

Impact Statement

Molly Cahill, Grade 11.

Hope for the Verdict, 2017.

Mixed media, 26 x 21.5 Inches.

Independence High School, Spring Hill, TN

Unsung Hero: Mitsuye Endo

As soon as I read the list for the unsung heroes, I knew that I wanted to choose Mitsuye Endo as my unsung hero. I immediately looked up her story and was quickly drawn to it. The articles about her described her resilience and selflessness as she braved the courts of America to end the internment of Japanese Americans like herself. Once I saw her picture, I had the greatest urge to draw her and present her as the hero she was and is. I found her willingness to be the change very inspirational: the way she easily agreed to be in the court case and sacrifice her time and personal life to change the lives of thousands of Japanese Americans living on the west coast. I also found her humbleness very admirable; she did not even tell her own daughter about her accomplishments and just let her own name fade into the distance, which I think was very inspirational and amazing, the way she did not reach for recognition that is.

For the piece of artwork, I knew that it would be challenging to create something that would encompass her actions and her inner beauty and her courage. I knew that it would challenge me as an artist and as a person. Mitsuye Endo was an American in every sense of the word. She was born in America, had a brother in the American army and she had a job working as a secretary. In the days after the attack on Pearl Harbor, all Japanese citizens were to be fired from their jobs and placed in internment camps, simply because they were of Japanese descent. Lawyer James C. Purcell looked to end this internment and sought out a candidate to take on the case. Endo was the best suitor for the court case considering she did not know any Japanese; she had never been to Japan and her brother was in the army. Her lawyer petitioned the case and eventually, it ruled in her favor in the Supreme Court, thus ending the internment. Her willingness to comply with the case inspired me to create a piece of work to honor her and her bravery.

When I started the piece, I knew I wanted her portrait to be central because she never let herself gain recognition for her actions, so I wanted to do that for her and showcase her as the hero she was. She is emerging from the background of World War II news-paper clippings almost as if she is leaving them behind and defying the words on the page that are popping out at her. I also did her portrait in black and white to make the piece feel a little old and cohesive with the portraiture of the 1940's. For the background I decoupage the newspaper clippings and then laid some white tissue paper over it to make it look weathered and old in a way, and after that I rubbed some graphite powder on top to make it look more blended into each other and not just simply over-lapping. To finish it off and complement her story and her as a person I pasted on patterned americana styled paper in the shape of stars around the edge of the paper to serve as a border and to represent that even though she was of Japanese ancestry, she was as American as anyone else.

This project presented a lot of challenges for me and pushed me to think about art making in a different way. I had never really put a whole lot of thought into the meanings of previous art pieces and drew them to simply be more aesthetically pleasing rather than having an emotional or meaningful connection. And since that is exactly what this project called for, I was ready to challenge myself to dig deeper inside myself and express the life of someone amazing in just one art piece. After doing this project my whole perspective of art making has changed. I feel now that I want to have emotional ties to my pieces and be able to tell a story or present a feeling without having to explain it with words. I think that is what art is and that is what I will strive to achieve and improve in the future. It was an adventure drawing Mitsuye Endo and I hope that I did her justice.