chosen the most common animals in Canada, caribou, raccoons and squirrel beavers. This fusion is not only an exploration of the symbolism of animals in the two countries, but also an expression of the connection between the two cultures. For me, this artwork symbolizes the importance of cross-cultural communication and understanding. As an individual with cultural convergence, I have a deep understanding of the common points and differences between cultures and have experienced the challenges and values of cross-cultural communication.

My work represents the strength and resilience of people because I believe that each individual has their own unique story and value. I strive to show through my art the diversity and resilience of human beings and the ability to survive and thrive in different cultures and environments. I believe that everyone has the right to be respected and understood, and my work aims to promote the spread and practice of this idea.



Daniel Tsatskas
A Journey Through Traditions
Mixed Media
2024

The idea of my piece is to explain the journey I have to go through to re-discover my culture. Living in Markham there are not many places where I can embrace and practice Macedonian traditions. Given the chance to symbolize my journey through art allows me to show people the struggle I go through when trying to find my origin and the conflict when fitting in with my own culture. Racism and discrimination against Macedonians is a recurring action throughout the world. Personally, I have not dealt with discrimination due to my Macedonian heritage but, in other neighboring countries to North Macedonia, it is seen most. An example of this would be an article named, “Ending discrimination against Macedonians” published by Meto Koloski in the Toronto Star. In this article it states that both Bulgaria and Greece have looked down upon Macedonians living inside their borders by removing their rights. This action had a negative impact upon all Macedonians as if it happened to people in Europe, it could happen to anyone, anywhere else in the world.

My grandparents and ancestors have paved a path of traditions up until my parents' generation. In my work the terrain is much different than here in Ontario, Canada. It is supposed to symbolize undiscovered land, that although my ancestors have walked on, I haven't. The small town and the wheat signify the marks my past ancestors left behind from their journey. It shows that although they have passed, they had the strength to leave steppingstones behind them allowing new generations to embrace their inventions. The sun in the back is actually the modern North Macedonian flag, this reinforces the idea of a new adventure. In the end, many Macedonians have dealt with difficult times; like my ancestors, they were strong enough to fight and give for future generations. I take their determination happily and hope that I can pursue my culture going forward.



Adam Fernando

Rebirth

Mixed Media

2024

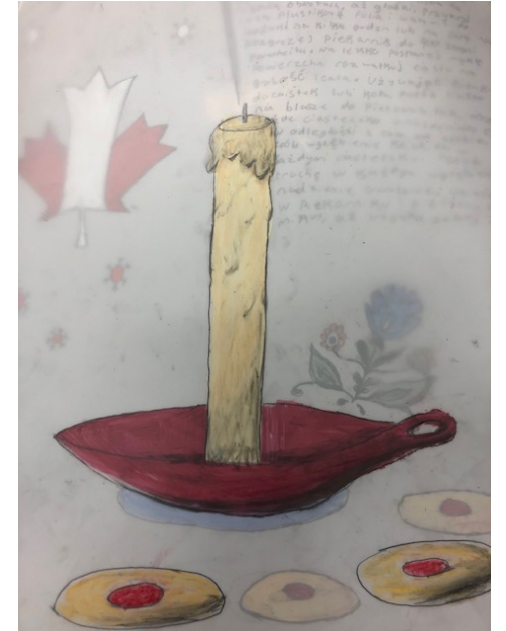
My idea going into this piece was to capture the essence behind baptism as a concept and an act. As most of you are probably aware, baptism is a religious practice people of the Christian faith undergo to declare their faith. My family and I have been Christian for as long as I can remember, and it's something I consider a crucial component of my identity. It's easy to write baptism off as just another religious practice in a world full of them, but I wanted to call attention to the deeper meaning behind baptism and how it applies to my own life with this piece. As a Sri Lankan in Canada, there have been times when those I know would call my family and I 'whitewashed', or that our 'culture has been erased', simply because we follow the Christian faith. Some of these comments stuck with me throughout my day-to-day growing up, and it even affected whether or not I told strangers I was Christian, for fear of changing their perspective. Baptism is all about relinquishing the burdens and inhibitions of one's past, symbolized by the body of water. The person being baptized is submerged fully underneath for a moment before emerging free, born anew.



I myself was baptized a few years ago, and the sensation of letting go empowers me to this day not to be afraid of what comprises an essential part of my identity, what I believe in. The figures in my piece are depicted as reference dolls because I wanted to symbolize the fact that baptism doesn't necessarily have to be about religious belief. The concept of letting things go so that you may live your life as a better human being after the fact is something that anyone can undertake and follow through with, thus, anyone can take the position of the figure in my piece. There are alternate figures on either side of the one in the centre, as baptism is normally conducted with the assistance of another person, but they serve a symbolic purpose too. In many ways, baptism is a journey that takes far more time to prepare oneself for than the act itself. Letting the past go to flourish in the present is a hard thing to do, especially if that past is filled with hardship. The figures on either side of the central figure symbolize the fact that we as people don't have to be alone in that journey of self-betterment. That we can afford to rely on and depend on those we trust with the strides we make in our lives.

Matthew Scott
Unburnt Fuel
Mixed Media
2024

The focal point of this artwork is a candle which has been extinguished. As a third generation Canadian I feel that parts of my culture are missing, and I am eager to reclaim them. The spark in the candle signify the rebirth of hope as I begin to make connections with my culture. My Polish grandmother is well known for her delectable cookies, and the insertion of these cookies at the bottom of the page, like the ones she made for me at Christmas, is a visual representation of me reclaiming parts of my culture. I took great care to learn and translate the recipe to her mother tongue in an effort to honour her and my identity. Through my research, I have gained a deeper understanding of different practices of Polish culture. My work symbolises and honours my culture through the candle being put out and relit signifying the history of Poland. Despite being suppressed by other countries in the past they were able to rebuild their culture. Although the candle has been extinguished and showcases the absence of culture, it has been reignited through the work that has gone into reclaiming the culture.



Ava Simas

Stories Through Time

Mixed Media

2024

My piece is a representation of my connection to both my Indian and Portuguese cultures. Being able to have the privilege of growing up with both unique and very different cultures, I was able to experience wonderful things. I love my cultures but at some points in my life I have felt that being in the middle gives me less of a sense of belonging within the family, almost like an outsider. It's not as though my family has ever done anything to make me feel this way, it is merely what I have experienced. For example, when praying with my Catholic Portuguese family it is difficult to fully belong as I don't know any of the prayers and feel almost like I am not anything. Same with when I go to the Gurdwara, I just feel out of place. I understand religion is not the same as my culture, but it is a huge aspect. I sometimes feel like I'm neither Indian or Portuguese and I don't even know what to label myself. To add to the confusion of who I am and where I belong, I have had several friends in the past invalidate my mixed culture. I have been told "you're not brown enough", or "you aren't white" and it leaves me in this place where I think to myself, what am I? I think that it has taken time, but I am beginning to come to terms with my ability to connect with both sides of my family. That feeling of displacement isn't temporary and will most likely follow me my whole life but my ability to be okay with it is the biggest

test. I understand the racism that has existed in our communities and the huge contrast of racism of the past to today, but the unfortunate truth is that racism still exists. The impact racism has on people is extremely negative and can destroy someone's self-confidence, confidence in their culture, and more. Overall, my work honors those people triumphing these racist comments they face on a daily basis. The two sides of my identity are symbolized in this artwork. The rooster of Barcelos seen in the middle along with the natas represent Portugal. While my Indian side is represented through the drawing of some Indian jewelry which reminds me of my grandma who loved jewelry and her favorite food, samosas. This piece shows my connection to both sides of myself and my desire to embrace the elements that shape who I am.



Oviya Sivanathan
Beyond The Surface: Understand Unseen Identities
Mixed Media
2024

My idea of this piece is how you cannot fully understand a person's identity and cultural history just by their appearance. Many may allow their arrogance to block them from the potential to understand how beautiful my culture is and the history of my family. I know this situation is common amongst our society and has been for too long, which is why I wanted to make this piece to spread awareness. To make people realize that there is a whole other unique side to individuals that you could not understand unless you listen to them and their story. Similarly, many people also have devastating histories that we could never know about or understand without doing our research and listening to others. Instead of allowing our biases to cloud our minds, we should be open-minded to the unique experiences and backgrounds of the people around us. Racism is prominent in many communities all over the world and I have learned that through my experiences and the experiences of others. Stereotypes and biases can have a negative impact on people's day to day lives. It can affect their work life, social life, mental health, and other aspects of their life. My piece is meant to honor those that have been stereotyped or mistreated due to discrimination. It is meant to honor the many people that have persevered in the face of discrimination and their experiences. My piece has two versions of myself. One is a self-portrait, and the other is a self-portrait but with an ancient style. In real life many people see the regular self portrait of me and might make assumptions about me without even knowing me. My ancient self-portrait is meant to represent my beautiful culture and the deep history of Tamil people. A side of me that you would never really know unless you listened to my story as well as the stories of other Tamil individuals.



Carlyn Wang
Willow

Ink, watercolor, pencil crayons, pastel (Mixed Media)

May 20, 2024

My parents came to Canada because they wanted to move to a place where there are more opportunities, a better life. The piece here represents our family's journey. Through researching about my community and my family's journey, I now realize what Chinese Canadians had to go through in the past to get the freedoms and rights that I take for granted today. Starting a new life in Canada was hard for my parents. When they came, they faced a language barrier. When my mother first came, she felt hesitant to even pick up a phone call because she was afraid that she would not understand the speaker and thus cause misunderstanding. They also faced discrimination. My parents had to live on limited assets, and for many years, they had to share a house with other people. In addition, they would miss and feel disconnected from their relatives back in China because of the distance. Finding a job was hard, and my parents had to restart their post-secondary degrees because university education from China weren't accepted here. For my father, who had worked as an electrical engineer in China, his experiences in the field were not recognized, and he couldn't find a job in his previous career. However, despite the hardships they faced, my parents did not give up on trying to find a better life in Canada.

The willow in my piece is a symbol of humans' capability to withstand hardship, loss, and difficult emotions. In addition, it represents our family and journey. The uprooting of the tree symbolizes how my parent's entire life was uprooted, and the things they left behind when they came to Canada, which are represented by the photos on the first half of the artwork. Similarly, I feel disconnected with my culture. I can't speak my language, I don't know much about our traditions, and I feel like I can't connect with other Chinese people very well. The rest of my family probably also feels bad that their culture is slowly being lost over the generations. In this way, the uprooting of the tree can also represent the loss my family and I feel as we slowly become disconnected with our culture, language, and the things we left behind. In the second half of my artwork, the tree is being replanted in another place, which represents the journey to Canada. "When trees are replanted, they need certain conditions to survive. For people, we need support from each other, the courage to face challenges in life, perseverance to conquer obstacles and willingness to accept new cultures and to learn new knowledge and skills. They are all parts of the ROOTS." As my mom said, "What should also be included are the friends who helped us after we came to Canada. Some friends who came to Canada from China before us helped us settle in Canada. For example, one of them rented a house for us before we landed in Canada so that we had a place to live in when we landed. Also, the friends we met after we came to Canada were also helpful. I made friends with some of them, whom I still keep in touch with these days." These friends and the support others gave us are represented by the hands, which are holding up the tree and helping to plant it into the ground. Meanwhile, the photo of my family symbolizes my family's new life in Canada.



Julia Wilson

The Ethnic Identity of Music

Mixed Media

2024

This artwork and its importance is based on my ethnicity and love for music; not just as a Canadian individual, but as a Caribbean representative as well. My mom is from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a small island in the Caribbean, while my dad was from Jamaica in the Caribbean. My parents moved to Canada where they had me and my other siblings. When I was growing up I listened to a lot of reggae, soca, afrobeats, hiphop, rap and old (late 60s to early 2000s music by black people), which included most of these genres. This played a huge importance in my life, because I wouldn't be who I am today without these life events.

When I was doing research for my project, I came across many histories of black people not being credited for certain music and genres. For example, most recently country music has been more recognized in the black industry since it was first created by us, like Beyonce's newest album "Cowboy Carter" and Tracy Chapman's country music acknowledgement. When I heard about this I would say it impacted me deeply, along with the black community. This is the topic that gave me the idea for my piece, the theme of how black individuals have influenced music a lot over many generations, coming from many continents in the world.

My work was made to honor how much people work hard to create something that not only they love, but something that they want other people to enjoy as well when they see or hear it in the music industry. For many generations it has been a huge importance for music to help you through your struggles and let you remember to have fun in your life. Music is what brings people together and is what really makes you who you are.

Lastly for my symbolism in my project, I used bright colors on my piece to showcase the Caribbean/African love for colorful things, as the Caribbean is known for having colorful parades (Bahamas, Caribana, Reggae Sumfest, Afrofuture, Felabration, etc...) and colorful dishes with strong flavours. The music notes and symbols are a big focus in this piece as they are what represent the fact that music is made from black influences, for example, Michael Jackson, Prince, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Lauryn Hill, Bob Marley, to name a few. The head in the middle represents us human beings. In this case, it symbolizes how music around us by different races and individuals is what influences inspirations and ideas of creating something great in your own way. and lastly the flags behind the head represent me, where I come from and how my countries have influenced me to embrace my ethnicity and love for certain music genres.



Wu, Venus
Traditional Sense: ChiJa
Mixed Media
2024

The main idea of this piece was to show the traditional side of me which involves my eastern-Asian side as well as my western-Canadian side. I tried showing that even though I come from a very traditional household, I can still show that I am Canadian and can be proud of it. People always think “oh you're so into your culture you must not know anything that happens here”, but in fact, I've been living in Canada my entire life and it is just my parents who encourage us that keep our traditions alive. My research helped me to understand racism more. I realize that people tend to judge you without knowing all the information, they think they know everything about you and start making assumptions. Their words used to affect me, and I used to take offense but now I just ignore them because they think that they can make opinions even though they are uneducated. My work shows that even if you move across the globe, you can still keep your traditions in the current generation, even later on if I have kids of my own, I would like to keep them in our traditions, I would like them to speak our mother tongue. My people have gotten so used to racism that we don't let it affect us anymore. We learn to ignore their words and strive to be ourselves. The majority of the key points in my piece show tradition and how it doesn't change even after moving across the globe. The temple and clothing show tradition, the snowflakes represent my nationality, and the flags show my ethnicity.

My piece shows a girl looking at a temple, Senso-ji, a place she used to visit almost every year. This part of the piece with the temple shows how traditional her family was, visiting the temple every year in the summer with her parents to show their prayers. This temple plays a significant part in my piece because being a mostly Chinese Asian, people in Canada assume that you're traditional and have no idea what is happening in the 21st century. Based on personal experience, people assume that my family didn't know how anything worked in the present times and think that just because we were traditional we only used the old ways. The traditional clothing that the girl is wearing is a Hanfu and in her hair is a traditional hair piece, this plays a significant part in this project because it is also about identity, the outfit shows where I'm from and that I am not afraid that people will comment on what I wear just because it isn't common to wear it in the west. The snowflakes represent my Canadian side. When I think of Canada the first thing I think of is the cold winters with a lot of snow. The snow also shows the stereotypes of Canadians, for example, living in igloos or they wear almost nothing in the cold weather. The flags are quite self-explanatory, they show what my ethnic background is and what my nationality is. I'm Chinese-Japanese, my mother is full Chinese, my dad is half Chinese and half Japanese, and my nationality is Canadian.



Ruby Zhang
Time Railroad In Memory
Mixed Media
2024



The images of the work describe the changes in the railroad over time, from left to right, based on actual historical accounts. From the beginning of the Chinese people's struggle to build the railroad and the casualties it brought; the strong color of gunpowder takes a big focus in the picture. In the course of time, the railroad was built with such tragic casualties and damage to the Chinese people. I did some research on the history of the railroad to understand the importance of the railroad to the history of Canada. I realized that due to the passage of time, many facts are no longer revealed to the public. I used mylar paper to achieve a layer gradient effect. I wanted to show the blurring effect of the passage of time in my work. I used two images of trains in my work, the first one is the first official train on this railroad and the second one is a modern train in operation in the year 2023. The ambiguity of the sequence from left to right leads the viewer to explore the shock of the truth from history. The black and white colours in the work map the colors in pictures of trains at the time, and since there were no color photographs at the time, when people tried to search the internet for what a train looked like it was black and white. I try to use real photograph color to reflect the reality of the facts. The ambiguity of such a work demonstrates my thoughts on this brutal history. Time blurs the truth, and when we try to go through this history we truly realize that there were people who paved your way to a better life in our long history. As we become more aware of and respectful of this history and propaganda, a proper understanding of the effects of different racisms will give us more perspective on the proper way to look at different races.

Zekai Zhou

“Unity Dove”

Mixed Media

2024

"Unity Dove" is a piece depicting a dove of peace covered with symbols from various countries, such as the maple leaf representing Canada, the dragon head representing China, and the pyramid representing Egypt. The inspiration for my creation comes from my deep desire for global peace and harmony. Throughout my upbringing, I have experienced and witnessed the pain and injustice caused by racial discrimination, which has driven me to express my voice through art. As an artist living in a multicultural environment, I deeply feel the importance of mutual understanding and respect among different ethnicities. This dove of peace symbolizes the unity and harmony among the nations of the world, expressing my hopeful vision for peace. Through in-depth research into history and current realities, I have gained a deeper understanding of racism and its impacts. Racial discrimination not only harms individual dignity and rights but also disrupts social harmony. In exploring these issues, I have come to understand the historical roots and contemporary manifestations of racism, as well as its profound impacts on me, my family, and my community. This understanding has strengthened my resolve to use art to advocate against discrimination and promote equality.

"Unity Dove" not only offers a critique of racism but also celebrates those who remain strong and hopeful in the face of adversity. Each symbol in the piece represents the culture and history of a country, symbolizing mutual respect and understanding between different cultures. For example, the maple leaf symbolizes Canada's multiculturalism and spirit of inclusivity; the dragon head represents China's long history and cultural heritage; and the pyramid symbolizes Egypt's ancient civilization and wisdom. These symbols come together on the dove of peace, conveying the power of different cultures coexisting harmoniously. Each symbol is not merely a representation of a country; their harmonious coexistence on this dove of peace symbolizes the fusion and mutual understanding of different cultures. This fusion is not only about cultural exchange but also about heartfelt communication and resonance. Through this piece, I hope the audience can appreciate the beauty and strength of cultures from around the world and be inspired to work together to build a more just and harmonious world.

"Unity Dove" calls on people to transcend racial and cultural boundaries and achieve global peace and unity through mutual respect and understanding. This dove of peace symbolizes hope, resilience, and strength, representing all those who remain steadfast in the face of oppression. Through this work, I hope to convey a positive force, inspiring more people to strive for peace and equality.



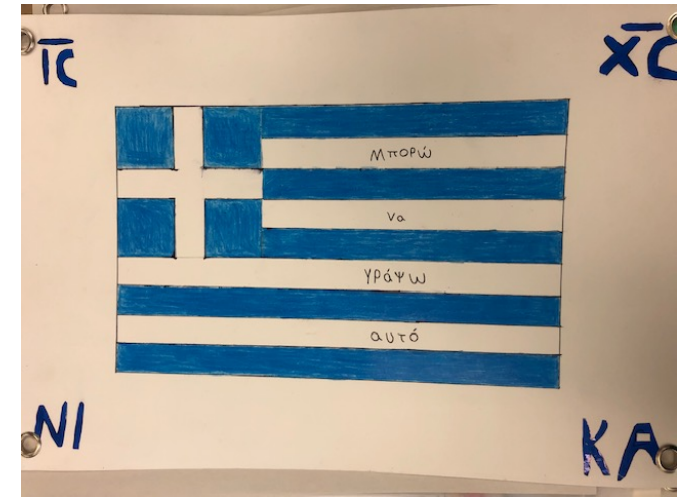
Carol Ni
Untitled
Mixed Media
2024

This is a work that explores race, culture and social relationships. Imagery is used to symbolize these abstract and untouchable things. My work expresses an ideal state in my mind: people of varied cultures build connections with others in order to reduce conflicts and ease relationships. In the artwork, there are five jars of different shapes. They can be any container, vase or pitcher of human understanding. These jars can be understood as people from different cultures and races, with different educations and coming from all over the world. The materials and patterns of these bottles and jars come from the products of various civilizations that I have seen in museums. They seem to be independent entities of many colours, but they still belong to the blue family. They are also connected to each other in details: handle, bottle mouth and bottle body. This symbolizes mutual acceptance rather than curse or grieve our destructive selfishness. The composition of the five jars although asymmetrical, still creates a subtle balance on paper. In general, we should also develop towards this balance. Although absolute balance will only appear in Utopia, we can still try to get infinitely close to it.



Xander Tsingis
Jesus Christ Conquers
Mixed Media
2024

As a person with mixed cultures, Greek and Italian, I feel like one has taken more of a role in my life. For example, my family only tends to celebrate Catholic holidays, as opposed to Greek Orthodox holidays. My mom put me in a Saturday school to learn Italian for about six years, but the only Greek I was ever been taught was from my Yiayia. I have always felt like I am a lot less connected to my Greek side, I don't even know any of my family members on that side of the family, other than my grandparents. I have revolved my piece around my Greek heritage, as I want to learn more about it. A step I am taking to do that is taking 'classical civilization' class in Grade 12. A lot of it is going to have Greek Mythology in the curriculum, which I have always been interested in, but have never gotten around to learning about. I'm excited to learn more about my Greek culture. For my piece, I decided to draw the Greek flag with the symbols 'IC XC NI KA' in the four corners. These symbols mean "Jesus Christ Conquers" which resonates with my beliefs as a Catholic Christian. I then used the cross from the 'IC XC NI KA' symbol for my artwork, to implement every part of the symbol into my project.



Brianna Tsang
Me and My Mom
Mixed Media
2024

My artwork is a personal expression, reflecting my experiences as well as the ones in my family to get to where I am today. I chose to show the journey I've undertaken to understand the layers of my identity and social issues. The silhouette heads in the background show that I'm a third-generation immigrant and the signs and details in the background symbolize the riots and fights for and against Asian rights. Researching helped me to understand the effects of racism on my community as I got to see the effects firsthand, when walking in grocery stores with my grandparents, and second hand, through my research. My art honors the strength of my community as it shows the older generations of immigrants standing behind me, the most recent generation.

It also honors the strength as the main focus of the art piece looks unfazed by the hateful comments and fights around her. The silhouettes of the past generations not only symbolize the generations of immigrants in my family but also symbolize that they are all standing behind me and my generation supporting us. The hateful comments mainly symbolize the riots and marches protesting against Asian hate; however, it also symbolizes the battles we face every day, and how we are unaffected by such.



Jason Chen
Time to Share
Mixed Media
2024

This artwork shows me sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee and eating a special dessert that my family likes to make. My family is originally from China, and they like to make foods from around the world because they like the flavours. They like all people from different countries, and we all hope for a future that is happy and everyone feels comfortable.



Trinity Baxter

Untitled

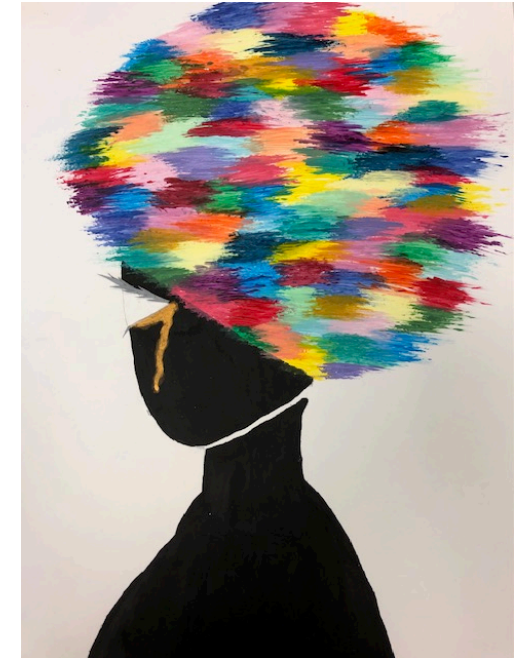
Acrylic Paint

May 10th, 2024

Growing up as a black girl with thick, curly, 4C hair, I often faced bullying from non-black peers. They would mock my hair, calling it "nappy" and comparing me to "Dora The Explorer" because of its distinct afro shape. People would even touch my hair without permission, finding it "strange" and "different" due to its “exotic” hair texture. I used to hate my hair and liked it better when straightened, to blend in. The attention, questions, and feeling of being different made me uncomfortable, and insecure. I didn't realize the significance and power of my curls at that time. Over time, I've come to embrace and appreciate my curls and everything they represent.

My artwork celebrates the beauty and adaptability that black women have shown with their hair. Black women have a diverse range of curl types and coil patterns, but they all share a common legacy. For centuries, black women have used their hair to display social status, mathematics, science, and self-expression. Cornrow patterns showcase African fractals, showing that they carry immense meaning beyond just being hair. As these diverse hairstyles and unfamiliar hair types become more common in a Euro-centric society, instead of being celebrated, they are often looked down upon, criticized, and deemed unacceptable. Many workplaces have enforced Euro-centric beauty standards, making natural black hair seem inappropriate and unprofessional. This has led many women to alter their hair to fit these standards. I didn't necessarily feel the pressure of having to fit the beauty standard of silky, straight hair in a work setting, but I was aware of it from a young age. Even at six, I recognized it as the highly desired beauty standard. There was very little representation of the beauty of natural black female hair while I was growing up. I vividly remember the impact of receiving my first Barbie with an afro. Looking back, I realize how significant that was for me. I finally had a doll with hair similar to me. Unfortunately, despite facing prejudice against my hair, I still would prefer Barbies with straight hair because I thought it was more beautiful and easier to manage. Now, ten years later, I understand that I was internalizing and projecting the same prejudice I had personally experienced onto my own Barbies. It was an eye-opening realization.

Although there might've been barriers and prejudices against black female hair, there has actively been a growing sense of empowerment among black women who are embracing and proudly displaying their natural hair. With my art piece, I aim to symbolize this empowerment, using various colours to emphasize the beauty and diversity of female black curly hair. Additionally, I incorporated tears into the piece to symbolize the challenges and obstacles that black women have to endure and overcome, while also celebrating the true beauty of their hair and the resilience they have demonstrated. I hope that through this piece, others can also find the beauty and strength in natural black female hair.



Selina Chen

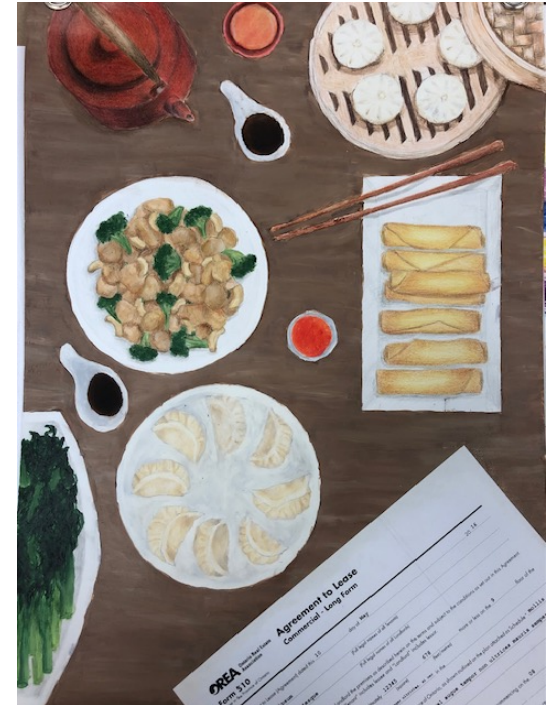
Untitled

Colored pencils, oil pastels, acrylic paints

May 11, 2024

After growing up in China, my father worked hard to move him and his wife overseas. He believed living in western world would give his children a better life, which was to start in America. Despite having to sacrifice their proximity to their family, they only thought of the future of their children. There would be more opportunities, western education, and the best part was living the supposed American dream. Two children were born, including me and my older sister, but our stay in America was cut short. Being a first-generation immigrant with children came with struggles. They eventually moved to Canada after earning a permanent residence card, and another baby girl was born. They missed their homeland and family, but with three small children and no extra money, a family trip to China was impossible. However, the cure to their homesickness was Chinese food and experiences shared and related with other first-generation immigrants from China.

My piece celebrates the achievements and hard work of people from diverse backgrounds by acknowledging the sacrifices they made for their children's future. Specifically in my artwork, it celebrates the moment when my dad was truly able to share his passion and love for Chinese dishes. My parents dreamed of our future being prosperous and filled with good fortune. Despite their hope for us to be doctors, lawyers, or engineers, they still understood if we wanted a different path. They still dream for us to make an impact without forgetting their culture. In some cases, the second generation of an immigrant takes advantage of their situation. Without their parents, the life they have currently would probably not be available to them. In my piece, the lease paper is in English. The lease paper is a bit yellow from the effects of aging. This symbolizes my dad's long-awaited permanent residence card, similar to how my dad always dreamed of having a restaurant. Hopefully, my piece is able to evoke one's understanding and appreciation of all through understanding my own work.



Chloe Teng

“Tea Of Recognition”

Photographs, acrylic paint, oil pastel

May 13, 2024

My piece “Tea Of Recognition” is about my experience of my culture and the journey to get here. I wanted my piece to represent what Chinese culture looks like versus how it looks to others. In the background, I included how my community has suffered in the past and even recently with the COVID-19 pandemic. Chinese immigrants faced constant racism, xenophobia, as well as discrimination. I decided to represent this in black and white prints of clippings as they reflect negative experiences from the past. The images in color represent my perception of the positives of my culture. The tea set and steam in the middle represent a tradition my family does during family gatherings- to drink tea after dinner. This has been a Chinese tradition for a long time and is still around today, which is why I wanted to have it in the center. The steam/tea coming from both ends of the teapot as well as the teacup represent my family’s immigration journey as first-generation immigrants. The steam and the tea mixing together represent me losing part of my Chinese identity while also gaining a new one (being Chinese Canadian).



With this piece I wanted people to see that Chinese Canadians once faced discrimination and it wasn’t an easy path to the free rights we have today. I also wanted to raise awareness of what I think about my culture and bring others to recognize the beauty of Chinese culture instead of seeing it as its stereotypes. Chinese culture is often seen as a joke by the public from people rebranding Chinese products to Japanese or Korean, to making stereotypical videos online. “Tea of Recognition” not only shows some of the history that Chinese Canadians faced, but also what some Chinese youth think of our culture now. I decided to show both the positives and negatives that Chinese immigrants had to face, to further their understanding of past experiences and appreciation of Chinese culture now.

Brooklyn Wang

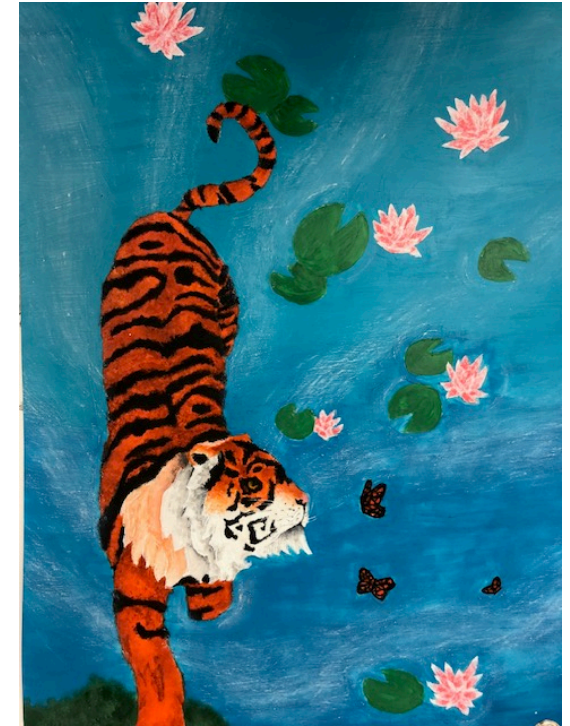
“The Tiger”

Acrylic Paint, Oil Pastel, Pencil Crayon

May 7th, 2024

This symbolic art piece references my Chinese and Korean culture while also representing my parents’ and grandparents’ experience when immigrating to Canada. As visible, it shows a tiger walking through water with lily pads and lotus flowers, stepping onto grassy land. My mom and dad both came to Canada with their families when they were very young but nonetheless faced many difficulties. In my piece, I used several aspects of nature that are significant in my culture like the tiger, flowers, and butterflies, to help tell my family’s story. The tiger is known as the national animal of Korea and it represents strength and bravery in Korean culture. I painted the animal in my piece to symbolize the sacrifice and strength that my parents and grandparents made/had on their journey from their home countries. Additionally, I was always taught by my grandmother that lotus flowers represent resilience and hope because they’re able to thrive and bloom even in the worst conditions like muddy water, which reminds me of how my family overcame struggles and adversity arriving in Canada. Lastly, the monarch butterflies are featured in my piece to reinforce the theme and beauty of migration and the positive change that it can bring. All of these symbols have meaning in my family and work together to create a composition depicting the struggles they faced when initially arriving in Canada and how they managed to overcome them to build better lives. The piece acts to acknowledge the sacrifice made by my parents and grandparents for my siblings and I and to celebrate how far they have come from their immigration.

Even though my family’s immigration was what inspired the piece, it is not limited to their specific experience but is instead meant to correlate with people of diverse backgrounds and cultures. Like my own, many immigrants came to Canada in search of new opportunities and better lives (whether it be for themselves or for their children), and this shared experience is incorporated in my piece to emphasize the interconnectedness of human lives, especially for people of colour. Overall, the aim of this piece is to address the ups and downs of immigration to deepen one’s understanding of the whole process. For people who have lived in one country their whole lives, like myself, the idea of moving to a new country may seem fun, exciting, and simple, and in some cases, it is, but in the experience of others, like my grandparents, it can be very troublesome. My grandparents had to leave their families and homes in order to secure better lives for my parents and had to learn how to navigate a completely new country without having job security or even knowing Canada’s official languages. So I wanted this art piece to loosely represent these challenges so that others can relate to their experiences or to further their understanding on the realities of immigration for many. Overall, I hope that this piece can educate people so that future immigrants are able to feel a sense of belonging in the country they're immigrating to and integrate into society smoothly, without fear or judgment.



Ashwin Balachandran

“Turn a New Leaf: Celebrate”

Acrylic Paint

May 10th, 2024

Food is a central part of South Asian communities and much more emotive than what comes first to the eye. It's a way to show love and gratitude; something to hold families and communities together and a piece of my culture that I wanted to share through my art. Growing up all I knew was Tamil food, which I associated with home and the feeling of security. When I was younger I used to come home for lunch from elementary school and have a hot plate of some form of Tamil food, maybe it was சோறு (so-reu) that day or ரொட்டி (rotti). Regardless of what it was, it felt like home. Despite the positive emotions I had towards Tamil food at that time, it didn't come without negatives. During these times when I was younger, it wasn't easy to feel pride in my food and culture. In fact, often I was ashamed to bring it up in front of other people. It didn't help that South Asian food was shamed and shunned in Western media, but mostly it was wanting the unattainable image of the “ideal” main character in what I saw and was told. Like most kids, I modeled my own life on the things and people in the shows and movies I watched. The problem with that was these shows and movies at the time didn't consider showing South Asians and BIPOC as much as they did with their Caucasian counterparts. The main characters in those movies never were South Asian let alone had a culture that they showcased. So that's what I tried to be, I tucked away my culture and strived to be what was seen as ideal.



My relationship with my culture has come a long way from that moment and for that I am grateful. As narratives started to change, so did my mindset on pride and culture. Realizing that being Tamil was a central facet of myself and one that should be celebrated was the first step to that change. My story isn't uncommon to south Asian youth and that's why we must recognize the importance of de-mystifying south Asian culture, that's also what my piece strives to do. Shedding light to a culture that's been hidden in Western media allows for youth to see themselves in someplace other than a commonly perpetrated stereotype. Not only for South Asian youth but for the general public to also see the beauty of south Asian culture and understand that it goes beyond those common stereotypes. Learning more about others creates more of an understanding which garners the ability to celebrate it. This piece was made in my hope for the perspective on South Asian food to be changed and allow for it to be beautifully entwined with Western culture, presenting it as something to have pride in for future generations of South Asian Canadians. Although I can't dictate what someone takes away from this piece, I can hope that they see that there is beauty in South Asian food/culture and that food along with understanding can be used as a powerful tool to bring us together regardless of identity.

Yijin Lin
Sanxingdui
Mixed Media
2024

For this artwork , I have chosen as a whole one of the more outstanding bronze statues from the Sanxingdui, a bronze statue and bronze coin whose craftsmanship was very much in the forefront at the time. The Sanxingdui Ruins, located on the banks of the Yuzi River in Sanxingdui Town, west of the city of Guanghan, Sichuan Province, China, is a Bronze Age cultural site. It is named after the three undulating mounds of loess in its ancient area. This bronze statue originates from my hometown, and elements of this bronze statue can be seen in many places in my hometown, such as high-speed train stations, subway stations, airports, and so on. I made the bronze statue look more like it had just come out of the ground by copying it and adding some brown paint on top of it. I wanted to show in this artwork how complex and important the Bronze Age and process was. Among these unearthed cultural relics, there are the largest, longest-lasting and most culturally rich ancient city, ancient country and ancient Shu cultural sites discovered in southwest China so far. They provide important clues for us to understand ancient China, especially the ancient civilization in the Yangtze River Basin. The uniqueness, richness and diversity of Sanxingdui culture have made important contributions to the development of Chinese culture. Its emergence and development marked the transition of ancient Chinese culture to the Bronze Age, which had a profound impact on the development and evolution of ancient Chinese culture. In my artwork 中國銀行 These four characters mean Bank of China, which is the largest bank in China. These four characters are engraved on the copper coin in the painting, which represents the first batch of common currency in China. It is of great collection value and cultural heritage for us.



Neider Jaimes
Cultural Roots
Mixed Media
2024

This artwork has certain importance for me as it represents my roots, along with the importance of being in Canada. I am representing my culture and that of Canadian culture and my experiences in this beautiful country that has opened its doors to me. I am originally from Colombia where there are many cities, wildlife and beautiful environments to exist in. The condor is the official animal of my country which is in the center of the piece carrying in its beak the flag of Canada and in its legs the orchid which is the official flower of Colombia. On the left side is a beaver (official animal of Canada) with a vueltiao hat, and on the right side is the spectacled bear which is another representative animal of Colombia, and in the background is the national flag of Colombia. Canada is a country that has given me the opportunity to build a better future because of its education and resources which are available to students. We have access to studies and quality of life with low crime rates and employment and many entrepreneurial opportunities. I have the benefit of keeping my culture while embracing a new one.



Akisha Sasikumar

A Hero'

Mixed Media

2024

My artwork is the national flower of Tamil eleem. This art piece symbolizes the remembrance of all the soldiers fighting for Tamil rights. I deeply connect with this art piece as my uncle was a soldier for Tamil eleem. He fought to protect and serve all Tamil people whose voices were not able to be heard. With his bravery and deep impact he was able to make a sacrifice for every individual. In the corner I wrote in Tamil Tamil நினைவகத்தின் தழுவலில், அவரது கை

சால்லப்பட்டது, ஒரு ஹீரோவின் மரபு, எப்போதும் தரியமானது, that translates to "In memory's embrace, his story told, A hero's legacy, forever bold." This poem is dedicated to my uncle as I highly respect him and his efforts for what he was able to accomplish for the entirety of the Tamil community. In this piece I wanted the scenery to be full of colour hence the blue background and the vibrant colours bring it to life. The flower represents fire and strong will, what I drew is a mimicry of fire to represent the determination, strong will and resilience of Tamil people as a flame is hard to put out and so is our courage. This brought me to a deeper understanding of racism. It enlightened me as my parents immigrated due to the war and it had an impact on them as they just came out of a war and it was difficult to adapt to a new environment, especially with loads of trauma. This was especially difficult as people would view them differently because of where they came from and the hardships they experienced causing them a lot of emotional distress and physical trauma. My work is a symbol of resilience as my people have been determined and strong-willed. Just like my uncle, he showed me and many others that you don't have to be afraid and your legacy will always be carried on. Despite the views of outsiders and people around you. Never give up fighting for what you believe, and don't be afraid to have a voice and share your opinion. Even though my uncle has passed on his resilience and will, he will always be honored and remembered not only in my family but in the Tamil community.



Kate
Growth
Mixed Media
2024

My piece is used to explain my route of self-identification through changing my hair. This is one of the most prominent memories as a kid because it was how I was able to express myself while growing up in a harsh world. My research through this time helped me learn not only more about myself but others. I learned that you can create something and have such an amazing impact on people all around the world, and this is constantly being done about racism through art and media. My art piece is about finding myself and figuring out who I am and I feel that everybody goes through a time when they feel about themselves and are trying to decide who they are and who they are going to be. This is a struggle many of us have faced and it should be recognized which I tried to showcase through my own experiences. The spotlight represents my desire to be seen as a kid by my parents. The head with two different hairstyles are real examples of hair I have had in the past. And the ropes signify the confusing and entangled struggle of growing up and deciding who you are.



Gala At The Aga Khan Museum

June 12, 2024



