

GRANDPA LOUIE

FOREST WONG

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Columbia University, Class of 2024*

Artist Statement

I come from a history of artists. Growing up, I would always watch my grandpa paint in the basement of our house (his “art studio”). He would create a range of works from oil paintings that emulated the styles of traditional Western painters to Chinese ink brush paintings. As a self-taught artist, he learned by copying the styles of old masters (I had stumbled upon a “Mona Lisa” while casually wandering around our basement one day). In 1989, my grandpa, grandma, mom, aunt, and uncle immigrated to the U.S. In China, they were separated while waiting for their visas. My grandpa, aunt, and uncle stayed in Hong Kong while my mom and grandma were stuck in Guangzhou. Since reuniting in San Francisco, they had not seen each other for ten years. My mom, who tells the story to me, recalls that her baby brother, who was just three years old when she last saw him, had suddenly become a young man. My family made this sacrifice because my grandpa wanted better career and education opportunities for his family in the U.S. While my mom attended San Francisco City College and California College of the Arts for graphic design, my grandpa worked as a chef in Chinatown to help support his family. Years later, my family moved out of San Francisco and settled down in a rural town up north called Oroville. I wouldn’t say that we Orovillians are completely disconnected from the rest of the world, but we also aren’t exactly the cultural hub of northern California, which is why when I won a congressional art competition and the opportunity to visit the U.S. Capitol, I made Oroville news. But when I went to D.C., it wasn’t the experience of visiting the Lincoln Memorial or Washington Monument that stuck in my mind, but the view of my grandpa, in his U.S.A. hat, and American flag pin, the man who encouraged me to pursue art in the first place, who said while standing inside the U.S. Capitol, that it was the happiest day of his life.



Media: Oil on gessobord
Size: 9 inches (width) x 12 inches (height)
Year: 2023