



Isabelle Nguyen, *Ong's Room*, 2015,  
coloured pencils on paper, approximately 101.6 x 355.6 cm.

A Montreal-based artist and illustrator from Calgary, Alberta, Isabelle Nguyen is in her fourth year of her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Concordia University. While her art practice is mostly focused on drawing, she has also explored performance art and interactive installation. In her drawing practice, she is interested in how illustration has the potential to challenge common assumptions about race, sexuality, religion and myth and to create touching personal narratives.

Inspired by Annie Pootoogook's (b. 1969) *Composition (Family Eating Lunch)* (2005–6), *Ong's Room* (2015) is a personal exploration of grief, ancestry and cultural identity. Nguyen uses religious iconography in conjunction with personal symbols to craft a window into her family history. This imagery is taken from her experiences with her family's mourning rituals and how they emerge from a cross-cultural meeting between Vietnamese culture and Catholicism. The altar and the white headbands on the figures to the left are a direct reference to such rituals. A portrait of the artist's grandfather is on the far right. Through this large-scale drawing the artist not only reflects on her grandfather's life but also works through personal loss. Ultimately, this work suggests that grief is complicated by race and cultural assimilation.

Isabelle Nguyen