

Q. Can you introduce yourself and tell us a little about who you are?

A. Hello, I'm Elsa, Xiyuan ZHANG. I am a 10th grader deeply passionate about artistic creation. My works often revolve around themes of "growth" and "cultural resonance." I aim to convey an artistic tension that blends Eastern heritage with a modern aesthetic through my creations.

Q. How did it feel when you found out you were a winner?

A. Oh, I'm absolutely thrilled! Winning feels like a lucky charm for the Year of the Horse. But that's just the beginning. The past is the past; I'm ready to move on and create my next piece.

Q. What first came to mind when you saw the theme "Roots and Resonance"?

A. The first things that came to mind were my hometowns—Shanghai and Hong Kong. "Roots" represent where we come from, the warmth and stories of our homeland. "Resonance" means carrying that warmth to light up places farther away.

Q. What does the theme mean to you personally?

A. To me, it is the source and destination of the soul. Roots are the homeland, the starting point; resonance is the footprint, the journey ahead. I wish to hold fast to my original roots and guide my artistic path farther and more steadily within the crossroads of Eastern and Western cultures.

Q. How did your work connect to your own experiences, identity, or community?

A. My work is a microcosm of my identity. On one side is the culture of devotion and prayer passed down by my ancestors, which is the root of us Chinese. On the other is the Western education and modern artistic aesthetic I grew up with, which shape my journey. I did not choose between them; I let them coexist in my art works.

Q. Can you tell us about the idea behind your work?

A. My creative concept is to capture "dual narratives in the same time and space." In the frame, the temple shrouded in incense is the spiritual home of Eastern people, filled with devotion and tradition. Meanwhile, the Western tourists sightseeing in the background represent an external, inquisitive gaze. I did not want to separate these two; instead, I tried to capture, through my lens, the coexistence of an Eastern religious atmosphere and a Western modern perspective in the same moment. I want to explore how people from different cultural backgrounds can resonate with this land in their own ways under the same haze of incense. Our Eastern culture not only thrives in the incense but also demonstrates inclusivity and resonance through encounters with the world. This is the "Roots and Resonance" I wish to express through my camera.

Q. What was your creative process like?

A. I saw this creation as a patient hunt. I stayed in front of the hall the entire time, guarding the wispy smoke rising into the air. My lens first locked onto the kneeling worshippers, aiming to capture that quiet and determined atmosphere—it is the root of the East. Then, I waited for a serendipitous moment. When Western tourists walked into the frame casually, surveying this sacred land with curious eyes, I knew the perfect instant had arrived. I did not stage it; instead, through this wait-and-see approach, I documented the natural coexistence of two completely different life rhythms in the same space. In this photo, there is my waiting and the resonance of the world.

Q. What was the biggest challenge you faced?

A. The biggest challenge was simply patience and waiting. Because this was an uncontrollable process, I could not stage the shot to get what I wanted. I had to stay on-site, observing for long periods to capture that natural moment of cultural intersection under the same incense. Opportunities pass by quickly, so I had to stay fully focused. My greatest luck in creation was restraining my impulsiveness and seizing that spontaneous moment of resonance.

Q. What are you most proud of in your piece?

A. What I am most proud of is freezing the perfect moment of "vertical inheritance" and "horizontal encounter." The Buddha statue represents Eastern belief, a vertical spiritual height. Meanwhile, the figures of the devout Eastern worshippers and the walking Western tourists form a cross-shaped dialogue on the same spatial plane. Though simple, this composition is full of tension—it metaphorically depicts how our generation can both honor the towering cultural pillars and embrace the world as equals. This is exactly the "Roots and Resonance" I want to express.

Q. What do you hope resonates with people when they experience your work?

A. I hope people can feel a warmth and calm that transcends cultures in the frame. When people see the Buddha, the worshippers, and the Western tourists amidst the incense, I want them to let go of obsessions over "differences" and feel the wisdom of seeking common ground while reserving differences. Different identities, different purposes, yet at this moment, they all share the same visual experience under the same incense. I hope this work, like the spring breeze of the Horse year, gently touches people's hearts, making them understand that true resonance often begins with peaceful acceptance.

Q. What brought you to submit your work to the AAPI Youth Art and Writing competition?

A. What motivated me to enter was my teacher's recommendation and the inspiration from the theme. My teacher said this is a stage suitable for youth expression. When I saw "Roots and Resonance," I realized it is exactly the direction I have been exploring: holding onto the roots without being limited by them. My creation is about breaking down barriers between cultures

and finding resonance that transcends borders. I hope to showcase our generation's cultural attitude to the judges and audience through this competition: seeking common ground while reserving differences, and being open and inclusive. This is the artistic stance I, as Elsa.Z, most want to express.

Q. Was the piece you submitted a good example of your usual art, or did you try something new for the competition?

A. This is indeed a direct extension of my usual artistic style. For me, the differences and integration between Eastern and Western cultures are not just a theme, but the core narrative thread running through all my creations—whether it is oil painting, Chinese painting, sketch, photography, or installation art. This work is just a specific exploration of "dual narratives in the same time and space" from this direction. I do not want to be just a creator; I hope to become an ambassador breaking the cultural deadlock, dispelling misunderstandings, and fostering resonance. Through this work and my entire artistic practice, I want to prove to the world that cultures are not barriers, but beautiful landscapes each with their own unique charm.