



Press Release

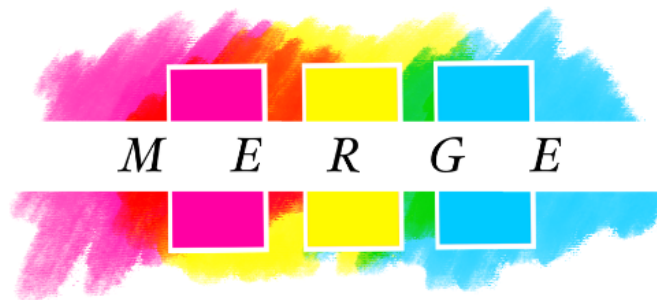
RELEASE:

FOR

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Presents



VSA Emerging Young Artists 2021

Visual Art Exhibition featuring 15 Emerging Artists with Disabilities to Tour Nationally

(WASHINGTON)—VSA, the Kennedy Center’s international organization on arts and disability, will present artwork by 15 emerging young artists with disabilities from across the country in a national touring exhibition, which will visit three to five sites between now and the end of 2022. Titled Merge, the tour kicks off in Washington, D.C. at the Volkswagen Headquarters and is presented through generous support from Volkswagen Group of America.

The 2021 VSA Emerging Young Artists Competition, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability Program of the Kennedy Center, drew submissions from talented young artists with disabilities, ages 16-25, from around the U.S. This year's theme, Merge, around which the artists were challenged to create work, explores uniting paths and asks what we can learn when it all comes together. The call invited artists to consider the intersections and combinations of their creative process and disability identity. In art, the juxtaposition of ideas can blur distinctions or reveal something new.

"These young artists challenge us to see the world through their lived experiences with disabilities. Their work sparks dialogue and examination of who we are and, hopefully, will ignite understanding around creative and identity," said Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility of the Kennedy Center. "We thank Volkswagen Group of America for their 20 years of support. We look forward to seeing the impact these 15 young artists and their work will have on bringing us all together."

2021 marks the 20th year of the program in which VSA's Emerging Artists Competition challenges young artists with disabilities to demonstrate their talents and skills across visual arts genres. The winners receive a total of \$60,000 in cash awards as well as national recognition via the exhibition, which will travel to museums and galleries as part of a one-year national tour. The artists will gather virtually throughout Fall 2021 to build a peer network, share and learn from each other as well as from alumni and other noted artists with disabilities. These moments of artist-to-artists engagement not only builds practical knowledge-but further develops the skills necessary to have a thriving careers as artists. In January 2022, the artists will travel to Washington, DC to meet in person, participate in professional learning intensives, and collectively celebrate their work with the community.

"Volkswagen Group's steadfast support of the VSA Emerging Young Artists Program over the past 20 years has helped emerging artists with disabilities build the foundation for successful careers. This year's exhibition theme, Merge, brings together a cross-cutting group of artists working across media, merging 2D and 3D forms, and creating exciting juxtapositions." said

Anna Schneider, Senior Vice President, Industry-Government Relations. “These artists invite us all to consider what new ideas might emerge from blending perspectives. I am both proud and excited to see their award-winning work in our Washington Office after the Capitol Hill debut, and for the opportunities the national tour will create for each artists and their career.”

Artists

Moriah Faith, age 22, of Black Forest, CO won the \$20,000 Grand Prize for Tough Love. An expressive figurative painter, currently working out of Boston, she draws inspiration for her striking and confronting self-portraits from her daily reality of living with a painful chronic illness. She actively shows and sells her art both locally and internationally. Notably in 2020, her piece “Tough Love,” received an international award for “representational excellence.” She works as a studio assistant and mentor for developmentally disabled individuals and in addition currently teaches private lessons and workshops remotely from her home studio. Currently she is developing a new body of work and has aspirations to attend grad school after further establishing herself within her local community. She believes all people should have access to art regardless of socioeconomic class, so this year she is pursuing the development of several public art projects. She is excited about ideas for future exhibitions highlighting the unique and often untold perspectives of chronically ill and disabled individuals.

Panteha Abareshi, age 22, of Tucson, AZ, won the \$10,000 First Prize for Methods of Care for the Precarious Body. Abareshi’s work is rooted in their existence as a chronically ill/disabled body with multiple medical illnesses and resulting disabilities, at the root of which is sickle cell zero beta thalassemia- a genetic blood disorder that causes debilitating pain, and bodily deterioration that increases with age Through this work Abareshi discusses the complexities of living within a body that is highly monitored, constantly examined, and made to feel like a specimen. Abareshi aims to make the viewer hyperaware of their own body, and actively employ accessibility as a tool, both withholding and over-extending it as a means of casting light onto the ill/disabled experience. These works speak to the ableism that is pervasive in language, behavior, and media that have and continue to persist today. Abareshi’s practice revolves around disrupting and appropriating traditional, comfortable ideas of identity, illness, disability, reassessing the diseased, malfunctioning and othered body as a phenomenon neither “natural” nor “unnatural,” but rather fundamentally human— an inevitable object of life.

May Ling Kopecky, age 26, of Plymouth, MN took the \$6,000 Second Prize for Welcome Back and Double Vision. Kopecky’s work is influenced by her experiences with pediatric-onset Multiple Sclerosis (MS). She experienced her first clear MS symptoms when she was thirteen and was diagnosed at fifteen. Due to her young age and the “invisible” nature of MS, Kopecky was often met with skepticism while talking about her illness. This is what prompted her to start creating artwork about MS. Paintings like Welcome Back document her personal relationship with medical spaces and share how places once perceived as frightening can grow to feel familiar. Kopecky is also working on a series of paintings that visualize how she sees the world while suffering from various MS symptoms, such as Double Vision. Her goal is to spread MS awareness through her work and advocate for those with

invisible illnesses. Kopecky received a BFA from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, and is currently pursuing an MFA at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design.

The following artists will receive an Award of Excellence in the amount of \$2,000:

- Sky Dai, 24, Columbus, OH
- Jasina Yu, 16, Lexington, KY
- Mia Neill, 18, Sandy, UT
- Dominic Killiany, 23, Watertown, MA
- MJ Cooper, 17, Blacklick, OH
- James Lee, 17, Hillsborough, CA
- Maya Milton, 26, Seattle, WA
- Maiya Hartman, 25, Minneapolis, MN
- Mike Cannata, 24, Geneva, IL
- Taylor Koedyker, 27, La Verne, CA
- Joshua Ben-Dylan, 23, New York, NY
- Miranda Chao, 25, Seattle, WA

The winners were selected by a jury of noted art professionals, including Jen White-Johnson, designer, educator, and activist; Xang Mimi Ho, fashion photographer and professor of Art at George Mason University and Emerging Young Artists Program alum; Darryl DeAngelo Terrell, artist, curator, and organizer, and Emerging Young Artists Program alum; Tabitha Jacques, Director of the Dyer Arts Center at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at Rochester Institute of Technology; Gordon Sasaki, artist and educator; Madelyn Covey, Youth Program Coordinator at Creative Growth; and Makeba Dixon-Hill, curator, connector, and advocate.

FUNDING CREDITS:

The VSA Emerging Young Artists Program is sponsored by Volkswagen Group of America, Inc.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF VSA AND ACCESSIBILITY AT THE KENNEDY CENTER

The Kennedy Center has been at the forefront of making the performing arts accessible to persons with disabilities. Serving the international disability and arts community, the Office of VSA and Accessibility, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program, provides opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages across the globe to learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. The Office focuses its efforts on cultural access for patrons and visitors with disabilities; arts and special education initiatives; professional development for educators and cultural administrators; and career

opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. For more information, please visit <http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/#Access>.

ABOUT EDUCATION AT THE KENNEDY CENTER

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts sets a national standard for arts learning. Working through model programs and a nationwide network of partners, the nation's cultural center harnesses the power of the arts to address education challenges, accelerate best practices, and uplift citizen artists. Across all its programs, the Kennedy Center is committed to increasing accessible, inclusive opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in, learn about, and learn through the arts. New York Times best-selling author and illustrator Mo Willems serves as the Center's first-ever Education Artist-in-Residence. Throughout his two-year residency, Willems will invite kids and former kids into the creative process with original productions and hands-on, interactive moments. On September 7, 2019, the Kennedy Center opened the REACH, an immersive arts and learning center with significant space and programming for arts education.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center's Education programs utilize the arts to embrace President Kennedy's ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude. By cultivating the citizen artist in everyone, the Kennedy Center brings the arts and creativity to the center of our lives. For more information, please visit kennedy-center.org/education/.

ABOUT VOLKSWAGEN GROUP OF AMERICA, INC.

Volkswagen Group of America, Inc. is a wholly owned subsidiary of Volkswagen AG, one of the world's leading automobile manufacturers and the largest carmaker in Europe. It operates a manufacturing plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee and houses the U.S. operations of a worldwide family of distinguished and exciting brands including Audi, Bentley, Bugatti, Lamborghini and Volkswagen, as well as VW Credit, Inc.

Founded in 1955, the company's headquarters are in Herndon, VA, Volkswagen Group of America brings vehicles to the U.S. that marry the science of engineering and the art of styling, with the goal of offering attractive, safe, and eco-conscious automobiles that are competitive and set world standards in their respective classes. The company has approximately 6,000 employees in the United States and sells its vehicles through a 1,000-strong dealer network.

For more information, please visit the Kennedy Center [website](#).

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PRESS CONTACT:

Chanel Williams
The Kennedy Center
(202) 416-8447

cpwilliams@kennedy-center.org