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Students Reflect on the Last Year through Art

State charter school students recognized in art exhibition

ATLANTA, GA – April 20, 2021 – The State Charter Schools Foundation of Georgia (SCSF), a nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting high-quality state charter schools in Georgia, presents a juried virtual exhibition of art created by 150 students across the state. The art demonstrates the challenges and hope the students have experienced during a turbulent time that has included the COVID-19 pandemic and protests of racial injustice. Students were invited to submit their 2-D art to the SCSF’s first annual Art of Connection – Exhibition of Student Art. The theme for 2021 was “How I Stay Connected to Others,” and state charter school students in grades K-12 were encouraged to express how they have been in touch with people and made connections during the COVID-19 pandemic. All entries are featured in the virtual art gallery located online at scsfga.org/art, and winners will receive an Amazon gift card and permanent exhibition of their art at the State Charter Schools Foundation office.

“Art gives us a way to process our experiences and emotions,” said Michele Neely, SCSF President. “These students have offered us a glimpse into their world and the ways that they have tried to find connections when everything felt disconnected. Every day we ask if our children are okay after all of disruptions over the last year. When you look at their artwork, you start to find answers to that question. These entries show resilience and hope, but they also display loss, isolation, and fear.” expressed Neely.

Students interpreted the theme in different ways - how they visited with family and friends, found inspiration from nature, felt the pain of loss, and discovered connections through participation in peaceful protests. Many entries featured electronic devices and mobile phones prominently as their primary means of connection. Audrey Na, a 12th grader at the Academy for Classical Education and 1st place winner of the High School Division, wrote, "My painting shows a woman looking at her phone while surrounded by Coronavirus cells. I stayed connected to all my loved ones by texting and calling them. I wanted to make the light coming from the phone the main light source because I thought that it is like a light in these dark times."

The theme of solidarity was common throughout many entries. Bix Taylor, a 7th grader from Liberty Tech Charter School and winner of the Middle School Division, wrote, "Kindness can be even the slightest of gestures, like a warm smile, but due to COVID-19, it has become harder than ever to show our appreciation for the people around us. With my painting, I tried to represent that we are together through this tough time. We have adapted to a situation the best we can and are continuing to try and make it as normal as possible." Showing a different side of solidarity, Carter Poole, a 2nd grader from the International Academy of Smyrna and 2nd place winner of the Junior Elementary Division, submitted an entry entitled "Peaceful Protest." Her statement talked about her experience meeting new people and finding hope. "It is important to respect others and to treat others like we want to be treated. I saw a lot of people protest this summer and they were young, old, Black, and white We stay connected to others by getting to know each other and helping each other. The peaceful protest is how I met new friends and now we stay connected."

Other entries expressed the agony of loss and separation during COVID-19, with winning artwork showing a child separated from a loved one in a hospital bed and a child separated from a

parent who is a nurse by a glass door. Overall, though, the students who participated in the Art of Connection tried to find glimmers of hope. Third place winner of the High School Division, Hannah Gil (12th grade, Georgia Connections Academy) summed up the sentiment of many students. “My submission captures the idea that although we are separated, the light within each and every one of us is still bright and noticeable to others. Even at a distance, we can still show our colors.”

The virtual art gallery will remain on the SCSF’s website through the end of the year (scsfga.org/art), and winners and judges will be featured on the SCSF’s social media channels. The exhibition was sponsored by FEV Tutor, who provided the gift cards for the winners.

Winners by Division

Junior Elementary (K-2nd grade)

1st Place: Daniella McClinton, Kindergarten, Resurgence Hall Charter School (East Point) - “Staying Connected”

2nd Place: Carter Poole, 2nd grade, International Academy of Smyrna (Smyrna) - “Peaceful Protest”

3rd Place: Nathan Padron, 1st grade, International Academy of Smyrna (Smyrna) - “The Battle Pokémon Comic Book”

Elementary (3rd-5th grades)

1st Place: Gabriela Gizaw, 4th grade, Brookhaven Innovation Academy (Norcross) – “Natural Nature”

2nd Place: Towa Kaminomiya, 3rd grade, International Charter Academy of Georgia (Peachtree Corners) – “Friends are Connected”

3rd Place: Taylor Dempsey, 5th grade, International Academy of Smyrna (Smyrna) – “Black Lives Matter”

Middle School (6th-7th grades)

1st Place: Bix Taylor, 7th grade, Liberty Tech Charter School (Brooks) – “Smiling with our Eyes”

2nd Place: Madison Henry, 8th grade, Academy for Classical Education (Macon) – “2020 in Review”

3rd Place: Rebecca Nicole Ramirez, 8th grade, Liberty Tech Charter School (Brooks) – “The Disconnection of Quarantine”

High School (9th-12th grades)

1st Place: Audrey Na, 12th grade, Academy for Classical Education (Macon) – “Phonelight”

2nd Place: Genesys Gonzalez-Cirilo, 11th grade, Georgia Connections Academy (virtual school) – “So Close Yet So Far”

3rd Place: Hannah Gil, 12th grade, Georgia Connections Academy (virtual school) – “Sharing the Light”

Judges

The SCSF would like to thank the Georgia artists who donated their time to serve as judges for the exhibition. The bios for this diverse group of artists and art champions are below.

Morgan Boszilkov is a self-taught artist using clay, fabric, and paint to create two-dimensional and sculptural vibrant works of art. She has created an innovative form of fine art: ceramics sewn onto canvas. Her work captures the beauty and richness of the natural world amidst our changing climate, reflecting her core values of conservation and sustainability. Her newest work of ceramics on canvas debuted in a nearly sold-out solo show at Gainey Hall in Serenbe. Her eclectic travels and self-taught craftsmanship culminated into a successful line of eco-friendly

wedding gowns, Natural Bridal Collection by Morgan Boszilkov. Her sustainable gown designs were featured in *Brides Magazine*, *Skirt!*, CNN, OneWed, and Style Me Pretty, and she designed a dress for Melissa Rivers during TLC's "Who are you wearing?" design challenge, winning the competition. Her current ceramic work featuring handmade tiles has been highlighted in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* and HGTV. <https://www.boszilkov.com/>

Ashley Dopson is a conceptual fine artist and muralist who lives and works in Atlanta, Georgia. Her multidisciplinary practice is informed by a background in Art which she studied at Hampton University, along with a twelve-year career in teaching art in inner city public schools. Ashley D. creates her own mythological legacy in her murals, drawings, and sculptures. She believes in using scale symbolism texture and color to change the way we perceive the world. She considers her paintings to be tapestries which provoke casual and philosophical commentary about childhood dreams and visions as they relate to modern society. In addition, she addresses sociopolitical preconceptions and racial epithets through her use of symbolism and imagery. Ultimately, Ashley is provoking conversation about universal implications surrounding African American life. She has exhibited at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem New York and the Charles H. Taylor gallery in Hampton Virginia. Ashley has completed 10 murals in Atlanta. <http://www.ashleydpaints.com/>

Chris Johnson is a native of South Georgia and has been a resident of Columbus, GA since 2012. In 2013, Chris became Associate Professor of Art at Andrew College in Cuthbert, where he has been engaged in an initiative to revitalize rural communities through the visual arts by painting large-scale public murals. Since 2017, Chris has painted over 40 murals throughout Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Although he is regionally known for his painted murals, Chris works in a variety of mediums including woodcarving, relief printmaking, charcoal,

ceramics, and mixed media. Most recently, Chris was awarded the 2019 Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities by Georgia Governor Brian Kemp. chrisjmfa.com

Melvin Toledo is an artist originally from Nicaragua, living in the United States since 2007. While his work in the past has focused mostly on still life painting, he has recently been working on landscape and portraiture. He is working on a new series of portraits depicting immigrants living in the United States, aiming to celebrate their lives and to bring attention to their contribution to society. He lives and works in Tucker, GA. <http://www.melvintoledo.com/>

Dr. Monika Wiley has been in education for 23 years and served as a magnet teacher and principal. She currently holds two titles with Georgia's Clayton County Public Schools - Director of Fine Arts and School Choice which includes Strategic Planning. Monika serves as an educational leadership consultant for various agencies and a member of the Board of Directors for Magnet Schools of America. Monika's education includes the University of West Georgia, Doctor of School Improvement; University of West Georgia, Specialist in Education; Nova Southeastern University, Master of Science in Mathematics Education; Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University, Bachelor of Science in Mathematics Education. Dr. Wiley is also an educational advisor for the High Museum of Art and Cobb Performing Arts Center's ArtsBridge Foundation. www.clayton.k12.ga.us

About the State Charter Schools Foundation

The State Charter Schools Foundation of Georgia (SCSF) is a nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting high-quality state charter schools serving children throughout Georgia by leveraging resources to help schools launch, build capacity and grow. Currently, there are 39 state charter

schools in Georgia serving more than 38,000 students throughout the state. For more information about the State Charter Schools Foundation and to get involved, visit www.scsfga.org