

MEDIA CONTACTS

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“Embracing Kindness”

Embracing Our Differences Announces

2023 Outdoor Art Exhibits and Top Winners

January 18-March 12 in Bayfront Park, Sarasota

Grand Opening Event is January 22

Match 22-April 19 in Butler Park, North Port

Grand Opening Event is March 25

April 26-May 29 at State College of Florida, Bradenton

Grand Opening Event is April 29

The organization received 13,733 entries from 119 countries and 45 states for the 20th annual outdoor art exhibit celebrating diversity and inclusion.

(December 6, 2022) Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences has used the power of art and prose to promote diversity. One way it achieves this is through its annual, juried international outdoor art exhibition comprising 50 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quotation. This year’s response to the call for artwork and inspirational quotations received 13,733 entries pouring in from 119 countries and 45 states. Students from 424 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotations to the juried exhibit. The **Best-in-Show Adult** artwork award went to Whitney de Araújo, from Recife, Brazil, for “We Are All Pearls.” Alexis Lee, a 10th grade student from the Icon Art Academy in Irvine, California, won the **Best-in-**

Show Student award for “Stretching Beauty.” Alexis Morrell of Wolcott, Connecticut, won **Best-in-Show Adult** for her inspirational quotation, “It takes more courage to speak in a silent room than to become another voice in a crowd.” The award for the **Best-in-Show Student** inspirational quotation was given to Hartley Livesey, a fifth grade student at The Out-of-Door Academy for “Always remember you are braver than you think and stronger than you believe.” **The winning quotations and art will be showcased at the 20th annual exhibits, January 18-March 12, in Sarasota’s Bayfront Park; March 22-April 19 at Butler Park in North Port; and April 26-May 29 at State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota.** *For more information about these exhibits or Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

2023 marks the 20th anniversary of the exhibit. Sarah Wertheimer, EOD’s executive director, explains that the past 20 years have been ones of monumental positive growth, forward movement—and many milestones.

“Our first call to artists received 124 submissions,” says Wertheimer. “This year, we received 13,733 from 119 countries. And we’re thrilled that annual visitor attendance has quadrupled since we began. Less than 100,000 people attended the first exhibit; we had almost 400,000 last year.”

Wertheimer adds that EOD’s 20th anniversary theme is “Embracing Kindness,” and the organization is planning several special events to celebrate the anniversary, including exhibiting at two new venues in addition to Bayfront Park.

Sheila D. McKoy, EOD’s exhibition director, says that the 2023 exhibit will also be displayed at Butler Park in North Port and at State College of Florida, Manatee-

Sarasota in Bradenton. “We are so excited to have the 2023 exhibit in North Port and in Bradenton. This will allow us to broaden our reach as well as our impact on the community while staying true to our mission and vision.” McKoy adds that the exhibit will open at Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota and that the public can expect a series of events commemorating the anniversary throughout the year, starting with a Grand Opening event on January 22 in Bayfront Park.

Wertheimer says that only a fraction of the powerful submissions is chosen for each year’s outdoor exhibit. “What you’ll see is only the tip of the iceberg,” she says. “We’re profoundly moved to see how many people share our core philosophy all over the world.”

Selection criteria boil down to medium and message. *What is the core idea of each submission? How well is it expressed?* “Our judges try to imagine the impact the artwork will have when it’s enlarged to the size of a billboard. *Will it stop me in my tracks? Will it move me and make me think? Will its truth stay with me on the ride home?* That’s what we’re going for.”

Awards for artwork 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 \$2,000; students receive \$2,000, which they split with their school’s art program. Awards are also given for inspirational quotations. Adult quote winners each receive \$2,000; students receive \$2,000, which they split with their school’s English program.

2023 ART WINNERS:

The **Best-in-Show Adult** winner for art is for “We Are All Pearls” by Whitney de Araújo, of Recife, Brazil. In it, eight women, seen from behind, sit on a bench in a museum staring at a wall with eight different paintings of a woman. The artist says she used the painting, “Girl with a Pearl Earring,” by Johannes Vermeer as a reference for the eight paintings in her work. As the viewer glances more deeply, we see the paintings reflect the diversity in color, size, physical ability, style and ethnicity of the women on the bench. “It doesn't matter what you look like, your race, orientation, or sexual identity, where you're from, or whether you have a disability,” says de Araújo. “Representation matters and makes a difference in the life of each person.”

Alexis Lee, a 10th grade student at the Icon Art Academy in Irvine, CA., won the **Best-in-Show Student** award for her work, “Stretching Beauty,” which depicts a thin ballerina who sees herself as much larger in the mirror. “Body dysmorphia is something so many people go through as they try to reach the extremely demanding beauty standards of society, which usually lead to eating disorders,” says Lee. “I have a close friend in the hospital recovering from anorexia, so this theme means a lot to me and I definitely think that there should be more body positivity in today's society.”

2023 QUOTATION WINNERS:

The award for the **Best-in-Show Adult** inspirational quotation was given to Alexis Morrell of Wolcott, Connecticut for: “It takes more courage to speak in a silent room than to become another voice in a crowd.”

The award for the **Best-in-Show Student** inspirational quotation was given to Hartley Livesey, a fifth grade student at The Out-of-Door Academy for “Always

remember you are braver than you think and stronger than you believe.” Hartley’s teacher is Mrs. Gulacsy.

Wertheimer stresses the importance of the statements accompanying each artwork. “Every quotation opens a window into our common humanity,” she says. “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.

A Quick Glance at Embracing Our Differences’ 20th Anniversary Schedule and Celebrations

Sarasota Exhibit (Bayfront Park):

- Opens: 1/18/2023
- Last Day: 3/12/2023

North Port Exhibit (Butler Park):

- Opens: 3/22/2023
- Last Day: 4/19/2023

Bradenton Exhibit (State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota):

- Opens: 4/26/2023
- Last Day: 5/29/2023

- **Grand Opening Event at Bayfront Park: Sunday, January 22, 2023**
- **Grand Opening Event at Butler Park: Saturday, March 25, 2023**

- **Grand Opening Event at State College of Florida: Saturday, April 29, 2023**
- **Annual Luncheon at Michael's On East: Friday, February 17, 2023**

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a not-for-profit organization that uses the transformational power of art and education to celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family. It accomplishes this through an annual, large-scale outdoor juried art exhibition and a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students. Visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.

Photo captions:

- **EOD 2023: Best-in-Show, Adult:** *"We Are All Pearls" by Whitney de Araújo of Recife, Brazil.*
- **EOD 2023: Best-in-Show, Student:** *"Stretching Beauty" by Alexis Lee, a 10th grade student from the Icon Art Academy in Irvine, California.*
- **EOD 2023:** *"Two for You and One for Me" by Becky Titus of Jemez Springs, New Mexico.*
- **EOD 2023:** *"Self Image" by Katrina Kinsey, 9th grade, Booker High School, Sarasota.*