

Impact Statement

Natalia Benitez, Grade 10

A Picture into the past, 2021.

Acrylic on canvas board, 16 x 20 inches.

Plainfield Academy for the Arts and Advanced Studies, Plainfield, NJ

Unsung Hero: Margaret Bourke-White

When choosing an unsung hero to represent, it was difficult to pick one unsung hero whose narrative I could depict on canvas. Many of these unsung hero stories are impactful and inspirational, but the one that stuck out to me was how one person can say and do so much with just a photo. This person is Margaret Bourke-White, my unsung hero. I found Margaret Bourke-White after looking at lists of unsung heroes on Google. Just by reading the small summary about her, I was already surprised at how I hadn't heard about her despite all her accomplishments. Margaret Bourke-White was first at many things, such as being the first woman to be allowed to photograph combat zones during World War II, being the first female photographer in Life magazine, the first photographer for fortune, and the first professional photographer from the West to enter the Soviet Union. However, without her mother gifting Bourke-White her first camera, which awakened her passion for photography, she would never have achieved any of these successes. Bourke-White studied many different subjects during her college years, but what started her career as a photographer was when she took photographs of her campus and sold them after having a difficult time finding a job. These photos turned out to be a huge success and even started getting her contacts with architects wondering if she was training to become a photographer, something she had never considered before. Through these contacts, she was able to start her career as a photographer and do the many great things that she has done just by being one.

Bourke-White was a risk-taking person due to her goals, but just by reading her story, it's clear she was also highly independent and determined all her life. She never gave up photography despite the difficulties it brought in her life, along with the life-threatening risks it also brought while taking photographs of war. In my artwork, I wanted to portray her side of fearlessness and daring, showing the extent she would take to photography. Most importantly, though, I wanted to offer a few of the images she has so diligently worked to get. Many of her photographs gave an insight into what some of the wars that she has lived through were like. I thought it was important to add these photographs to retell some of the stories that she has told with them.

In the same way that Bourke-White's photographs revealed so much, I wanted to follow a similar structure in my artwork. I made the painting black and white with a white border to make the painting look like one big picture to represent this. As mentioned before, I wanted to demonstrate Bourke-White's fearlessness and recklessness in my

composition. I illustrated this by showing her capturing a photo in a tall building that has a faded rhythm at the end of it, showing the heights and risks she would take for a photograph. Many of these risks also came from Bourke-White employment in battle zones during World War II. With the painting being about Bourke-White, I thought it was significant to make her the main focus and put her in the foreground, but at the same time include some of the essential pieces in her life, such as her camera. Mainly, though, besides the camera, I added one of the uniforms that she would wear when taking photographs while traveling and the plane that she would use to go to these combat zones and other issues worldwide in the background to demonstrate the part of her life when she would take photographs of these historical events. I further demonstrated this by adding two of the photos that she took in the bottom foreground of the canvas. The one in the bottom left corner is one where Bourke-White took a photo of people waiting for free food and clothes during the Great Depression, while the sign behind them says "World's Highest Standard of Living," and the other in the bottom middle shows one man sitting and another man in the corner with a market place in the background of them. I selected these pictures primarily because, even though Bourke-White took pictures of combat areas, she would also take photos of important issues such as the Great Depression.

During the stages of making this artwork, Bourke-White taught me how doing what you enjoy can lead to many accomplishments. Bourke-White was able to fulfill many things throughout her life, all the while continuing to pursue her passion for photography. Seeing how she was able to follow the things she loved and let no one stop her shows me that I can similarly follow my life. Although this might be the way I see it, I know many other people will view it differently, but I still hope it will have the same impact it did on me. To do this, I want to display my artwork at school events like the art show my school does annually and share it with friends and family.