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San Dimas High School Students Win Cash Prizes for International ‘Unsung Heroes’ Art Competition

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – San Dimas High School advanced art students spent months learning about themselves as individuals and as artists as they created artworks centered on historical figures for the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes (LMC) ninth annual ARTEFFECT art competition.

Class of 2024 graduate Sophia Cabalfin and rising senior Vanessa Hoyt stood out among hundreds of submissions for their creations and were recognized on May 29 in front of classmates and family, as well as leaders from LMC Unsung Heroes and ARTEFFECT, who hosted the surprise visit over Zoom.

Every year, students in grades six through 12 are asked to explore the stories of LMC Unsung Heroes – individuals who took heroic actions to make a positive and lasting impact in their communities and on history. Students select a historical figure, then perform in-depth research to craft an original artwork as well as an artist impact statement. This year for the international competition, LMC named 20 winners across their middle and high school divisions and awarded a total of \$26,250 in cash prizes.

Cabalfin won second place in the high school category and a \$2,000 award for her depiction of Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, a Japanese American political activist whose advocacy and research played a fundamental role in securing reparations for fellow survivors of World War II internment camps.

“I wanted to choose an Asian American for representation and I knew I wanted to do watercolor because it’s my strongest medium. It’s amazing that I got this far in the competition and I’m proud as an Asian American to be selected,” Cabalfin said. “I want to thank Mr. Black, who taught me all my techniques about watercolor and other mediums, and my family for always supporting my art journey.”

Her watercolor painting, titled “Blossoming of New Life,” shows Herzig-Yoshinaga in the foreground in black and white, surrounded on both sides by pink blooming cherry blossoms. In the background is a black-and-white view of an internment camp, with an American flag and red sun centered above.

Cabalfin plans to pursue civil engineering in college, but said this project opened her eyes to continuing an arts education so that she can continue to create and learn about her culture.

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Hoyt was awarded a \$750 prize for her representation of Martin A. Couney, whose life-saving advancements in neonatal technology were displayed in carnival and amusement park sideshows. Titled “Martin A. Couney’s Show,” Hoyt’s acrylic portrait focuses on the perspective of a baby looking up at Couney. The piece was created with the colors red, white, and a gentle use of yellow to evoke the feeling of being in a large fair or circus tent.

Best known for his Infantorium at Coney Island, and for being a pioneer in neonatal technology, Couney was one of the first advocates for babies born prematurely, and his Infantoriums were later credited with saving the lives of more than 6,500 premature babies.

“I wanted to choose someone interesting and known for working with people. Couney didn’t let others stop him from his passion of helping people and I identified with that,” Hoyt said. “It means a lot to win. I can’t believe it and didn’t think something like this would ever happen.”

Hoyt said she plans to continue exploring art and is considering it as a field of study in college.

Along with the cash prize, the artists will have their work featured on the LMC website, and the top award-winning pieces will be displayed in the LMC Hall of Unsung Heroes in Fort Scott, Kansas, and will be featured in future exhibitions.

“We are grateful to the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes and ARTEFFECT for recognizing our outstanding student artists and encouraging them to continue on the path of learning and creating,” San Dimas High School art teacher Dominic Black said. “Students were able to not only learn about important historical figures but they also learned more about themselves through this multidisciplinary project. I am incredibly proud of the work my students created and their passion for their subjects.”

PHOTOS:

BUSD_UNsung_HEROES1: San Dimas High School graduate Sophia Cabalfin (left) and rising senior Vanessa Hoyt (right) were recognized on May 29 for their award-winning submissions for the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes (LMC) ninth annual ARTEFFECT art competition.

BUSD_UNsung_HEROES2: Cabalfin’s watercolor painting, titled “Blossoming of New Life,” depicts Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, a Japanese American political activist whose advocacy and research played a fundamental role in securing reparations for fellow survivors of World War II internment camps.

BUSD_UNsung_HEROES3: Hoyt’s acrylic portrait features Martin A. Couney, whose life-saving advancements in neonatal technology were displayed in carnival and amusement park sideshows.

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