



Impact Statement

Madison Randick, Grade 12

Mapping the Unseen While Speaking for the Unheard, 2026

Oil, collage on canvas, 18 x 20 inches

Oakland Christian School, Auburn Hills, MI

Unsung Hero: Marie Tharp

Marie Tharp was the Unsung Hero I chose because of how much it seemed I could relate to her. Marie Tharp grew up in Michigan helping her father in the field, this is what started her love of mapmaking and nature. These humble beginnings are reflected in my painting with grass-like texture and her state of origin behind her head. She quickly learned about mapmaking in those early years, she never believed she could be a scientist or do fieldwork because she was a woman. I felt I could relate to how she felt, being also a woman who grew up in Michigan in a lower income home. I often thought my opportunities were limited by my circumstances, and for a while I did not want to pursue art since I believed making it as an artist was unreachable. But something that largely inspired me about Marie is that despite the limitations around her, she always pursued her passion. Due to her father's job she moved around constantly making her life seem unpredictable, but even worse her mother, her closest female companion passed away at the early age of 15. Many may look at this circumstance and think she would be discouraged or give up but despite the inconsistencies in her life, she stayed consistent for her love of mapmaking. Her life changing did not make her shy away but better yet, gave her an embracing attitude. This attitude gave her the courage to discover the unknown seas. Again, her origins struck me so much since my father passed away at a young age and I moved around a lot growing up. Life often seemed inconsistent, but something that remained consistent in my life was God and the passion I had for art. This story is inspiring since Marie today is still touching the young ladies all around the world in inconsistent circumstances that the unknown is to be embraced, because that unknown can be what changes your life.

Marie Tharp showed that this was true since later she went to college in Ohio, which was already incredibly impressive for women, better yet, after WW II opened more opportunities for women, she beat the odds and got accepted into the University of Michigan. This was a 4% acceptance rate for women. She studied geology and constantly excelled; her adventure did not stop at her university. She moved all over the country but eventually met her business partner Bruce Heezen in New York and continued to work with him in Columbia University.

Before the 1950s there was little known about the ocean, and the significance of what Marie had done impacted the whole world. Since to understand the world and how it runs we must understand the ocean as well. Marie being fearless and despite the doubts ended up mapping the ocean floor. And eventually with her partner was the first person that had work representing a systematic attempt at mapping the entire ocean floor. This was a huge accomplishment and this showed how, despite the circumstances, she prevailed in living out her dreams. This was

not the end to her beautiful discoveries; she continued to dive deep into the Atlantic Ocean; she aligned sound profiles from the Atlantic and created approximately six profiles stretching west to east across the North Atlantic.

From these profiles, this started her discovery of the continental drift. When she discovered this many people did not believe her since this was so nuanced and even more so, people limited her due to her gender. After a while of explaining her business partner Bruce Heezen finally saw things from her lens and spread news of this amazing discovery. This is also why in the painting I had her and her partner in blue, to represent the deep seas they researched but also to show that Bruce Heezen, holding Marie Tharp's glasses in hand, was able to see things through Marie's lens through the mapmaking process. It was important that Bruce was illuminated to see things through Marie's point of view to publish her works. Marie impacted the whole world by mapping oceans, and she was the first person to dive this deep into the unknown place that is the ocean. We now understand our Earth so much better due to her, and I'm so shocked I had not heard of her until this contest.

Learning about her has impacted my art and given me new inspiration. This painting I created is an homage to Marie Tharp. I wanted to make a painting of Marie at work in action because it is clear she was home when she was working. Hence, I wanted to make her at work in warm hues and nostalgic feeling. I wanted to emphasize how her passion and work always lit up her life.

She moved all over the country and documented data from all over the world, so I wanted to capture her daring and vivid personality through making a configuration of sea cartography maps of oceans. I wanted to put a collage piece of the Atlantic Ocean to document how much effort she had put into studying the Atlantic. I also put 6 sea animals all from the Atlantic Ocean over top of the maps to highlight the six profiles she discovered that led to her ground-breaking discovery of the continental drift.

Marie is an inspiration to all young women facing adversity and limitation, she persevered and followed her love for agriculture, the unknown, and mapping. Despite this being uncommon for women she beat the odds, and her story rains true as inspiration that all young women can beat the odds and live out their dreams and God given talents.

References:

<https://www.aag.org/memorial/marie-tharp/#:~:text=1920%20%2D%202006,1940s%2C%20Tharp%20recalled%20decades%20later.>