

Project funded by:



ART FOR CHANGE:
RACIALIZED YOUTH
MENTAL HEALTH
ADVOCACY



emerging
artists'
exhibition

Project Youth Weave Team, ActionDignity

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check out the virtual gallery

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Land Acknowledgment	04
1. Our Purpose	05
2. Foreword	06
3. Artists	08
4. Junior Artists	36
5. Testimonials	38
6. Curator's Note	40
7. About ActionDignity	42

Land Acknowledgment

At ActionDignity, we respectfully acknowledge that we live, work, and gather on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy- comprising the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani Nations; as well as the Tsuut'ina Nation and the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations. This land, where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.

We honour the enduring presence, strength, and knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples who have cared for this land since time immemorial. As an organization rooted in equity, justice, and the empowerment of racialized communities, we recognize the deep interconnections between Indigenous sovereignty and our collective struggles for dignity, systemic transformation and the mission to build a just, inclusive future for all.





Our Purpose

ActionDignity's *Art for Change: Racialized Youth Mental Health Advocacy* catalogue is a celebration of voices, vulnerability, and vision. Created through 'Project Youth WEAVE: Youth Weaving Worldviews and Practices - Collaborating to Improve Mental Health of Racialized Communities', this collection of artwork reflects the powerful and personal expressions of racialized youth in Calgary who are using creativity as a tool for advocacy.

Youth WEAVE has been an impactful journey involving six community partner organizations - *CVMHSA, FRIENDS, Bridges for Newcomers, Future Stars Cricket Foundation, YES Centre & Calgary Women's Cultural Association* and a diverse and dynamic *Youth Community Leadership Team* - leading the way to decolonize the mental health narratives.

FOREWORD

Too brown to belong in white spaces. Too western to feel at home in my own culture. Sometimes, it feels like I don't fit anywhere....

— Youth WEAVE Participant

Racialized youth mental health crisis is not just standalone public health issue but a deeper crisis of unseen struggles: complexities of immigration experiences, fractured identities, stigma, Eurocentric norms in our social spaces, the pressures of adaptation and belonging to more than one communal identity.

Mental health is a deeply personal journey but for racialized youth, it is also shaped by unique challenges. These include the complexities of cultural dissonance, migration & racial trauma, differences of intergenerational lived experiences, cultural code switching and a persistent sense of not fully belonging anywhere. These intersect with the everyday realities of adolescence; peer pressure, academic stress, social expectations, creating an emotional landscape that is both layered and often overlooked.

In asserting their voices through art, these young artists are also asserting their unique space, as racialized Canadian youth, living at complex intersections of culture, identity and belongingness. Their art speaks to the barriers they face, from stigma and silence to the systemic inequities embedded in the structures around them; and a commitment to strive for racial equity in mental health systems.

At ActionDignity, our commitment has been to walk alongside youth; through sustained engagement, capacity-building, policy advocacy, peer-led trainings, reflection sessions, and art workshops. These relationships have been deeply transformational; rooted in trust, empowerment, and co-creation, and not just a transactional exchange of art. Together, we are shaping a vision where racial equity in mental health is not just an aspiration, but an active and ongoing pursuit.

This catalogue is more than a collection of art. It is a testament to the resilience, creativity, and leadership of BIPOC youth; and a call to all of us to do better, together. It stands as a powerful call to action for a culturally sensitive, racial trauma-informed understanding of youth mental health, across our schools, universities, healthcare systems, mainstream service providers, public spaces, and Canadian society at large.

The way forward lies in bringing about transformational Systems Change through policy advocacy replacing assimilation with inclusive integration, stigma with natural peer support and cultural dissonance with celebration of diverse identities. Only then we can fulfil the vision of a just and equitable Calgary for all.

Team Youth Weave, ActionDignity

GET TO KNOW THE ARTISTS

Alex Carreon

Alex was born in Salmaniya Medical Complex, one of Bahrain's three public hospitals. They were raised by their chosen family of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the Middle East — whose upbringing they later poke and prod like 'tinik', or fish thorns. At nineteen, Alex moved from Bahrain to Mohkinstsis (Calgary), three months before the pandemic. Their current themes are 'gigil', an uncomfortable feeling like gritting teeth, but in constant anticipation through collage-ing, digital art, and personal archiving.

Amber Noor

Amber Noor is a Pakistani-Canadian artist with roots in Balochistan. Her work explores themes of identity, memory, and the ongoing struggle to preserve culture in the face of erasure. As a novice artist, she's interested in a wide range of mediums, with a particular interest in textiles and collage for their tactile, layered storytelling potential.

Aya Yacout

Aya Yacout is a young emerging artist who has a passion for creating simple yet meaningful art. In her spare time, she enjoys watching shows and movies, which often inspire her work. Inclusivity and diversity are core values for her and have shaped her experiences with cultural dissonance and immigration. Through visual art and conversations, she strives to ensure everyone feels valued and included, regardless of racialized identity, religion, or background.

Fatimah Braimoh

Fatimah is a 17-year-old Nigerian, Canadian, and Muslim artist who is still navigating her unique path in life. She is passionate about sharing diverse perspectives and exploring what it means to live in an inclusive, pluralistic society. While she feels a strong connection to social work and science, she aspires to pursue a career in the medical field, particularly nursing. Her art reflects her journey of self-discovery and the blending of cultural and personal identities, while also expressing her desire to connect with others through shared experiences.

Habeebah Kafo

Habeebah is a 16-year-old teenager who immigrated to Canada with her family from Nigeria in 2018. She is planning to begin studying biomedical engineering at a university in 2026. She is grateful for her family's support through the hardships she has experienced over the past years.

Haniyyah Khan

Haniyyah Khan is a community-based artist and facilitator with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Calgary.

Ghazal B.

Youth Artist.

Lei Verosil

Lei is a 25-year-old Filipino makeup artist, occasional wanderer with a love for traveling and driving, and the ultimate yes-woman—always open to trying new things at least once. She immigrated to Canada from the Philippines with her family at the age of 12. Lei currently works in outreach, and outside of her 9-to-5 job, she enjoys spending time with her friends, her dogs, and her family

Maria Derder

Maria is a student who wrote ‘The Hijab’ to express the strength and pride behind wearing the hijab. This was her first time creating something of this kind, and she wanted to share an authentic message about identity, confidence, and being true to oneself. Even though she does not consider herself a writer or artist, Maria believes that using one’s voice - especially for something meaningful - can make a difference.

Matthew Tang

Matthew enjoys both beholding and creating art. He likes sketching people in pencil, doodling with pens, and making miniature clay models. He also uses watercolour and Sharpie markers to create appreciation cards for his community. He hopes to become a counselling psychologist one day. For fun, he enjoys bouldering and learning about people’s lives. His favourite animal is the bee—tiny, curious, and vital. Like art, bees create something sweet through collaboration.

Muna Abdulle

Muna Abdulle is a 17-year-old Somali high school student living in Calgary, Alberta. She is passionate about helping others and plans to study nursing in university, with hopes of becoming a doctor in the future. This is her first time sharing her creative work, and writing has become a way for her to express her thoughts and experiences. Through her art, Muna hopes to connect with others and share messages that are honest, personal, and empowering.

Patricia Mapeso

Patricia, also known as Pat, is 25 years old and currently completing a Sociology degree with a minor in Psychology at the University of Calgary. She hopes to create more and dedicate more time to her artistic practice. Patricia is especially interested in integrating aspects of her academic background into her art and is excited to see where that journey will take her.

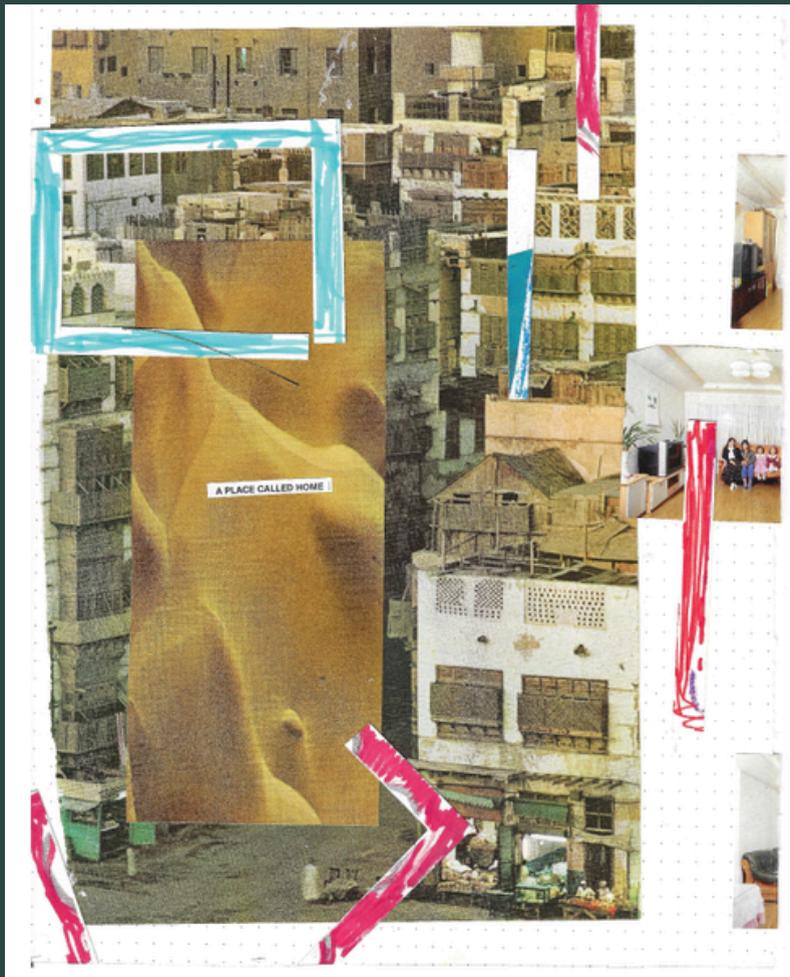
Supreet Kaur

Supreet is a Punjabi Canadian artist whose work is deeply rooted in the intergenerational impact of the Partition of India, a historical trauma that reshaped the identities, spiritual rhythms, and lived realities of her community. Coming from a people fractured by forced borders, she carries forward memories that are both sacred and haunted. Her art holds space for this complexity, offering a poignant exploration of ancestral longing, the weight of erased stories, and the enduring resilience woven through cultural survival.

Zena Yacout

Zena is a passionate emerging artist whose creative work is inspired by a deep curiosity about the world. Drawing influence from the visual storytelling experiences and the diverse expressions found in global artwork, Zena explores themes of memory, identity, and connection through their art.

ALEX CARREON



i. in places held by concrete / i. sa mga lugar na hawak ng kongkreto
Medium: Mixed Media and Collage
8.5 x 11 inches
2024

Artwork Description

Immigrants leave in pursuit of building roots in places held by concrete. Throughout the pursuit of rootedness is the fragmentation, alienation, creation and deconstruction of families, relationships, and identities.



ii. in places held by concrete / i. sa mga lugar na hawak ng kongkreto"

Medium: Mixed Media and Collage

8.5 x 11 inches

2024

Alex's Why

I create art as an act of love, joy and resistance. As an immigrant myself, in my early 20s having experienced the places that first generation immigrants need to live and survive in, I want to keep an archive of these experiences through art. Currently, I do not have all the language for the experiences that I am feeling especially in English, and the practice of creating art is the language that I sit in momentarily.

YOUTH ARTIST



Harmony
Acrylic on Canvas
8.5 by 11 inches
2025

Artwork Description

This painting reflects the harmony between two cultures - Vietnamese and Canadian. When I first came to Canada, I thought that I needed to get rid of my Vietnamese identity in order to belong. But in Canada, a multicultural country where different cultures are celebrated, I could carry both cultures with pride, like two different melodies woven into one song, each with distinct features, but together creating a more wholesome song.

AMBER NOOR

Artwork Description

Balochistan, a province of Pakistan, stretches along the Gulf of Oman and is home to rich coastal mangrove forests and rugged mountainous valleys. Despite its natural beauty, the region is often overshadowed by political unrest. This project allowed me to reflect on the challenges of maintaining a strong sense of identity while living in a multicultural society. I created this piece using heirloom textiles as they stand as a powerful symbol of racialized resilience, identity, and the enduring struggle for liberty.



*For the People, By
the People*
Textile Collage
12 by 15 inches
2025

Amber's Why

I want to reclaim and reframe narratives that have been erased—particularly those tied to identity, place, and mental health. My work seeks to give visual form to resilience and hope, often using symbolism rooted in Baloch culture. This practice helps me not only to preserve stories but to challenge dominant narratives.



Two places, One soul
Acrylic on Canvas
16 by 20 inches
2025

AYA YACOUT

Artwork Description

This painting is a reflection of my life stretched between two places—Egypt, where I was born, and Canada, where I now live. Each side of the Earth shows a part of me. Egypt is filled with the golden sand, pyramids, and the lotus flower, its national symbol of strength and renewal. Canada is painted with snowy mountains, the red maple leaf, and the bunchberry flower, which speaks to quiet resilience and beauty in the cold.

Living between these two cultures hasn't always been easy. Sometimes it feels like I'm floating in space—not fully here, not fully there. That's why the Earth is surrounded by stars and darkness. But in that space, I've found something beautiful too: a sense of belonging that doesn't need to choose one side. This piece is about carrying both worlds within me, about finding home in the middle of difference, and learning that identity can be more than one thing.



Aya's Why

My work is inspired by the distance between two places, Canada and Egypt, and the memory, culture, and identity pull in different directions. Themes like belonging and migration are central to my life journey, and I use art as a way to hold onto both parts of myself.



Lightyears from Home
Canvas painting
16 by 20 inches
2025

FATIMAH BRAIMOH

Artwork Description

“Lightyears from Home” explores the emotional weight of navigating multiple cultural identities. Depicting an astronaut lying on a moon, reaching up toward a planet where red and green colours merge—symbolizing my Canadian and Nigerian roots—the piece reflects the tension of cultural dissonance, where identity feels both fluid and fractured. Amidst this cosmic landscape, a dandelion grows beside the astronaut, symbolizing resilience in the face of uncertainty and adversity. A quote by Maya Angelou, etched onto a drifting asteroid, reminds us that true freedom comes from belonging nowhere and everywhere at once—perfectly capturing the feeling of existing between worlds. In this vast, silent universe, the astronaut embodies the diasporic self: untethered yet deeply connected to two cultures. Through this work, I aim to express the quiet struggle of holding two identities, yet never fully claimed by neither. It reflects the complex journey of defining home, self, and belonging in a world that often demands we choose just one.

Fatimah’s Why

As a Nigerian and Canadian, my work expresses the internal struggle of balancing both identities. I’m not an experienced artist, but I had a message to share, and that’s what drove my creativity. My art explores themes of identity, belonging, and the search for home. It also reflects how it feels to be pulled between two cultures. I created my piece because it helped me process these complex feelings, and communicate what words can’t.



HABEEBAH KAFO

Artwork Description

For as long as I can remember, I have struggled with cultural dissonance due to not being able to properly speak my native language, Yoruba. I tried to learn from other people speaking but it always ended up sounding weird, so I decided to stop trying. When I immigrated from Nigeria to Canada with my family, I felt happy to not have to put myself in those kind of uncomfortable situations anymore. However, the more time I spend in Canada speaking English, the less I can speak Yoruba, if I tried. As shown in the painting, Canada is pushing the Nigerian flag out of frame and parts of myself leave with it. It is important to me since cultural dissonance has been a part of my life for a long time and has become part of my identity, in a way.



Losing Myself
Canvas painting
16 by 20 inches
2025

Habeebah's Why

I was inspired by seeing puzzle pieces when coming up with my rough draft and how it perfectly fit my situation. Cultural dissonance is having a sense of unease when in a new cultural environment. Although I have only changed my environment once, the effects on my identity have been everlasting.



Mama's Reminder

Photolithography, Linocut and thread. 8.5 by 10 inches, 2024
 Portfolio Exchange, wearable piece.
 Edition of 25



Mama's Reminder

Close up of Urdu Text: "The tragic events of the establishment of Pakistan and Migration. Millions of Muslims martyred during the Migration"

Artwork Description

The work "Mama's Reminder" explores the complex relationship between migration and place. This piece is more than just the craftsmanship of the birthday hat through the resourceful means of a newspaper. Instead, this work critiques the celebration of Pakistan's Independence from India. The written text was taken from an Urdu newspaper with a headline comment from the Independence Day article. This juxtaposition of a celebration contrasts with the brutal history of what it means to celebrate Independence Day.

HANIYYAH KHAN

GHAZAL B.

In Gaza,

the sky is not blue,

it is the colour of fear,

Of drones and smoke and prayers that shatter before they reach heaven.

In Gaza,

Childhood is buried beneath broken homes and broken promises,

Their toys were crushed alongside their dreams.

The loudest silence is not when the bombs fall, but when the world looks away.

In Gaza,

the war does not end at the ceasefire.

It crawls into their bones,

Etches itself into their breath,

Sits heavy in their chests where childhood used to live.

In Gaza,

the loudest silence is the one the world refuses to hear.

The silence of stolen childhoods.



*In every war, the loudest silence is the stolen
childhoods left behind*
Mixed Media
16 by 20 inches
2025

*In every war, the loudest silence is the
stolen childhoods left behind*
Mixed Media
16 by 20 inches
2025

This work captures the duality of survival in Palestine: the body escapes, but the soul carries the invisible weight of war. The first image shows an innocent child trapped under the rubble, a haunting symbol of destruction, vulnerability, and innocence crushed beneath forces beyond their control. In the second image, the child is physically safe in a new space, yet the heavy shadow of trauma lingers in their eyes, posture, and the kite she is trying to fly in the sky. The walls may no longer crumble, but inside, the collapse continues.



Through these images, I invite viewers to confront the enduring impact of violence on children. Safety is more than shelter; it is healing, it is peace, it is dignity restored. Until then, many remain prisoners of memories that no rescue team can reach.

Ghazal's Why

Art is one of many ways a person can express the unspoken. The urgency drives my practice to give voice to those silenced by violence and injustice, especially children. I am inspired by stories of survival, resilience, and the invisible wounds.

LEI VEROSIL



Archives of a Dropout
Interactive Sculpture
2025

Artwork Description

The blanket is inspired by the roaring and vibrant textile industry in the Philippines. My family finally got the chance to step back home in the motherland after 12 years when we first immigrated here. I was terrified to go back- having spent half of my life growing up here and adjusting to the culture and lifestyle here, I wasn't sure how they would receive me back home. When I got there, it was nothing but warm hugs and welcoming kisses. Much like the feeling of wrapping a blanket around you. We ended up buying locally weaved blankets from our hometown at Ilocos and brought it back to Canada. I use it when I'm out for picnics with friends here. The journals are my real journals. So tread lightly. I have tried my best to go through both of them and black out sensitive information- but should you find any, let's keep it between us. Both were written around the time of the pandemic. I thought about replicating a journal and writing new entries- but feelings and vulnerability cannot be replicated. Doing this felt more impactful.



Leigh's Why

What inspires my practice is a loaded question. I started off as an English major at UofC right out of high school. Literature and writing was my initial form of expression- until school burnt me out and I lost my passion for reading and writing. Then I pivoted to make up artistry as an art form and have been doing that ever since. After leaving school, my adoration for writing has been revived- that's for sure. My inspiration primarily comes from my friends and loved ones. They are my anchors in this lifetime. They are the sun. I make art for expression- to release and bring something else to life. I make art to let people know I am alive- and that I've lived.



The Hijab Maria Derder

The Hijab isn't just a cloth,
But a symbol of strength and
pride.

It speaks without a word,
With honor worn, and not to
hide.

It cover's the hair but reveals
the soul,
A story of islam, a woman's
control.
Freedoms embrace, not
oppression,
In this race, a bold confession.

Challenges the beauty
standard,
I try my best, but still get
slandered.
Despite outside pressure, my
confidence recovered,
Like a hidden treasure, ready
to be discovered.

So wear it with pride and
grace,
The hijab is your strength,
and a sacred space.
Not a wall, but a door
unlocked,
A woman with power, never
to be blocked.

MARIA DERDER

Artwork Description

I wrote *The Hijab* to show that the hijab is not just a cloth—it's a symbol of strength, pride, and choice. For many of us, especially young girls, wearing the hijab in school is a big step. It takes courage to walk into a space where people might judge you for what you wear or what you believe. I wanted to express how the hijab can be both empowering and challenging—how it reveals inner strength even when others don't understand it. This poem is about owning that power, pushing back against stereotypes, and finding confidence in a world that often tries to shake it.

Maria's Why

My poem's message is about reclaiming control, breaking stereotypes, and showing that the hijab represents power—not oppression. This piece is personal, but it also stands for many others like me who carry their culture and faith with pride despite the pressures around them.



Disoriental
Watercolour paint
9 by 9 inches
2025

Artwork Description

Growing up as a second-generation immigrant was disorienting—caught between my Vietnamese roots and the Canadian soil I was raised in. Among white kids, I felt like a knockoff; at home, too white-washed. I became a shape-shifter, never quite fitting, never quite seen. Trái thanh long (dragon fruit) embodies my heritage: vivid on the outside, colourless within. Sweet but undefined. The glass cloche holds the quiet weight of internalized shame. To belong, I performed for the white gaze. I smiled through slurs, silenced discomfort, and pretended home was a steady place. White splotches mark the decaying voice of self-doubt. The maple leaves are a quiet reminder of the culture that raised me but never fully held me. In the blend of too much and not enough, I learned this: I don't have to be one or the other. I'm simply me. And home is where I find myself and belonging.



MATTHEW TANG

Matthew's Why

My daily practice is compassion, which, to me, means recognizing the shared lifehood and humanity in all that I do. This might look like respecting the dignity of a stranger or holding a ladybug with gentleness. To recognize our common humanity is to know that I leave a unique fingerprint on the world—just as others leave theirs on me.

A central theme in my work is holding space. I believe all life forms have worth because they take up space and can hold space for others. I make art because beauty is not only perceived—it's shared. It takes noticing to be noticed.

Artwork Description

I wrote Foreign Faith to express what it feels like to be visibly Muslim in a world that often misunderstands me. This poem was my way of turning frustration into something powerful. It's important to me because it speaks for so many people who are judged before they're known especially Black Muslim girls like me. I wanted to show that our faith isn't something foreign or weak it's strength, confidence, and something to be proud of. This piece is a reminder that we don't need to change to fit in. We deserve to take up space exactly as we are.

MUNA ABDULLE

Muna's Why

This is my first time sharing my work, but I've always used writing as a way to express what I feel inside. I'm inspired by my identity as a Black Muslim girl and the things I go through the stares, the strength, the faith, and the love I carry. My art is about being seen and heard, even when the world tries to silence people like me. I make art because it helps me process who I am and hopefully gives someone else the courage to do the same.



Foreign Faith
by: *Muna Abdulle*

They stare before I speak, like my hijab makes me weak. They don't hear what I say, just watch the way I pray.

I walk in with peace and grace, but they only see a threat to face. They ask me, "Where are you really from?" As if my faith makes me wrong, not strong.

They act like I don't belong here, like I should shrink or disappear. But I've learned to hold my space, to walk with pride, to move with grace.

My prayer is quiet, but it's power. My voice gets stronger by the hour. I'm not here to make them feel okay I'm here to be me, anyway.

So let them stare, let them doubt. I'll still bow my head and block it out. I'm Muslim, bold and unashamed, and no one's fear will get me tamed.

Foreign Faith
Digital text
8.3 by 11.7 inches

MUNA ABDULLE

PATRICIA MAPESO

Artwork Description

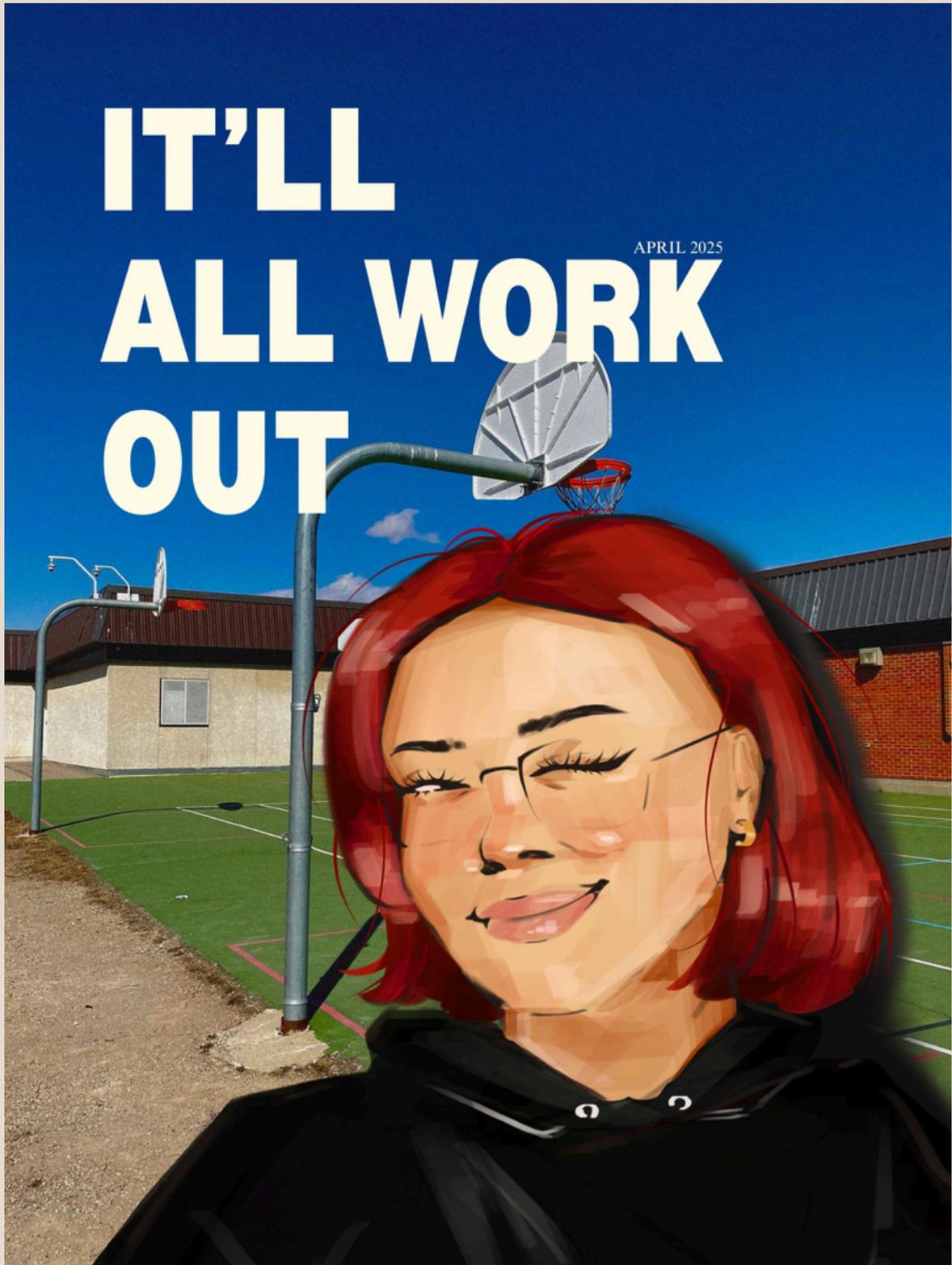
This self-portrait was based off of a photograph taken by a friend at a time when I felt most undone. I had just lost my job, dyed my hair red, and was drowning in the quiet shame of unproductivity—a weight heavy for someone raised to equate worth with work. In my culture, we are taught resilience, not vulnerability; prayer, not dialogue. But in my friends, I found bayanihan—a gentle, unwavering presence of your community. This piece is a love letter to that community, a reminder that even in the ache of dissonance, we are held. And slowly, we begin again.

Patricia's Why

I've always been an avid artist ever since I learned to pick up a pencil, and I'd like to hold on to drawing and making visuals and claim them some of the only things I'm naturally talented at. However, lately, I find that I only gravitate towards drawing and creating when I'm going through particularly difficult periods in my life - so my art is deeply personal to me in that sense. When I do find the urge to create, I want to create art that is simultaneously personal to me and easy for others to connect with. I find inspiration in my everyday life, everyday scenes, everyday objects, and everyday people - because I'd like to think that there's always something beautiful and extraordinary to take out of what we think is ordinary.

IT'LL ALL WORK OUT

APRIL 2025



It'll All Work Out
Digital Painting
2025

SUPREET KAUR

Artwork Description

The artwork 'Coloured Faces, White Spaces' reflects the emotional and psychological toll of navigating neurodivergence as a racialized person in predominantly white environments. Through the interplay of skin colour and mind patterns, I want to show the silent labor of masking, code-switching, and surviving in spaces that were never built for us. Challenging the norms of who gets to be seen as 'whole', I reimagine inclusion as one that embraces neurodivergence without stereotyping or demanding assimilation.

Supreet's Why

I am drawn to the intersections of racial trauma, youth mental health, and diasporic identity, especially for BIPOC communities navigating inherited grief in systems not built for their healing. Through visual expression, I seek to honour what was lost and dream of a future that doesn't demand that we divide ourselves.



Coloured Faces, White Spaces
Mixed Media on Canvas
16 by 20 inches
2025

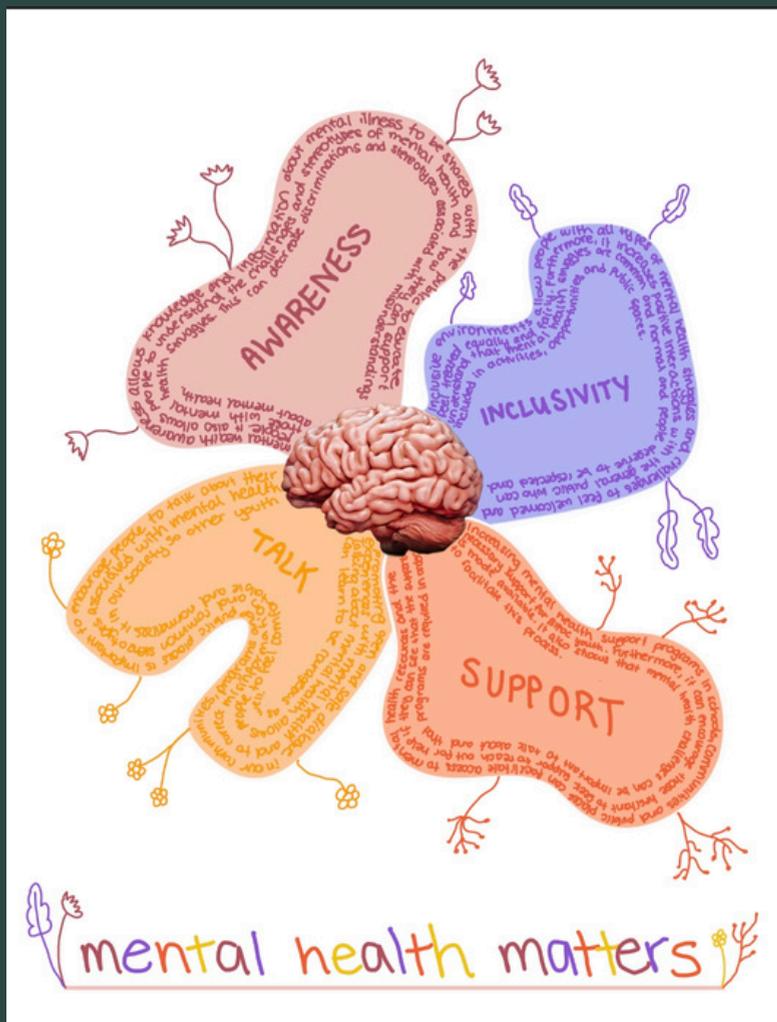
ZENA YACOUT



Dhikr by the Sea
Mixed Media on Canvas
16 by 20 inches
2025

Artwork Description

Dhikr, the remembrance of Allah in Islam, is a peaceful and grounding act of worship. It invites Muslims to reflect on their existence, find purpose, and express gratitude to God. The artwork "*Dhikr by the Sea*" explores a unique mental health practice among Muslim youth, where spiritual remembrance becomes a source of strength in navigating life's challenges. Through *dhikr*, one finds meaning in struggle and faith in the process of personal growth. Set against the calming backdrop of the sea, the piece emphasizes how spiritual practices and mental health can intersect through a deep connection to nature.



Artwork Description

The artwork "Mental Health Matters" highlights the essential pillars of mental health support—awareness, inclusivity, talk, and support—that should be actively offered to youth within our communities. By centering these key aspects, the piece aims to encourage open conversations around mental health and promote greater access to resources. It serves as a visual reminder that fostering a supportive and informed environment is crucial to the well-being of youth in our communities.

Pillars of Mental Health
 Digital Art
 16 by 20 inches
 2025

Zena's Why

As a Muslim youth passionate about mental health advocacy, I use various forms of artwork to express my thoughts and perspectives on mental health and to address the stigma that still exists in our communities. Through my work, I hope to connect with others—to show them they are not alone—and to encourage collective advocacy for the care and support everyone deserves. By exploring mental health through an Islamic lens, I aim to highlight the strength and beauty found in spiritual practices like dhikr (remembrance of Allah) during times of adversity. I hope my art inspires others—especially Muslim youth—to understand that turning to faith is neither a weakness nor a denial of struggle, but rather a powerful and beautiful way to face challenges with hope, connection, and purpose.

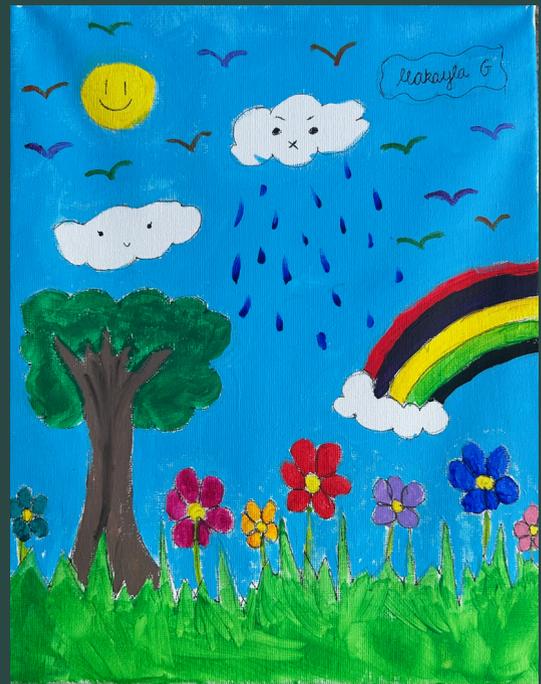
JUNIOR ARTISTS



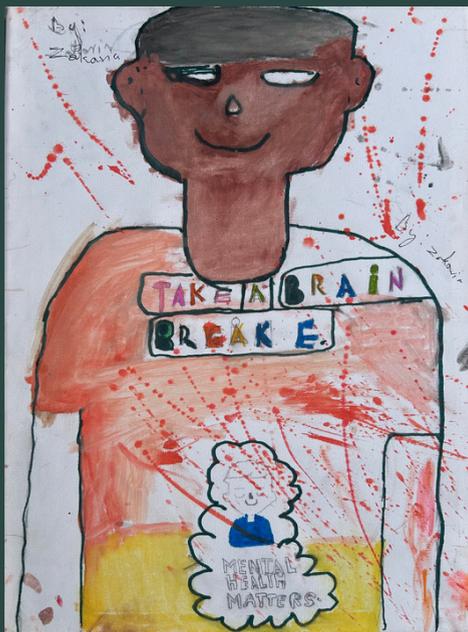
Mental Health Matters
Ariz Mudansiru, 12
Acrylic on Canvas
8 by 10 inches

The painting is about a boy who is thinking about all the troubles in his life, along with the mental health support he received.

The field represents my mind, with flowers symbolizing emotions and life events, while the birds are my thoughts and feelings.



Mental Health Matters
Makayla Givans, 15
Acrylic on Canvas
8 by 10 inches



The red splatters in this painting represent stress. I hope to express the importance of caring our mental health. With self-care, like yoga, meditation and support from others. We can stay calm and resilient through life's challenges.

Take a break
Zakaria Mudansiru, 12
Acrylic on Canvas
8 by 10 inches

In my painting, each fish represent a culture I belong to; English, Jamaican and Indian. The shark symbolizes by nervousness. When I first came to Canada, I felt overwhelmed and anxious, having lived in the UK until I was eight. The shark captures the sense of the fear and uncertainty as I navigated a new and unfamiliar world.



Mental Health Sharks
Amelia Givans, 10
Acrylic on Canvas
8 by 10 inches



Overwhelmed
Andy Nguyen, 11
Acrylic on Canvas
8 by 10 inches

Andy's painting shows a bright yellow smiley face, cheerful on the outside but slowly melting down. Around it are bursts of shapes, colors, and patterns, capturing how much is happening around him and how that can feel overwhelming.

This powerful piece reminds us that even when kids seem happy, they may be carrying more than they show.

TESTIMONIALS

Through this project, a number of youth voices have been given the opportunity to speak and share their experiences. Here is how some of them have been impacted by this opportunity....

"Topics such as cultural dissonance and mental health stigma has no age limit. They can affect an individual of any background and age. It is beneficial to give them a safe space to share their thoughts and experiences without judgement or expectations."

- Habeebah Kafo

"SHARING MY WORK HELPED ME REALIZE THAT I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE CARRYING THESE FEELINGS. ART GAVE ME A WAY TO SPEAK WITHOUT HAVING TO EXPLAIN EVERYTHING — AND THAT'S WHY IT'S SO POWERFUL. IT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL SEEN."

— MUNA ABDULLE

"Through this project, I reflected on my experience growing up as a second-generation Canadian. Like many others, I've felt loneliness, shame, and isolation—especially when I wasn't understood or felt rejected. I'm drawn to Brené Brown's definition of shame: "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging." I hope to live in a world with more opportunities for connection, and I'm trying to build that in my own relationships. Art should be used as a tool for advocacy because beauty is universal. It exists inside us and around us. It's a common language that helps us express emotions, tell stories, and understand each other's needs. Art creates space for empathy, healing, and community. Thank you for sponsoring this project and making space for voices like mine to be heard."

- Matthew Tang

"ART IS MOVEMENT, AND A WAY TO CREATE SPACES FOR OPEN CONVERSATIONS. MORE THAN EVER, WE ARE IN NEED OF BEING IN COMMUNITY AND TALKING TO EACH OTHER; ART AND PLAY IS THE TOOL FOR THAT."

- ALEX C

"Through this project, I've come to realize just how powerful art is in helping us express emotions that we might not always have the words for—especially when it comes to mental health struggles within BIPOC communities and the deep impact of racial trauma. Growing up, I often felt torn between cultures, and art became my way of making sense of that dissonance. I believe art can be a bridge, a way to speak up about issues like stigma and isolation that many of us face but rarely discuss openly. For me, art isn't just about creating; it's about connecting, sharing experiences, and showing that we're not alone in our struggles."

– Aya Yacout

IT'S INSPIRING HOW THE TEAM DECIDED TO EXHIBIT ARTWORKS TO TALK ABOUT THESE TOPICS INSTEAD OF HAVING PEOPLE GO INTO CITY HALL/ETC. AND COME UP TO A PODIUM TO TALK ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE. USING ART AS A TOOL MAKES IT LESS INTIMIDATING, SLIGHTLY (POSSIBLY) THERAPEUTIC, AND CREATES A VISUAL ELEMENT TO EXPERIENCES THAT OUR YOUTHS HAVE DEALT WITH."

– Leigh Verosil

"Through making this art piece, I learned just how deeply cultural dissonance affects my internal experience. Before this opportunity, I was passive about my feelings of inadequacy and isolation, often ignoring the disconnect I felt with my culture. But this process gave me the chance to confront and address those emotions head-on. I was able to express them in a way that felt both authentic and creative, which allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of myself and the complexities of my cultural identity."

– Fatimah Braimoh

TO THE SPONSORS, I WANT YOU TO KNOW: ART IS NOT DECORATION, IT'S SURVIVAL. IT'S RESISTANCE. IT'S A BRIDGE BETWEEN WHAT WE FEEL AND WHAT THE WORLD MUST SEE. ART MAKES VISIBLE THE TRAUMA WE ARE OFTEN TOLD TO HIDE. THAT'S WHY WE MUST USE IT FIERCELY AS A TOOL FOR ADVOCACY."

– GHAZAL B.

"I've learned how powerful art can be in giving voice to feelings we're often told to hide—especially as BIPOC youth. Writing about the hijab helped me process the confidence it takes to wear it and the judgment we face for our identities. I want the funders to know that this isn't just a poem—it's a piece of my truth. Art lets us turn pain, pride, and struggle into something that speaks louder than silence, and that's how change begins."

– Maria Derder

CURATOR'S NOTE

I've had the privilege and honour of working with BIPOC emerging artists through the Youth WEAVE Project. This experience reminded me how important it is to create space for our stories—especially the ones that are often left out or held quietly.

As someone who works at the intersection of art and community, I've seen how powerful it can be when young people are given the tools and trust to express themselves. This project invited youth to explore themes like identity, mental health, and systems of care through a variety of mediums. It wasn't about polished outcomes, but about making room for honesty, reflection, and connection.

There's something deeply necessary about sharing stories shaped by migration, intergenerational memory, and cultural dissonance. Art gives us language for what's complex, layered, and sometimes hard to name. It helps us process, reimagine, and begin to heal.

What made this project special was how it centered care - care for each other, care for the process, and care for the truths being shared. I'm grateful to have witnessed these artists step into their voices and trust their own rhythms. Their work is a powerful reminder that when we create space for storytelling, we also create space for transformation.

Thank you to the Action Dignity team and the City of Calgary for allowing us the opportunity to be supported in sharing our voice.

- Haniyyah Khan, assisted by Zena Yacout

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Haniyyah Khan, a Pakistani-Canadian artist based in Calgary, Alberta, believes in the power of storytelling and community building as essential aspects of her creative practice. With a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Studies from the University of Calgary, she uses mixed-media techniques, including printmaking, textiles, drawing, collage and film to explore themes of heritage and belonging, weaving together her South Asian identity and contemporary art.

Haniyyah remains dedicated to making arts education accessible and sustainable through artist residencies, workshops and facilitation. She works to nurture spaces of creativity and cultural expression and celebrates diverse identities while inspiring future generations.

ABOUT ACTIONDIGNITY



Vision

Calgary is a just and equitable society for all

Mission

To work together with ethnocultural, racialized, and equity-seeking groups to create transformational changes in our communities and society

Values

Respect for diversity
Equity and social justice
Active citizenship and democratic participation
Collaboration

"An equitable and just Calgary is the tree which grows from the seed of Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms, sown in the land of Truth & Reconciliation, watered with equity and inclusive integration; bearing fruits of social justice, harmony, unity in diversity and prosperity for all."

In 1969, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism clarified the distinction between integration and assimilation, noting that *“man is a thinking and sensitive being; severing him from his roots could destroy an aspect of his personality and deprive society of some of the values he can bring to it.”*

Since then, integration has been the official policy of Government of Canada.

Therefore, through this work on Racialized Youth Mental Health, ActionDignity calls for:

Increased funding for community-based, grassroots organizations working towards equitable access to mental health resources and services

Disaggregation in State of Youth in Canada report.

Anti-racism training for mainstream mental health professionals.

Racial Trauma-informed care in schools & healthcare.

Race-based disaggregated data collection and analysis.

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