

PRESENTATIONS ***of LEARNING***

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8, 2026
Ukrop Auditorium, Robins School of Business



**Bonner Center for
Civic Engagement**

WELCOME

Thank you for joining us! Presentations of Learning are a Bonner Center for Civic Engagement tradition at the University of Richmond, providing Bonner Scholars and community-engaged seniors an opportunity to share the impact of community engagement on their learning, growth, and development. This year, each senior created an original work of art under the guidance of Richmond artist Hamilton Glass. We hope you enjoy their work as much as we do.

TEACHING ARTIST



Hamilton Glass is a painter and public artist living in Richmond, Virginia. His work focuses around using public art to build up communities and create spaces in which the community members feel they have a stake in their surroundings. To him, it is vital that he uses his work in ways that serve the public and engage people through art. He believes in the power of art which can hold communities together and increase equity around access to the arts. Learn more at whosham.com.

PROGRAM

Art Viewing & Reception

5-5:45 p.m.

Panel Discussions

5:45-7 p.m.

Education & Economic Access

Alumni Facilitator: Kim Dean-Anderson

Dhruvam Desai
Abdulahi Abeaw
Amber Castaneda
Sahar Bajwha
Natali Sabri

Healthcare, Inclusion, & Well-Being

Alumni Facilitator: Victoria Lara

Mohamed Adam
Sanskriti Basnyat
Josias Collier
Violeta Montelongo

Advocacy & Justice

Alumni Facilitator: Cory Schutter

Ny'Kya Scott-McKoy
Grace Randolph
Cristalla Chapman
Ina Loka

Sustainability, Housing, & Immigration

Alumni Facilitator: Benedict Roemer

Alexa Mora
Ibrahim Alkaseer
Jeff (Ping Yen) Tsai
Devin Morgan



Abdulahi Abeaw

Economic Ecosystem

Acrylic on canvas

This piece was inspired by my reflections on community engagement, civic commitment, and economic systems during my time with the Bonner Program and my internships at my sites. The central tree, with its wide trunk and visible roots, represents the resilience of economic systems and the institutions that support them. The roots anchor the tree firmly in the ground, symbolizing the foundational structures that sustain the broader economy, including smaller institutions and organizations that rely on them. The fruits are the benefits that people and communities enjoy.

The river flowing beside the tree represents the interdependence between systems and communities. Just as the tree draws water from the river, it also contributes to the environment by facilitating the water cycle, helping bring rain to refill the river. This cyclical relationship mirrors the mutual support between strong institutions and smaller entities: each depends on the other to thrive. The smaller plants and shrubs around the tree represent smaller firms or economies, which flourish when the larger economic framework is stable and nurturing.

Green dominates the canvas to convey flourishing growth, vitality, and the positive state of the economy when structures work in harmony. Stylistically, the visible roots and flowing water highlight connections that are often hidden, just as in civic and economic engagement, the systems supporting communities are not always visible but are critical to overall health and resilience.

Overall, the painting embodies themes of interconnection, resilience, and stewardship. It reflects the lessons I have learned about civic responsibility: that meaningful change depends on understanding how individuals, organizations, and systems work together. By visualizing these ideas in a tree and river, I aimed to create a piece that conveys the importance of sustaining and nurturing both large and small components of the economic and community ecosystem.



Mohamed Adam

Reality

Acrylic on canvas

My piece, *Reality*, was born from my direct experiences volunteering at Health Brigade, a medical clinic, and Peter Paul Development Center, an after-school program serving youth in the Richmond community. These two spaces opened my eyes to the layered, often invisible barriers that shape the lives of people in underserved communities, and *Reality* is my attempt to translate that understanding into visual form.

At the center of the composition stands a house, representing one of the most fundamental social determinants of health: stable housing. Where you live determines what schools are nearby, what food is accessible, what air you breathe, and how safe you feel. Surrounding the house are a dollar sign and a medical cross, showcasing that access to healthcare is deeply tied to economic circumstance. The patients who walked through those doors came because they had nowhere else to go.

The two windows sit on opposite sides of the canvas and carry the weight of the piece. The regular window is bathed in lighter blue, positioned alongside the sun, representing a life where the social determinants align: stable income, access to education, safe housing, and healthcare. The sun is not just light. It is what life looks like when everything works out. On the other side, the moon looms beside the jail cell window, casting a darker tone over a reality shaped by systemic neglect, poverty, and exposure to the criminal justice system. The same starting point, two entirely different worlds.

The white acrylic seeping along the side of the canvas near the regular window and the sun was intentional. In my work with Peter Paul, I saw what education can do. It bleeds into a young person's world quietly but powerfully. Education is itself a social determinant, and the white represents that light: slow, spreading, and capable of pulling someone toward the sun rather than the moon. *Reality* is not a comfortable piece. It is an honest one, a portrait of what the social determinants of health look like when they are lived, not just studied.



Sahar Bajwha

Threshold of Possibility

Acrylic on canvas

This piece explores the idea of access as a turning point, the moment where possibility begins. The stacked books represent knowledge, literacy, and the accumulation of resources that make growth possible. Rather than remaining closed objects, one book becomes a doorway, symbolizing how education can transform from something passive into something active and life-changing.

The light emerging from the book represents hope, opportunity, and the unknown future that becomes reachable through learning. The small silhouetted figure emphasizes both individuality and universality. The lack of detail allows the figure to represent anyone, reinforcing themes of inclusion and shared experience. Positioned at the threshold, the figure captures a moment of decision and transition, standing between limitation and opportunity. The path of light extending outward suggests that access is not just a single moment, but the beginning of a journey.

My stylistic choices focus on contrast to communicate meaning. The bright, warm light is intentionally placed against a darker surrounding space to emphasize how powerful access can be when it is present. Acrylic paint was used to layer color and build the glow effect, allowing the light to feel soft yet radiant. Simplicity in form was intentional, ensuring that the message remains clear and accessible.

This work is inspired by my experience with IT4Causes, where I have seen how access to educational and technological resources can impact individuals and communities. The painting reflects the belief that when barriers to knowledge are reduced, people are better able to move forward, participate, and thrive. Ultimately, this piece is about possibility, how even a single point of access can open the door to a wider, more inclusive future.



Sanskriti Basnyat

Journey of Becoming

Mixed media (water color, paint, collage, crayons)

This piece represents my journey from freshman year to senior year and how my understanding of myself and my place in a community has evolved over time. The center of the artwork begins with muddy, layered textures, symbolizing confusion, uncertainty, and the feeling of being unformed when I first started college. It reflects a stage where I was trying to piece things together and make meaning out of new experiences.

As the composition moves outward, the left side appears more structured and controlled, representing the expectations, rules, and systems I learned to navigate. In contrast, the right side becomes more fluid and expressive, showing how I gradually allowed myself to grow beyond those structures and embrace a more authentic version of who I am. My handprint is included to emphasize that this journey is uniquely mine.

Elements like DNA strands and neuron-like patterns symbolize connection, belonging, and the relationships that shaped me. The brain in the corner represents perseverance and personal growth, while the idea of it "lighting up" reflects how these connections helped me develop and understand myself more deeply. At the top, the explosion of color and collage incorporates words of encouragement and inspiration. These are intentionally fragmented and rearranged to show that community and meaning are not the same for everyone.

Overall, this piece shows that my path has not been linear. It began with uncertainty and broken pieces, but over time it has grown into something more intentional. Looking forward, it represents how I want to exist beyond school when I'm not defined by structure, but by presence, connection, and showing up for others.



Amber Castaneda

More Than a Dream

Oil on canvas

As a Cristo Rey graduate and intern with the Cristo Rey Network for over three years, I often reflect on what it means to be shaped by such a unique model. An early memory I have of my time as a student is learning how to use public transportation to our job site. This is a common experience CR students have, as CR schools are located in urban areas and often start without funding to personally transport students to their job sites. I remember sitting beside my peers in uniform, music in our ears, watching the city pass by as we prepared for the workplace. There's a quiet bravery in that. Students commit four years to a future they cannot fully see—following a path laid out like a map. Four years of working towards a dream, a hope, a goal to achieve economic stability and break generational poverty. The older figure in green represents who that student is becoming. Growth doesn't end with graduation; it evolves. The shared earbuds reflect what carries through time: music, routine, and memory. Outside the window, colors shift. Dreams don't stay fixed. What begins as a goal—college, a degree, a livable wage—becomes something larger: the freedom to imagine more, and to ask, what comes next? The map, the end goal a student is trying to follow becomes more than a dream. It becomes a life they've built for themselves; it becomes a reality



Cristalla Chapman

Round and Around the Systems of Injustice

Charcoal, oil pastel, acrylic paint, and newspaper

This piece explores the connections between my two service sites over the last four years: Ronald McDonald House and the Virginia Poverty Law Center. These organizations focus on different things, but people may be entering these two buildings simultaneously. At the Virginia Poverty Law Center, my service focused on helping make resources more accessible to Virginians experiencing warrants in debt and garnishment. I observed court cases and saw lives uprooted by debts. These debts ranged from credit card debt to medical debt, often leaving people unable to make ends meet. Anyone can fall victim to debt collection, and while facing these challenges, people still have to persevere. While the world is falling apart, people are expected to continue on with their daily lives. At Ronald McDonald House, their mission is to provide housing to families of children facing illness. Through my work here, I would serve as a resource to staff members and families. Moving from RMHC to VPLC, I couldn't help but notice how families may experience medical debt when their child is ill. Escaping debt is difficult, especially for those without healthcare or the ability to pay. This can create a cycle where people move between these buildings, raising questions about society's structures and why this happens in the first place.



Josias Collier

No One Shines Alone

Acrylic on canvas

This painting, *No One Shines Alone*, was inspired by my experience volunteering with SOAR365 and how it changed the way I understand support, disability, and community. Going into this experience, I thought of support as something one person gives to another. But over time, I realized it's much more mutual than that. I wasn't just helping, I was learning, connecting, and becoming part of a larger system where everyone plays a role. I chose a galaxy and constellation theme to represent this idea. Each star symbolizes different aspects of what I observed, such as early support, job opportunities, community, strength, and individuals of all ages. On their own, the stars are small, but when connected, they form something much bigger. The human figure made from the constellation reflects how people with disabilities are not defined by limitations, but are whole individuals with strength, identity, and purpose. The darker background represents how these connections are not always visible or recognized. I used brighter, glowing stars to show how support systems and individual strengths stand out once you begin to really see them. I also kept the symbols simple to reflect how these ideas of belonging, opportunity, and connection are fundamental, even if they are often overlooked. This piece is a reflection of what I've learned; that no one truly succeeds alone. Strength comes from being supported, but also from being part of a community that grows together.



Dhruvam Desai

Upward Mobility: Avoiding traps to seek light

Acrylic, origami, and miscellaneous (magnets, tape, etc.)

Current

Grass is always greener on the other side, but most people seek to escape the traps of their situation and enjoy the freedom of a harmless environment. Personally, Bonner meant empowering others to navigate the traps of their realities and breaking mobility barriers. Organizations excelled here, represented by birds with golden dots, as they combine contributions to make change. And that is where the true gold is.

This is also a bottom-up movement because reciprocity exists, and those who received help know its value. From the Bonner website, “the central goal of the Bonner Program is to provide diverse, predominantly low-income students with an ‘access to education and opportunity to serve’”. Some at the top can turn a blind eye to others’ realities, but those who live it cannot. Thus, the help is localized at the bottom.

Some traps are simply harmful, like prisons, which are more punitive and reformatory. Some disasters, like portals, can even reset progress, because destruction is easier than progress. But others are unavoidable yet needed for benign things. For example, education requires tuition or, at a minimum, time that could have been spent elsewhere and money that could have been earned.

Finally, while institutions are foundations of our democracy and society, they can be bent and corrupted. When they have side windows larger than front doors and distance decision makers from the public, change is needed. And burning it down is not an option, because these institutions and trust in them make society feasible. We have to support these foundations and empower people, so we can make collective change.

Change

Birds shouldn’t be underground when a vast sky awaits. While reality often defies imagination, we can shape it. The birds are movable, and there is a flexagon, so different, better realities can be imagined from the painting. Building a vision while reflecting on reality ensures our change-oriented actions are effective. The actions also ‘need’ to be effective because our time and energy are limited. This requires choosing priorities, often based on our surroundings, values, and experiences. Mine led me to put my dots during Bonner in teaching entrepreneurship (thorny but effective path), job growth (opening opportunities), food banks (necessities), and tax-filing assistance (hassles of life). I found empowerment and upward mobility as core values through this journey. I hope this painting helps you assess your priorities and imagine actions that help those around you.



Ina Loka

Unity in Faith, Justice for All

Acrylic on canvas

This painting reflects my experience as a Bonner Scholar working with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP), where advocacy, community, and faith intersect in the pursuit of justice. At first glance, the Virginia General Assembly appears as the most powerful actor in this piece, representing the institutional space where policy decisions are made and where much of our advocacy work takes place. However, the true power lies within the hands of the community, those who bring issues to light, advocate for change, and do the sustained work that drives justice forward. This is why figures holding hands encircle the outline of Virginia, emphasizing that real impact extends beyond Richmond and is rooted in collective action across the entire state. The scales of justice symbolize the pursuit of equity that guides our efforts, while the multifaith symbols reflect VICPP's foundation as an organization rooted in diverse religious traditions coming together for a common purpose. These elements highlight the importance of unity across differences in addressing systemic issues. The figures holding hands represent the communities I work with, particularly the children and families whose voices often go unheard in policy spaces. Their presence at the forefront of the painting signifies that advocacy begins with people and lived experiences, not institutions. The composition intentionally places community and policy in dialogue, suggesting that justice is not created in isolation but through continuous interaction between grassroots voices and formal systems of power. Through this piece, I wanted to capture how collective action, grounded in care and solidarity, can influence structures of governance and move us closer to a more just and inclusive society.



Violeta Montelongo

Beyond the Paperwork

Acrylic paint, mixed media (paper, yarn)

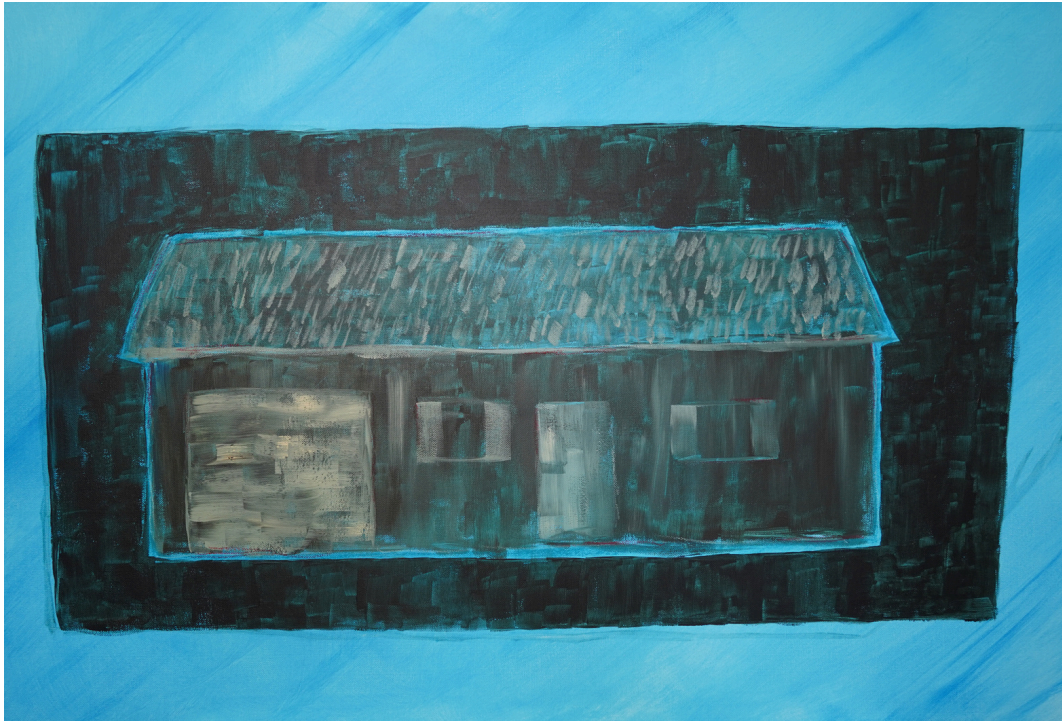
Beyond the Paperwork reflects my personal journey of understanding what community engagement truly means through my work at Crossover Healthcare Ministry. When I first started, I saw my role in terms of tasks: checking in patients, completing intake forms, and trying to keep everything moving efficiently. The layered paperwork at the bottom of this piece represents that mindset. It felt structured and clear, but also limiting, as if the forms and systems defined the entirety of care.

As the paper begins to tear and peel away, a different reality is revealed. Beneath the surface of forms and procedures are people, stories, and experiences that cannot be reduced to a checkbox or a line on a page. The building at the center grounds the work in a real place, but the surrounding elements, like the bus and symbols of cost, reflect the barriers I began to notice over time. Transportation, financial stress, and systemic inequities shape people's access to care in ways that are often invisible unless you take the time to look deeper.

The yarn in my piece represents the community beneath all of this. I used a love knot stitch to show how deeply connected people are and how much we rely on one another. At the same time, I intentionally adjusted the yarn tension and varied the stitch size. Some areas are tighter, while others are looser and more uneven. This reflects how the community is not perfect or stable, but constantly shifting, shaped by individual lives, struggles, and resilience. Even so, the threads remain connected. That sense of connection is what holds everything together.

This piece also reflects a shift within myself. I had to learn to slow down, to listen, and to question my assumptions. I began to see patients not as people who needed help, but as individuals with knowledge, strength, and lived experience. The contrast between the muted paperwork and the more vibrant layers beneath it represents this realization that what matters most is often what we do not immediately see.

Ultimately, this work is about learning to look beyond the surface. It is about recognizing that care is not just found in systems, but in relationships, in community, and in the spaces where people hold each other up.



Alexa Mora

Belcher, LA

Acrylic and oil pastel on canvas

During my time of service at Housing Opportunities Made Equal, I've reflected on my family's history of land ownership and how sacrifices from the past have impacted my future. There's a patch of farmland in Belcher, Louisiana that my great great grandparents owned. They owned property during a time when it was not common for sharecroppers to do so. Through discussions with relatives, I learned that the house that used to be on the property burned down so I depicted an abstracted version of a house. The haziness of the brushstrokes were used to emphasize that this home lives on only in memory and a handful of physical photographs. The dark box surrounding the abstracted house represents a farm developer buying out my living relatives' share of the property. It represents a looming shadow that dampens the memory my relatives want to keep alive. There is a fight to hold onto what is my family's that will eventually be passed on to my generation.

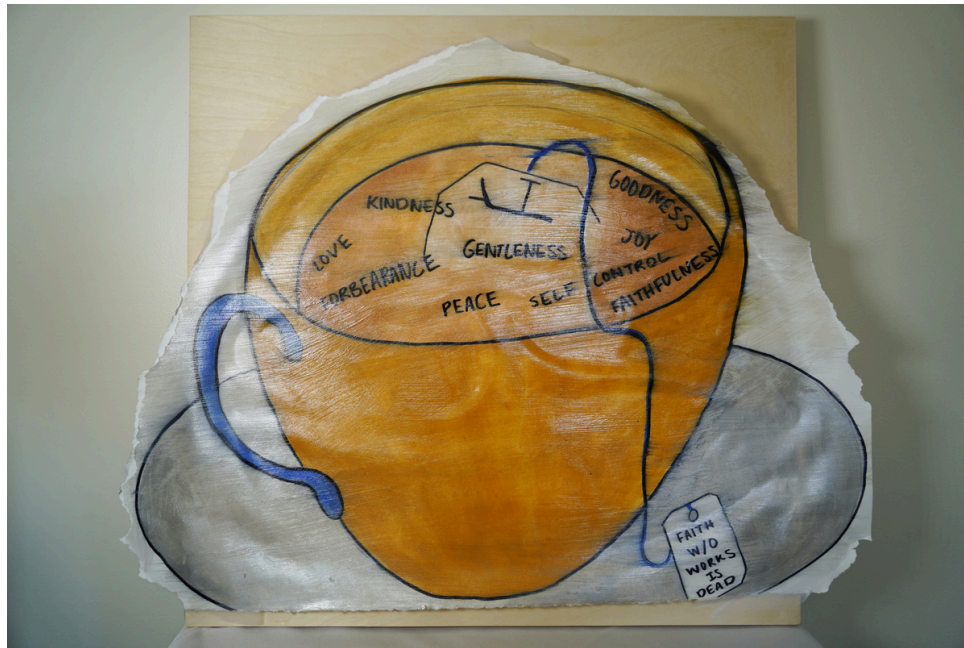


Devin Morgan

Grow Food, Grow Community

Acrylic on canvas

This piece was inspired by my work and time with Shalom Farms, where one of our core missions is to not only grow food, but to grow community. I wanted to bring that idea to life in a way that felt simple but meaningful. The tree serves as the central image because it represents growth, life, and the connection between what is seen and what is often unseen. At the top of the piece, the phrase “Grow Food” is placed in the canopy of the tree. I incorporated fruits and vegetables into the lettering to emphasize nourishment and access to fresh, healthy food. Food is highly visible because it is something we immediately recognize as essential. It sustains our bodies, supports health, and provides a sense of dignity. At the bottom of the piece, “Grow Community” is written in the roots. This placement is intentional. Just like roots support and stabilize a tree, community is the foundation that makes everything else possible. It represents relationships, trust, and collective care. These are not always visible, but they are necessary for food systems to exist and thrive. The contrast between the bright, colorful canopy and the earthy tones of the roots reflects this relationship between visibility and foundation. While food is what we often see, community is what sustains it. This piece reflects my belief that food justice is not just about growing food, but about building strong, connected communities that allow people to truly thrive.



Grace Randolph

A Cup of Tea

Watercolor

For me, faith and justice are inseparable. In the summer of 2023, following my first year, I participated in the Richmond Justice Program. Across seven transformative weeks, I learned how the Bible defines justice and how justice is rooted in the character of God. As Christians, we are called to justice, just as much as God commands us to love our neighbor (Micah 6:8).

During that summer, I was also introduced to the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy. I began as an affordable housing intern, working under Sheila Herlihy-Hennessee, VICPP's Director of Faith Organizing, to develop a toolkit for church congregations interested in converting their unused property into affordable housing. Through this project, I saw firsthand what it looks like to blend faith with justice in practice.

So, when I officially became a walk-on Bonner scholar in the fall of 2023, I knew I wanted to continue the work I started at VICPP. VICPP sits at the intersection of what I value most: service, justice, and faith; as our motto states: "All Faiths Believe in Justice."

When I think about who best embodies the connection between faith and justice, I think of Sheila, my site supervisor since that summer. When I think of Sheila, I also think of tea. Sheila loves tea. When the GA was in session, she always kept her Hydro Flask filled with tea, sipping various herbal flavors between legislator visits. Sometimes she would even ask an administrative assistant if she could use the kitchen to refill her bottle with hot water.

Tea cannot exist without water, just like faith cannot exist without justice. Sheila once said during an immigrant prayer service, "faith without works is dead." I painted this cup of tea in honor of Sheila and the powerful message she lives out every day.

I don't know many people who work as hard as Sheila. With her tea and her faith (Franciscan), she serves the city of Richmond and Virginia at large in extraordinary ways. She inspires me and motivates me to hold fast to my faith as I serve and pursue God's justice, one sip at a time.

Thank you, Sheila.



Natali Sabri

Beneath the Surface

Acrylic on canvas

There is often more to people than meets the eye, much like vegetables growing in a garden. Only a small part of the vegetable is seen on the surface: the leaves, simple and unassuming. However, what truly makes up the vegetable lies beyond the surface, where the human eye cannot see. The same is true of people. My time in the community has taught me to never make assumptions about someone's life based on their outward appearance. Regardless of the way one presents themselves, there is often far more to them and their journey than we are able to see on the surface level. It takes time and human connection to reveal and understand the experiences that make up one's life. I met many students and individuals who appeared joyful and unbothered on the outside, but, when I took a moment to get to know them, I learned of their struggles, their fears, the quiet weights they carried, and how easily we can assume we already understand someone. This painting not only represents the elementary school garden I spent my time in, but also those I was lucky enough to connect with and hear their stories—it represents the most meaningful parts of us that we cannot display.



Ny'Kya Scott-McKoy

Injustice x

Mixed media

The papier-mache newspaper background is representative of the different stories I encountered. From volunteering to paint at elementary schools with a primarily Hispanic population. To also work on legislation that addresses the injustices of the Black maternal mortality rate in Virginia. Or picking weeds and painting the outside of houses in preparation for families who had been granted housing.

Largely, the stories of people at my summer internship with Senator Tim Kaine, where citizens were requesting aid after a federal agency had taken advantage of them. This was the inspiration for my artwork; I wanted it to require a closer inspection. Hearing people call daily with sightings of ICE & requesting help with their immigration status, it fueled the chaos I wanted to emit with this project. I wanted the color blue to capture and represent the current injustices of immigration.

While abroad, I worked at Sisters' Incorporated, a domestic violence haven for women. There, I encountered heartbreaking stories of women who had suffered at the hands of men and how those experiences fueled them into a passion for a better life for themselves and for their children. Purple became the primary color that South African women chose to represent their protest against Gender Based Violence, which reflects with the purple in my piece.

The quotes I chose were from a project through the Bonner Scholars program, an internship I've been at since my freshman year. Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy exposed me to many different issues, one of which is integrating higher education programs into prisons. America treats its incarcerated population like people deserving of punishment and not rehabilitation. These prisons are places of profit and fueling America's capitalist system.

The green in my piece represents all the fraudulent counts of those incarcerated on weed charges, as decriminalization spreads and dispensaries pop up, and yet many Black men and women are still locked up.

Red splotches represent the anger I feel at the injustices committed by my country. Though the red and white yarn is representative of America as a whole, and how its depravity seeps into every system.



Jeff (Ping Yen) Tsai

The Honey of Knowledge

Mixed media containing acrylic, glue, and seeds (Forget-me-not flowers & green beans)

Honey, a universal symbol of prosperity and vitality, is the fuel of life in *The Honey of Knowledge*. This natural substance from bees is inseparable from pollinator health, biodiversity, and ecosystem stability. My piece speaks to my motivation for using multimedia communication to connect the public with my two Bonner sites: the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy and the City of Richmond's Office of Sustainability. The act of doing work to benefit underrepresented communities is as healing and empowering as the honey portrayed in this piece. The web of honey acts as a network of knowledge between community stakeholders at RVA to cross-pollinate the ideas that empower the seeds to grow.

To give this vision a visual language, I drew inspiration from Mexico's muralism movement, referencing Siqueiros' *Las fechas en la historia de México o el derecho a la cultura* (1953) to include the significant dates of my personal journey embarking on civic engagement. The pen is painted in three universal elements: the sky (white), water (blue), and land (green), to show the healthy environment necessary to support the web of honey. It is dated from 2022 to 2026, marking our cohort's years at Richmond to make a difference within our communities. The hand reaching up in 2022 is painted in white, reminiscent of my time starting fresh with learning about my community, to the hand reaching downwards in 2026, that nurtures the soil. The two hands hold the tip and end of the pen together, symbolizing the power of community building to transform words into action. The tip of the pen sparks in bright rich colors of red and orange to signify the ongoing momentum.

In the soil, each seed represents every initiative and idea that is growing and prospering throughout time, where each plant is growing at their own speed at different heights. This ties back to my work in sustainability and public advocacy, where grassroots community initiatives take time to bloom. The flowing honey then becomes the synthesis that ties the human and natural worlds together for civic empowerment.



Senior and junior Bonner Scholars with Richmond artist Hamilton Glass



Bonner Center for
Civic Engagement

ENGAGE.RICHMOND.EDU   @SPIDERSENGAGE