

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

A. My name is Xiwei (Sherry) Zhang, and I am currently studying visual arts at Interlochen Arts Academy. I am interested in how identity is shaped through memory, environment, and quiet, often overlooked emotional experiences.

My work is less about representing what is immediately visible, and more about translating what is felt but difficult to articulate—the subtle tension between belonging and displacement, clarity and ambiguity.

Through my practice, I aim to create visual spaces where personal experiences can extend beyond the individual and become something shared, reflective, and open to interpretation.

Q. What does the theme mean to you personally?

A. To me, Roots and Resonance is not just about a fixed origin, but about how those origins continue to shape us over time. Roots are not static—they shift as we move through different environments and experiences.

Growing up between cultures, I've come to understand that “roots” are not something I can point to directly, but something I carry with me and continuously reinterpret. For me, my roots exist in many forms—my home country, my culture, my mother, and the love and influence she has given me.

Resonance, on the other hand, is what remains. It is the emotional trace that stays with me—sometimes quietly, sometimes unexpectedly—shaping how I see myself and the world. Through writing and visual art, I try to give form to these resonances, allowing them to become a way of connecting with others, and a way of expressing care, presence, and my response to the world.

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

A. This work is closely connected to my relationship with my mother, who is a first-generation Chinese immigrant. I grew up watching her take on multiple roles at once—student, worker, and parent—often without pause.

Over time, I began to realize that what appeared as strength on the surface often came with a kind of exhaustion that was rarely expressed.

Through this piece, I was thinking about how identity is shaped not only by culture, but also by responsibility, sacrifice, and the need to keep moving forward, even when there is little space to rest.

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

A. The work focuses on a quiet, everyday moment—my mother resting while wearing a facial mask. It's a scene I've witnessed many times, but only began to reflect on more deeply through this piece.

I was drawn to its stillness and the way it contrasts with the more visible narratives of strength and productivity often associated with immigrant experiences.

The fragmented surface of her face reflects the layered and unstable nature of identity, while the mask becomes both a physical object and a metaphor—suggesting protection, transformation, and concealment.

I wanted to explore the tension between what is shown and what is hidden, and how identity is continuously shaped within that space.

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

A. I hope viewers can find a sense of familiarity in the emotional atmosphere of the piece, even if their experiences are different from mine.

To me, the image is quiet, but not empty—it holds moments that are often overlooked in everyday life. When people see this work, I hope it reminds them of someone close to them—perhaps their mother, someone they love, or even a part of themselves that is often unseen.

If the piece can encourage viewers to pause, even briefly, and reconsider those small but real experiences—especially those connected to care, fatigue, and vulnerability—then it has created a meaningful connection.

Some of the most important emotions are not loud—they exist in the quiet, waiting to be noticed.