

The VSA Emerging Young Artists Program

The Journey

2014 Finalists

Selected by:

Brandon Brame Fortune
Chief Curator, Curator of
Painting and Sculpture
National Portrait Gallery

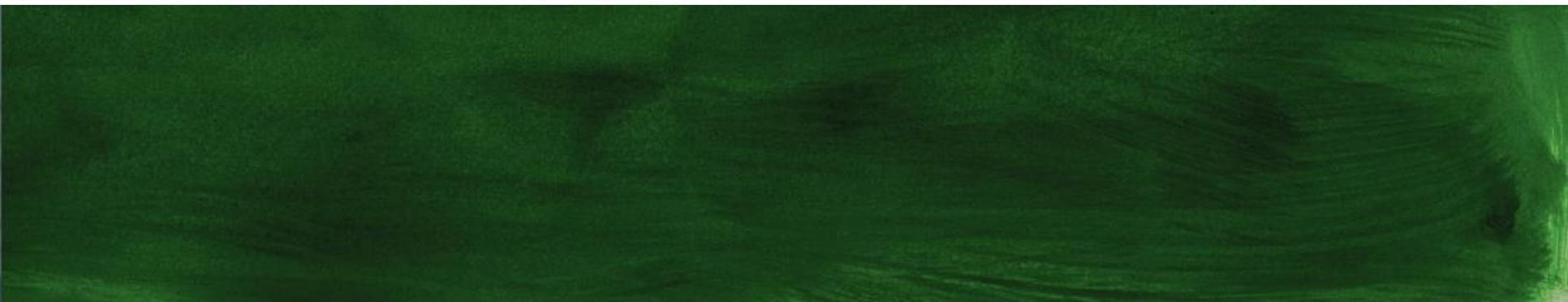
William Newman
Professional Artist and
Professor, Corcoran College
of Art + Design

Sarah Tanguy
Curator,
ART in Embassies,
U.S. Department
of State

THE VSA |
EMERGING
YOUNG ARTISTS |
PROGRAM

The 2014 VSA Emerging Young Artists Program, **The Journey**, asks emerging artists to showcase work that illuminates innovative viewpoints at the intersection of sustainability, creativity, and disability.

Emerging young visual artists are invited to reflect on the theme **The Journey** — internal and external, personal and communal, human and technological — our journeys shape our aesthetic and environmental terrain and define our daily lives.



Gianna Paniagua

Age 23

Pittsburgh, PA & Miami, FL

Grand Prize Awardee \$20,000

Never Stopping,
handcut paper, screenprint
40" x 60" x 8"



Gianna Paniagua Statement

The human body, both anatomically and figuratively, is at the root of my work stemming from the fact that I am a heart transplant recipient and have lived a life reliant on medicine. Past and present experiences force me to see the body as fragile rather than the traditional symbol of vigor. In my work, I place an emphasis on the physical, delicate nature of the body and, conversely, its abilities for healing. Growing up in Miami as a Cuban American, I was exposed to different sects of Afro-Cuban religions and spiritual practices. While much of my life is focused on Western medicine, I am drawn to the possibility of spiritual healing through ritual and meditation. I believe that each material possesses intrinsic qualities that must be given attention. When making, I consider each separate material to be its own “body,” meaning that it is susceptible to growth and decay. In order to work best, one must understand the qualities and work with them. With these qualities in mind, I am able to push the materials further and investigate new forms of three-dimensional papercutting. By consciously trying to use more creative techniques, I shifted away from my past process that contained a majority of destructive techniques towards the material (burning, cutting, tearing).

My work is part of my journey. It heavily relies on personal experience, but I transform it into something that all types of viewers can connect to. I believe that all of our experiences are meant to be shared with others. Communication is key in transforming our perspectives. That is what I aim to do: allow people to take on a new perspective and opinion on life after hearing my story. I never expected to be creating art, it was something that I fell into. Because of my disability, I could not follow other career paths that caused too much strain on my body (I cannot be in crowded areas, hospitals, etc). Papercutting allowed for meditation, reflection, and a motivation to continue creating.

Timothy Lee

Age 24

Brooklyn, NY

First Prize Awardee \$10,000

Gookeyes,
watercolor on paper,
60" diameter



Timothy Lee Statement

Issues of identity and self-exploration serve as the groundwork for my artistic endeavors. Although I tend to work on multiple, often tangential, projects in any given time, they are all united under major themes involving my identity as a Korean-American, and as an individual suffering from generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), which manifests predominantly in obsessive-compulsiveness (OCD).

Born in Seoul, South Korea, and immigrating to the United States with my family at an early age, my identity as a *kyopo*, or a Korean-in-between, has largely shaped the way I view the world around me. As a child, I recall being bullied about the shape of my eyes, or the unusual intonations of my words, despite feeling as “American” as the other students in my class. Moreover, I was unable to understand and heed the advice of my parents, often dismissing them as archaic Korean proverbs inapplicable to my American lifestyle.

As an adult, I have now reconciled these two conflicting cultures: those of my parent’s and that which I grew up in; however, my identity as a “ghost” was advantageous in allowing me to have a uniquely shaped perspective about my environment. Specifically, I am able to view the two facets of my life, my Korean and American backgrounds, through the lens of the other, unapologetically confronting and exploring both worlds of thought. In the process, I strive to highlight the moments when their respective political and social ideologies coalesce and break away from one another. Even now, I often feel a pressure from my environment to conform to a particular role, as dictated by societal expectations and stereotypes of being Asian. As such, my work manifests from my frustrations that Korean Americans, and Asian Americans overall, experience in America.

Although the traditionally conservative views of Korean culture clashes with those of America with regards to religion and social issues, one topic that particularly compels me are psychological disorders. As an individual who suffers from OCD, I had to hide my illness from my parents, whose Korean upbringings reinforced in them traditional notions of psychological disorders as being taboo. In particular, many Koreans believe that such disorders are mental, rather than neurobiological, and the afflicted individuals are seen as weak and shameful. This social stigma contrasts with the transparency and openness with which America confronts psychological disorders.

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Timothy Lee Statement, continued

Exploring my OCD through art allows me to take my disorder, thought as a sign of vulnerability in Korea, and create powerful and tangible works with it. By creating works about OCD, and psychological disorders in general, I am regaining a part of my identity that has haunted me since childhood.

In elementary school, I remember learning how to write cursive script. Even though we were encouraged to work through our mistakes and go against our desire to write in print, I could not bring myself to curl and connect my letters. Every time I tried, a feeling of restlessness overtook me; I could not explain it, but something didn't "feel right." Since that incident, my obsessive-compulsive disorder has taken control over arbitrary facets of my life: having to rewrite a word if I was not satisfied with "how it felt," or cleaning my glasses until it "felt good." Within this curse however, was a blessing – my obsessive nature allowed me to immerse myself into a locus of interest, which I found in art, and enter a new world of thought. Fully engaged with my reality and disengaged with their reality, my relentless neurosis allows me to sit for hours, even nights, at my table working.

My background in cytology and immunohistochemistry serves as a vector for the exploration of my obsessive--compulsiveness. I use my condition to render thousands of diamond-like "cells" that are reminiscent of Yayoi Kusama's dot works. Each cell is hand-painted, with over four layers of watercolor, and the composition of the accumulation of these cells are not pre-meditated– the forms occur as a result of what I feel is "right" during my working process. The results are abstract, amorphous shapes that serve as mappings of my thought process. Thus, by making these works, I hope to investigate my unconscious and regain control of what has controlled me since childhood. Because of my educational background involves a degree in Neuroscience, I am interested in seeing the resulting images that form purely from following my tics and compulsions a cartography of my psychopathology.

My work relates to the exhibition theme of "The Journey" because I truly believe that my trajectory as an artist will always continue to be a journey, with both struggles and rewards waiting for me. Living with an anxiety disorder is something that you can never cope with; its instability and temperance always keeps the afflicted on the tip of their toes, uncertain of when the next panic attack may strike. For me, I have managed to pave this rocky road by channeling my tensions, thoughts, and adversities into my works.

Grace Tinsley

Age 24

Arlington, MA

Second Prize Awardee \$6,000



XOXO BLOOMER BOY BHE A NOON FISH

The Disorient,
digital,
12" x 60"

Grace Tinsley Statement

I am at a point in my artistic career where I am still experimenting as well as starting to hone in on what I would like to communicate. Before I was aware of this call for entry, I have been trying to come up with different ways in which to portray what I experience. I have only recently discovered that I have dyslexia and have started investigating how exactly that affected me growing up and still affects me today. Struggling with reading and comprehension more than my classmates throughout my school career definitely took a toll on my self-esteem and confidence as a student in the classroom. I realized that not understanding why I struggled more than everyone else is really what impaired me. There were countless ways that I tried to compensate in order to keep up with everyone else, but these techniques that I resorted to really just impaired me in the long run.

I recently met a friend's aunt who works with a special education program in the public school system in Massachusetts. I told her I discovered my dyslexia not too long ago. Her whole face lit up and she exclaimed, "Dyslexics are my favorite type of people!" Never, ever receiving such a response as this from anyone, I was very taken aback, but also excited. She told me that the dyslexic brain works very differently than everyone else's and that I should read a book called *The Gift of Dyslexia* by Ronald Davis. After reading this, my childhood started to make sense and I am able to look at those years of struggle in a different light. Davis discovered that, in terms of dyslexia, there are verbal thinkers and nonverbal thinkers, or picture thinkers. On page 98 of Davis's book, he states "Verbal thought is linear in time, performed by making sentences one word at a time, whereas picture thinking is evolutionary. The picture grows as the mental process adds more subconcepts to the overall concepts." Verbal thinkers have two to five thoughts per second whereas nonverbal thinkers experience 32 mental images per second, which is about six to ten times more than their verbal thinking counterparts. When a dyslexic is reading a sentence and comes upon a word that they cannot visualize as a picture in their head, they become disoriented. If they continue to read the sentence, the image being created becomes more and more distorted as words keep piling onto the confusion. I would be taken over by deep, intense concentration in an effort to comprehend what was written in front of me, which actually just caused me to enter a sort of hypnotic state. This state is called *disorientation*.

Statement continues, next slide

Grace Tinsley Statement, continued

Davis explains, “When dyslexic people look at an alphabet letter and disorient, within a split second, they see dozens of different views – from the top, the sides, and the back of the letter. In other words, the mind’s eye is mentally circling around the letter as though it were an object in three-dimensional space. It’s like a helicopter buzzing around, doing surveillance on a building. This is the disorientation function hard at work, trying to recognize the object,” on page 129. Letters and words then become a dizzying haze that is difficult to merely look at, let alone actually read and understand.

The artwork that I have created portrays just a fraction of what a dyslexic, such as myself, may experience in a split second when presented with a given sentence. This is a tiny portion of what my journey through life with dyslexia has involved. For this piece, I have chosen a sentence out of one of my favorite books, *Big Al* by Andrew Clements Yoshi, which my parents used to read to me growing up. I was able to understand the general story at the time because of the illustrations that accompanied the narrative, but if I were to look at this sentence, “You could never find a nicer fish”, on one of the first couple of pages, I would have experienced the type of hypnotic state that is experienced when looking at my piece, without necessarily achieving an understanding of what it is actually saying. There are many other combinations that my brain would file through during this split second. I feel as though only showing four out of the forty plus combinations for each word would be more successful in catching peoples’ attention if there was a little bit of discernable text. Knowing that this is merely a fraction of my experience is, however, still important.

I have since realized that dyslexia has absolutely played a part in my artwork. I have been working mostly in three-dimensions for my whole life, and now it makes sense- because that is how I think. I have realized that my dyslexia is actually, in fact, a gift just as Ronald Davis suggests, as I am able to think of a piece from all angles before I actually execute it. I have memories of becoming frustrated with reading and comprehension throughout my years in school and turning to drawing and making as a source of accomplishment and gratification in myself. I grew up with parents who practice as well as have a respect for the visual arts. My mother is a potter and my father is a structural engineer, so I have had my hands in all sorts of materials ever since the day I can remember. My art making has always been motivated from within, like a need that must be met for the satisfaction of my livelihood. My hands are happiest when they are actively kneading, cutting, carving, sawing, filing, sanding, buffing, anything to keep them and my mind in motion.

Allison Anderson

Age 24

Cyprus, CA

Award of Excellence \$2,000

Promise,
oil and spray paint,
6' x 5'



Allison Anderson Statement

Having spent a great deal of time in therapy, I am very aware of the psychological thoughts and voices in my head. Even though I have learned not to give into these thoughts, they still linger in my head to cause confusion. Many of these thoughts consist of a distorted body image I have of myself due to having Anorexia/ Bulimia Nervosa and depression. I have been diagnosed clinically depressed on and off since I was twelve and have had an eating disorder since I was sixteen. Even though I am currently only prescribed medication for anxiety, I have been on and off anti-depressants all while being in intense therapy twice a week.

A lot of my work is based around these disorders/ disabilities I battle with everyday. The text that I use in the beginning of my work are my own thoughts but as the painting matures, I use text from books and films that deal with young females battling with similar thought processes of the female body and of society. I started working with these ideas in my last year in art school, right after I was finally at normal weight and did not need anti-depressants anymore. I found that working with these ideas of the female body and how much pressure is put on young women to live up to ridiculous standards that our culture sets actually suppresses my disabilities. Before when I was not painting but still in art school, I was severely underweight and had to be constantly working out. By painting and drawing, I feel as if I am challenging myself in a conceptual way that intrigues me more than worrying about something superficial. Besides dealing with these disabilities as motivation, I think being around an art department with faculty that is heavily female dominated is what motivated me to work with my disabilities as themes.

Unlike before where I had to be constantly working out or burning calories, now I am very much concerned with what is happening in my paintings because it is a form of communication to the world. Being in the studio so much in itself is a journey for me because I can see the growth within myself. There are many days where I feel like I am getting nowhere in my painting practice and want to submit to myself to my eating disorder ways. The biggest struggle for me with this disability is properly nourishing myself in order to be able to work in the studio physically and mentally with conceptual ideas. There have been days where I am so busy I forgot to eat. Running around the printmaking and painting studios all day on an empty stomach and un nourished brain is very challenging. I think for having this disability for such a long time now, I see it as one of those things that will never go away. Thoughts of being skinnier will always linger but if I want to be able to grow as an artist I need to nourish myself. I know that I will have up and downs not just with my disability affecting my work but also having up and downs with painting. One of the biggest things I have learned in art school is that if you are not willing to fail, than you are never going to be able to grow and see the journey of yourself and your artwork. Being in the studio in itself is journey.

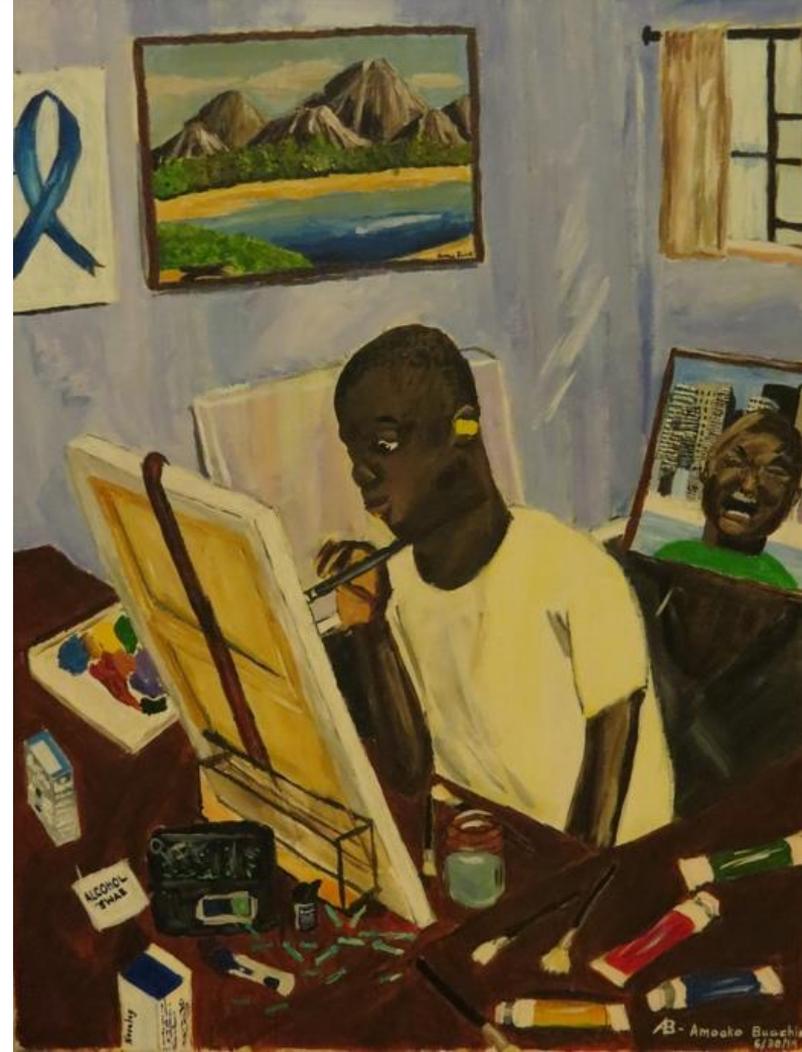
Amoako Buachie

Age 23

Brooklyn, NY

Award of Excellence \$2,000

The Quiet Painter's Peace,
acrylic,
24" x 18"



Amoako Buachie Statement

My painting relates to the exhibit theme *The Journey* because living with a disability can be very challenging and quite a journey indeed. I am a young man with autism and Type 1 diabetes. There are a lot of issues to overcome when you have a disability. At times it is frustrating to deal with the loud noises in the city like honking horns, firetrucks and police sirens. I wear earplugs when I create my artwork to help keep me calm and focused. My artwork demonstrates that despite all of the difficulties I go through in life, I still have something special to give to the world by being an artist.

Art plays a role in living with Autism and diabetes because it gives me something to look forward to when I feel agitated or nervous. Sometimes it can be difficult to say how I am feeling or what I am thinking through words and that is why being a creative artist is so important to me. My artwork explains exactly what I am feeling, what I am thinking and what I want to express without words. Making my art calms me down and helps me be more creative by expressing myself in each piece that I create. This piece shows me in my room creating a painting. There is a blue ribbon on the wall to represent Autism Awareness. My glucometer, lancets, test strips, alcohol swabs and insulin are on the table just next to my painting supplies because I am always monitoring my blood sugar levels and I am also always creating works of art. I am calm and happy when I create my artwork and I wear my earplugs to drown out the noises of the city. Sometimes the noise is too much to take and I need to scream to let out my frustration and to erase all of the other noises. The image in the background is a portrait of me reacting to the city noises. But I always return to my artwork to keep me relaxed and content.

I started creating this painting a few weeks ago when my High School art teacher Ms. Lacy called my mother with the information about the competition. She thought that it would be a good idea for me to participate in *The Journey* competition because in High School I really loved being involved in competitions. What motivated me to begin was the opportunity to tell my story through my artwork. Being an artist is truly my life's journey and each piece that I create tells the story of that ongoing journey.

Cory Daniels

Age 24

Norwich, VT

Award of Excellence \$2,000

Untitled (Construction Site 2014),
digital photography,
24" x 30"



Cory Daniels Statement

Night Shift

I have always found photography to be the truest way for me to express how I feel living with my disability. I like to use these overwhelming, cluttered depictions of the world under construction as insight to my own mind and a way for the viewer to experience the way I perceive the world around me. And I have found this to be a much more effective way for me to cope with ADHD than any medication ever was. My art has always been a way of understanding myself better and is constantly a learning process. Not only has it been a journey of understanding how my mind works but also a way for me to relate to the world around me. Art was one of the first things I ever found myself actually striving at and something that my disability didn't get in the way of. In fact I believe that my disability gives me a unique perspective on the world and I have come to realize that I wouldn't change that for anything. Through this journey I have learned to accept, understand and channel my ADHD into something that I am actually confident in.

I remember the first time I was given confidence in myself was senior year of high school. I had an art teacher named Pete Lang and I took his Photo 1 class without any prior knowledge of cameras, film or the darkroom process. I instantly fell in love and he was so supportive of my work and helped me gain the confidence to actually consider photography as a path out of high school. He eventually came to tell me about Massart and pushed me to apply there. I have come a long way from the insecure ADHD high school student with no direction I once was. And after graduating from Massart I can now truly say with confidence that the actual journey of it all has been just as important.

Growing up in a blue-collar family with a father who works in construction has affected the way I see the world. I can't think of a time in my life where construction has not been going on around me. Once one project finishes another immediately seems to start up. This is something that most people accept and never really give much thought to whether it be renovation in the schools we learn in or repaving of the roads we travel on. We take note, but never think much about it.

Personally, I find it very peculiar that the world around me is in constant flux with construction and destruction, forever evolving and changing to fill the needs and desires of the industrious species that controls it. For me, the constant need for change is a mystery ephemeral moments that change over night. In my work I look closely at the transformations that occur both in the construction of it, and also at the way the artificial light alters the experience through photography.

In this series I am transforming these landscapes amidst the process of being altered. Otherworldly perception of the light and composition create a place neither here nor there. Looking for oddities, details and complexities that occur in these little noticed scenes. I am borrowing the dramatic lighting created by the night to illuminate moments and artifacts that would otherwise be hidden in plain sight. It is the shifting light sources that create new dimensions within the frame.

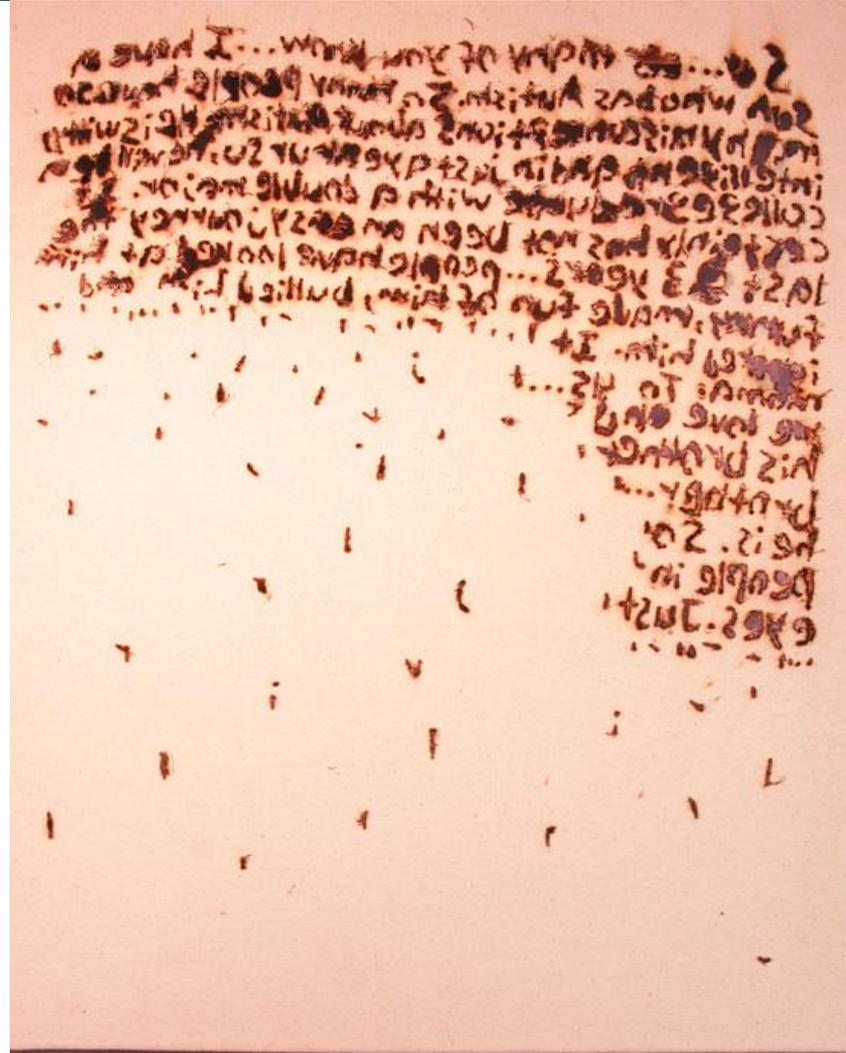
Not only are these photographs a journey of the development of the man made structures all around us, they are also an allegory for my own personal development as a young adult living with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Ethan Engel

Age 24

Winner, SD

Award of Excellence \$2,000



Overcast,

Raw canvas and wood burning tool,
30" x 24"

Ethan Engel Statement

My artwork takes a critical view on my life journey with Autism through mixed media artwork. Growing up, I've struggled a lot with Autism. Schooling has been a rough ride as I tried so hard getting good grades through intense therapy. Sometimes the results of my grades are not so good. I was also the subject of bullying by others who misjudged me and my disability. I don't think that my bullies, friends, family members, and others don't know what Autism is all about, but they see it every day. I am on a journey to share my story through art.

Even though I had suffered through hard times, it does not mean that I didn't have any positive moments in my life. I think that art has really changed that scenario. Creating art is such a great way to express myself and my unique life. For my autism, I truly believe that it is the perfect candidate for this topic – creating positive, informative imagery from personally negative experiences. I believe that it is the best choice in understanding what Autism is from an individual, like me.

I want to tell stories of my life with Autism through art so people can understand how I live with it every day. Some of my stories maybe a little strong of words, and some can be very emotional. As an adult, I feel that expressing my scarred memories or internal conflicts through art softens a burden I carry, but more importantly, tells others I function just as everyone else.

I began creating artwork in the fall of 2012, using materials that are recycled or trashed. My current work is motivated by past memories – my Mother's words, being bullied, accepting guilt, and proving to people that I am not different just because I have Autism. The raw canvas represents the "flesh", which sometimes disguises internal differences. The burning represents the scars on the flesh, or incidents, which built me into who I am today. The imagery is reversed as a way to internalize my experience, yet allow the viewer to engage with the art and the metaphor of struggle.

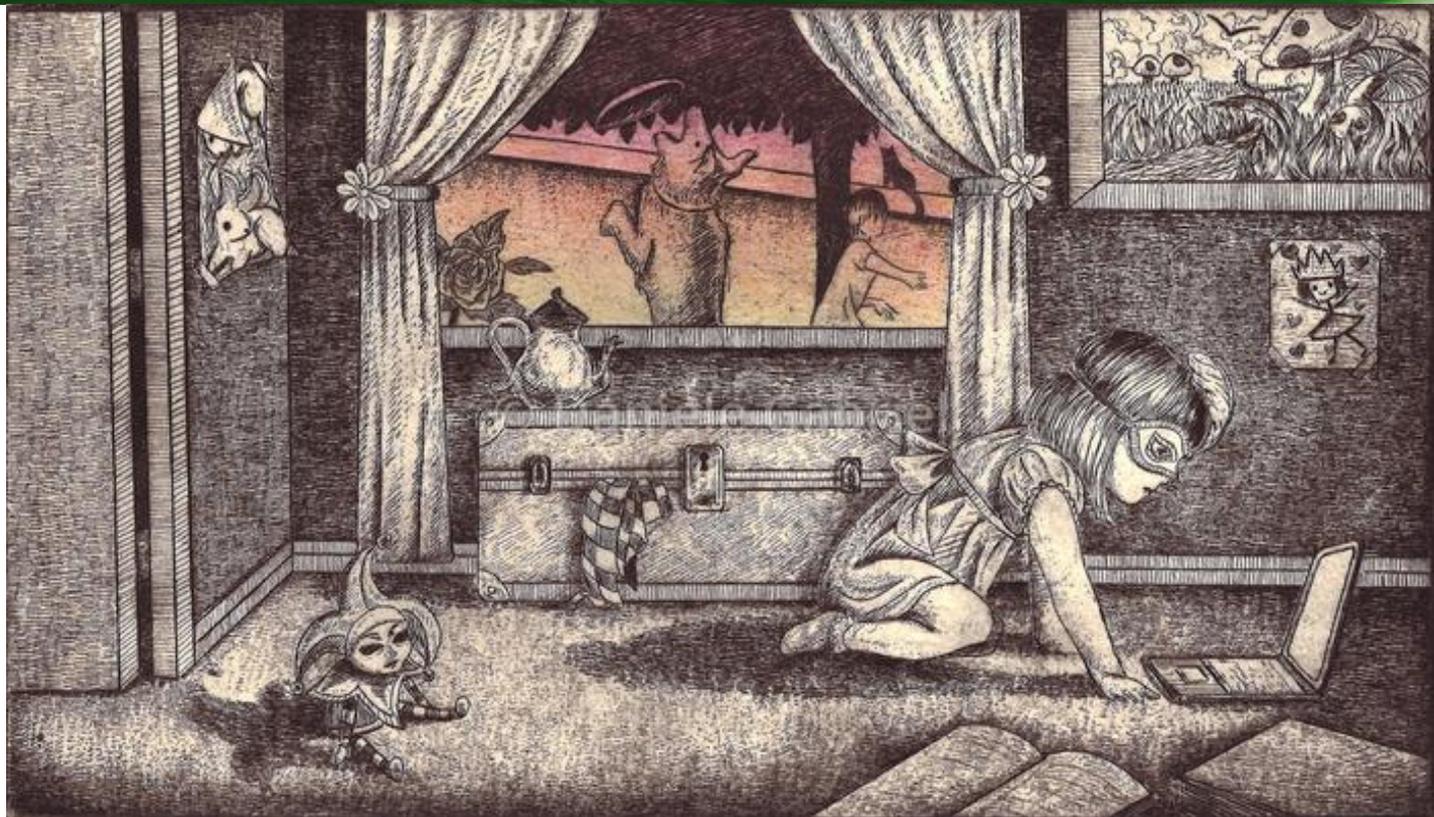
Danièle Gabriel

Age 24

Miami, FL

Award of Excellence
\$2,000

World of My Own,
Etching,
6" x 8.75"



Daniele Gabriel Statement

The art I create focuses on the transformation of identity by altering one's physical appearance through the uncanny use of fantasy-like disguises. The work itself is mainly representational, using line variations to create drama in various narratives. The subjects are often ordinary people dressed in masks derived from my personal imagination, such as the piece I'm submitting, "World of My Own" which depicts a masked little girl, staring at a laptop screen, situated inside a room with a touch of *Alice in Wonderland* elements.

The theme of masks found in my work exhibits key childhood moments in which I grew up partially deaf. My hearing disability has provided me with a unique perspective of the world around me and has placed me in situations most would find average. My strongest memories began at the age of 5, which is when my journey began. It was at this age my parents and I learned about my moderate to severe hearing loss.

Since my disability was discovered, I was then placed on a school bus for handicapped children. One morning, my mother dropped me off at the bus and kissed me good-bye as usual. However, on that particular morning an unexpected event happened, the school bus was hijacked. This event to a young girl would seem confusing and harmless; that is until the police shot the man, I recount this memory strongly, and his blood spattered onto the child in the seat ahead of me. Although surreal to hear now, at the time, I was unaware of the danger.

Another instance includes the time my parents were getting a divorce and my father had to cope with the severity of my hearing loss and how it will impact me socially. Personally for me my journey for being one who is hearing impaired has been like a silent movie. I use art as a tool for communication, such as my etching series "Playing Online".

The etching series I'm currently working on focuses on today's society surrounded by technology. Nowadays with the power of computers, it is possible to virtually become whoever you want to be through the use of social networking. When signing in onto a website, such as Facebook, we have the option to change our entire identity. One never truly knows whom they are communicating with when on the web.

Statement continues, next slide

Daniele Gabriel Statement, Continued

These etchings illustrate a series of masked characters situated indoors while interacting on an electronic device, instead of communicating face to face with another physical body. Our world as we know it will eventually become detached from reality and forever logged into cyber space. Or has it already? However technology such as computers, has enabled those with poor speech and hearing impediment to communicate freely without hardship, thus opening their world and mine.

Art definitely is connected to my hearing disability. Since childhood, I've been pretending to understand words spoken by other people. I wouldn't know what they were saying, so I would create dialogue for them; creating a story so to speak. I would take words I did catch, like a piece of a puzzle, and form a sentence that can create a probable scenario. I am drawn to masks because masks conceal the identity, and when I catch fragments of dialogue, it's like seeing only part of a person's face while their mask conceals the rest of their face. The masks is used to cover up the missing information and replaced with what I thought was said. Also, in order for me to fit into this world I must look at a person's face to lip-read. The face is important to me and in my other art works I concentrate on portraitures. Similarly, as a child, I would pretend that I couldn't hear my father blaming my mother for my deafness simply by turning my head and creating my own dialogue. This reinstates my attraction to masks- those wearing them get the story I create for them and I sometimes wear one to depict the story others want.

My hearing disability greatly affects my artwork, but in a good way. It has pushed me to rely more on my observations skill in that I'm more sensitive to visual details and color variations. My disability also helps me to not be distracted by unnecessary audio such as music, phones, and conversations of strangers, which helps me to solely concentrate on making art.

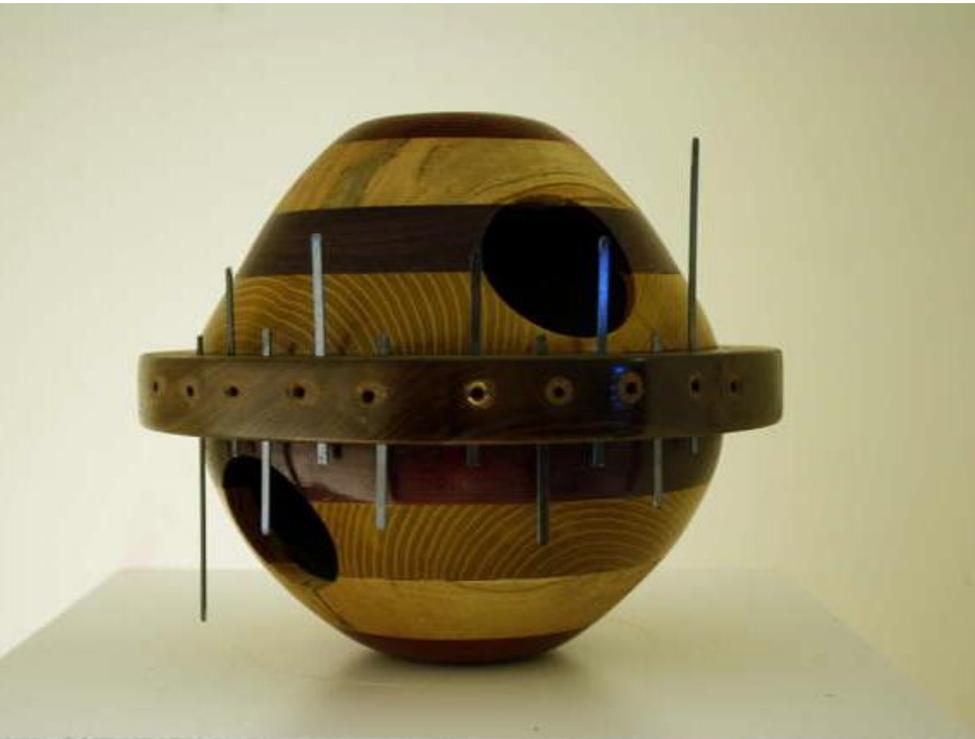
I've been creating art since I was a child, but I mainly did it for fun and communication. While growing up it was difficult for me to communicate with other children who can hear well because I couldn't hear them, and they couldn't understand my poor speech. As a result, I relied on imagery a lot to interact with other individuals and my family. Art was the key that opened the door to the world of communication! Till this day, I still use art as a way to express my feelings or thoughts. Art is and will always be my source of motivation in order to continue my journey.

Andrew Jacob

Age 23

Bear, DE

Award of Excellence \$2,000



Phase Sense and ***Phase Sense performance***,
Wood, steel, video installation,
8" x 9" x 7"



Andrew Jacob Statement

My greatest interest is to create sculptures that produce sound and utilize the elements around them (space, people, and architectural structures) as an integral part of the work. I am interested in seeing how an exhibited work of sculpture can influence viewers, both by its visual characteristics and its acoustic properties.

I create sculptures that will “sing” or “speak”, as their composition involves the particular space they inhabit. The creation of these pieces involves a thoughtful process to include the sounds and vibrations naturally inherent from the materials, available in the environment, or from interaction with viewers. My work is an attempt to create a physiological experience for my audience. The form invites them closer, and they enter into a moment of exploration and immersion into an aural experience.

I am interested in the notions of contrast and juxtaposition of concepts. As a result, I find myself using and combining materials that are visually pleasing in color, texture, and form, but provide a strong contrast. In my recent work, I have been focused on large scaled sound sculptures that imitate the acoustic elements of musical instruments utilizing wind, percussion, and strings. I am interested in seeking out musical instruments, dissecting their structures and recreating them in a whole new form. The juxtaposition of contrasting lines, materials and the sounds produced results in a sculptural work that is at once visually stimulating, aurally intriguing, and readily inviting viewer’s involvement.

Sophie Klafter

Age 23

New York, NY

Award of Excellence \$2,000



Dad and Me,
archival pigment print,
30" x 30"

Sophie Klafter Statement

I have my mother's light eyes, my great grandmother's round nose, and my grandfather's gift of gab. From my father, I have inherited Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease, a rare neuromuscular disorder with which he was born.

Because of this, I have had to view things other people took for granted from a different perspective. Since childhood, I have had to be sharply observant of my surroundings—details such as little grooves in the pavement or uneven bricks on the sidewalk could make the difference between a pleasant outing and a catastrophic fall.

This need to develop an acute awareness of my surroundings, compounded with my unique physicality, eventually evolved into the desire to document the natural variations of the human body. Photography was the obvious medium, and I realized then that I had the perfect subject for my photographic journey—myself.

Consequently, I spent several years creating a series of self-portraits—offering the viewer an intimate glimpse of my own body. As photography grew from hobby into passion, I began to feel a strong sense of responsibility to bring attention to the reality of living in an “imperfect” body, and started photographing other subjects in addition to myself.

While it was certainly my own situation that initially attracted me to people who have faced challenges due to their physical appearance and/or functionality, the more interaction I had with the people I photographed, the more I realized that what I was trying to get at was more complicated than my initial aim. My attraction to these peoples' physicality began to feel scientific and insincere. My original approach appeared as though I was viewing them in the way most others saw them, simply externally. I wanted to break through this boundary and recognize a richer sense of who they were.

With this project, I not only wanted to create portraits of disabled people functioning out in the world; I also wanted their life stories. I wanted to go into their homes, meet their families, hold their possessions and hear their stories of perseverance. I wanted to truly capture their spirit and what it was like for them to go through life in an atypical body. I wanted others to experience their journey.

Chloe Leigh

Age 20

Rockport, MA

Award of Excellence \$2,000

Clothing the Invisible,
charcoal drawing,
24" x 18"



Chloe Leigh Statement

They can be dirty, clean, rough, smooth, wrinkly, small, big, dark, sun-kissed, pale, polished, manicured, scratched, bruised, calloused or soft. They are unique in size, color and markings, revealing many different creases and freckles that set them apart from one another. One might take them for granted; yet they carry you through life. They can tell endless things about you and they are part of your daily life. They are simply your hands.

I believe my hands make me unique. I believe in scratched, dirty, and messy hands. They show mistakes, achievements, and risks that I have taken in my life. I believe if I don't get my hands messy and try new things, I will not get anywhere in my life. Therefore, mine are always messy. I use them to explore. They have scratches from x-acto knives, paint under my fingernails, and charcoal covering my palms. Even when I wash them, they do not look like many of my friend's hands, which have been freshly manicured at the local salon. They might not look polished all the time, yet I take pride in my hands because they show all the achievements I have made.

Making art with my hands has always been my way of expressing my emotions, thoughts, and voice. When I was in elementary school, I was diagnosed with a reading and language disability, both receptive and expressive. I struggled with the ability to think and solve problems quickly, retain large amounts of verbal information, formulate verbal sentences properly, and read. I envied most of my classmates, but over time, I learned that with a great deal of extra effort, I could accomplish some of the same achievements as other students. I was classified as a visual learner and I had a special education teacher and a speech and language therapist that helped me find strategies that would help me succeed in school. I have since grown to accept my disability and realize that along with it, comes newly discovered abilities... like art. Art has become my way of expressing my emotions and thoughts and, at times, on how I still struggle with my disability. It is my way of talking and it is a form of expressing that I am fluent too.

Statement continues, next slide

Chloe Leigh Statement, Continued

I have been exploring and creating art all my life, with my hands. They have always influenced the way I think, act, and speak. Art has always been my safety zone, something that I have felt that I could always excel at and be proud of. Although I worked very hard in my academic classes, participated in afterschool activities, joined clubs, and provided service to my school, I pursued art seriously in high school and received many honors and awards for my work. It inspired me to never give up on my dreams and goals. My work ethic and perseverance have stemmed not only from my passion to create art, but also my passion to overcome and excel beyond my disability.

I used to be very structural with my art and I was always concerned about how people viewed my work. I always tried to reach perfection, perhaps because I envied people who had no disability to overcome. I wanted to reach perfection, yet I have learned that perfection does not exist. In order to create great art, I do not have to be perfect. I need to make mistakes and take risks. I have learned that I can really be free when I do not overanalyze my work. I love creating art now! It is my little escape where I do not have to be concerned with perfection and where I can let my mind free. Now I am constantly dipping my hands into new forms of art and materials and letting my hands free.

I believe in calloused hands because they show how I have used them in my life and I am dedicated to the work that I produce. Every art project has scratched, bumped, cut, or scraped them. It is a permanent, physical record of what I have done and achieved. I have been exploring and creating art all my life, with my hands. I am still undecided on what path I might take, yet I know I will continue my lifelong work of art, which is this, beautiful, intricate and a permanent record already accumulating on my hands. My hands have helped shape the person that I am and the person that I will become.

SaraNoa Mark

Age 23

Philadelphia, PA

Award of Excellence \$2,000

City of Doubt,
oil and graphite on canvas,
8" x 10"



SaraNoa Mark Statement

Making art has always been an essential part of my life. From a very young age I relished any opportunity to hold a pencil or paintbrush. Art period was my favorite time of the school day, from nursery school on, and a far more comfortable moment than the times designated for reading or writing. At age seven, it became clear that I had learning disabilities. While I would set out on a path of tutoring and learning intervention programs to address dyslexia and language processing issues, I still had art with which to truly express myself.

A few years later I was diagnosed with scoliosis. Several years of wearing a brace to correct this condition did not stop its rapid progression, and at age 14, when my curvature became severe, I underwent a spinal fusion operation. Recovered from this surgery by my senior year in high school enough to resume the sports that I also excelled at, at age 17 I was in a car accident that resulted in a fractured spine. Requiring a second spinal fusion, I was forced to repeat the worst experience of my life.

My personal journey has had its peaks and plateaus. What remains constant is my passion to create — a passion that evolved and collected greater significance after I suffered extensive physical trauma.

I began investing in drawing and painting at an early age, as an alternative to reading and writing. Expressing myself visually felt natural, while reading was a struggle. I was able to use drawing to distinguish myself among my peers. Most importantly, when I drew I felt worthy of respect. Thus, art paved the road toward self-expression, and provided me with the confidence I needed to get through many a day in school.

Statement continues, next slide

SaraNoa Mark Statement, continued

Undergoing scoliosis surgery in ninth grade required me to miss a portion of the school year. I was a freshman at a new school, missing both class time and the social whirl of high school at a most critical time in an adolescent's life. However, when I returned to classes I was not a complete unknown to my peers. I was the one who was "really good at art." And, while I had to make up lost class time with additional tutoring, my art class was one area of study I could slip right back into. Once again, art was there for me. Three years later, my car accident caused me to struggle to understand a world that made me repeat a similar form of physical and emotional torture. After missing time in classes and with friends during my freshman year of high school due to my first spinal surgery, there I was, only three years later, in the hospital anticipating losing another year of my life to recovering from a second spinal fusion. The visual world took on greater importance. It was a world without answers, yet a space where I was able to invent creative solutions. Making art was my safe space where I felt empowered to experiment and to express myself in a physical form.

Color, light, form, and composition—the traditional aspects of an art education— have always driven my artistic exploration. My studies and independent work have resulted in a solid body of figure paintings, still life, landscapes, and abstract interpretations. But, during this past academic year, as I advanced from class study to independent, critic-guided studio work, I allowed myself to consciously process my spinal surgeries in my artwork. For one example, I began deconstructing my images in a way that sometimes scattered the limbs of group of dancers, or skewed the structure of a building or empty urban lot. More significantly, I began a new body of work in which I use woodcut tools—perhaps akin to surgical tools—to irritate the surface of raw canvas, and have begun to think of the canvas as skin. Visually, I am interested in texture as it relates to the experience of touch. Making the fiber work is physically exhausting, but there is a great release that comes from losing myself in the simultaneously aggressive and meditative act of scratching against the canvas, and in manipulating material into positive and negative spaces, that, I realize, reflects the mix of positive and negative experience that embodies my personal history of dealing with disability through art.

As art has always been ever-present in my development through life, I know it will continue to direct and respond to my personal journey. I appreciate the opportunity this application has given me to coalesce thoughts on these essential aspects of my creative process.

Paige Robertson

Age 17

Fort Wayne, IN

**Award of
Excellence \$2,000**



***I Think He Forgot
I'm Deaf,***
photograph
19" x 13" x 1"

Paige Robertson Statement

I can remember the first time I picked up a camera. Constantly following my mother's hand movements on her big, black camera. You can be anything you want to be, she says. I wanted to be like my mother. We shared the passion of creating images that defined us. Photography showed people my deafness in a way that words could never explain.

Being the only deaf child in the family, I knew that I had to find a hobby that I loved and gave me the same opportunities that other photographers had, unlike most of other hobbies that involved hearing with my ears. I started photography at a young age, following the footsteps of a self-taught photographer who was my mother. I admired the beauty my mother took of other people. I took my favorite class starting my sophomore year, not knowing I would learn so much wisdom from my photography teacher and improving my talent in a way I never thought I could.

I won three gold keys in Scholastic on my junior year. I took thousands of pictures of people. I created pieces and projects and things I could think of. I decided to put up my work socially and I have not got nothing but admiration and complements and opportunities to shoot pictures of those people. But my passion for photography is not all about the fame. I wanted something that described me that explained who I am, to get all the hearing people to understand the joy and struggles of hearing loss.

The four pieces I have chosen to enter The Journey describes my feelings and experiences of being hearing impaired. They each have a different emotion, different story. It shows how I struggle understanding hearing people and hearing people understanding me. It has been a tough journey for myself but in the end, people learned from me and I learned from them.

Andrew Weatherly

Age 22

Closter, NJ

Award of Excellence \$2,000

Winter Worlds,
Acrylic,
11" x 9"



Andrew Weatherly Statement

This is how my art and "The Journey" relate. My art allows me different avenues to develop and expand my inner self. I use three different mediums for self-expression; photography, writing poetry and painting. My art lets me reach out and explore new horizons, providing me with the opportunity and the chance to try new things. For example, using my camera and observing new situations through its lens I became more comfortable when faced with participating in new social or groups of peers that I was unfamiliar with. Photography allowed me to be part of the whole group from the perimeter. I developed confidence and began to participate more by bringing my interest in photography to others. Developing my skills painting gives me the chance to release my inner thoughts and feelings in addition to allowing me to express myself in ways I normally wouldn't. I expose myself when given the opportunity to share my art with others which makes me feel fulfilled. It allows others to see the inner creative me. As an artist, I am proud of my accomplishments and have a great sense of self-pride.

Navigating social barriers has been confusing at times. Yet, through my artwork I have developed new skills and a greater sense of confidence. Sharing my art has opened new doors. Exhibiting my art has allowed me to be an advocate for persons who have disabilities and has helped to provide a new insight to the skills many people with different abilities have. I think life is a continuous Journey. As an artist I am continuously growing and learning and refining my skills and developing my style. To me, the best part of my journey is the ability to reach inside and share my insight and perspective of life through the artistic medias that give me the greatest avenues for self-expression. I am learning to expand my creative interests by painting some of the feelings in my poetry and photographing things I want to paint in the future.

Painting has helped me to develop fine motor skills including navigating proportion, space and the use of color. Painting allows me to freely express myself on a canvas. Through painting I have been able to participate in projects such as set designs for plays, or painting a group mural for an office that I might not have participated in.

Statement continues, next slide

Andrew Weatherly Statement

Writing poetry has always been a way for me to convey my deepest thoughts. Putting words onto paper is a less demanding way to reveal my thoughts and observations. When I am behind the lens of my camera, I am comfortable. Photography allows me to share events and helps to create a bridge for conversations with others. Photography helps to bring people together.

I have always enjoyed working with different art forms. Writing poetry has always been a part of me. Painting always appealed to me, although I really didn't get into it seriously until about five or six years ago. Art classes were a way to participate in the school plays and set designs and to be involved in new projects. Probably the best motivation for all of my artworks was the opportunity to express myself.

Does my disability affect my art in any way? I was born with Down Syndrome. No my art doesn't affect my disability because my artworks give me confidence in the inner me.

Jason Wellington

Age 25

Arlington, VA

Award of Excellence
\$2,000

Blood Stains 3,
archival jet print,
27" x 22"

Blood Stains 8,
archival jet print,
27" x 22"



Jason Wellington Statement

Throughout the generations of this country, our ground has been stained with blood. This blood has been spilt because of the hungriness that men have for power. Even before the foot of a European explorer touched this soil, the blood of men has flowed because of this hunger. These new settlers brought new ideals and beliefs that brought more conflict. More and more settlers came and eventually war followed. Eighty years later came one of the bloodiest civil wars ever fought on this continent. The American Civil War spread across nineteen states. An estimated 620,000 people lost their lives during the war, the most in American history.

One hundred and fifty years later, an equally personal form of warfare is on the streets of most major US cities. “Some 33,000 violent street gangs, motorcycle gangs, and prison gangs with about 1.4 million members are criminally active in the U.S. today,” reports the FBI. This is actively true in the Washington D.C. area and in other places that once were battlegrounds in the American Civil War.

In *Blood Stains*, I examine the unfortunate journey of lost and stolen innocence, forms of warfare crossing family lines, and draw parallels between the conflict that destroyed America's unity and today's more current street conflicts that threaten it. This country has a great challenge ahead of it to end this journey that has been a long and terrible. This journey has taken me to places that have deep histories that are not always seen. The battlefields of the American Civil War have become protected land and tourist attractions. Whereas, today's American battlefields go unmarked, unnoticed by all those who pass by them except for those personally affected.

For *Blood Stains*, I document gang related crime and American Civil war sites where lives were stolen or lost in Richmond, Virginia, Manassas, Virginia, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. I used a modern interpretation of the tintype process to photograph the location of the incidents. The final images are enlarged inkjet prints from the original 4"x5" images. The tintype process is a historical photographic process that was widely used during the American Civil War. By using a modern tintype process and printing the images digitally, I mimic my investigation of how gang violence is the contemporary of American Civil War.

Statement continues, next slide

Jason Wellington Statement

I started this investigation last year, but for the past four years my artwork has been focused on themes of fear, terrorism, and human conflict. These themes have been something I have been interested in since I was young. I always planned to go into criminal justice and counterterrorism, but then art changed my life. Creating art became a safe place for me where I could learn and express myself in my own way.

Growing up I was always drawn to images, mostly because I could see them. I have a visual focusing impairment. This impairment caused me to not be able to focus on or see parts of things, like text. I went through three years of visual therapy to help fix my focusing impairment, but that was not all. I also developed auditory processing and auditory memory disabilities in my childhood. I struggled through school, but art always brought me peace.

Now, my enjoyment of photography can have a negative effect on my life. The use of digital cameras and computer screens is making my eyes worse again. I am slowly undoing those three years of visual therapy by creating my art. This set back has influenced me into using large format cameras and darkroom based processes in my artwork because they relieve some stresses off of my eyes. Also, I feel a connection to the history of photography by using darkroom processes in my work. It helps me to address fast pace contemporary issues with slower historical tools. This has brought me on a journey that helps me to understand the world I live in and to live with my disabilities.