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that paint on your wall

Kianna Burke
kianna.m.burke@dartmouth.edu

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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
the evil 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