Asian American Creative Expressions students showcase mask exhibit in the Pollak Library

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The Pollak Library is adorned with painted masks by students of Asian American Creative Expressions depicting their “masked” emotions that are unseen by others and what they are perceived as by their peers. ZEILA EDRIAL / Daily Titan

Dynamically designed masks of many colors hang on a straw mat in the Pollak Library, representing the emotions of the students who created them.

Next to the masks, a bright golden sun adorns a blue, white and red wall representing the Philippines’ flag. An explanation of the symbolism in the flag accompanies a descriptive history of the nation.

On a brightly painted yellow and red mask, licks of red flames engulf the cheeks and eyebrows. A drawn figure delivers a front kick to the chin of another atop a bright red nose—an algebra equation is written on the forehead.

A dollar bill and an open book are also illustrated upon the mask.

“People see me as a wealthy and generous individual who is smart but intimidating,” the mask description explains.

These masks were created by students in Professor Carol Ojeda-Kimbrough’s Asian American Creative Expressions class.

Ojeda-Kimbrough’s class focuses on Filipino American life as portrayed through novels, short stories, plays, poetry, film, music, painting, dance and other expressive forms.

She got the idea for the masks while attending a workshop sponsored by a group called the Center for Babaylan Studies in Sonoma.

“I met a woman who had previously done a similar workshop to deal with identity issues among Filipino Americans through the use of mask making,” Ojeda-Kimbrough said.

Before Ojeda-Kimbrough gave her students the assignment, she gave a lecture on the utility of masks in society in general, and in Filipino cultural context.

Students created masks that either reflected how they appear to the outside world or depicted their inside feelings and emotions that were being “masked.”

She provided her students with two blank papier-mache masks, paint, markers and feathers. She gave them two weeks to complete the masks and told the students they could use anything else they wanted to include in their mask.

Once the masks were completed, Ojeda-Kimbrough worked with Pollak Library Exhibit Coordinator Trish Campbell to showcase them at the Pollak Library.

“It was like the blind leading the blind, but we managed to put (the exhibit) together. Trish Campbell was a tremendous resource for the students who actually did the layout,” Ojeda-Kimbrough said.

“高 MASK exhibit is part of a series of high-impact learning practices focused on Filipino American cultural studies,” Eliza Noh, Ph.D., the Asian American studies program coordinator, said. “High-impact practices (HIPs)
HIPs include collaborative projects, community-based learning, diversity/global learning experiences and co-curricular activities.

Since the exhibit is run entirely by students, it was initially funded by students.

A few students were selected to be the marketing team. The team then created a donation page online to encourage people to help them put together the exhibit financially.

The class decided the remainder of the funds would go toward a charity to benefit the Philippines, which was recently hit by Typhoon Haiyan.

One mask on display was pale blue flowing into red with intricate white, lace-like designs.

The description under it read, “I do not depict myself as solely Asian, Filipino or American; I practice different aspects of each culture. My melding of cultures is simply my foundation. I am free to branch out, to absorb new ideas, to create my own personalized culture.”

Abigail Yarcia, 21, a communicative disorders major, is one of the students in the Asian American Creative Expressions class who made a mask for display in the exhibit.

“Although the description below the mask doesn’t appropriately explain the mask, it represents my ‘outer mask’ or what everyone sees and what I let them see,” Yarcia said.

She said not everyone in the class is Filipino-American, so it was “nice to share this experience with them and learn Filipino history and culture together.”

The mask exhibit is on display until Dec. 31, and can be viewed during regular library hours.

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About Zeila Edrial
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