

SFDS 2025 VISUAL GUIDEBOOK



by Akachukwu Eze & Mitch Hanson

At the Intersection of Art and Dermatology

Art and dermatology share a profound connection—they both rely on keen observation, creativity, and deep human connection. In dermatology, the ability to truly see a patient beyond the surface can shape diagnosis, empathy, and care. Likewise, art invites us to pause, reflect, and interpret the stories etched into skin, identity, and experience.

This visual guidebook showcases how medical students and residents use art to express their identities, their journeys in medicine, and the diverse realities of patients living with skin disorders. From vibrant depictions of skin of color to abstract renderings, whether through painting, photography, sculpture, or digital design, these works highlight themes of representation, resilience, and reflection, illuminating the ways in which art can give voice to both the seen and unseen in dermatology.

While medicine champions science and objectivity, art provides space for subjectivity, creativity, and healing. In this curated collection from the San Francisco Dermatology Conference, we witness how art not only complements dermatologic medical training but also elevates it, reminding us that our ability to observe with skill and empathy is not just a powerful clinical tool but a profoundly human one.

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Paintings and Drawings





Title: Vivid Fatigue

Author: Tiana, Medical Student

School: Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine

Description: This attempts to capture the exhaustion that comes with medicine. The contrasting colors reflect both mental strain and perseverance, while the tense expression represents endurance. It's a visual representation of the balance between burnout and dedication—tired, but still standing.

Title: Across the Table

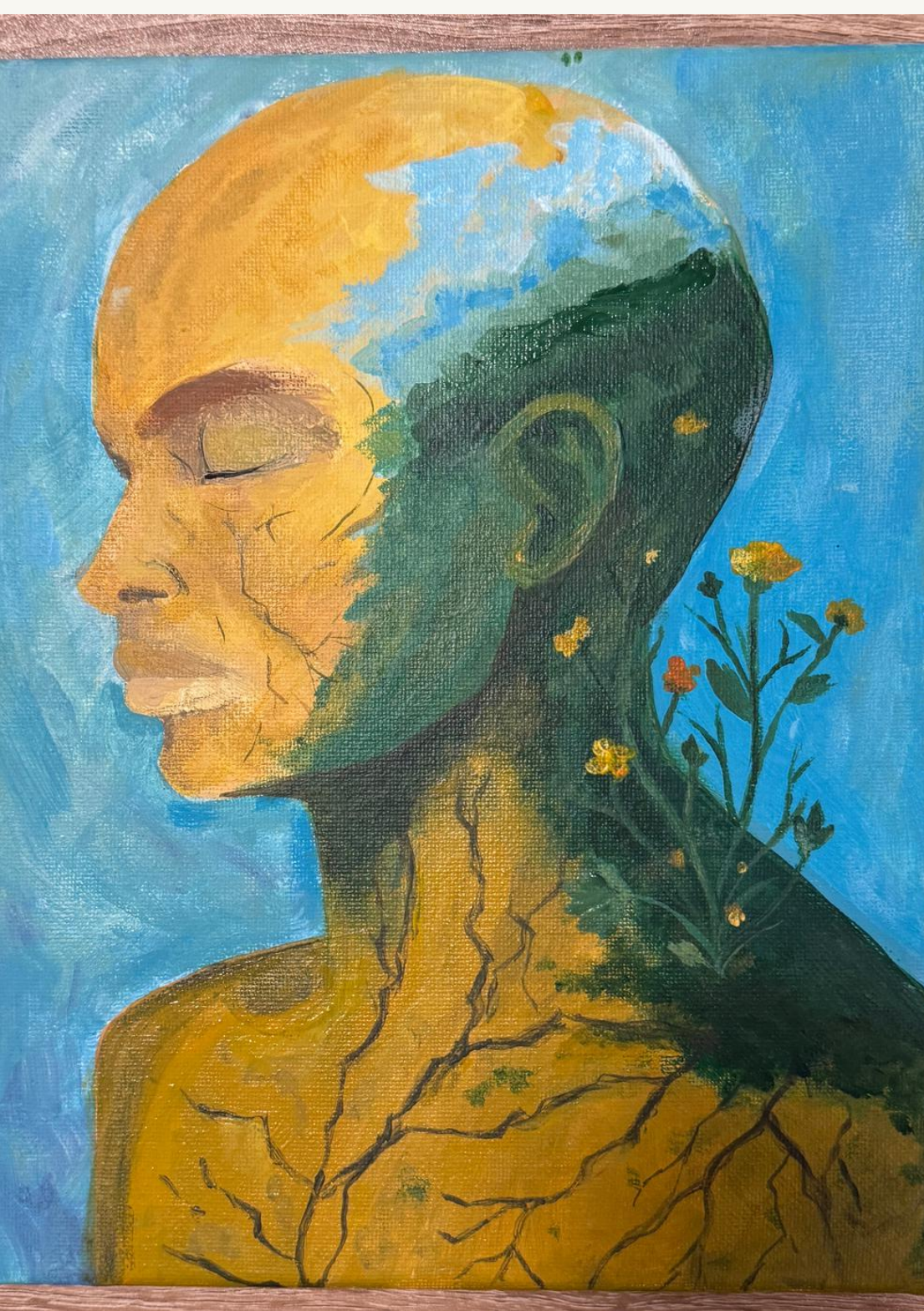
Author: Jenny Lee, Medical Student

School: Chicago Medical School, Rosalind Franklin University of Health and Sciences

Description: Across the Table reflects my motivation behind my research project “Bringing Specialty to Community: Determining the Prevalence of Skin Disorders Among Immigrant/ Refugee Nail Salon Workers.” Most of the women in my family are manicurists on top of being devoted housewives. As such, many do not have access to specialty care, such as dermatology.- despite the prevalence of skin conditions given their constant contact with toxic chemicals. Coming from a family of Vietnamese refugees, I am so grateful to be the first female physician in my family. I had always put healthcare professionals on a pedestal. I know now the knowledge and training that goes into being a great physician is a huge sacrifice, and at the end of the day, we are all human.



With my experience over the last few years, I see this sacrifice as a privilege and responsibility to care for the patients that come into our hands, and to be morally upstanding citizens. These days, I get to sit Across the Table and study, fueled by my "why".



Title: Skin of the Earth

Author: Katherine Jina Kim, Medical Student

School: Medical College of Georgia

Description: This piece invites viewers to see the Earth as a living organ, its surface as a vast and textured skin. Cracked deserts mimic dehydrated dermis, lush forests become freckles of life, and rivers trace the fluid networks that echo beneath our own skin. Through layered brushstrokes and earthy pigments, this painting becomes a metaphor for dermatology's core truth: that the skin, like the planet, holds stories of resilience, trauma, and regeneration. Just as dermatologists read the body's landscape to understand health and history, this work urges us to observe the Earth's surface as a mirror of our own—sensitive, scarred, and stunningly alive.



Title: Itchier Than Skin

Author: Danny Lee, Medical Student

School: University of California, San Diego

Description: This piece explores the complex connection between skin, mind, and quality of life. Inspired by the origins and media portrayal of Morgellons disease, it highlights the psychiatric aspects of dermatologic illness.

Scratch art was chosen to reflect the mind-consuming symptoms patients experience. The zoomed-in perspective represents the hyperfixation often associated with skin sensations. The shapes and lines symbolize both the fibers historically linked to Morgellons and a magnified lens on personal experience. These layered perspectives suggest that how one perceives and lives with skin disease can shape both identity and well-being.



Title: Visibility

Author: Erin Lee, Medical Student

School: Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership

Description: “Visibility”

Two identical forms, perceived differently.

This piece explores differences in visibility: how skin of color is underrepresented in dermatology, and how that lack of representation affects care. Dermatologic disease presents differently across skin tones, yet the visual standard remains centered on lighter skin. I was inspired by the surface and texture of keloid scars.

What’s visible isn’t always understood. What’s missing isn’t always absent.



Title: In Bloom, Part 1

Author: Jessica Crockett, Medical Student

School: UCSF School of Medicine, matched at Stanford Dermatology Residency Program

Description: Each Fall, I helped my mom plant bulbs of hyacinth, tulips, and daffodils in our yard. Months would pass, the bulbs forgotten underground, until seemingly out of nowhere green shoots would pierce the soil and erupt in vibrant flowers of purple, red, and yellow. I marveled at our flowers, in awe that they and the bulbs we planted were one and the same. In medicine, we spend much of our early training taking root, investing energy, quietly growing, subtly transforming, yet questioning how we will ever become the physicians we are destined to become. The journey feels long and slow, the outcome distant, until one day a patient views us as their primary doctor, and we realize, indeed, we are the flower in bloom.



Title: In Bloom, Part 2

Author: Jessica Crockett, Medical Student

School: UCSF School of Medicine, matched at Stanford Dermatology Residency Program

Description: Each Fall, I helped my mom plant bulbs of hyacinth, tulips, and daffodils in our yard. Months would pass, the bulbs forgotten underground, until seemingly out of nowhere green shoots would pierce the soil and erupt in vibrant flowers of purple, red, and yellow. I marveled at our flowers, in awe that they and the bulbs we planted were one and the same. In medicine, we spend much of our early training taking root, investing energy, quietly growing, subtly transforming, yet questioning how we will ever become the physicians we are destined to become. The journey feels long and slow, the outcome distant, until one day a patient views us as their primary doctor, and we realize, indeed, we are the flower in bloom.



Title: The Universal Language of Compassion

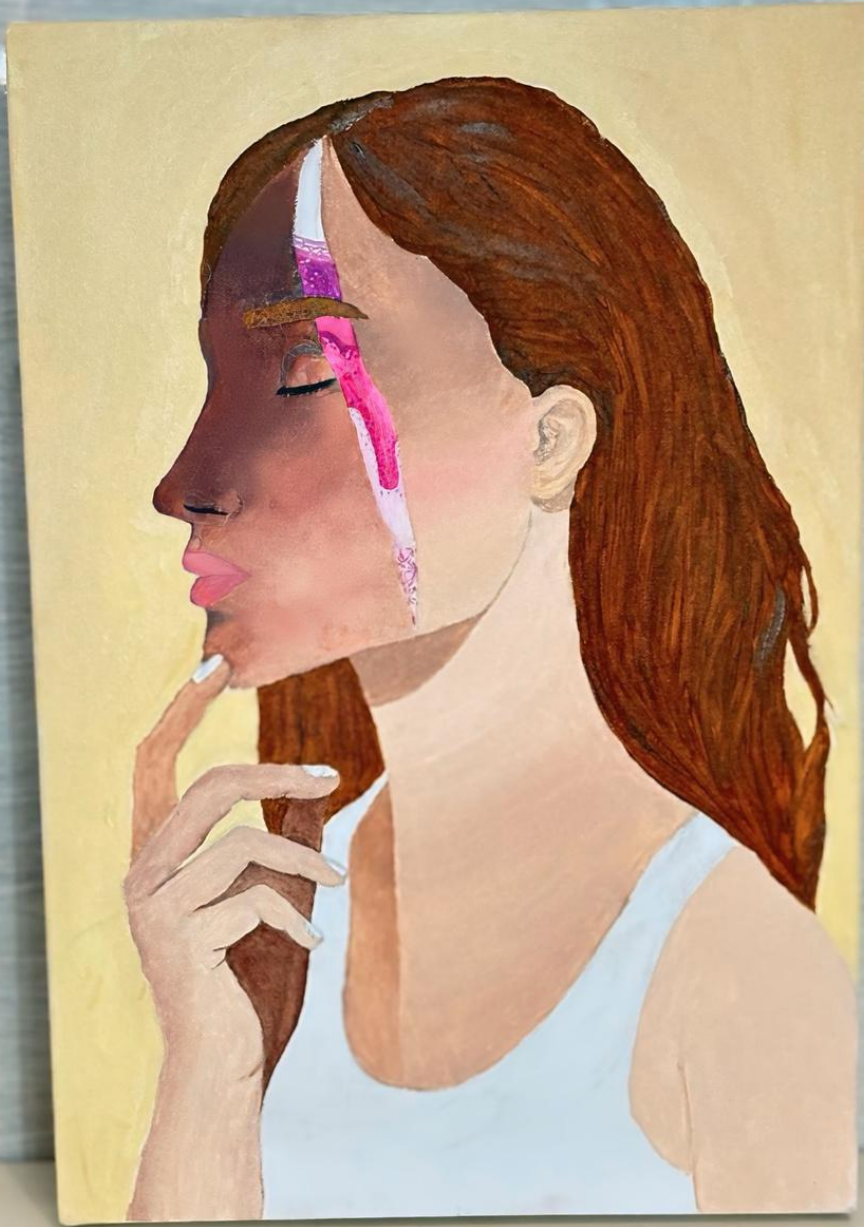
Author: Lakshmi Laasya Vallabhaneni, Medical Student

School: University of Arizona, College of Medicine, Tucson

Description: To care for another is to stand at the threshold of suffering and hope. Our calling transcends borders and divisions—we choose to serve life itself. We are entrusted not only with the healing of bodies, but with the quiet mending of spirits worn down by pain.

In tending to others on their darkest days, we honor both the oath we took and the deeper pull that led us to medicine. Our hands mend, our words soothe, and our presence restores a sense of worth to those who feel forgotten.

To offer care without condition is to speak the language of compassion—a language that reminds us, beneath the weight of illness or circumstance, we are all human. And in that shared humanity, healing begins.



Title: Beneath the Surface

Author: Juliana Cantor N, Medical Student

School: Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia

Description: This oil on canvas portrays a woman whose face displays the full spectrum of human skin tones. At its center, a wound reveals a histological cross-section of the skin—highlighting the unchanging microscopic truth that beneath our varied tones, we are structurally the same. This piece challenges biases in dermatologic care and celebrates the beauty of diversity, advocating for equitable treatment across all skin colors. Beneath the Surface invites viewers to reflect on the shared humanity that connects us beyond pigmentation.



Title: Where Natures Meet: The Beauty in the Undesirable

Author: Juliana Cantor N, Medical Student

School: Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia

Description: This piece features a watercolor pigment background rendered in liquid keratin, symbolizing the stratum corneum—the outermost layer of human skin. Emerging in textured relief is *Trichophyton mentagrophytes*, formed with casein, a dermatophyte known to feed on keratin and cause tinea infections. By portraying a pathogen in an artistic and tactile medium, this work explores the moment where two forms of nature—human and fungal—interact. It challenges the viewer to find beauty in the clinically undesirable.

Author: Mitchell Hanson, Medical Student**School:** Medical College of Georgia

Description: This illustration, composed entirely of abstract lines, depicts two girls embracing— an image of quiet strength, comfort, and shared reliance. All colors in the piece were derived from pigments collected directly from clinical photographs of psoriasis across a range of Fitzpatrick skin types from the Clearance Photo Library. The girl in the foreground is composed using pigment from types III and IV skin, while the girl in the background draws from types V and VI.

Rather than illustrating plaques outright, this piece makes a deliberate choice: psoriasis does not define these figures. Instead, pigment from psoriatic skin was funneled into the fine detailing— outlining, facial contours, the textures of their hair and the hollows of their eyes-while unaffected skin tones were used to build larger gradients across their bodies and hair. In doing so, the disease becomes a quiet presence subtle, textural, and embedded —rather than the dominant visual feature. Furthermore, the first impression made is the beauty in their physique, bodily figure, demeanor, and skin.

The linework itself is inspired by the morphology of psoriasis and influenced by the artist's own skin condition, ichthyosis, adding personal resonance to the form. The figures, leaning into one another, evoke a sense of shared identity and community care. Their pose reflects how people of color have historically relied on their own communities for healing, education, and empathy particularly in medical systems that often overlook them. This piece is both a gesture of tenderness and a call to attention: no matter identity, we all should become confident in physical exam techniques, cognizant of treatment considerations, and receptive of lived experience in those with skin of color to make their healthcare a priority in dermatology and beyond.

Poetry and Prose



I am a dark spot on white skin.
 As I grow, do you feel uncomfortable?
 Does my irregularity make you nervous?
 Do you run to politicians—or to the physician?
 I know I'm darker than usual, my pigment varies.
 Heterogeneous—that's what they call me.
 A mix of cells, unstable, atypical.
 I'm not supposed to be here; Not like this.
 I know I'm not benign; you've seen me before.
 Screened for me before,
 Afraid of what I might become, who I am at my core.
 I am hyperplastic, dysplastic,
 Dangerous, metastatic,
 Spreading, multiplying, slipping into your lymph nodes.
 I began so simple, excited to be present.
 So small you never even noticed.
 Until I began to invade your barriers, your bloodstream.
 I became demanding, wanting to spread vertically,
 Breaking the rules of horizontal complacency.
 I and other small dark spots in white space.
 Was this my mistake? Not staying small
 Was this when I became a problem,
 no longer self-effaced?
 So deadly you reached for the scalpel ?
 Of politics, more policies, and guidelines—
 Are they all the same?
 For me, they are. Is it the price to pay?
 I am always seen—on the screen, in your music,
 Before I read the lines between Thought you accepted me.
 Now in the hospital we are together
 Learning, eating, working.
 But you want a clean excision
 No margins left on your skin
 Near-zero recurrence
 My absence.
 Who am I?
 I am pigmented
 I am African American.
 I am Black.
 I have so much to give.
 What am I to you?
 I am Melanoma.

Title: I am Melanoma

Author: Evan Hicks, Medical Student

School: University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

Description: This poem highlights the analogous relationship between the current political reaction to DEI and the appearance of melanoma. It explores the fear that arises in both situations, emphasizing how neither poses danger until pursuing "vertical growth." The poem compares the ambitious journey of a Black medical student to the development of melanoma, where the initial presence may be overlooked, but growth—symbolizing ambition and striving for success—elicits discomfort and fear. It critiques how societal and institutional reactions to growth in marginalized communities mirror the responses to melanoma, urging a reexamination of how ambition is perceived and treated.

*Bright lights, white walls
Lots of ringing, distant calls
All I see are watchful eyes
Given a form I cannot describe
Nodding my head to everything asked
Unable to speak, how long will this last?
I know my doc, but does she know me?
This is my norm, I let it be
I am the patient, I have the patience
Told what to do yet still don't know
To bridge the gap between us is a lot to unfold
Beneath my skin, a story untold*

Title: Unseen Process

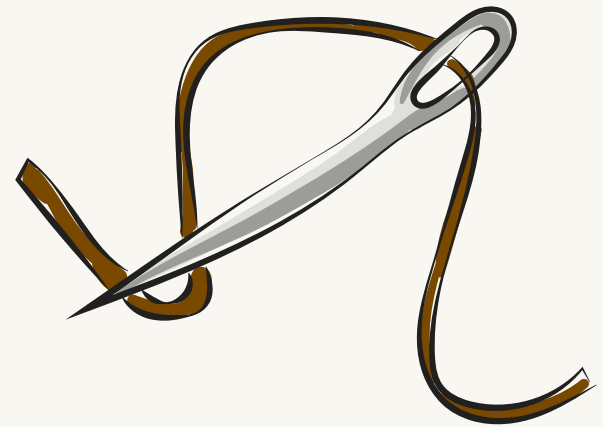
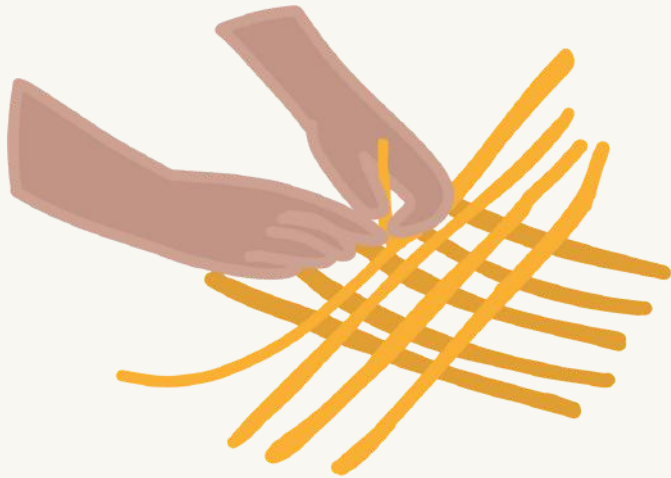
Author: Danny Lee, Medical Student

School: University of California, San Diego

Description: This poem reflects my parents' experiences as immigrant refugees navigating the medical system. I witnessed their respectful yet hesitant interactions with doctors. They were deferential toward authority but often unable to follow instructions due to language barriers and limited understanding of their conditions. Social and cultural factors shaped their silence, such as withholding information about secondhand smoke exposure for fear of judgment.

The poem centers on patient intake—a familiar yet uncomfortable process - to invite readers to reflect on what it means to be a patient. It challenges providers to consider the patient's perspective when delivering care.

Printmaking and Textile





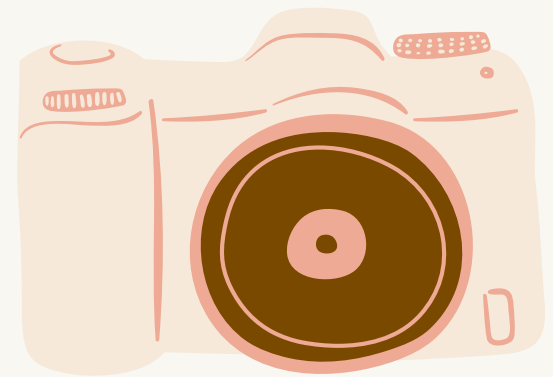
Title: Vitiligo in Thread: A Celebration of Skin as Canvas

Author: Rojina Nekoonam, Medical Student

School: UCSF School of Medicine

Description: This hand-embroidered piece portrays vitiligo in African American skin, elevating pigment variation as a striking expression of identity and beauty. Each stitch mimics the layered texture of skin, tracing the natural patterns of depigmentation with intention and care. Through bold contrast and delicate detailing, the work transforms a visible difference into a visual strength. It invites viewers to reconsider how we define beauty—and who we include within it. By framing these patterns as art, the piece challenges conventional ideals and reclaims the skin as a powerful medium—one that speaks to difference, dignity, and the resilience of being visibly unique.

Mixed Media, Photography, and Ceramics





Title: Dottie

Author: Chandler Johnson, Medical Student

School: Augusta University/University of Georgia Medical Partnership

Description: This painting, using liquid clay on ceramic, was inspired by my earliest exposure to research in dermatology. During a research elective at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH), I evaluated differences in the BWH staging of cutaneous squamous cell carcinoma (cSCC) in individuals with solid organ malignancy (SOM) versus those without SOM. My work was conducted via retrospective chart review, though I felt deeply connected to the patients whom I investigated virtually. This piece is a representation of my desire to keep medicine human. Using an everyday object--a dish--and displaying an abstract representation of cSCC, I seek to relay this connection to a viewer.



Title: All Skin in the Game

Author: Kayla Leiber, Medical Student

School: Alabama College of Osteopathic Medicine

Description: "All Skin in the Game" is inspired by my work distributing free sunscreen to youth organizations. This piece serves as a call to action for inclusive sun safety education that acknowledges and protects the full spectrum of skin tones. This piece invites viewers to reconsider their thoughts about who needs SPF and affirms that every skin tone needs protection.



Title: Benign and Beautiful

Author: Tahirih Nasser, Medical Student

School: University of Toronto

Description: This photograph features a woman's leg hair shaped into a soft, curving pattern — a deliberate embrace of what is often erased. In dermatology, especially cosmetic practice, we support patients as they make choices that align with their personal sense of beauty. Just as we help patients feel confident through aesthetic treatments, we must also honour those who find beauty in their natural state. When identifying a benign feature, patient-centered care means offering options without assumptions — including no intervention. This image challenges us to expand our definition of beauty and meet patients where they feel most at home in their bodies.



Title: Excoriate and Extinguish

Author: Daphne Pate, Medical Student

School: Wayne State University School of Medicine

Description: "Excoriate and Extinguish" represents my journey with eczema, highlighting both internal and external struggles that many dermatologic patients face. The art incorporates histological elements of eczema: spongiosis, acanthosis, and exocytosis, reflecting the skin's inflammatory response. The fiery explosion symbolizes flare ups, while torn medical text fragments point to treatments used by dermatologists such as corticosteroids, antihistamines, and immunosuppressants. This piece captures the ongoing battle to manage eczema, emphasizing the intersection of skin, science, and self.



Title: Henna Art: A Tradition Designed on the Skin

Author: Shreya Chandak, Medical Student

School: University of Arizona College of Medicine - Tucson

Description: Henna art, or Mehendi, is an intricate form of body adornment used to celebrate weddings, deeply rooted in South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. Once the henna paste dries on the skin, it leaves behind a rich, reddish-brown stain that temporarily adorns the hands. Whether applied to young or aged skin, light or dark skin, henna presents uniquely on each individual—yet carries the same meaning. Similarly, dermatology is a form of medicine that varies from patient to patient. Both henna art and dermatology share the skin as their canvas: one honors it through artistic expression, the other through medical care—each caring for the skin in its own way.

A special thank you to all the contributing artists for making this column possible

For questions or inquiries, please reach out to us at sfdermsociety@gmail.com

