

Biography

Eva Cheraisi is a senior majoring in English with a minor in computer science. Cheraisi is a Kenyan American writer, poet, and student at Vanderbilt University. Her work lives at the intersection of memory, identity, and inheritance, often tracing the quiet violences and fragile resurrections embedded in language, family, and ambition. She writes with an attentiveness to displacement, both geographic and emotional, and is particularly drawn to questions of belonging within institutions that were not built with her in mind.

Artist Statement

Cheraisi's poem, "For Immigrants and Children Masquerading on Stolen Soil III," emerges from a sustained meditation on what it means to exist within higher education as both beneficiary and critique—as someone told to be grateful while simultaneously being asked to diminish herself. The work was inspired by the tension between visibility and erasure: the ways Black and immigrant students are celebrated rhetorically, yet often pressured into silence, assimilation, or performance.

At its core, this piece explores the emotional and psychological labor of navigating predominantly white academic spaces. The repeated insistence—"they told us to be grateful"—mirrors a broader institutional narrative that frames access as generosity rather than as something earned, while obscuring the histories of exclusion that make such access feel conditional. The poem resists this framing by reimagining gratitude, shifting it away from submission and toward reclamation: "lucky is the land / that gets to tremble / under the weight / of our hunger."

I chose poetry as my form because it allows fragmentation, breath, and rupture, because it mirrors the disjointed experience of holding multiple identities within a single body. Poetry lets me compress contradiction without resolving it. It lets me sit in tension rather than explaining it away.

This piece left me wondering about the cost of endurance. About what is lost when voices are "smoothed" to be palatable, about whether belonging in these spaces requires transformation, or whether transformation itself is a quiet form of disappearance. It also left me considering what it would mean to move through higher education not as a guest, but as someone who alters the ground beneath her.

Ultimately, this poem is not just about survival within these institutions. It is about destabilizing them—insisting that our presence is not incidental but formative. That we are not lucky to be here. That something in these spaces shifts, irrevocably, because we are.