

BEYOND THE CANVAS

Visual junior **Taniyah Aris** uses portraits as a means of better understand the human psyche

By Ben Seelig

With a final stroke, visual junior **Taniyah Aris** paints a large black line over her painting. While some might have initially thought of it as a mistake, Aris used art as a means of self-expression and has learned how to turn her shortcomings into areas of growth and opportunities for new ideas.

“With each new piece, I found what works for me, what doesn't work for me, and I try to capture the things that I like and I don't like,” Aris said. “I don't really like physically drawing the body, but I (found) a way to where I like drawing the male's back. ... It's one of the strongest components of the body and is truly symbolic of structure. That's one of the ways I find loopholes for executing body parts I'm not as experienced with.”

One of Aris's biggest goals in a portrait was to capture the subject's “physical aura,” or how their personality was shown through their gestures, style, and facial expressions. Her paintings also drew from expressionism and abstract art styles to communicate feelings such as isolation and fear. She took the most fascination in the face, which she believed communicated “the words that come out of their mouth to the music they listen to.”

“The face includes all your senses, and your senses are in touch with everything related to your physical, mental, and spiritual state,” Aris said. “Obscuring the face usually represents a symbol for new beginnings or something that's falling apart in that person or myself. There's one piece that I did called ‘Conceptually’ where everything, my hair, my face, is just all over the place in a smear, but it's a symbolic way of exploring these different ideas that are constantly going through my head.”

Since freshman year, art teacher **Scott Armetta** has provided guidance and support for Aris. He said he admired her dedication and commitment, such as when she transformed a “large, ambitious” piece that wasn't ready for the spring show into a “smaller, workable” piece in one period.

“She was asking about having her own show outside of school, but sometimes may or may not go further with that,” Mr. Armetta said. “She actually had the show though. She went for it. Instead of closing down or making excuses, she finds ways to make it work and open up”

Aris was refining her craft, often practicing on the design of eyes. She was also working on connecting with her artist persona: Aris. There was no difference between herself and Aris, she said, but rather, Aris was “another half of her.” On her way to becoming a professional artist, she was trying to “build a brand for herself” and a personality that she could develop onto the canvas.

“I have so many different parts (of) myself that I don't like to separate,” Aris said. “I blend them all together, and I'm like, ‘Okay, what would this part of (me) like to spill on the canvas?’ and, ‘Okay, I want to do something red, I want to do something crazy, I want something (to come) out,’ I don't let the different parts of myself hold me back, (and) I let them all bleed through.”

Along with technique, Aris worked on improving at “working with the flow.” To her, that meant stepping back from a piece to see where it was taking her and meditating on each step to

see what it needed. It also meant allowing herself to get “frustrated” and “letting the tears flow” when she needed to release.

“Lately, I’ve been working with (the flow) and not against it, because if you work against it, you’re just (going to) be frustrated,” Aris said. “Then you’re (going to) have an art block and you’re like, ‘Oh, I can’t do this,’ and ‘I’m gonna give up on this case,’ (but) when I let it flow naturally, the piece just comes to fruition.”