



Impact Statement

Steve Han, Grade 10

The Hands of Reconstruction, Frances Perkins, 2026

Acrylic on canvas board, 24 x 18 inches

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Unsung Hero: Frances Perkins

The sea route to Oedo Island is particularly rough to pass through on a rainy day. One day, my father and I had to cross to the island in a boat weighing only 20 tons. As the waves rose high, we were on our way to inspect the waterways and facilities on Oedo Island, which my grandparents had built on and maintained for more than 50 years. Growing up, whenever I came to the island, I always thought about how feelings are different out in the middle of the sea. Traveling the rough voyage made me realize that protecting a place is never a passive job. It requires patience, responsibility, and the will to continue no matter what the situation may be.

Oedo Island was almost an abandoned island after Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945 and was known to be an isolated and neglected space. Luckily, my grandparents were deeply moved by the island's ecosystem and natural beauty, so they began to change the island with just two hands outside of the help of the government or environmental groups. Over time, Oedo Island has become recognized as an important marine resource of Korea. The Botanic Garden that my grandparents created has become a place where many visitors come to appreciate the ecology and scenery of the island. For me, Oedo Island is not just a tourist destination or home, but proof that once forgotten places can be revived through will, labor, and care.

The experience of growing up in such an environment has created a way for me to understand responsibility. Preserving the outside world was not just about protecting beautiful scenery. Systems such as solar power supply, eco-friendly sewage treatment, and rainwater purification must be managed together. Running an outside world often feels as complicated as running a small city. In the process, I realized that creation does not always mean creating something completely new. Rather, an opportunity to be reviving what has been neglected, rekindling what is disappearing, and returning new meaning to what already exists.

This perspective interested me in projects that modernize and reuse abandoned infrastructure. I am more attracted to purposeful recovery and regeneration than simply inventing for the new. I have come to believe that real development lies not only in establishing something new but also discovering and reviving hidden value. Taking on this perspective has made me feel a deeper sense of respect for Francis Perkins, my unsung hero.

Francis Perkins is often remembered as the first woman to serve in the U.S. presidential cabinet, but I admire her because she was trying to rebuild a society in crisis. When

millions of Americans were unemployed, anxious, and in pain during the Great Depression, Perkins did not remain a far-sighted observer. She faced the pain firsthand and turned it into an action. After witnessing the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, she believed that tragedy should not just be mourned and forgotten but rather considered as a turning point. She played a major role in the development of worker protection, workplace safety standards, unemployment insurance, and social security systems. She did not rebuild society with bricks or machinery, but with law, advocacy, and moral courage.

Francis Perkins touches me very deeply. In her, I see the same spirit that my family demonstrated while taking care of Oedo: The will to revive the fragile, protect what others pass by, and build a long-standing system for people to get to places. My grandparents revived the abandoned island and made it a living ecological space with beauty and learning. My father and I care for the invisible foundation that allows the island to continue. Francis Perkins did something similar in a different environment, on a much larger scale. Looking at a country scarred by economic collapse and social injustice, she pondered how to rebuild it so that even ordinary people could live with dignity rather than asking how to escape from it.

That vision was reflected in my work as well. In my painting, workers are standing on the ruined land and working on the ground with tools in their hands. They represent all those who quietly lay the groundwork for society to get back on its feet. In the center is Perkins who lifts a torn American flag...The flag shows a nation hurt and sunken by poverty, exploitation, and instability, but she is still lifting the flag. Through this gesture, I wanted to express Perkins' determination not to let suffering define the future. She stands not as a symbol of perfection, but as a symbol of power and encouragement to hold on to the end.

The workers surrounding her are very important to properly observe when understanding her work. The workers reflect the lives of people Perkins respected and tried to protect. She gave meaning to the sacrifices workers make through her voice, pen, and policy. She did not let their pain disappear in silence. In this sense, I think of her as a builder who rebuilt society through leadership and reform, not just through physical construction.

In the background of the painting, images such as industrial ruins and networks were put to connect the past and the present. Francis Perkins faced the crisis of industrial labor and economic collapse in his time, but her thoughtful reconstruction continues in other forms today. My experience has shown me that issues such as sustainability, energy instability, and environmental protection also require a long-term sense of responsibility.