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The Kennedy Center

Press Release

VSA

presents

Electrify!

Visual Art Exhibition featuring
15 Emerging Artists with Disabilities to Tour Nationally,
October 25, 2017–September 30, 2018

(WASHINGTON)—VSA, the Kennedy Center’s international organization on arts and
disability, will present artwork by 15 emerging young artists with disabilities, ages 21 to
25, in a traveling exhibition. Titled Electrify!, this year-long national tour kicks off in
Washington, D.C. at the Rayburn House Office Building on October 25, 2017, and is
presented through generous support from Volkswagen Group of America.

The 2017 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 from around the U.S. This year’s theme, around which the artists
were challenged to create work, was to excite our senses, awaken our curiosity and
electrify our very being. The winners, selected from a pool of hundreds of applicants,
were chosen for their artistic quality, proficiency and enlightening or compelling
interpretations of the theme.

“These young artists challenge us to see the world from a different point of view, and
through their personal lens. Their work will spark debate and conversation, and
ultimately ignite understanding,” said Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility
of the Kennedy Center. “We thank Volkswagen Group of America for their continued
support in making this possible. We look forward to seeing the impact these 15 young artists and their work will have on invoking unity and inclusivity across the nation.”

2017 marks the 16th 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. As part of their award package, the winners also receive all-expense paid travel to Washington, D.C. for three days of educational events and seminars October 24–27, 2017, including a reception at the Rayburn House Office Building on October 25, 2017. Over the three days, the artists will convene at the Kennedy Center for a series of professional development workshops, which will provide skill-building and practical knowledge-sharing opportunities to support career growth. Volkswagen Group of America has supported the program through funds and board support since 2002. Additionally, the company will display the art in its Herndon, Virginia headquarters for employees and visitors to view as part of the national tour.

David Geanacopoulos, Senior Executive Vice President for Public Affairs and Policy of Volkswagen Group of America, remarked, “We are thrilled to once again support VSA’s Emerging Young Artist Competition, the program not only empowers young artists but it inspires our entire company. The program combines art and culture while advocating for diversity and inclusion, all values that Volkswagen Group of America promotes throughout the organization.”

**Trinity Kai**, age 25, of Little Rock, Arkansas won the $20,000 Grand Prize for *Insight*, a work of gum bichromate over palladium. Born with oculocutaneous albinism, a genetic condition that results in poor vision and over-sensitivity to light, Kai turns the camera on herself to create images that speak to spirituality, identity, and feelings of alienation. She prints her images using 19th-century photographic processes to impart a luminous painterly quality that complements the electrifying quiet of Kai’s
gaze. Kai received a B.F.A. from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and is currently pursuing an M.F.A. in photography at University of North Texas in Denton, Texas.

**Summer Mason**, age 22, born and raised Los Angeles, California, won the $10,000 First Prize for *Copper*, a digital short film. In the work, dancers float in and out of focus in a kaleidoscope of color and movement in an intimate interpretation of black experiences and narratives throughout America. Each of the film’s five acts correspond to Mason’s exploration of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Mason, who has bipolar disorder, wrote *Copper* over a series of manic depressive episodes, and hopes to shift the current focus on black experience from a place of brutality and violence to a place of healing and artistic freedom. Mason earned a bachelor’s degree in film and media studies at University of California, Berkeley.

**Haley Macherone**, age 23, of Portland, Maine took the $6,000 Second Prize for *Hold for Inspection*, a mixed media sculpture. A graduate of the Maine College of Art, her work is informed by her investigations into her identity as an artist with Tourette Syndrome. Her sculptures blend memories with fiction, delving into her childhood with a mix of humor, uncertainty, and wonder.

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

- Brianna Beck, Chicago, Illinois, age 25
- Taylor Bielecki, Royersford, Pennsylvania, age 23
- Kevin Quiles Bonilla, San Juan, Puerto Rico, age 25
- Rein Brooks, St. Louis Park, Minnesota, age 23
- Marieke Davis, Gilbert, Arizona, age 24
- Rowan Diloia, Santa Barbara, California, age 22
- Blythe Gurche, Trumansburg, New York, age 22
- Carly Mandel, Brooklyn, New York age 25
- Jillian Santora, Chicago, Illinois, age 25
- Kendall Schauder, Chicago, Illinois, age 23
- Becca Schwartz, Richmond, Virginia, age 22
- Esther Woo, Coppell, Texas, age 21
The winners were selected by a jury of noted art professionals, including artist Saul C. Chernick; Makeba Dixon-Hill, Curator of Education at Spelman College Museum; Justus Harris, artist at the School of Art Institute of Chicago; Xang Mimi Ho, Professor of Art at George Washington University; Tabitha Jacques, Director of the Dyer Arts Center at the Rochester Institute of Technology’s National Technical Institute for the Deaf; Nandini Makrandi, Senior Curator at the Hunter Museum of American Art; Jackie Milad, Assistant Director for Fine Art at the Maryland Institute College of Art; Isaac Powell, Professor of Art at Eastern Kentucky University; Gordon Sasaki, artist at the Wynn Newhouse Foundation; and Sarah Tanguy, Senior Curator at the State Department.

**IMAGES:**
https://spaces.highlight.com/receive/o4Z1mZsdQs

**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 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. For more information, please visit [http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/#Access](http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/#Access).

**ABOUT EDUCATION AT THE KENNEDY CENTER**
The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is the national champion for arts learning and creativity. Committed to increasing opportunities for all people to participate in, learn about, and understand the arts, the Center offers programs and events that strive to reflect the nation and its communities, and that are accessible
and inclusive for all. From the Center’s stages to classrooms and communities across the country, to online resources accessible nearly anywhere, the Center serves the burgeoning artist, the curious explorer, the student (of any age), the teacher and teaching artist—any person interested in arts learning and utilizing the arts for positive change.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center’s Education programs utilize the arts to embrace the ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude, and cultivate the Citizen Artists in all the people we serve. For more information, please visit kennedy-center.org/education/.

**ABOUT VOLKSWAGEN GROUP OF AMERICA, INC.**
Volkswagen Group of America, Inc. (VWGoA) is a wholly owned subsidiary of Volkswagen AG, one of the world’s leading automobile manufacturers and the largest carmaker in Europe. VWGoA 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, Virginia. The company has approximately 6,000 employees in the United States and sells its vehicles through a network of approximately 1,000 dealers.

For more information, please visit the Kennedy Center [website](http://kennedy-center.org/).

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