



TRUE TO OURSELVES

Two of the New Mexico Black Leadership Council’s focal areas of impact are positive youth development and cultural vibrancy. In late May, a collaboration with the New Mexico Asian Family Center bore the third annual TrueNM cohort of youth artists celebrating their heritage—whether Asian or Black or a mix—and exploring identity, community, and racism through their work. Three of this year’s participants and their pieces are below.

DUC PHAM, 15



“Mirrors”
still from digital animation by Duc Pham

WHAT’S IT LIKE TO EXPRESS YOURSELF THROUGH YOUR ART?

“I have a lot of things in my mind and, when I make art, it helps me put my ideas out into a general image. It helps me collect my thoughts and simplify them down into a way that not only I can understand, but also others can understand.”

ANY ADVICE FOR OTHER YOUNG ARTISTS COMING UP?

“[Do] whatever feels most important to you at the time; just put it out there. For instance, last year for me, the biggest issue was Asian hate during Covid. It was a big deal experienced by a lot of people; it was the thing that I felt was important at the time. So, I tried to put it into my project.”



TABITHA MAGHEE, 15



“This Is Who I Am”
pencil, colored pencil, marker by Tabitha Maghee

WHY IS YOUR ART IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO CREATE?

“It’s important because I feel like it tells people who I really am and tells them more about me. I want them to know that sometimes I’m not in the right place and sometimes I am. And how my days can be good or bad and [that] I have problems I can’t really express through words.”

WHAT DO YOU TELL ARTISTS WHO ARE JITTERY ABOUT BEING EXHIBITED?

“Don’t be afraid to express yourself. Don’t be afraid to talk to people through your art and just keep going. Show them how beautiful you are.”



COBY KEBE, 16



“By Any Means Necessary”
denim, leather by Coby Kebe

WHY DO YOU CHOOSE THE MEDIUM YOU CHOOSE FOR YOUR ART?

“The medium I use is sewing. People have been wearing clothes for thousands of years. [My work is] a reflection of the world around me. Mainly what I base my work on is civil rights issues, [especially the] 1970s Black Panther Party. [For this exhibit, I made] the same pieces the Panthers wore and used during protests. A lot of my friends, when I told them how I felt about my pieces, they thought it was cringey or funny, but it’s really important for someone to be in touch with themselves and do what they like.”

WHAT’S NEXT ON THE HORIZON FOR YOU?

“[For my first runway show at Badland Studios,] my theme is ‘Sierra Leone at War.’ It’s where my dad is from, so a lot of pieces have a personal touch but also are like an outsider looking in on my past and cultural roots. I make these pieces, you wear them, people ask [what the pieces are about], and so then history doesn’t repeat itself.”

