

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

A. Hi! I'm Sophia, a tenth-grader at Phillips Academy, originally from Atlanta, Georgia. At my core, I am a student of the human experience; I find endless inspiration in the way people live, create, and connect. I am someone who thrives on both the thrill of the "new"—whether that's a complex academic theory or a skill I've never tried before—and a deep appreciation for the quiet joys of daily life, like walking my dog and my cat (at the same time!).

**Q. What does the theme mean to you personally?**

A. The last time I walked through the doors of my family home was in 2024. Since then, the relentless cadence of high school has pulled me into a world of deadlines and distances, leaving little room for the slow-simmered comforts of home. Yet, upon reading the theme *Roots and Resonance*, the years between then and now simply vanished. I found myself back in that kitchen, thousands of miles away, tasting the dewy, amber honey of my favorite dish: Grandma's braised pork belly (红烧肉). For me, roots are not just a point of origin; they are what elevate the atmosphere of my hometown from a generic "smoky smell" into the rich aroma of salty soup brewed from the essence of humid July weather and braised board belly sizzling in the kitchen. However, these happy memories are now inextricably linked to a more difficult reality. Since my grandmother suffered a stroke in 2019, her memory has faded, and she barely recognizes the face of the grandchild who loves her so deeply. This grief, though painful, became a catalyst for my art. It pushed me to complete my first portrait of her—not to cherry-pick our happy memories but to capture the reality of what inspires me most: her resilience.

**Q. What was your creative process like?**

A. My creative process is shaped by a visual mind; I think in images rather than internal dialogue, which allows me to find a bridge between aesthetic satisfaction and philosophical inquiry. I am often driven by moral epiphanies that strike during the most mundane moments—while brushing my teeth or walking between classes. The pearls of the world drive me to create; in observing reality, I've found the beauty of the truth unique to each human experience. In *Convalescent*, the gentle glow of the medical technology protecting my grandmother—set against the monochrome paleness of the hospital sheets—reveals my own discovery: that even in the most sterile environments, there is a profound resonance of care and resilience.

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

A. I hope my grandma's unwavering strength—commanded by her matriarchal presence even in a hospital bed—resonates with the visceral respect we have for the generation that worked so hard to raise us and the roots from which we've grown.