

“Embracing Our Differences” opens 2020 outdoor art exhibit

Thursday, January 16, 2020

Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences has used the power of art and prose to promote diversity. One way it accomplishes this is through its annual, juried international outdoor art exhibition consisting of 50 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quote. The response to the call for artwork and inspirational quotes was record-breaking this year, with 16,118 entries pouring in from 127 countries and 50 states. Students from 398 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit. The winning quotes and art are showcased in the 17th annual exhibit, which runs through April 5, in Sarasota’s Bayfront Park. For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit embracingourdifferences.org.



“Come Together” by Ash DiCristofalo

Sarah Wertheimer, Embracing Our Differences’ executive director, said she is thrilled at the global response to this year’s call for submissions. “Yet again, thousands of people from around the world seized the opportunity to celebrate the values of diversity and inclusion,” she said. “Our art selection jury was truly moved by the heartfelt honesty and level of artistic excellence.



“I Have a Dream” by Shangxi Wu

“It boils down to respecting every individual for who they are,” Ms. Wertheimer said. “Human identity is a complex intersection of race, culture, sexual orientation and so much more. That incredible diversity is a beautiful thing. Embracing Our Differences honors that beauty, and we select the quotes and artwork that best express it.”

According to Ms. Wertheimer, only a fraction of the powerful artworks and statements are selected for each year’s outdoor exhibit. “Even

so, we were deeply touched to see how many people share our core philosophy.”

The selection criteria boil down to medium and message. What is the core idea of each submission? How well is it expressed? “We try to imagine the impact when the artwork is blown up to the size of a billboard. Will it stop me in my tracks? Will it move me and make me think? That’s what we’re going for.”

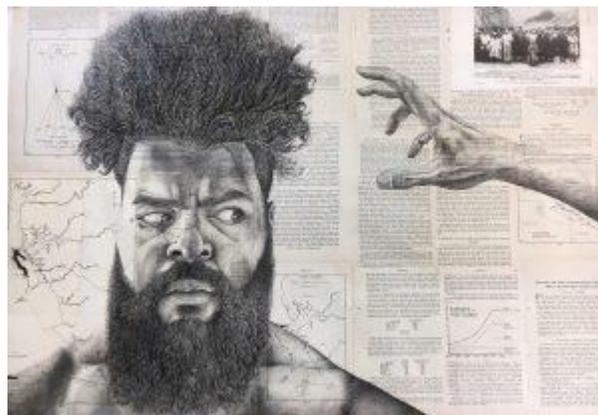


“Be Shore of Yourself” by Brooks Tracey

Awards are given for “Best in Show Adult,” “Best-in-Show Student” and “People’s Choice” categories, with the last chosen by visitors to the exhibit. Adult art winners each receive \$1,000 and students receive \$1,000, which they split with their school’s art program. The person who pens the winning quote is awarded \$1,000 to be split evenly with his or her school’s language arts program.

2020 winners

The Best-in-Show Adult winner for art is for “Can I Touch Your Hair?” by Habib Hajallie, from Dartford, United Kingdom. The work shows a black man looking askew at a white man’s hand reaching out to touch his afro. According to the artist’s statement, “Nuanced prejudices in society serve to constantly remind you that, if you are not white, you are different. This notion seems to be perpetually present in social situations when people attempt to touch my hair. This may seem perfectly innocuous to be intrigued by hair that is different than the norm but looking below that veneer of innocent curiosity you will find the root of racial prejudice. For a Caucasian person to ask to touch afro hair without asking, is a demeaning act with connotations of petting an animal.” Mr. Hajallie will receive \$1,000 for his work.



“Can I Touch Your Hair” by Habib Hajallie, Dartford, United Kingdom

Shangxi Wu, an 11th-grade student from Amador Valley High School in Pleasanton, Calif., won Best in Show Student for his painting, "I Have a Dream," which depicts a disabled street person sitting in an alleyway. The portrait is black and white, except for the man's rainbow wings extending and a box of colored pencils. Mr. Wu noted that, "Despite being disabled and having little wealth, with limited art materials and colors, this man shows healing and a vigorous desire to extend his world by using imagination and embracing his dreams with angel wings. Everyone has the right to dream." He will receive \$1,000 for his work.

In the **KNOW**

Embracing our Differences outdoor art exhibit.

- » **When:** Through April 5
- » **Where:** Bayfront Park, 5 Bayfront Drive, Sarasota
- » **Information:** 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.

The award for the Best-in-Show inspirational quote was given to Brian Hendricks, a sixth-grade student at Pine View School in Osprey, for his quote, "If you stand by, then who will stand up?" His teacher is Fran Squires. Mr. Hendricks will receive \$1,000 to be split evenly with Pine View.

Ms. Wertheimer stressed the importance of the statements accompanying each artwork. "Every quote opens a window into our common humanity," she said. "They touch us with their wit, insight, and empathy."

Embracing Our Differences' annual outdoor exhibits are the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity.

For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.