that paint on your wall

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that paint on your wall
-an honest critique of the hovey murals

that paint on your wall depicts my skin
my hair, my body encased within
those shallow smears of colored oil
defile the walls aiming to spoil
the truth, which should be self-evident
these portraits masquerade and wickedly prevent
the viewer from seeing with eyes of their own
they rely on the image, the readily shown
that paint on your wall dishonors my skin
my heart my mind and my soul within
stay strong despite your sinister manner
“art causes no harm, so what is the matter?”
you give no heed to what brush strokes can do
devil they incite in those who chose to
believe in the lies you display with such glory
you romantically beautify the honestly gory
that “art” you protect, gives you right to forget
the only good indian was a dead one at best
that paint on your wall erases my skin
allowing no one to see the beauty within
the images you’ve formed entertain your ideals
hooked noses, high cheekbones of mediterranean feel
our women, turned white, pale skin wrapped in beads
breasts naked whilst straddling an elegant steed
our men crouch low, turned to animals, meek
without help from the white man, decidedly weak
that paint on your wall is not my skin
it is a hatred filled lie that you find yourself in
how dare you smear our essence with bile
you think that you’ve won, when all of the while
it is your ignorance, your bliss, that soon will crumble
your love for destruction will cause you to stumble
how dare you think that your colors could upend
millennia of traditions, ceremony and stories that mend
the hearts of the ones that continue to thrive
despite those colorful filthy lies
that paint on your wall has no power over me
you are the fool, I hope you now see

kianna burke - august 2018

Located in the basement of Dartmouth’s Class of 1953 Commons, the Hovey Murals were painted in 1939 by alumni Walter Beach Humphrey ’37. Humphrey created them in protest to the Orozco Murals, which are located in Baker Library. Using a Dartmouth drinking song, written by Richard Hovey, class of 1883, he illustrated Eleazar Wheelock’s founding of Dartmouth College and the offensively inaccurate depiction of his
interactions with Indigenous peoples from the region. The murals are extremely harmful because of their depiction of “The Dartmouth Indian,” their objectification of women, and their glorification of rape culture.

When I wrote this poem in April 2018, I was a member of the Dartmouth College Hovey Mural study group. It was formed by Interim Provost, David Kotz, in response to a letter from students calling for the mural’s removal. It was not the first time students had given voice to this particular issue. When the decision was made in September to have them removed, I was proud of Dartmouth, if only for a moment. It was truly an historical event for the college. It was one small step towards reconciling the college’s history. I hope the community will continue to push for true justice. For Dartmouth still has a long journey to travel