

Impact Statement

Katherine Holtman, Grade 12

Beauty and Brilliance, 2025

Acrylic, charcoal on canvas board, 11 x 14 inches

John C Kimball High School, Tracy, CA

Unsung Hero: Hedy Lamarr

Hedy Lamarr was remembered for her glamorous roles in Hollywood; she's the definition of a true unsung hero whose legacy extended far beyond the screen. I chose to explore Lamarr's life and work because of her incredible determination to excel in both artistic and scientific fields, something which I deeply admire and aspire to do myself. As someone who has both the passion for intellectual pursuits and creative aspirations, Lamarr's story was a powerful reminder that it's possible to thrive in both worlds. Her ability to defy societal expectations during a time when women were limited to traditional roles makes her an outstanding inspiration for anyone breaking the boundaries to follow their own paths.

Despite Lamarr's success as an actress in the 1930s and 1940s, she found deep passion in innovation and technology. She co-invented a frequency hopping system during WWI which changed the game and later became a precursor to modern day Wi-Fi, GPS technology, and Bluetooth. Specifically, during a time when women were rarely seen in the STEM field, Lamarr broke through the barriers, showing her strong commitment to expanding her mind and creativity for a greater good. Her work in the STEM field was largely unrecognized in her lifetime but her impact was undeniable. Through her invention she shook the course of history, shaping how we communicate and navigate the world.

Through my artist interpretation of Lamarr's story, I aim to highlight her impact in both Hollywood and the scientific field. My artwork will incorporate elements of glamour and elegance, reflecting both her Hollywood persona and representation of her scientific contributions. That being said, I created a magazine cover style painting of Hedy Lamarr to highlight the contrast between how she is perceived and who she truly was. I used acrylic paint and charcoal for this piece. The headlines on the cover reflect both her public image and her overlooked scientific findings portrayed behind her. Through this piece, I want to show how her beauty often overlooked her intellect. Research played a major role in my decisions in developing this project. I studied her contributions to science but also the cultural context in which she lived. During a time when women were not given credits for their achievements let alone intellectual ones, her perseverance to contribute to a male dominated field is a powerful testament to her character. This is something I wish to highlight in my artwork.

The impact of this artwork goes beyond the canvas. Her story is a reminder to never limit yourself based on societal expectations. It encourages me to pursue all my interests and passions to the fullest, even if they seem different and don't conform, knowing each of them hold value and importance to me. I hope that through this project others will also be inspired to break boundaries and follow their dreams no matter how unconventional they may seem. I hope to share my artwork within my community and at school to spark a conversation about women in STEM. If possible, I would love to display the piece at my school's office or community center so others can be educated and inspired.