KING COUNTY METRO • AANHP VISIBILITY PROJECT • 2024

Celebrating the Strengths of AANHP Moms

A portrait series honoring the mothers of American Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pasifika employees at King County Metro

Artwork by Linh Hoàng

In May 2024, for American Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pasifika (AANHP) Heritage Month, King County Metro unveiled employee artwork from its AANHP Visibility Project. Through an internal call for art, employees were invited to honor the AANHP communities who helped shape the region and to make visible Metro's commitment to equity, inclusion, and belonging.

This series, created by Metro graphic designer Linh Hoàng, celebrates the mothers of four Metro employees, including her own. Each portrait pairs a mother with plants chosen to carry her story: her heritage, her sacrifices, and the strength she passed on. Together, the portraits push back against long-held stereotypes and ask viewers to recognize the resilience of AANHP mothers.

IN THIS SERIES



Nurkhan Khudaiberdieva



Xí Lê



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Meeramma Naidu

King County uses "AANHP" (American Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pasifika) in place of "AAPI," in alignment with its AANHP Employee Resource Group.

Learn More at https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/metro/programs-and-projects/community-programs/aanhp



Nurkhan Khudaiberdieva

Mother of Nasir Khudaiberdiev, Rail Division, Project/Program Manager III

This portrait invites you to see Nasir’s mother not only through the eyes of her son but also as a universal symbol of maternal strength.

In the portrait of Nurkhan Khudaiberdieva, Nasir’s mother, we witness the embodiment of enduring strength and nurturing spirit that defines her essence. She is depicted standing tall and unwavering like a birch tree, rooted in the fertile ground of sacrifice—a testament to her protective nature and the sustenance she provides. The birch’s slender leaves allow dappled sunlight to filter through, symbolizing her ability to let in just enough light of hope, even in the toughest of times, encouraging growth and resilience.

The moonflower, rare and enchanting, mirrors her exceptional patience and the quiet persistence in her heart. It blooms in the silence of the night, a perfect metaphor for her belief in the inevitable dawn that follows life’s darkest moments. This rare bloom signifies her faith and the serene certainty that with time, change will come.

Like the tulip, she possesses a delicate backbone that stands defiant to the harshest winds of challenge. The tulip’s vibrant colors reflect the life and joy she brings to those around her, while its steadfast stance in the face of adversity speaks to her indomitable will.

Nasir’s mother is the gardener of her family’s spirit, sowing seeds of unity, culture, and heritage. Her favorite hue of green whispers of fresh beginnings and the undying promise of renewal—patience made visible. She serves not just as the bearer of life but as the bold curator of hope, guiding her family through life’s ebb and flow with grace and wisdom.

This artwork attempts to portray Nasir's mother not only through the eyes of her son but also as a universal symbol of maternal strength, an anchor in the shifting sands of time, a beacon of light in the obscurity of challenge, and the eternal gardener whose love blooms in perpetual spring.







Xí Lê

Mother of Linh Hoàng, Mobility Division, Marketing & Sales Specialist III

Xí’s personal narrative represents the collective immigrant experience—one marked by unwavering determination to surmount unimaginable odds.

The experiences of Linh's mother, Xí Lê, mirror the struggles faced by countless immigrant women. Born amidst the Vietnam-American war, she navigated through the hardships of poverty and starvation following Vietnam’s independence. As the eldest in her family, she selflessly shouldered the responsibility of caring for her ten siblings. Despite marrying a man who later became abusive and battled alcoholism, she summoned the courage to embark on a quest for a better life for herself and her children in the United States.

Her personal narrative represents the collective immigrant experience—one marked by unwavering determination to surmount unimaginable odds. Moms, like Xi, confront discrimination and racism in their daily lives, often lacking the necessary language skills or knowledge to navigate the intricate systems designed to support them. Yet, they persevere. They work tirelessly, sacrificing their own wellbeing to provide for their families. In defying societal expectations and norms, they emerge as resilient, successful, and independent women.

In each artwork, layers of symbolism intricately intertwine to reflect the multifaceted lives of these extraordinary women. Xi’s unwavering wish for her family and loved ones to have “just enough” is embodied by the presence of a papaya tree—a symbol of abundance and sufficiency. In Vietnamese culture, papaya carries the meaning of “just enough,” and during the new year, papayas are placed on shrines to wish for sufficiency in the upcoming year. Additionally, the lotuses in the foreground represent her enduring humanhood, resilience, and strength. Like lotuses that grow in muddy waters but bloom beautifully and emit a delightful fragrance, Xi, despite the tragedies and hardships she has faced, continues to radiate joy and beauty into the world.







Mary Jane Shirakawa

Mother of Keiko Budech, General Manager's Office, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Manager I

Mary Jane's story illuminates universal themes of cultural assimilation, the enduring power of family bonds, and the lifelong journey of self-discovery.

As a Japanese American, Mary Jane's journey is intricately intertwined with the historical legacy of World War II, which forced her father to relinquish all he held dear and endure the confines of a Japanese incarceration camp. Growing up under the shadow of pervasive anti-Japanese sentiment, Mary Jane's parents shouldered the weight of their anxieties, swiftly immersing their children in white culture and bestowing them with anglicized names to foster a sense of belonging and assimilation. Now, as Mary Jane matures, she continues to navigate the complexities of her childhood, unravel her identity, and explore what it truly means to be a Japanese woman in America.

Mary Jane, Keiko's mother, selfless and nurturing, devotes herself to caring for her family, often at the expense of her own wellbeing. The intention of this artwork is to encapsulate the essence of her boundless love and the profound sacrifices she makes to ensure the health of her family.

Mary Jane's story illuminates universal themes of cultural assimilation, the enduring power of family bonds, and the lifelong journey of self-discovery. Within the artwork, Mary Jane is symbolized through the presence of ferns, passion fruit vine, and the bird of paradise. The ferns represent her time in Seattle, embodying the nourishment and support they provide to a thriving forest. Additionally, ferns are revered for their medicinal properties, absorbing pain and offering healing. Passion fruit and the bird of paradise plant represent Mary Jane's childhood in Hawaii. Passion fruit, with their numerous seeds, care for the next generations until they are ready to grow and flourish on their own. Similarly, the bird of paradise plant, often seen with its majestic green leaves, reveals its breathtaking flowers only in favorable conditions. In many ways, Mary Jane, like the bird of paradise, embodies the steady support and shade of the big green leaves. But in rare moments when she can prioritize herself, her creativity and artistry bloom, shining forth like the resplendent flowers of the bird of paradise.







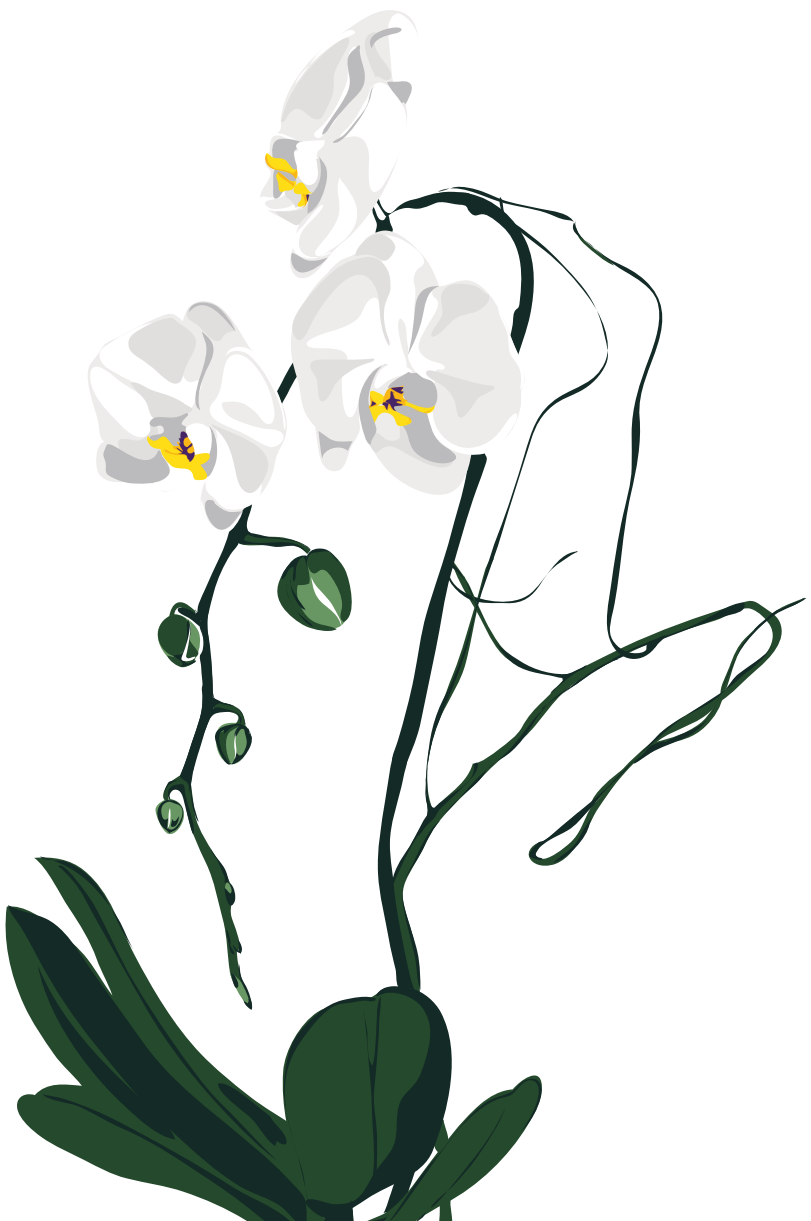
Meeramma Naidu

Mother of Vilash Naidu, Bus Operations, Transit Operator

This portrait of Meeramma Naidu captures a woman whose essence cannot be confined to a single role or moment.

In the tapestry of life, Meeramma Naidu, Vilash’s mother, stands as a living testament to resilience, a symbol of the enduring spirit woven through the fibers of motherhood and entrepreneurship. Her portrait is an homage to the rich, symbolic textures of the banana tree, the coconut, and the orchid—each an emblem of her multifaceted nature.

The banana tree, known for its regenerative prowess, mirrors Meeramma's exceptional ability to recover and thrive through life's cycles. Like this robust tree, she is a matriarchal presence that continues to give, her spirit sprouting anew with each challenge, offering sustenance and shade in life's relentless sun.



Resembling the coconut, Meeramma embodies the tree's versatile strength. The coconut is a beacon of purity in her culture—hard and resilient on the outside, yet nurturing within. Its every part finds purpose, reflecting her various roles: a businesswoman, a family anchor, a provider, and now, a caregiver in a new land. Her life, like the coconut, is a narrative of practicality and profound utility, a life that sustains and enriches those around her.

The orchid represents Meeramma’s delicate balance of strength and care. This favored flower, with its need for precise nurturing, parallels her journey. With a tender hand and an unshakeable resolve, she cultivates beauty and prosperity in the most unyielding circumstances, her solutions blooming in the face of adversity.

This portrait of Meeramma Naidu captures a woman whose essence cannot be confined to a single role or moment. It is a celebration of her entrepreneurial spirit, her cultural heritage, and her unwavering support for her family. Through the symbolism of the banana tree’s resilience, the coconut’s utility, and the orchid’s delicate care, we see Meeramma's life—a beautiful, continuous act of love, an orchard of humanity where she is both the gardener and the nourishing tree.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Linh Hoàng

Artist & Graphic Designer



I am a Vietnamese artist, and my work begins with the women who raised me. My grandmother, Bà Nội, was a village girl who never learned to read. The war, at its worst when she was in her twenties, took every opportunity she might have had and left her hungry and broke. My mother, the eldest of eleven children, grew up in poverty after the war and raised her younger siblings. Her parents didn't believe girls needed an education and pulled her out of school before she finished middle school. She is a smart woman, and I believe her when she says she could have become a doctor if they had let her stay. Later, she married a man who became abusive. Neither woman was dealt a fair hand, and both were blamed for their own hardship. I grew up watching people treat a battered wife as the cause of her own beating, and a struggling mother as proof of her own failure. That is why Equity and Social Justice is personal to me. It means refusing to look away from the women our communities blame, and insisting that they be seen clearly.

When King County Metro put out a call for art for its AANHP Visibility Project, I saw a chance to give my mother what the world had rarely given her: dignity. I drew her beside a papaya tree. In Vietnamese, papaya is đu đủ, and đủ means "enough." At Tết we place papayas on the family altar to ask for just enough in the year ahead, and just enough is all my mother ever wished for her family. In front of her I placed lotuses, which root in mud and bloom anyway. Then I widened the circle to three more mothers of Metro employees, each carrying her own story of sacrifice. I made these portraits so that women like my mother and my grandmother are remembered for their strength, not blamed for what was done to them.

