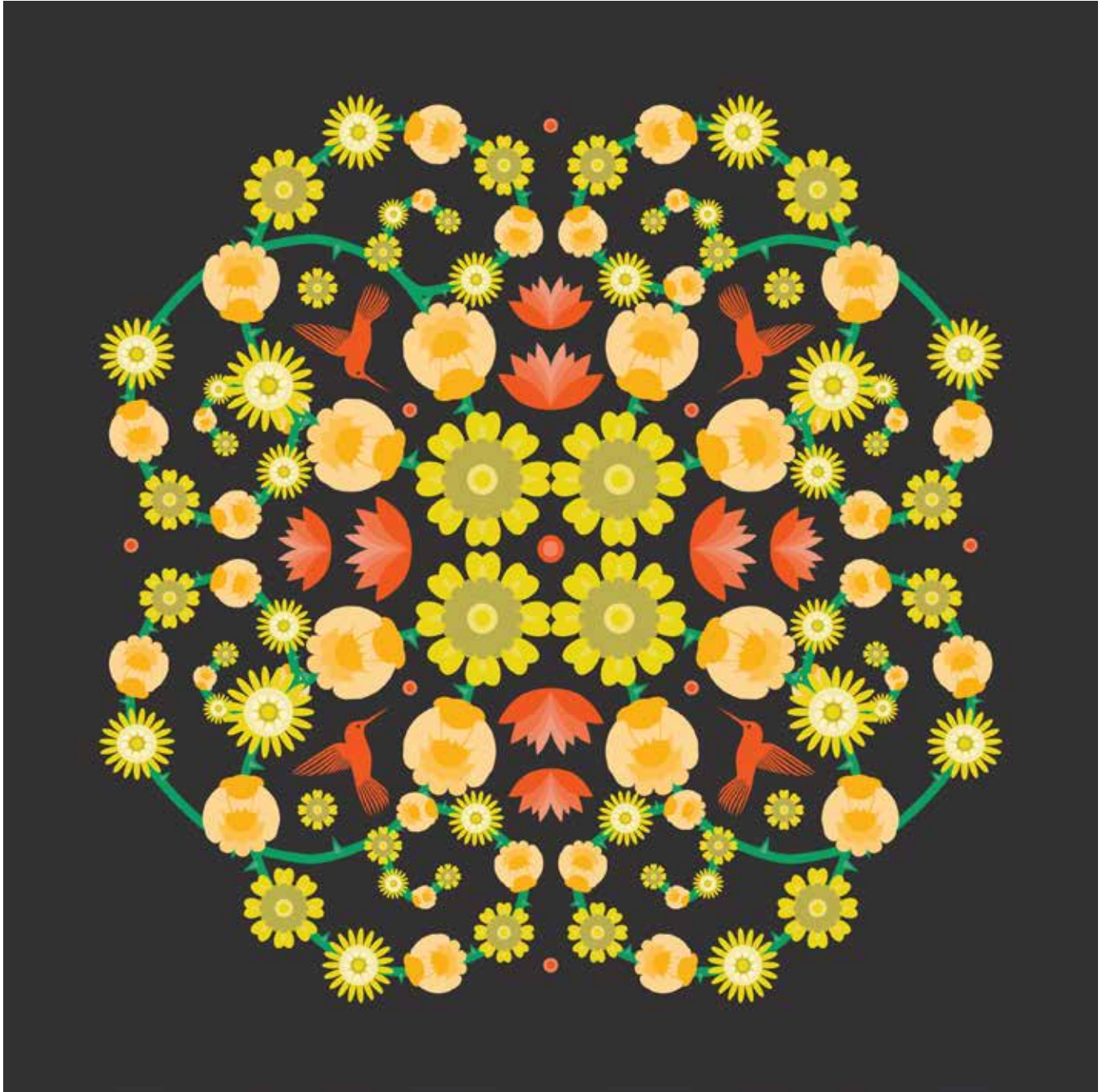


# THE FLORAL FOLK ART PROJECT

EXPLORING THE RELEVANCY OF FOLK ART TODAY





Previous page: Jonathan M. Above: Josefina F.

### Kasmira Mohanty

It can be difficult to talk about race and culture, but perhaps even more so when those issues weigh heavily on the backs of my students. I faced challenges growing up as a child of mixed race, and those experiences are occasionally processed through my personal artwork. I feel the same outlet can and has helped some of my students meaningfully engage with their thoughts and emotions in regard to cultural conflict.

One way to help facilitate this is through my Floral Folk Art project. I initially engineered this project four years ago for my level 1 Computer

Graphics classes to provide a segue from line into shape and color. This project has become profoundly so much more and a vehicle for my students to explore more of what we all have in common rather than our differences.

#### Introducing Folk Art

I start simple by defining folk art as having a highly decorative design aesthetic, using bright bold colors, a flattened perspective, and strong forms in simple arrangements which contain an immediacy of meaning. Afterward, during my Google Slides

#### OBJECTIVE

Create a digital illustration using flowers to represent oneself and/or culture.

#### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How can digital images be used to represent personal meaning?

#### ARTIST CONNECTIONS

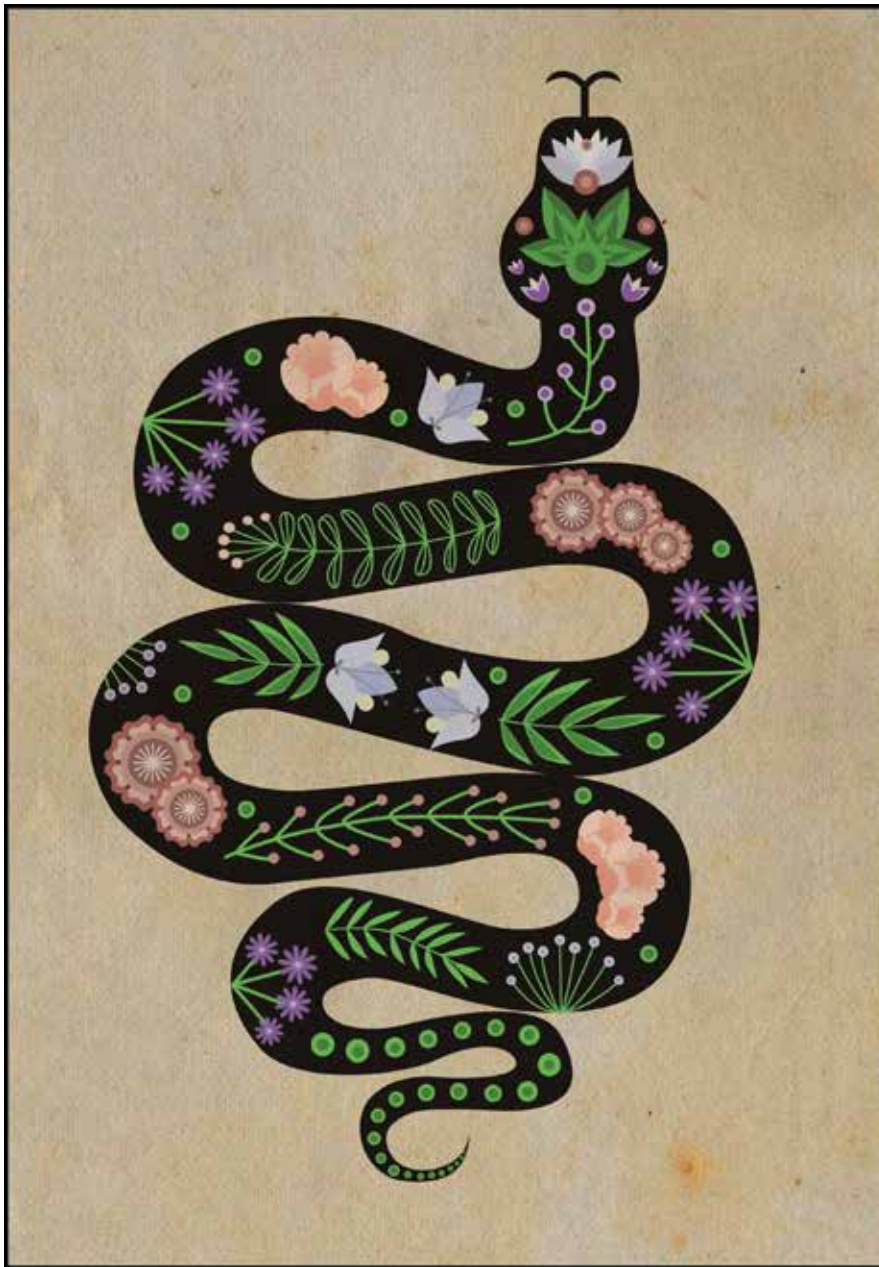
- Clairice Gifford
- Geoffroy Mottart
- Vicki Rawlins

#### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

- Examples of folk art from around the world
- Gods in Face Masks: India's Folk Artists Take on COVID-19 (website)
- Learn the Language of Flowers the Victorian Way! | Horrible Histories (website)
- Adobe Illustrator

#### NATIONAL MEDIA ARTS STANDARD

Producing: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.



Emily R.

presentation, students learn about examples of folk art from various countries around the globe.

I emphasize that every country has a form of folk art that adheres to the definition of what folk art is, thus linking all these different cultures together through this style of visual communication. We go on to discuss how folk art is typically created in cultural isolation by untrained, often

anonymous artists or by artisans of varying degrees of skill.

The question becomes, how can artists who are isolated or haven't had extensive artistic training create works that are so similar throughout the world? The conclusion that students often come to is that humans have had to rely on nature and their immediate communities for survival. All humans throughout time have wanted to docu-

ment that experience using shapes and colors that are easy to make from raw materials and simple tools.

### Introducing Contemporary Folk Art

To make the concept of folk art more relatable, I show antique baskets, furniture, utensils, sculptures, and paintings that display folk art. Even more importantly, students are shown how folk art is currently being woven into modern life. I warm them up to the idea by introducing a few modern designers who are incorporating traditional Mexican Otomi Embroidery into fashion and home decor. Artist Clairice Gifford, whose work graces book jackets, magazine covers, and a wide variety of products offers another vantage point. A wonderful video, At Santa Fe's International Folk Art Market, Culture is the Commodity, also reinforces the relevancy of folk art in today's society.

### Investigating Personal Heritage

With the students fully primed and to make folk art more personal I have them complete a worksheet based on their own heritage. I allow flexibility with this, since some students are mixed like I am or are unsure if their roots. This year I showed examples of the completed worksheet using my Indian half. It was kismet that the piece I selected to showcase was part of an online article entitled Gods in Face Masks: India's Folk Artists Take on Covid-19. I have to admit I teacher geeked when I located this timely and perfect article which had fallen serendipitously into my lap.

Once students located a piece of folk art from their heritage, I had them respond to the following questions "What country is the piece of folk art you selected from?" "What is the name of the artist who created it (if available);" "What is the title of the piece (if available);" "Describe what you see in the artwork.," "What elements of art can you identify in the artwork?" and "What is the meaning or message behind the artwork?" The last question "Why did you choose to share this piece of artwork?" may intensely pull on your heart strings.

One last bit I share with my stu-

dents is Floriography. Since the focal point of the project is floral, they need to know that flowers can convey meaning or a message, and that this is true throughout all cultures. I shared a humorous look at Floriography called Learn the Language of Flowers the Victorian Way! | Horrible Histories. Contemporary artists you might want to share who use flowers in their work include Geoffroy Mottart and Vicki Rawlins.

### Working with Illustrator

Their brains packed with folk art knowledge; students used Adobe Illustrator to create a floral folk art piece of their own. They are provided with a step-by-step written tutorial and keeping remote learning in mind, instructional videos as well. Students must include up to 3-5 main flowers, stems, leaves, at least one flower bud, and decorative dots. The finished composition must be symmetrical and offer visual variety.

Once students are introduced to fundamental methods of modifying some of the basic shapes available within Illustrator via the toolbar, they can choose to follow the tutorial or inject custom flowers and/or a modified composition. For example, I've had a student create a red poppy flower to symbolize his grandfather's military service. Another illustrated a lily because they were in her mother's wedding bouquet, another assembled a dahlia to represent her Mexican heritage. Others invented an imaginary flower to represent who they are as a person.

It somehow always astonishes me how multi-faceted students become when given the opportunity to share bits of themselves that extend beyond the classroom when they accept a simple offering as with my Floral Folk Art project. I hope it brings peace, beauty and a different perspective to something that is often fraught with negativity.

*Kasmira is an art teacher at Huntington High School in Huntington, New York. kasmiramohanty@gmail.com*



*Giada L.*



*Fiorella B.*