



Impact Statement

Charlotte Zhang

***Our Terry Fox Run*, 2026**

Oil on wood panel, 24 x 31 inches

Appleby College, Oakville, Canada

Unsung Hero: Terry Fox

Resilience and kindness are perhaps the most beautiful qualities humanity has to offer...

To me, the name Terry Fox has always been close. My brother once ran the Terry Fox Marathon of Hope, and I'd encountered Terry's story in textbooks and school presentations. But it wasn't until I set out to paint him that I truly connected with it.

Terry Fox was a Canadian athlete and cancer activist who, at 18, was diagnosed with osteosarcoma and had his right leg amputated. And yet, he kept running. In 1980, he embarked on the Marathon of Hope — a cross-country run across Canada to raise money for cancer research. Running the equivalent of a full marathon every single day on a prosthetic leg, he covered 5,373 kilometers over 143 days before being forced to stop when cancer spread to his lungs. He passed away in 1981 at the age of 22. His Terry Fox Foundation has since raised more than \$800 million for cancer research annually, and his annual run is now held in communities across more than 20 countries. He moved the hearts of many.

It was this quality, that persistent, generous spirit, that I tried to capture in the painting.

During the reference collection process, I reached out to a coach leading a track and field team. For several reasons, I wasn't able to make it to their practice for quite some time. When I finally dropped by for photographs, it was raining, and I was having a horrible day. Still, I went. The coach and the team turned out to be immensely kind. When I asked if they'd still be training on the track, they told me the rain had moved them indoors. This was completely off script from what I'd planned. Just then, one of the athletes warmly offered to head out into the rain to help me with the pictures anyway. The way he spoke put me at ease immediately. Those small gestures were magical. And in that moment, I thought of Terry — how he, too, must have encountered countless people who showed up with quiet warmth.

For the composition itself, I was inspired by the glint in Fox's eyes when looking through his old photographs. The eyes are often the window to one's soul, and in his there was a particular shine — of hope, resilience, and a certain tenderness. I incorporated a double exposure effect to evoke collective memory and nostalgia, layering his image with the figures of runners beside him, representing the solidarity he inspired. I added a wing to his prosthetic leg, hoping to convey the spiritual strength he carried within him.

The piece was made using oil on wood, and the alla prima technique felt fitting for a story that lives so richly and vividly in so many people's memories.

To explain the impact I hope this painting has, perhaps it makes sense to start with where I was when I made it.

For years, art was not something I dared to pursue. I've felt a subtle devaluation of the arts in the world around me and found myself slowly beholden to it. Secretly, I often felt conditioned to feel embarrassed about wanting to pursue art as my life's meaning.

And yet, I think of standing before the Berlin Wall. The haunting sculpture at the Dachau concentration camp. A friend sharing her favorite Iranian animation with me, pausing to explain the cultural context behind certain dialogues. The power art has to make people feel things is unparalleled. And the story of Terry Fox held a similar spirit. He made people feel something. So did everyone who lined the roads to cheer him on.

That is what I hope my painting can do, in its small way: bring his story to people who haven't yet encountered it, and bring forth his spirit with those who have. In hard times, Terry's story kept me going. I hope this painting can carry some of that forward.

I'm not sure whether my artwork will ever reach an audience, but I've uploaded it to my personal website. Maybe—if I'm lucky and cold-emailing a gallery ever leads to an exhibition—and someone happens to stumble across my site, my work might have some impact.

Reflecting on this project, I'm also grateful to have stumbled upon the archive that made it possible. Through it, I encountered so many remarkable human beings and connected with Fox's story on a deeper level than before. I recognized familiar names and faces, and finally matched beautiful moments to names I'd long held without context. I had seen the photo of the "Migrant Mother" in school but never learned who took it. I had heard of the pilot who dropped candy from parachutes over Berlin for children but never knew his name. It is those moments, those acts of quiet courage and kindness, that make up the best of us. In a world so chaotic, I might as well remain a hopeless romantic. I've always believed that souls carrying hope, beauty, and kindness will always persist, like Terry Fox's.