



Student reworks art piece, wins Embracing Our Differences award

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When Carly Stafford, a senior at Booker High School, originally created her piece called "Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil" during her sophomore year, she had no idea of the effects her work would have in the future.

"I had originally done the piece my sophomore year to shed light on the fact that all women, regardless of background or culture, experience domestic violence," Stafford said.

Inspired by the Women's March in Washington, D.C., in January, and her teacher, Stafford returned to her piece two years later and submitted it to the Embracing Our Differences international art exhibition. Her piece depicts three women who appear to be victims of domestic violence.

"I revisited the piece and used techniques I've learned over the past couple of years to make it better. You can definitely see the improvement when looking at the original and the one I submitted."

Although it took more than two hours to complete, Stafford's efforts proved to be worth it. Out of 6,835 student submissions, Stafford was awarded Best-in-Show Student award.

"This work is meant to represent the way society treats women who have been abused," Stafford said in a news release. "Often, media and society turn a blind eye against victims of abuse — sometimes even blaming the victims. I made this piece to create a discussion and shed light on the issue."

This year the Embracing Our Differences exhibition received a record-breaking 10,761 entries, beating last year's record by more than 2,400. The

entries came from 115 countries, 48 states, and 204 schools; 33 of this year's 49 student winners were from local schools.

Embracing Our Differences, a nonprofit, uses art and education to "celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family" through a large annual juried art exhibition of 45 billboard-sized works of art, with each accompanied by an inspirational quote. Selected works and quotes will be on display from April 1 to May 31 in Sarasota's Island Park.

Other winners from this year's exhibition are Dylan Caçador of Smithfield, Rhode Island, and Jessica Ritchie, a sixth-grader at Sarasota Middle School.

Caçador's work, "Pulse, Pride, Hope," earned the Best-in-Show Adult award, and was his way of coping with the horrors from last summer's mass shooting at the Pulse Night Club in Orlando. Caçador describes going back into art "as a tribute to those we lost that night and as a reminder that there is still good in the world, and that we must never give up hope for a better tomorrow."

Ritchie received the Best-in-Show inspirational quote award for "If you don't fit into a scene, always remember there's a bigger picture." Her school will receive \$1,000 for its arts or creative writing department.

Quotes for the 2017 exhibition include, "If people saw difference of opinion as the birth of new ideas rather than conflicts, the world could be a better place." (Nauseen Tabassum, Dhaka, Bangladesh), and "Bullying is a disease, why spread it?" (Zacchary Smith, Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota).