

Impact Statement

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Digital art.

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Unsung Hero: Mary Anning

Mary Anning was a female paleontologist who lived from 1799 to 1847 in the United Kingdom. I think the most inspirational thing about Mary Anning was her ability to persist. I'm someone who has struggled with motivation and drive in my life, but she was able to continue despite the frequent setbacks she faced. From growing up in poverty, to losing her father, to being excluded from the scientific community and even branded a liar, she was still able to keep pursuing her passion for paleontology. She continued to work finding, cleaning, and selling fossils despite all of the opposition that she faced, and she did it in part to support her family. Without her father, needed to make money to support herself, her mother, and her one surviving brother, which shows the extreme pressure that she was under. She suffered from the opposition that she constantly had to fight, and even wrote in a letter that "the world has used [her] so unkindly" yet still, she persisted.

I wanted to portray both her amazing accomplishments and her defying of social norms of the time through my piece. Two of the fossils that she discovered are depicted flying with her in the piece to represent the scientific discoveries that she made in her life. Additionally, the way that she is framed, not simply gazing at the world outside from her home but finding the courage to go out into it conveys her drive to work towards her goals no matter what might be caging her in. In her life she was continuously denied by the scientific community, and the general sexism that existed in the 1800's, which is represented by how she is inside her house; caged in by expectations. However, she still went out, finding new fossils and defying the expectations that tried to keep her inside, which is represented by how she steps out of her door walking with the fossils that she discovered. She was both able to work harder than men in her field to gain recognition and achieve amazing things, and I worked to convey that in my art.

The vision behind my creative interpretation involved trying to represent a sense of movement and freedom, as well as the time that she lived in. Firstly, I used the smooth shapes of the dinosaurs in contrast to the straight lines of Mary's window to show freedom in contrast with restriction. I also wanted these lines to flow horizontally to make it seem like the drawing was moving in a direction. However, instead of left to right – which is the way our eyes normally flow when reading – the drawing flows right to left to emphasize the resistance and opposition that Mary experienced moving

through her life. I used texture and color to make the drawing feel old fashioned to take into consideration the time that Mary lived in.

While I was creating this work, I realized how much I could accomplish if I didn't cage myself in and would explore more in life. Thanks to women like Mary Anning, I have more freedom to achieve my goals, so I want to take the leg up they've given me to do amazing things. She had the strength and bravery to persist at what she loved, so I can find it inside myself too. This experience has shown me that great accomplishment often lies at the end of great struggle. Many of my friends have an interest in history so I want to use this as a gateway to start competitions about history that has been lost to time and isn't celebrated by the general public. I would like to spread Mary Anning's story to all those who feel forgotten and left behind by society.