

NIMISHA DOONGARWAL BIO

Nimisha is originally from India. She came to the United States in 2007 for Masters in Computer Science. After finishing her Master's, she realized her true passion was art for self-expression. Currently, she is doing MFA part-time and working as a full-time software engineer. Her art represents immigrant Identity by using cultural and colonial past.

RUMINATIONS

What is Asian America in 2020's?

Asian America for me is the hybrid world and culture we live in America today, which had its origins in Asia, brought to America by Asia immigrants but got mixed with the culture here in America to create a totally new culture which is very much American. Boba tea shops, yoga classes are perfect examples of Asian America which are as American as a diner. It's a new America with a diverse and vibrant culture and food.

What in my opinion should not be Asian America is categorizing communities and stereotyping people based on looks, race, and so on. Someone who looks Asian surely doesn't make up Asian America.

What is Asian American art?

Asian American art is what gets created when an artist with an understanding of Asian art and culture gets influenced by the same from other places and creates something new and unique. Asian American art according to me is all about diversity, mixed identities, and showcasing a new hybrid culture we live in today. It being said art has no boundaries and isn't boxed into one or the other culture but is limitless.

Does such a thing exist?

Cultures like American and Asian by themselves can be very strong and it's hard to have one or the other in today's modern world. The only way society can progress is by letting the cultures combine and moving forward together as one. I believe Asian America and Asian American art is a great thing for our progressively modern society, it gives life to amazing things. We should still be very aware that Asian America is just America and not a way to categorize and discriminate Asian people who live in America.

Q&A

Has your identity as an artist shifted in any way during the pandemic? if so please explain.

A lot has been happening during the pandemic, a sense of community and belonging became stronger for me as an artist and even as an individual. I started thinking about identity in broader terms. Before this, for me, Identity was more about me as an immigrant and people like me but after this, now I see Identity as a broader concept. I am always a strong believer that we can conquer mountains if we are together, even though we saw a lot of happening around racial discrimination and hate against specific races we still saw people coming together as a community to support each other. This helped me stay strong during these rough times when we were all lonely and were seeing the world becoming a more hateful place. It's good to know that we still have people who are fighting for the good cause and equality in society and this makes me optimistic about the future. So, yes this pandemic has made me closer to the issues in my heart like racial and gender discrimination, and I am able to express those feelings through my art.

Does a racialization and racial formation of the US affect your work as an artist?

Yes, it does, I always believe that one shouldn't be judged by the color of their skin, but the actions of their heart. This racial division saddens me and goes completely against my ideologies as an artist. I constantly try to make a statement through my art that diversity is beautiful and vibrant. It truly has the power of making a society that not only acknowledges the difference but comes together to celebrate it and work on for a better future. Each of my pieces creates an abstract identity by combining characteristics that define who we are and what makes us unique rather than focusing on physical traits such as race, color, appearance, and so on.

To add on, I believe, Identity should relate to those properties one takes to “define them as a person” or “make them the person they are”, which can be due to all the cultural shifts and traditional overlap they go through and their ancestors went through. This distinguishes them from others but also makes them similar to others. These Identities aren't their skin color or their race or any physical traits whatsoever.

Are you responding or adapting to the political landscape, social landscape? Is this directly or subconsciously expressed in your art?

My work is most influenced by social issues and current affairs. Each piece is a result of the social issues I see or read around me, The piece called. "Portrait of USA 2020" was created in response to the crime against George Floyd and such other fellow citizens, this was a direct response to the political and social climate we were in 2020. My works can be best described as social-political commentary that appears to be like a colorful abstract portrait from a distance, but up close, it documents the issues of our current society. I try to create works that are pretty to look at but at the same time make an effort to raise awareness in a way that is visually digestible.

What in your work comes from your own culture? Heritage?

I create these conceptually layered pieces exploring varying relationships between colonial past, which a lot of people of color and immigrants relate to historically, and how this links back to popular culture today. Being an Indian citizen gives a closer perspective to colonization and how it changed our current contemporary world. Being an immigrant myself, I can relate more closely to the hardships of an immigrant and get a perspective of a person of color living in the United

States. A lot of vintage photographs I use in my works are from India and the UK during the colonial years from the 1800s to 1900s.

Is your work affected by the contemporary moment: i.e. such as hate crimes, legacy of systems of oppression, attack on the capital?

Yes, it does, as mentioned above my works are a direct response to the social and political climate, and it portrays hate crime against Asian American communities to crime against African Americans. As an artist, I feel a sense of responsibility to raise concerns against injustice when I see it. If I don't do that I feel suffocated as a person and as an artist. I do think we all as fellow citizens should support each other as you never know when something wrong starts happening with your own community. It is crucial for me to stand against anything I see wrong in the works and I choose art as a medium to raise my voice.

Do you have thoughts on rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans?

My heart and soul ache to hear about it. I can't imagine people finding a community to blame for what's happening to the world. This darkness, people have, in their hearts against other communities is the real Virus and not COVID-19. We can cure COVID-19 by the vaccine but how are we supposed to cure the hatred people have within them. Trump becoming the President was an indication that there we live amongst people who still discriminate and never before got a chance to come out in the open before Trump. I, as a person who looks different, is always concerned for my safety. This surely isn't the world I want to live in, so I do what I can do to make people understand it's never the communities but the individuals who can be criminals.

Do any of these prompts materialize in your work?

Yes, mostly all of them concern my art practice. I consider myself a social-political artist and most of my inspiration come from the social climate around me. Fight against racism and equal justice is truly the core of my art.