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SMA Prep student awarded for reinventing historical icon in Embracing Our Differences painting

by: [Niki Kottmann](#) Managing Editor of Arts and Entertainment

She's just one person, but she represents millions.

"The New Rosie the Riveter" sits along the bayfront, her green almond-shaped eyes facing downtown Sarasota, her Afro pulled back with a red scarf and dark-brown arm flexed, just like the original World War II-era Rosie icon.

The creator of the painting, eighth grade Sarasota Military Academy Prep student Elisa Uzcategui, purposefully updated everything but Rosie's attire and pose.

She says the Embracing Our Differences exhibit piece represents both Asian and Caucasian women through the shape and color of her eyes, African-American women through the texture of her hair and Latino women through the color of her skin.

“(Original) Rosie is white, but there are other strong women of other races,” Uzcategui says.

The 13-year-old won Best in Show in the student category of the art competition, part of the 15th anniversary of EOD’s outdoor exhibit celebrating diversity.

Uzcategui worked on the piece as a project for her fall semester art class under the instruction of Captain Pamela Kok — the first art class she’s ever taken.

The eighth-grader moved to Sarasota three years ago from Maracay, Venezuela, without any English-language skills. Through her time at SMA Prep and programs such as 50-50 Day (a full day of education about female leaders throughout American history), she was introduced not only to art, but the concept of female empowerment.



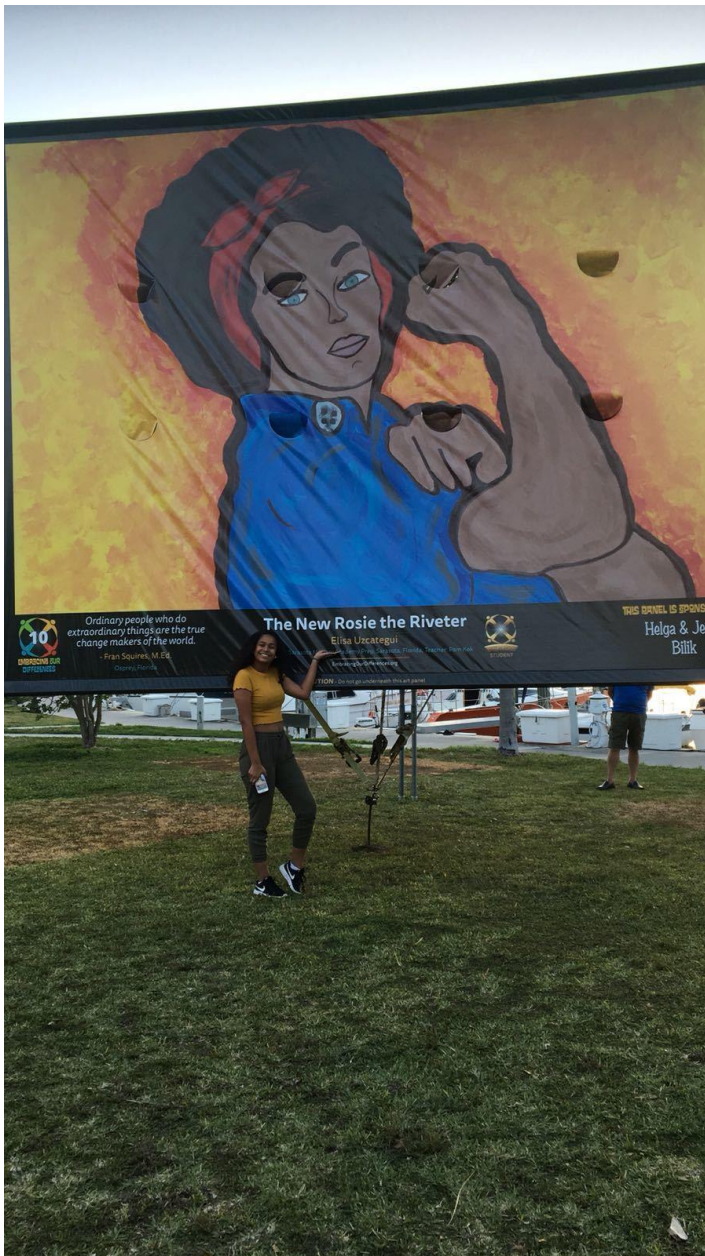
Sarasota Military Academy Prep student Elisa Uzcategui learned conversational English three years after moving here from Venezuela without any English language skills. Photo by Niki Kottmann

It was in history class that she first learned about Rosie, she says. She was inspired by the WWII icon symbolizing women who stepped up to work in factories and shipyards when the traditionally male-dominated jobs became vacant once many men left for war.

“Rosie is a symbol of American feminism,” she says. “And I decided to make a new one.”

Her painting was created over the span of a week using paint and black marker. She worked on the piece daily, both in art class and at home, where Uzcategui says her mom would sit at the table and watch her work.

Uzcategui says she enjoys art because it's a way of expressing herself. Just like English was new to her when she started at SMA Prep, so was art, and she's strived to excel in her academic efforts involving both.



Sarasota Military Academy Prep student Elisa Uzcategui poses in front of the blown-up version of her award-winning creation. Courtesy photo

“Really, she’s a model student in terms of her attitude and academics and leadership,” says Assistant Head of School Becky Morris. “We’re very proud of what she’s been able to accomplish considering potential obstacles in her way having just arrived in the U.S. three years ago.”

Uzcategui has three stripes on the shoulders of her school uniform that she earned by displaying a hardworking nature and developing leadership qualities.

She aspires to have a successful career like the strong women in her family who serve as her own Rosies to look up to. Uzcategui says she loves hearing about her aunts’ work in the medical and graphic design fields, and her mother’s job as a preschool teacher.

She wants to continue to create art for fun, but she hopes to be a forensic criminologist when she grows up.

As for what she wants people to take away from her work, that’s simple.

“I want them to feel like it’s OK to be different,” Uzcategui says. “It doesn’t matter, race ... We’re all special.”



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