

## COMMUNITY

# Art Installation in Redwood City reflects on living with autism

*'Autimus Prime' highlights special abilities*



by Simmerdeep Kaur

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Autimus Prime art installation at the Art Kiosk in Redwood City. Photo Courtesy Redwood City Improvement Association.

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drawings and kind words from classmates — a gesture that made him feel loved and supported, even when he struggled to express it. That memory, among others, now lives on in “Autimus Prime,” his new public art installation in Redwood City.

“They (people with autism) want the same things those without a developmental disability want,” Raghani said. “They want to feel loved. They want to feel accepted and part of the community.”

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Commissioned by the Redwood City Improvement Association in collaboration with an arts organization [Fung Collaboratives](#), the installation portrays Raghani’s experience growing up with autism, especially during his formative years. Drawing inspiration from the name of the iconic Transformers character Optimus Prime, the title nods to the idea that people with autism are, in their own way, everyday heroes.

Standing 10 feet tall, the artwork will be on display inside the Art Kiosk at 2208 Broadway St. through April 13.

Autimus Prime is a giant mechanical flipbook styled like a children’s storybook, featuring six original illustrations and six reflective text panels drawn from pivotal moments in Raghani’s childhood. Two stand out most to him.

The first is a memory of a classroom “behavior board,” which divided students’ daily conduct into categories — “happy,” “OK” and “sad” — visibly ranking children based on teacher approval. “All we wanted was to express ourselves...” Raghani said. “But we realized we couldn’t, because that might get the teacher mad and get us moved to the sad side. No one wanted to be there.”

Raised and currently based in San Ramon, Raghani spent much of his education in special education classrooms alongside other autistic students, whom he described as a family, sharing in each other’s struggles and celebrating one another’s happiness.

The second inspiration was the classroom tradition of the “birthday book” — a celebration in which students wrote heartfelt notes and drew scenes for their peers on their birthdays. “It was a beautiful ritual,” Raghani added. Growing up he had trouble communicating his feelings, so the book gave him a way to show appreciation and love for others.

These contrasting experiences — one that stifled expression and another that fostered connection — along with others depicted in the artwork, offer a glimpse into the challenges and joys Raghani faced while living with autism.

Beyond sharing his own experiences, he hopes the installation encourages parents, educators and peers of autistic individuals to approach them with patience and openness, recognizing their unique strengths and the bright futures they have the potential to create.

"I want to dismantle the narratives that portray autistic people as crazy or incapable," he said. "Not only can they create change and positivity but can really teach people about community and belonging."



Autimus Prime art installation at the Art Kiosk in Redwood City. Photo Courtesy Redwood City Improvement Association.

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### SIMMERDEEP KAUR REDWOOD CITY PULSE REPORTER

Simmerdeep Kaur is the lead reporter at the Redwood City Pulse and a graduate of Berkeley Journalism. Passionate about uncovering unconventional yet significant news stories, she aims to bring important... [More by Simmerdeep Kaur](#)

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