

Interview with Cover Artist Crystal Contreras

Nikitha Jeyaprakash

Crystal Contreras' artwork *Sedona My Love* appears on the cover of this Fall 2021 issue of *The Undergraduate Review*. Student co-editor Nikitha Jeyaprakash discussed Ms. Contreras's work with her and reported their conversation in the interview below.

Nikitha Jeyaprakash: What's your major and minor? Graduation year?

Crystal Contreras: I am a business major majoring in business administration, and I graduate in May 2023.

NJ: Please share your history as an artist. How long have you been drawing, what inspired you to draw, and what general themes are in your art if any?

CC: I have been involved in the arts since I was a young child. I started with drawing. Around twelve I was introduced to painting and participated in many projects which included creating props for the drama club, a painting for the board of education and partaking in my middle school's mosaic art piece. While in high school I took elective art classes to further my skills and knowledge about art. During that time frame, I learned stamp making, papier mâché, ceramics and modeling. After high school I became self-taught in digital art, collage art, photography and wire wrapping. In college I took an elective art class which was art appreciation. Today, I mainly focus on abstract acrylic painting and digital art. Currently, I still create for myself and others. You can find my art on my socials creatresscrystal (instagram, YouTube, and TikTok) and radartwork (Instagram). When it comes to

art, my inspiration for creating is to be able to express myself and to uplift others.

NJ: Will you share your artistic achievements?

CC: I had an artwork published in second grade. I was appointed to create a painting of my school for my middle school's board of education. In high school my self-portrait drawing was displayed and I was the subject model for a student photographer's project.

NJ: Please tell us more about *Sedona My Love*.

CC: The artwork is a reference from a photo I took while on a spiritual women's retreat in Sedona, Arizona. It was October 25, 2022 at 5:33pm. We had just finished our second hike of the trip and were walking on a dirt path back to the car. During the walk my spiritual coach played some Disney princess songs to help us connect to our inner child. This was a special day to me because this is when the ladies and I fully connected. I remembered looking at the scenery and being completely captivated by the environment and so I took a picture to keep the memory forever. During this timeframe in my art journey, I was focusing on making linework art and I wanted to make this piece solely with lines.

NJ: What meaning do you hope viewers see in this work?

CC: The meaning behind this artwork is that everything is going to work out in divine timing and to trust our intuition because it will guide us to the most beautiful experiences in life. We come here on earth to appreciate the beauty of life, to make connections and to know we are never truly lost, for we are always home on earth. For me, this piece is inspired by a moment in my life where I chose to listen to my intuition and

pushed myself out of my comfort zone. If I had chosen to not get serious about my healing journey then I wouldn't have reached out to my spiritual coach, taken a chance on flying alone, meet inspiring women, and be who I am now. For me, this was my turning point in stepping into being my most authentic self.

NJ: Does the time the artwork was created hold any significance to it?

CC: The time this artwork was created holds deep significance to this piece. That day was very impactful in terms of having faith. I woke up around 7 a.m. and tried to schedule a flight with my father who works for the airlines. I fly under the buddy system, so it isn't always clear if they are good flights. I was stressed out because I did not want to take a flight back to New Jersey. Before coming to the retreat, I left New Jersey on not the best of terms which made me want to be around a supportive community instead of the one I had there. So, I asked to go to Texas instead. We managed to book a flight to TX for around 4pm but the seating did not look so promising, which meant in the worst-case scenario I would have to go back to NJ or be stuck out in AZ with nowhere to go. The ladies and I packed our things and grabbed some breakfast. We decided to take our last hike of the trip on a whim to kill some time. It was around 2:30pm when we finished the hike and we realized we had cut it close. The airport was roughly an hour away from where we were, so we headed off quickly. The closer it got towards 4pm, I started to panic because it was dawning on me that I might miss the flight and be stuck in Arizona with nowhere to go. During the ride, a song played that held great significance to me and I knew in my heart that I'll be okay. We arrived at the airport with 30 minutes left until my boarding time. I had no time to change out of my hiking clothes, which meant there

was a chance I wouldn't be accepted onto the flight because of the strict clothing policy for flying with the buddy system. I rushed through security and towards my gate. I passed by a large window on the way, it made a reflection of a rainbow, and I knew it was a sign that a blessing was right around the corner, so I tried to remain optimistic. I got to my gate and there were no available seats, but I was asked to wait just in case someone didn't show up, which ended up happening. That meant I was able to get on the flight. A wave of fear and uncertainty left my body, it was like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. While on the flight I went through my photos trying to find one to recreate the scenery I saw until I found one that resonated which is the reference photo for this piece. As a final goodbye to the place that made me feel so welcomed, loved and supported I made the artwork, Sedona My Love.