

## Impact Statement

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***Fish Eyes***, 2024.

Digital art.

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Unsung Hero: Mitsuye Endo

While scrolling through the thorough list of pre-approved heroes, I searched for someone whose story aligned with my set of values, and that shared an aspect of my identity. Mitsuye Endo's incredible courage was founded upon her loyalty to her peers, and her Japanese background, which perfectly fit both criteria, as a half-Japanese boy who strives to display consideration through leadership. Endo perfectly embodies these qualities, as she stood up among thousands of incarcerated Japanese Americans to fight injustice. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Mitsuye Endo, among all other working Japanese in California, were immediately fired from their jobs, and were placed in internment camps indefinitely. Seeking to rebel against the unjust and discriminative situation, Endo, along with several of her colleagues, enlisted lawyer James C. Purcell to aid in the objection of the firings. As Purcell worked on the case, he realized that he needed a strong plaintiff that exemplified civil services and important traits that would persuade the U.S. court, with Endo being the top candidate: a sister to an American soldier, an employee for the Department of Motor Vehicles, an attendee to a Methodist church, and someone who has never traveled to Japan. Endo was opposed to the idea at first, as it would require her to remain in the internment camp during the length of the entire case and be an incredible amount of work. However, after being told that this role would benefit everyone in the camp, and Japanese American employees on the West Coast, she immediately took the opportunity. The case was filed in July of 1942, and was decided in her favor two years later. During the pending period of her case, Endo remained in the internment camps, despite being given the option to leave in order to silence the case. In the end, the loyalty and commitment Endo showed towards her peers displayed incredible leadership and strength, and these key values, displayed at the highest level, is what makes this story so inspirational for me.

While researching Endo's story, I was repeatedly impressed by her determination and commitment to her case, despite people trying to steer her in other directions. I wanted to display this in my art by portraying Endo's facial expression as focused and resolute, tuning in to her rooted values and goals. Her commitment to her case, despite painful conditions, is also represented through her hand being stuffed under layers of ice; sacrificing comfort in order to achieve her goal, or as interpreted in the art, choosing the right fish. I also believe that Endo's resilience and persistence in the face of harsh conditions is another reason why I look up to her as a role model.

During the research process, I discovered that Endo's father worked selling fish in a grocery store. This gave me the idea for an analogy where I connected the idea of Endo making her difficult decision of whether to stay in the internment camp whilst working on the case, to choosing the "right fish" at a market. I added expressions of other people closely watching Endo's every move to portray the pressure Endo must have felt as she decided on the future of everyone around her. I also emphasized the stress and weight of Endo's position by putting her forefront in the composition, with the lighting adding dramatic highlights and shadows, bringing out Endo's heroicness. Additionally, the title of the work, *Fish Eyes*, plays into the imagery of the eyes of a fish out of water, desperate for someone to help them breathe as it gasps for air. In this metaphor, Endo is the hero, as she aids her incarcerated peers, and the people watching her are the fish, gasping for freedom and needing to return home. Zooming out, the overall goal of my artwork was to emphasize the values brought out in Endo's story, as opposed to highlighting various physical and objective aspects. I was determined to subtly bring out the emotion and internal conflicts, as I believe that is the most important part of Endo's work.

Through this project, I have learned that sacrifice is an important aspect of community.

Everyone plays an important role in others' lives, and Endo displays this by going above and beyond, overcoming the harsh conditions of Japanese internment to fight for her peers. In my community, more specifically my family, I think my art will have an uplifting impact. My grandfather is a survivor of the Nagasaki bomb, and both of my grandparents are extremely grateful that I learn Japanese traditions, learn the language, and study important Japanese figures, as sometimes they can be lost in the business of our lives. I hope that this artwork will fill them with pride, as Endo is a perfect role model for many of the values my family embodies, and a hero of Japanese internment, an event directly related to the war that greatly affected my grandfather. Overall, I hope that this work can encapsulate the set of values Endo practiced and is able to inspire others to look further into her story and learn from her example to better communities around the world.