



Impact Statement

Fiona He, Grade 10

More Powerful Than Words, 2026

Charcoal, colored pencil, graphite, photography, mixed media on paper, 14.5 x 13.5 inches

Luckie Art Studio, Lexington, MA

Unsung Hero: Corky Lee

The Unsung Hero I chose to draw is Corky Lee (1947-2021). He was a Chinese American photographer who lived in New York City, photographing different aspects of the Asian American identity to increase representation and diversity. He documented everyday life and monumental protests alike, with many of his famous photographs being of discriminatory injustices held against the Asian American community, such as police brutality. In addition to being a photographer, Lee also helped organize and run large-scale protests. He showed up to almost, if not all, AAPI marches and protests, documenting the event with his camera. He left behind such a strong impact that in 1988, the New York City mayor named May 5th as Corky Lee Day. He received many awards for his photographs and even has a street in Chinatown in New York City dedicated to him. Lee was known and is remembered for his strong sense of civil justice, fighting for Asian American equality throughout his life.

When I began illustrating this piece, I knew that I wanted to highlight what his photographs aim to shed light on, whilst also including some of his actual photographs. I decided to create a collage as I think collage is the most effective and interesting way to piece together parts of a person's identity and add some depth to the artwork. I chose first to draw Lee as my main subject, then two protesting signs that people in some of his black and white photographs were holding. For the photo I referenced a drawing of Lee, I chose the one I felt was most eye-catching, both figuratively and literally. Lee is looking directly at the observer with a dull expression, his eyes boring into theirs, almost as if he's daring the viewer to do something, to notice the injustice, to speak out about it. He's holding a camera, alluding to his job as a photographer. To draw Lee, I used charcoal to emulate the black and white photos of the 1900s.

I also added two red Chinese lanterns, one with the words “正义” written on it—the Mandarin word for justice. Red lanterns are a big part of Chinese culture and can be found all over in New York City's Chinatown, which is why I decided to add them. Since my collage was mostly monotone, I thought that adding this burst of color with the aim of Lee's photography was fitting for the piece. Furthermore, to highlight the photographs I used to construct the background of my piece, I color-toned it slightly so that it would have a warmer color to complement the red lanterns. I think that the best way to demonstrate the impact someone has had on our generation is to give real examples, which is why I thought including his photographs in my piece was so important.

I hope that through my artwork, viewers are reminded of the civil injustice Asian Americans suffered through. By making a piece of artwork in Lee's honor, I want the viewer to become aware and to confront the grim reality of injustice in America.