



'Embracing Our Differences' opens 20th exhibit today

- By SU BYRON Guest Writer
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Embracing Our Differences celebrated the start of its 20th anniversary recently in Sarasota's downtown Bayfront Park.

Admission to the grand opening celebration was free of charge.

The event was scheduled to feature live performances by Jah Movement, Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe and spoken word poets.

Local arts and education organizations were to have booths featuring interactive, kid-friendly activities. Miss Susie's Newtown Kitchen, Big Blue Grilled Cheese, Kilik's Kitchen and Krewe Du Snoball food trucks.

EOD also was to recognize many of the artists and quoters who had their works selected for display as well as honoring Best-in-Show award winners, including Best-in-Show Student Artist Alexis Lee, a 10th grade student from Irvine, Calif., who was to be present for the event.

For more information, visit embracingourdifferences.org.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the exhibit. Sarah Wertheimer, EOD's executive director, said 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,” Wertheimer said. “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 added 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, said 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.”

2023 ART WINNERS

The Best-in-Show Adult winner for art is for “We Are All Pearls” by Whittney 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,” said 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, Calif., 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,” Lee said. “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, Conn., 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 Martha Gulácsy.

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.

A Quick Glance at Embracing Our Differences’ 20th anniversary schedule and celebrations:

- Jan. 18 —Sarasota Exhibit opens in Bayfront Park. Closes on March 12.
- Jan. 22 —Grand Opening Event at Bayfront Park
- Feb. 17 —Annual Luncheon at Michael’s On East
- March 22 —North Port Exhibit opens in Butler Park. Closes April 19.
- March 25 —Grand Opening Event at Butler Park

- April 26 — Bradenton Exhibit opens at State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota. Closes May 29.
- April 29 — Grand Opening Event at State College of Florida.

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