

Ravina Toor

The Power of Representation

Ravina Toor, an Edmonton based interdisciplinary artist is working to create inclusive spaces within the art world. Her work highlights her Punjabi heritage as well as her Canadian identity. Growing up as a second-generation immigrant Ravina had to figure out her own identity in a community with no clear representation of her heritage. As a young adult of colour, trying to figure out where to fit in was frustrating and difficult. Art was a place of solace for Ravina. Drawing and painting representations of herself helped her not feel so alone. Even today, where representation is more mainstream, Ravina's art is about celebrating her roots and finding where she belongs amidst two very different cultures. Her art is representative of many themes such as family, culture, religion, identity and inter-generational integration.

Trying to find a stable career path, Ravina went to the University of Alberta for a Bachelor of Commerce focusing on Human Resources and Marketing. After graduating in 2020 she was able to get a job with the business team at Apple. While working at Apple she came across the digital drawing program Procreate. After mainly working on canvas with traditional styles of art she turned to digital art. She uses an iPad every day. Her art career started growing when she began posting her work on Twitter. She would draw people's profile picture in exchange for being reposted. Her work gained more exposure, and she started getting commission requests. Ravina opened an Etsy store, and a month later she got her first order. In 2021 she officially launched her business RAVINARTOOR (1). Her entrepreneurial expertise has been helpful in developing her business into a career that can financially support her.



Ravina's parents and grandparents being from India, had never seen what opportunities artists could have in Canada. In India, women's creative talents are silenced. Sometimes Ravina wonders how much this remarkable talent was never nurtured because of societal expectations. She realizes she has been offered opportunities her ancestors were never given. Ravina honours her roots and uses her art to preserve her Indian culture and religion. She donates ten percent of her monthly income to various charities that support women in Punjab (2) and Haryana (3).

Even though she grew up in a spiritual household, Ravina discovered religion in university. Being a part of the Shiki religion, she feels a strong connection to the divine, which comes through in her art. Ravina says that even through there is a large generational gap, her grandmother relates to her art, validating her work. Her art is also used to bring attention to societal issues. In 2020 India's farmers were in crisis after the government passed laws that made farming wages unviable as a way to support themselves and their families. As millions protested these laws Ravina did her part in joining the fight through art. The mural called Still I Rise was installed in Calgary during 2021 in collaboration with two other artists. This artwork brings to light the important role that Indian farmers have in supplying food



and participating in India's economy. This thirty-six-foot-high mural joins the fight for justice against the Indian government's unfair treatment of the farmers.

"The best part about being an artist is that I am living my dream."

Building her art career has been a challenging pursuit for Ravina. She has worked hard to expand her business enough to be able to hire a manager and an assistant. This progression has allowed her to hand over some of the taxing administrative components and focus more on the art. Ravina established good work-life balance and continues to prioritize her own mental and physical health. While she still sees herself as an emerging artist, Ravina's accomplishments suggest otherwise. Her work has a distinct style and a colour palette people recognize. Much of her work is done in

brown and beige with very intricate details.

Ravina recalls her art as a child where she would alter her appearance to appear whiter or to fit into the societal norms. That is something, I as an Indian youth, can relate to. I recall telling my mom that I wished my hair was blond and my eyes were blue so I would fit in better with my friends. Today, Ravina says that her art is about appreciating and honouring the features that make her unique. Her journey as an artist and connecting with her community has allowed her to realize just how powerful imagery can be. Ravina plans to paint more on canvas and in more traditional art styles again. As well, she is writing a children's book. As her business grows, she hopes to also be able to bring art to underprivileged children and do more charity work. Ravina's work has brought a sense of togetherness and happiness to her community. Being an artist for Ravina is like

living a dream; she loves being able to create whatever she wants whenever she wants. Her work is invaluable to youths of colour everywhere.

Based on an interview by Isaac Belland in 2022

References

1. Toor, R. (n.d.). 1111. RAVINARTOOR. <https://ravinarartoor.com/pages/1111>
2. "Punjab is a state in northwest region of India and is one of the most prosperous states. The name Punjab is made of two words Punj (Five) + Aab (Water) i.e. land of five rivers. These five rivers of Punjab are Sutlej, Beas, Ravi, Chenab, and Jhelum. Only Sutlej, Ravi and Beas rivers flow in today's Punjab. The other two rivers are now in the state of Punjab, situated in Pakistan. The Punjab State is divided into three regions: Majha, Doaba and Malwa." Home. Government of Punjab, India. (n.d.). <https://punjab.gov.in/known-punjab/>
3. "Haryana, state in north-central India. It is bounded on the northwest by the state of Punjab and the union territory of Chandigarh, on the north and northeast by the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, on the east by the state of Uttar Pradesh and the union territory of Delhi, and on the south and southwest by the state of Rajasthan. The city of Chandigarh, within the Chandigarh union territory, serves as the capital of not only that territory but also of the states of Haryana and Punjab." Encyclopedia Britannica, inc. (2023, July 5). Haryana Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Haryana>