



VSA
Emerging
Young
Artists
Program
2019

Connected



VSA
The Kennedy Center

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A Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability Program



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Contents

Introduction	3
About VSA	3
The Artists	4
Exhibition Jurors.....	34
Credits.....	38

Connected

Connected is the 18th exhibition presented by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts as part of the VSA Emerging Young Artists Program. This juried competition and national touring exhibition displays work from fifteen artists with disabilities at the beginning of their careers. Each individual talent, mode of expression, and view of the world broadens our dialogue about disability and the arts.

This year's theme asks artists to connect, to span new distances, and to see unexpected relationships. When is connection, or disconnection, most needed? What roads lead us there? Overlapping stories and interrelated ideas can overwhelm or can create important new discoveries. These artworks resonate deeply and spark greater understanding of our connected lives.

The Kennedy Center

About the VSA Emerging Young Artists Program

Since 2002, the Kennedy Center and Volkswagen Group of America have presented the VSA Emerging Young Artists Program to recognize and showcase the work of emerging young artists living with disabilities, ages 16-25, who are currently residing in the United States. This collaboration creates opportunities for these artists at a critical time when many are choosing to pursue arts-based careers. VSA and Volkswagen are committed to investing in the future of young artists living with disabilities.

Every year, emerging young artists living with disabilities compete to be included in the national exhibition. After a rigorous adjudication process, 15 winning artists share a total of \$60,000 in awards. The artists also participate in professional development workshops at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The resulting exhibition tours for one year around the United States.

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hand model, 2018
Video, 1:47

Michelle Miles

Charlottesville, Virginia • Age 22
Grand Prize

Michelle Miles's recent work demonstrates an interest in how we conceal and reveal aspects of our identities, specifically through signifiers of disability — in this piece, using her own hands, atrophied from a neuromuscular condition. She first explored the images and fantasies of her own personal experiences, and then began an investigation of a new way to represent disability in conversation with the symbols, colors, and gestures of classical art, where positive representations of disability are largely absent.

The film *hand model* accentuates how the limp nature of her gestures and the contortions she uses to grip objects all tend to reference the hands found frequently in Renaissance-era paintings. In the film, she uses objects that symbolize beauty, femininity, or sexuality, positioning disability in realms where it is traditionally excluded.

Miles graduated from the University of Virginia in May of 2019, and works as the Access and Inclusive Education Intern for the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



“In addition to art-making, I’m studying how art-viewing spaces can be made inclusive of viewers with a wide range of disabilities.”



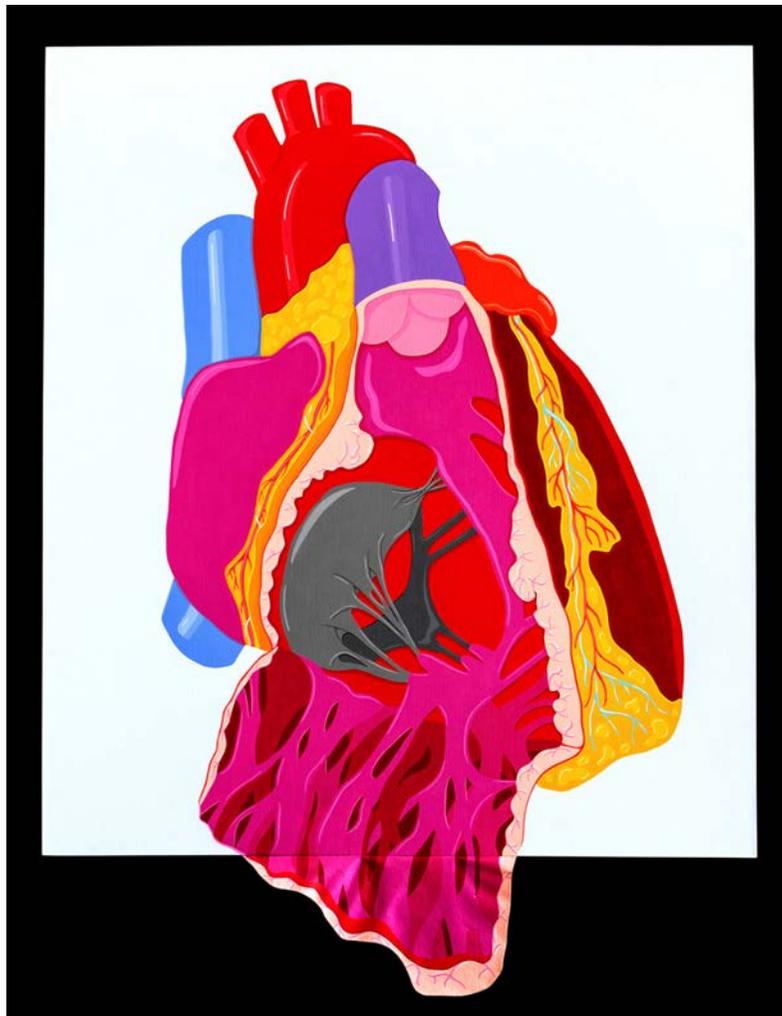
Savannah Magnolia

Tampa, Florida • Age 23
First Prize

With a background in the health sciences, laboratory precision, and the hidden physiology of the body, Magnolia's work merges science with art. Instead of depicting this combination as stoic medical textbook illustrations, she re-presents anatomy through stylized forms, hyper-saturated colors, and precise technical execution without using tape or stencils to create shapes. Creating these paintings has helped her embrace life with an autoimmune disorder by illustrating that diseases are often invisible on the surface. She explores the role that medicine can play in art and that art can subsequently play in medicine by addressing both the positive and negative aspects of healthcare. She hopes to have a successful career as a painter, to secure gallery representation, and she continue to spark conversations about the convergence of art and science.

Savannah Magnolia received a BFA from Ringling College of Art and Design. She works as a studio artist in Tampa, Florida.

“Creating these paintings has helped me embrace my personal experience and start conversations with others about our collective health.”



After Getting Your Heart Ripped Out, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 56" x 42"



Daveed Baptiste

Brooklyn, New York • Age 22
Second Prize

Daveed was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and immigrated to North Miami, Florida when he was nine years old. In this photo series, he examines the social dynamics within the Haitian American home by constructing sets of intimate living spaces and positioning both black and Haitian Americans in these re-imagined realities. The sets are built by collecting and rearranging material elements that construct the Haitian identity, symbolizing financial status, choice, and personality.

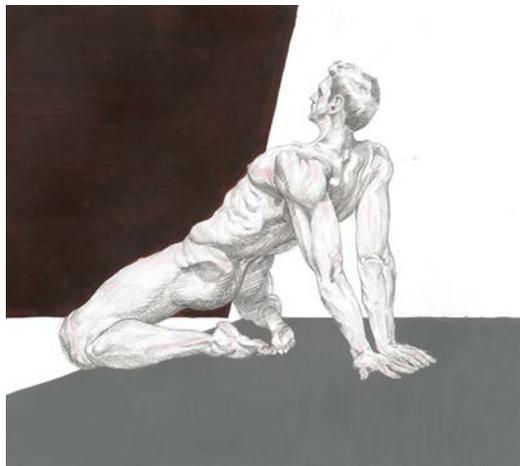
As a child, Baptiste remembers his parents understanding his attention difficulties, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness as “bad manners” and “misbehavior” that often resulted in physical discipline. *Hood Dandy* aims to relate these frustrations through the home’s interior and the subject’s face.

Currently Baptiste is creating a cross-disciplinary project for his final year at Parsons School of Design. He will graduate in 2020.

“My cognitive disability does not live on its own; it intersects with the dynamic structures that makes up my, queer, black, male, and Haitian American identity. In my work, I try to tell the whole narrative, and not just a fractured part of it.”



Hood Dandy, 2018
Photography, 26" x 36"



*Dynamic Dance Series:
Full Body Stretch;
Never Again;
Love Even, 2019*
Graphite, acrylic, and pastel on paper, 11" x 14"

Jesus Miguel Avena

Santa Fe, New Mexico • Age 21
Award of Excellence

Jesus Avena has practiced art since the age of eight. He finds influences all around him, specifically in changing human and facial forms. He has a passion for depicting foreshortening, proportions, anatomical structures, and expression and movement of the human form in all its complexity.

Avena's artwork is about human expression with an emphasis on "visual gestalt," or small parts making up a meaningful whole. This series, representing a complicated relationship, uses dynamic dances, movement, and human expression, to convey ideas and stories through performance. Avena describes his learning disability as playing a major role in his artistic practice, but not reflecting in his finished artwork. It allows for a greater outlet of meticulous and articulate self-expression.

Avena aspires to continue broadening his knowledge of the arts and currently attends Santa Fe Community College where he studies painting and drawing.



"I use my own way of communicating to inform, persuade, and entertain my audience. It's all either poetic, tragic, interconnected, romanticized, or an intermixture of emotions and concepts."



Goodnight, Travel Well, 2018
Colored pencil on paper, 30" x 40"

Timothy Bair

New York, New York • Age 22
Award of Excellence

Timothy Bair's paintings and drawings examine how knowledge and biases are developed. In *Goodnight, Travel Well*, fragile porcelain vases and polished silver jugs sit serenely on the table, despite the background displaying a tragic aftermath of a plane wreck. In our contemporary age, the barrage of information can remove and distract us from the immediacy of events and crises. Bair has a motor neuron disease and uses a wheelchair, prompting an interest in how "subjectivity and biases are formulated." Bair's work questions this using clashing and juxtaposed color, form, and subjects. These contradicting attributes attempt to disorient the viewer and allow them to review the structures that form their prejudice.

Bair moved to New York from Taiwan in 2015 and he is a recent graduate from the BFA program at The School of Visual Arts.



"My curiosity [in misperception] stems primarily from my use of a wheelchair. Being extremely private, I soon became aware of the rumors regarding my disability that often circulated, like some larger, more socially extensive game of telephone."





Bleeding Out, 2018
Photography, 30" x 40"

Aurora Berger

South Strafford, Vermont • Age 24
Award of Excellence

Aurora Berger uses her photography to navigate the frameworks of capacity and disability. As an artist with physical and visual disability, her work is a reflection of how she sees the world. Photography is visible, but as an invisibly disabled artist Berger is constantly searching for the edges of photography's vision. Using her camera as an intermediary, Berger creates self-portraits and visual environments. *Bleeding Out* comes from a series of durational works made in 2018, in the forest surrounding her childhood home in rural Vermont. At the beginning of the summer, she placed seventeen black and white photographic fabric prints of her body in the forest, and documented over the next three months as they slowly disintegrated. As time passed, these self-portraits changed from pristine blacks and whites to faded browns and greys. Wind battered, rain soaked, edges frayed and coated in pine sap, the work finally felt complete. Berger's work investigates the concepts of normalcy, disability, agency, visual acuity, and interpretation. Her works consider inhabiting spaces, perceiving surroundings, and above all, the process of survival.

Berger holds an MFA from Claremont Graduate University, as well as a BFA and BA in Art Education from Prescott College.



“My hope with my work is not to inspire awe or grief but to present and document my identity as I continue to process it.”





6:14 pm (5:01 Series), 2016
Red striking matches
on mat board, 21" x 21" x 2"

Rora Blue

San Francisco, California • Age 23
Award of Excellence

Rora Blue is a conceptual artist based in California. Her artwork features color, text, and interactivity. She relies heavily on color to communicate a feeling to the viewer. Participation and documenting the experiences of others is also essential to her artistic process.

Over Christmas of 2015, Rora Blue cared for her sick mother who was suffering from late stage Lyme disease. Her mother's fever reached 104 and they were not sure she would survive. Weeks later Rora was diagnosed with the same disease she was watching her mother fight.

During that time Rora Blue kept a journal to track her mother's fever. She would write down her temperature and the time of day. Sometimes, she would also write down the first thought that popped into her head. *6:14 PM* presents one of those phrases, "I'm here if you need me," crafted from thousands of striking matches. The piece is created to be destroyed, set on fire at its corresponding time.

Rora Blue's work has been featured in news outlets such as *The New York Times*, *Good Morning America*, *Teen Vogue*, and *Cosmopolitan*. She is currently studying at the San Francisco Art Institute.



"I have never created art because I wanted to. I do it because I feel that I have to."





Malcolm Corley

Lancaster, Pennsylvania • Age 20
Award of Excellence

Malcolm Corley creates art because it makes him happy. He started drawing at the age of three after sketching what he saw on television. At the same age he was diagnosed with Autism, and today Corley has limited verbal language. His artwork features areas of heightened focus and other areas, seemingly neglected, that all come together to create balance and cadence. *Untitled #1* began with two of Corley's favorite photographs of himself, combined with images of plants he found and printed. Corley then selected aspects from the photographs to cut and collage together. The resulting photo collage became his starting point for this painting. He selected some areas to emphasize the detail and other areas to delete some aspects from the collage. The canvas appears where he avoided color altogether to create the final composition.

Corley is in his final year at Hempfield High School. He completed the requirements for graduation in 2018, however he has remained in school to receive further art and skills instruction.

“Malcolm draws and paints what he sees. He pays very close attention to detail. He wants people to feel very happy when they see his art.”

– Corley's teacher, with input from Corley



Untitled #1, 2019
Acrylic on canvas, 48" x 30.5"



Lorenzo DiAndrea

Bound Brook, New Jersey • Age 22
Award of Excellence



**“Lorenzo’s work reflects
his innate ability to spread
joy and generosity”**

–DiAndrea’s family

Lorenzo DiAndrea, a printmaker, painter, and weaver, centers his work on explorations of color, pattern, and composition. DiAndrea uses the creative process to navigate the world with ingenuity and persistence. He was born with spine and chest anomalies that led to over 30 surgical procedures. As a person who prioritizes gestural and visual communication, DiAndrea’s work allows him to share his human experience, while opening pathways for connection between people and places. He frequently uses repetition in his artwork, with select elements of variation and detail. The layers of his monoprints offer a reminder that everyday patterns accumulate into life sustaining relationships and memories.

DiAndrea’s future goals include continuing his exploration of the creative process and leveraging opportunities for his work to advance the social narrative of disability. His developmental, medical, and creative journey provides an opportunity for others to better understand the thinking and actions that work toward inclusive ecosystems.



Monoprint 8 The Grande Collection, 12" x 14 1/2"
Monoprint 27 The Grande Collection, 12" x 14 1/2"
Monoprint 56 The Frontline Collection, 8" x 9"
Silkscreen monoprints on paper, 2019



Pill-ows, 2019
106 crafted objects, Dimensions vary

Libby Evan

Albany, New York • Age 21
Award of Excellence

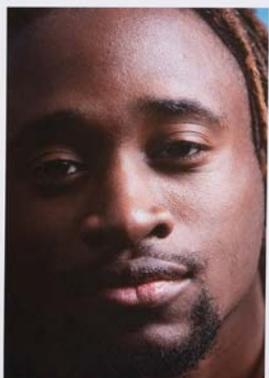
Libby Evan is a multimedia artist who explores the significant objects in her daily life while living with chronic fatigue syndrome and severe arthritis. One constant motif she explores is a fascination with pills. *Pill-ows* expresses pills' ability to provide security and function while also creating dependency. The overwhelming accumulation makes comfort objects suddenly feel uncomfortable. The humorous title and whimsical, child-like patterns coexist with a sense of pain. Evan has days when she must stay among the pillows on her bed due to pain and exhaustion. The hidden nature of her disability gives her the opportunity to pass as able-bodied, while she is still dependent on a pile of pills each day. Approachable and often tongue-in-cheek, Evan's art about her disability connects people to new ideas as she makes her invisible disability visible.

Evan is currently pursuing a BFA in Studio Art with a minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Art at Washington University in St. Louis. She will graduate in 2020.



“My art about my disability is not exclusionary, but rather connects people to new ideas as I celebrate the objects and accessories that allow me to create my own connections.”





To Feel is To Be Weakened, 2019
Photography, 27" x 31"

Courtney Lowry

Baltimore, Maryland • Age 22
Award of Excellence

Courtney Lowry's photography seeks to empower the silenced voices of marginalized people, particularly those in the black community. Lowry has psoriatic arthritis, a condition that causes joint pain, inflammation, and skin sores. Alongside the physical pain, Lowry also copes with anxiety and depression as psoriasis takes a toll on her mental health. When Lowry was in high school, she watched her hometown catch fire in response to the harsh realities of police brutality at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement after the death of Freddie Gray. She decided to use her camera as a platform for activism. *The Last Boys* series showcases and embraces black male vulnerability. Lowry captures a fresh intimacy as she connects with her subjects, presenting a softer side to black men not typically seen in the community or the media. While each man is photographed separately, they are all bonded by sensitivity. The featured piece *To Feel is to Be Weakened* features Vaughn Akira and Bayete Chinwendu.

Lowry received a BFA in Photography from the The Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta, GA, and works as a photography assistant in Maryland.



“Sharing the stories of others and humanizing my subjects gave me a sense of purpose and confidence that I'd lost after being diagnosed.”





Blue Glasses; Static; Unwelcome, 2018
Digital illustrations, 11" x 17"

Meghan McDunnah

Bar Harbor, Maine • Age 21
Award of Excellence

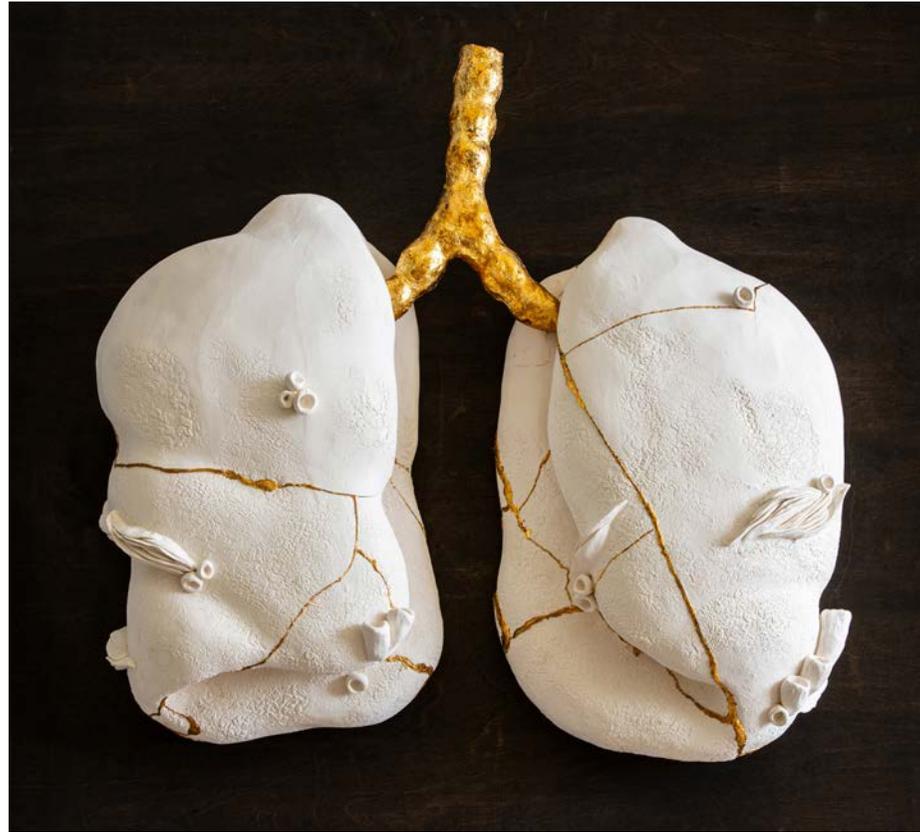
Meghan McDunnah is a multi-disciplinary illustrator who seeks to communicate important ideas and complex emotions using accessible, compelling imagery. They are passionate about creating illustrations that say what words cannot, reaching their audience on an emotional level in unexpected and eloquent ways. This series of self-portraits serves as a visual representation of their various mental illnesses and disorders. *Blue Glasses* hopes to communicate the dulled and subdued perception of the world that comes with chronic depression; *Unwelcome* shows a struggle with intrusive and upsetting thoughts that come with severe anxiety and ADHD; *Static* represents a state of shut-down that accompanies the panic attacks, numbness and sensory overload that result as a combination of their diagnoses.

McDunnah grew up in Bar Harbor, Maine, and is currently residing in Portland, Maine, where they have recently graduated from the Maine College of Art with their BFA in Illustration, with honors.



“It is my hope that these illustrations of my own experiences might also ring true for others.”





Beautiful Brokenness, 2019
Ceramic, 34" x 36" x 7"

Julia O'Bryan

Taylor, Texas • Age 22
Award of Excellence

Julia O'Bryan speaks about the passage of time through her ceramic sculpture. Her work develops from her experiences living with an aggressive autoimmune disease. In *Beautiful Brokenness*, coral growing out of the organic forms reflects the beauty that can be seen through decay, like the destructive impacts in O'Bryan's lungs and body created by her own immune system. Her work portrays the beauty that is found in the brokenness that can occur throughout life. She hopes that her work will be a light to others and will show them you can overcome any difficulty. She draws inspiration from contemporary artists such as Jennifer McCurdy, Claire Prenton, and Kate MacDowell.

O'Bryan is currently finishing her Bachelor of Arts at Southwestern University, focusing in ceramics and sculpture, and plans to complete her Masters in Archeology.



“I will continue to create and I hope to connect with others through my work and to meet new people in similar circumstances in order to give them hope and joy through the work that I create.”





“Much of my work is highly theatrical, as I often treat my camera as a stage: composing and building evocative narratives and scenes.”

Lexie Peterson

**Milwaukee, Wisconsin • Age 21
Award of Excellence**

Lexie Peterson is a photographer who utilizes her camera as a means of healing. Peterson is a survivor of domestic abuse and lives with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Much of her work confronts her trauma, her diagnosis, and her symptoms. *Attached and Detached* explores her experience with episodes of dissociation, a symptom that is difficult to describe. In a dissociative episode, often brought on by feelings of intense vulnerability, Peterson sometimes feels as though she becomes a passenger within her body, as opposed to the driver, disconnecting from reality but still remaining present. *Attached and Detached* provides a visual representation of this intangible experience.

Peterson is pursuing her BFA in Photography at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). She has started working with other survivors to empower one another, share stories, and create imagery to help each other reclaim their bodies and celebrate their journeys.



Attached and Detached (6 of 10), 2018
Photography, 20" x 30"

Exhibition Jurors



Kayleigh Bryant-Greenwell

Kayleigh Bryant-Greenwell, is a Washington, D.C. native and cultural programmer with over 10 years of GLAM experience [Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums], devoted to exploring ways to cultivate marginalized audiences through art, museum, and social justice practice. As a DEAI [diversity, equity, accessibility, inclusion] facilitator, she is a contributor to national initiatives towards increasing equity and inclusion in museums. In her role as Head of Public Programs with Smithsonian American Art Museum and the Renwick Gallery she is responsible for an extensive calendar of programs across two museums. She has previously worked for the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, and the David C. Driskell Center, among other cultural organizations. She currently serves on the Board of Washington Project for the Arts, in Washington, D.C.



Brandon Cordrey

Brandon Cordrey is the Executive Director and ADA Coordinator for VAE Raleigh in Downtown Raleigh, North Carolina and the recipient of the 2017 John F. Kennedy Center LEAD Emerging Leader Award. He has worked in accessibility for the past seven years. Prior to you his time at VAE he worked as the Program and Development Director for Arts Access, a statewide organization focused on the intersection of arts and accessibility, and the VSA affiliate for North Carolina. He has provided training and consultation services to a wide range of cultural arts organizations across North Carolina. Brandon works with VAE's exhibit and program staff to view all of the organization's programming through an accessibility lens. In his time with the organization accessibility for all VAE events has increased through better web information, the introduction of accessibility guide for events and programs, community outreach efforts, and by bringing more people with disabilities into the discussion about accommodations provided.



Amanda Cachia

Amanda Cachia has curated over 40 exhibitions, many of which focus on disability politics in contemporary art. She is an Assistant Professor of Art History at Moreno Valley College in Riverside, California. She completed her PhD in Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the University of California, San Diego, in spring 2017. Her exhibition *Automatisme Ambulatoire: Hysteria, Imitation, Performance* opened at the Owens Art Gallery at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick in Fall 2019.



Carol Rhodes Dyson

Carol Rhodes Dyson is a graduate of Howard University in Art History with over 30 years' experience as an art administrator, educator and curator for museums, galleries, cultural institutions and alternative spaces in Washington, D.C.; Baltimore, MD and Kansas City, MO. Carol completed an MFA in Curatorial Practice from Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD, in May, 2017. She currently serves as the Curator in Residence for all locations of Busboys and Poets, a progressive restaurant and alternative arts space. Most recently, Carol founded "Social Impact Arts Collective," a non-profit organization providing curatorial and educational services for underserved communities.

Exhibition Jurors



Xang Mimi Ho

Xang Mimi Ho is a fashion photographer in Virginia area as well as an adjunct professor at George Mason University. Ho received her Bachelor of Fine Art from George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, and her Master of Fine Art from the Maryland Institute College of Arts, Baltimore, Maryland. Her artwork explores themes of identity and social issues. Ho is a 2005 VSA Emerging Young Artists Program First Place winner, and participated in the 2015 Emerging Young Artists program retrospective exhibit *Focus Forward* at the Kennedy Center. She is a practicing fashion photographer, and her photographs are included in two published books; *Portrait from The Pike: A Celebration of Community* and *Living Diversity: The Columbia Pike Documentary Project*.



Hanna Lee

Hanna Lee is an art educator with an extensive background in teaching people of all ages who have disabilities. She has her Masters in Art Education with an Emphasis in Special Populations from Moore College of Art & Design and is currently pursuing a second Masters in Art Therapy at Drexel University. She is a passionate advocate for using the arts to provide a variety of supports for underserved populations, and has spoken on this topic through organizations such as the National Art Educators Association, the Office of VSA and Accessibility at the Kennedy Center, and the International Conference on Disability Studies, Arts, and Education. Despite (or perhaps due to) having a visual impairment, she explores seen and unseen worlds in her own art practice through media such as watercolors, fabric, printmaking, and clay.



Mikaela Jaros

Mikaela Jaros is a high school art teacher at Timber Creek High School in Fort Worth, Texas. After receiving her BFA and Art Education Certification from West Virginia University she continued her education at Moore College of Art and Design, earning a Master in Art Education with a Specialization in Special Populations degree. Ms. Jaros is a regional director of the Visual Arts Scholastic Event in Texas and also sponsors her school's National Art Honor Society. At Timber Creek High School she teaches Art I, AP Art History and Partners in Art; a course she developed, implemented and designed specifically for students with special needs. The course has since been introduced across all high school and middle school campuses in her school district. Mikaela Jaros is continuing her education at the University of North Texas and is currently pursuing a PhD in Art Education; a degree with which she intends to advocate for the fine arts on a professional platform.



Isaac Powell

Isaac Powell is a graduate of the MFA program at Washington State University who teaches painting and drawing as Associate Professor at Eastern Kentucky University. Powell interweaves the themes of life, growth, reproduction, and creativity with those of his own personal history in his still life depictions. Having been born without a right hand, the flora in his work directly references the body, its appendages and digits. By addressing his own anxieties through the imagery of plant cuttings and graftings, he has developed his own vocabulary for confronting both awkwardness and beauty. Powell's work has been exhibited recently at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C., as well as the prestigious Armory Show in New York City. In addition, his work was awarded First Prize in VSA's 2004 Driving Force exhibition and the following year was awarded Grand Prize in VSA's 2005 Revealing Culture exhibition.



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 arts and special education initiatives; accessibility services for patrons and visitors with disabilities; professional development for educators and cultural administrators; and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities.

Office of VSA and Accessibility staff who contributed to this program include:

Betty Siegel, *Director, VSA and Accessibility*

Stephanie Litvak, *Manager, VSA Programs*

Nicole Smith, *Assistant Manager, VSA Membership*

Katharine Mead, *VSA Programmer*



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Founded in 1955, the company's headquarters are in Herndon, Virginia. 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 8,500 employees in the United States and sells its vehicles through a 1,000-strong dealer network.



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