

Counting my blessings

Emily Kummerow

The theme that I explored in this work was family heritage and connection. The intention was to present a candid representation of these three women who have had a large influence on me, my life, and values. Two of the women are my parents' mothers, Pamela Schoff and Vreni Kummerow. My own mother has greatly shaped me into who I am today. Each of them has inspired me with their hardworking spirit and strong Christian faith. I have illustrated this in my work from the two bible verses on the bottom of two of the works and an excerpt from the Lord's prayer in German on the other.

Charcoal portrait artist John Singer Sargent inspired me throughout this process. Researching his works, I found that he focused on individuality and personality. He utilized the traditional portrait style but included expressive charcoal line work, and both dramatic and soft shading. His style influenced my works in that they were neither hyper realistic nor over expressive. His works conveyed softness, using light to emphasize the notable features of the face. You can see in my works on brown paper that the subject's face is emphasized by the charcoal working around the paper, lightly blending it in. This allowed for a softness throughout my works, highlighting feminine features.

Each of the figures' upper torso takes up around a quarter of the page; I decided to give this area a more expressive feel due to me being inspired by the emotive charcoal style of artist Käthe Kollwitz. Throughout this process, I effectively explored various artists and techniques to develop ideas for my final work. It was important for me to experiment with various techniques, styles, and mediums. The main process of the practical work that I found the most difficult was the initial challenge of working with such a simple medium. I worried that I would not be able to create enough interest in the light composition of the works to bring out the unique features of everyone. I found myself comparing my process to that of hyper realistic charcoal artists and soon realized that that was far too much pressure to place on myself. It was important for me to take the time to enjoy the process and all the mistakes along the way. Especially with the structure of the faces for each subject, I had to go back and forth with a single charcoal pencil to create depth, light, and shadow. I could have incorporated other monotone mediums within these works if I wished, I had practiced with markers, pencils, and varying types of charcoal. But in reducing my materials to charcoal pencils, white charcoal, and an eraser, my drive and creativity was not diminished and rather, it created a beautiful simplicity in these works.

Overall, while this process challenged me in many ways, it allowed me to find one of my favorite mediums and styles of art. These works display each woman's unique personality and communicate the personal connection I have with each of them.