



Embracing Kindness at the Sarasota Art Museum

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Pictured: One World One Heart by Anna Zigel of Boyarka, Ukraine, from the 2019 Embracing Our Differences Exhibit.

Embracing Our Differences celebrates its 20th anniversary this year with a special retrospective exhibition installed on the Great Lawn of the Sarasota Art Museum. Opening today and titled “Embracing Kindness,” the exhibition takes viewers on a look back through 20 years of art and community, while promoting its own message of kindness in an increasingly unkind time. “We

have a lot to celebrate and a lot of challenges,” says Embracing Our Differences Executive Director Sarah Wertheimer. “The work and this mission are needed more today than they were 20 years ago.” The exhibition is free and open to the public.

For two decades, Embracing Our Differences has championed inclusion and tolerance in the community through educational programming and its yearly flagship art exhibition in Bayfront Park, seeing as many as 50 or more billboard-sized works of art erected on the green, each paired with an original quote calling for peace, love and acceptance. Embracing Kindness sees the Sarasota-based nonprofit looking back through hundreds of entries over the years and narrowing that down to a select 14 to be displayed outside at the Sarasota Art Museum. “We tried to find those pieces that were memorable for the community,” says Wertheimer, “but also vary topics and art styles and representation.” It’s impossible to pick a favorite, she says, but she’s proud to include two from Ukraine—one from the 2019 show and the other from the 2020 exhibition. In total, Embracing Kindness includes art from five different countries.

But as much as Embracing Kindness is about looking back and celebrating how the wider community has embraced and supported the Embracing Our Differences mission over the years, it’s also about looking forward to what kind of future that community wants to create and how important kindness is in daily life. “It’s a simple concept,” Wertheimer says, “but unfortunately it isn’t practiced all the time.” But by blowing up the message 16 feet wide and more than 12 feet tall, she hopes maybe it’ll make an impact. “I hope people walk away with a deeper appreciation for the importance of treating one another with kindness and respect,” she says. “And a deeper appreciation of diverse perspectives and life experiences, and how much richer it makes our world when we’re able to bring them together.”

And although the world, at times, may seem to be going in the opposite direction—“We were hoping the world would be growing into a kinder, more respectful place,” Wertheimer says, “but unfortunately that’s not what we’re seeing across the world today.”—she won’t let it slow her, or Embracing Our

Differences, down. “That doesn’t mean we need to stop trying,” she says. “It just means we need to do even more.”

On display through November 26, Embracing Kindness is free to view and membership with Sarasota Art Museum is not required for entry, although access is through the museum building. An Art Talk with Embracing Our Differences Exhibit Director Sheila D. McKoy will be held at the museum on October 28 at 1pm and is also free to attend.

PICTURED: ONE WORLD ONE HEART BY ANNA ZIGEL OF BOYARKA, UKRAINE, FROM THE 2019 EMBRACING OUR DIFFERENCES EXHIBIT.