



Stunning exhibit of student art celebrates diversity at Bayfront Park

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‘Embracing Our Differences’ exhibit features stunning student art on billboard-sized panels.

Steven Staub and Zac Kralik, a pair of seniors at North Port High School, worked together on a drawing for the annual Embracing Our Differences exhibit at Bayfront Park.

“We brainstormed and had a couple of ideas,” said Kralik. “We combined a couple of them and settled on the monster with the little girl.”

Their final piece, called “Ripples,” shows an innocent girl offering flowers to a blue monster representing the Earth.

“We didn’t want it to look too gruesome,” said Staub. “There’s a lightness to the piece. There’s a kindness to him.”

Their drawing is one of 45 works chosen for display on billboard-sized panels. The annual exhibit at Bayfront Park is presented by Embracing Our Differences, a Sarasota-based arts and education nonprofit that received more than 8,325 entries from 98 countries.

The exhibit is on display through June 1.

Elisa Uzcategui, an eighth-grader at the Sarasota Military Academy, submitted a painting called “The New Rosie the Riveter.” It won Best-in-Show.

“Rosie is a symbol of American feminism,” said Uzcategui. “I wanted to show Rosie in a different light, so I made Rosie multiracial. Her eyes are a mix of Caucasian and Asian traits, her hair is an Afro and her skin color resembles people of Latin American and Hispanic origins. My new Rosie represents the strengths of many races.”

Best-in-Show for adult artists went to Larisa Okhotna from Svitlovodsk, Ukraine. Her piece, called “Choice,” shows a tiny flower struggling to grow in arid ground. On one side, a hand attempts to water the flower; on the other, a shoe threatens to stomp it.

Interested?

Embracing our Differences is an open-air exhibit on display through June 1 at Bayfront Park, which is on Marina Jack Trail off Bayfront Drive, Sarasota. Admission is free. Next, year the outdoor show will come earlier in the year — mid-January through mid-March. For more information, call 941-404-5710 or visit embracingourdifferences.org.

15th anniversary show

Embracing Our Differences was inspired by a 2004 traveling display from the Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg.

“A lot of people know the organization by the public art,” said associate executive director Sarah Wertheimer. “But really, the majority of our time, energy and resources are spent on educational programs throughout Sarasota and Manatee schools.”

To celebrate the 15th anniversary of the outdoor exhibit, this year’s display will include 15 works of art from previous years. There are also 30 pieces chosen from thousands of entries in 2018.

“Yet again,” Wertheimer said, “thousands of people answered the call to create art that celebrates the values of diversity, inclusion and respect. We’re honored to enter our 15th year with this outpouring of faith in humanity from the global human family.”

Adult winners received \$1,000. Student winners received \$1,000 for their school art programs.

There were also awards for best inspirational quote chosen to accompany a piece of art. Hayley Peace, a sixth-grader at Pine View School, won Best-in-Show for this entry: “If your heart opens, doors will too.”

North Port artists

Kralik and Staub, the North Port artists, would both like to attend the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota.

They began working together in art class at the end of their school days. A black-and-white outline gave way to work with colored pencils. For several weeks, an 11-by-16-inch sketch pad was passed back and forth.

“We worked on it separately,” said Kralik, “and then brought it back to school.”

For the monster’s skin, he drew blue oceans with green-and-brown continents.

Staub did the background in a rainbow palette that represents diversity. His pig-tailed little girl holds a blanket in one hand and a bouquet of flowers in the other.

“We had to combine our ideas into something both of us would like,” said Staub. “We had to embrace our own differences in this piece.”