

Hidden Figures

Ellyn Cale

I began knowing I wanted to create a portrait and through brainstorming I devised a multitude of themes/subjects, artists and mediums that I could use and be inspired by. When looking at what appealed to me the most, I found I wanted to say something significant about the world through my portrait and really capture the identity of my subject. I also found that many of the artists who had similar goals for their artwork, used collage techniques as a main aspect of their style. A piece by John Carrid of a woman's face 'burnt' out collaged onto equations and blueprints, reminded me of the movie *Hidden Figures* about a group of African American Women who played pivotal roles in John Glen's launch into space but were discriminated against due to their race and gender. I then did research to see whether any other women had been treated in a similarly and found many examples. As a female myself and an advocate for equality I connected with the idea of presenting these stories in a way which commented on the injustice.

I began with the idea of creating a series of women's portraits in a similar style of John Carrid's, but during my exploration I found a technique that was more original. I also decided it would be more effective to show their stories instead of the fact that they were unacknowledged and that the issue is deeper than just one or two women.

My portrait *Hidden Figures* is a culmination of nine women combined in panels to present a new person, a symbol of the many women who have achieved great things, but whose accomplishments have been overshadowed and wrongly attributed to their male counterparts. The women I have chosen as subjects are: palaeontologist, Mary Anning, artist, Elizabeth Gould, astronomer, Henrietta Leavitt, mathematician Katherine Johnson, astrophysicist Cecilia Payne-Gasposchkin, musician Maria Mozart, microbiologist, Ester Lederberg and physicists, Lise Meitner and Chien-Shiung Wu. have 'embossed' text into each piece recounting their stories, giving a snapshot of their lives and the injustice they faced.

After exploration with many mediums and text transfer methods I found that the embossing technique and charcoal were best suited. I was inspired by the emotion Casey Baugh presents in his charcoal pieces and through exploration developed my technique. My manipulation of the medium and understanding techniques, specifically my tonal work has been successful in creating an effective and realistic portrait. I have used charcoal as the monotone nature of the media creates a historical aspect and it contrasts well with the embossing. I also like the symbolism it provides. Charcoal, at least historically, is mainly used for loose sketches which are used as the foundations of a larger piece. By using charcoal as a final medium, it provides some symbolism to the nature of how these women were often treated and further establishes the idea that my piece aims to give these women the recognition they did not receive.

I believe my piece creates interest with its collage layout and will hopefully attract the viewer to look closely and take the time to observe the subtle messages within.

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