

Embracing Our Differences 2021 Exhibit Debuts at NBP

April 21, 2021 – Sarasota

An international art exhibit designed to proclaim inclusion, respect and kindness debuts at Sarasota-Bradenton's Nathan Benderson Park.

The annual, juried art exhibit is composed by a Sarasota-based arts and education non-profit, Embracing Our Differences (EOD). It consists of 50 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quote. The international exhibit uses the power of art and prose to promote diversity and inclusion.

The exhibit is on display at the park May 20-Aug. 8 and is free for the public to view.

The 2021 exhibit brought 15,912 entries from 128 nations, and from 48 U.S. states. The winning quotes and art are showcased in Sarasota's Bayfront Park every year, from January through March. Thanks to the generosity of the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation, the public will have another opportunity to see this exhibit.

The chief executive officer of the nonprofit that operates Nathan Benderson Park (NBP) for Sarasota County said the exhibit's appearance at the park is something for which the park is proud.

"We are so pleased to be partnering with Embracing our Differences and the Charles & Margery Barancik Foundation to bring this powerful public art exhibit to share with our many visitors," said Tomás Herrera-Mishler, the president and CEO of Suncoast Aquatic Nature Center Associates at NBP. "The messages expressed by the art are moving, springing from the artists' experiences, joys and sorrows, coming from many nations, ages, and backgrounds."

Herrera-Mishler said the organization is “proud to host this exhibit at Nathan Benderson Park and welcome all to come, free of charge to enjoy and experience a unique public art display in our beautiful park.”

Sarah Wertheimer, EOD’s executive director, says she and the art selection committee were inspired by the substantial number of works they received this year.

“Embracing Our Differences exists to proclaim the values of inclusion, kindness and respect, and we were moved to see that thousands of people around the world share these values,” Wertheimer said. “More than ever, their art and words confirm that we need to replace hostility and division with a respect for diversity. We need to honor the things that make us different and celebrate the things we have in common.”

Wertheimer said the selection committee considers how well the core idea of the work is expressed and how the piece will work when blown up to the size of a billboard.

“It needs to make an immediate impact,” she says. “Does the message encourage me to think? Does it inspire me to see something from a new perspective? Does the art itself stop me in my path? These are some of the reactions we’re hoping to inspire in the viewer.”

Three categories of awards are given — best-in-show adult, best-in-show student, and people’s choice. The people’s choice award is chosen by visitors to the exhibit. Adult art winners each receive \$1,000; students receive \$1,000, which they split with their school’s art program. The person who pens the winning quote is awarded \$1,000, and if that winner is a student, the award is split evenly with their school’s language arts program.

The best-in-show adult winner for art is for “Liberty Enlightening the World” by Arya Badiyan, an artist, poet, writer, community builder and entrepreneur from Lake Oswego, Oregon. In this bold and striking work, the artist explains that “Lady Liberty is a Black woman who stands before the millions of Black lives that have been lost to slavery and injustice in this country. She is lighting the way and leading us forward.” Badiyan will receive \$1,000 for her work.

Emily Norris, a seventh-grade student from Sarasota Middle School, won the best-in-show student award for “Small Struggles,” a work depicting a girl of color standing in

front of an aisle of dolls that are white with blonde hair. “To me, the concept of ‘embracing our differences’ means showing off what’s unique about yourself,” says Norris. “Through my work, I attempt to highlight the little struggles people of color go through every day.” Norris will split the \$1,000 award with her school’s art program.

The award for the best-in-show inspirational quote was given to Temilola Aderemi from Ibafo, Nigeria, for “If we were to exchange shoes, would you be willing to wear mine?”

Wertheimer stresses the importance of the statements accompanying each artwork. “Every quote opens a window into our common humanity,” she says. “They touch us with their wit, insight, and empathy.”

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