



Talented Young Artists Awarded Over \$45,000 in 2026 International ARTEFFECT Competition

46 middle and high school students' Unsung Heroes-themed visual art projects earn worldwide acclaim

[VIEW THE 2026 AWARD RECIPIENTS](#)

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (June 1, 2026)—ARTEFFECT, a visual arts education initiative founded by international entrepreneur and philanthropist Lowell Milken, has announced the 46 winners of the 11th annual ARTEFFECT competition. The competition invited students in grades six through 12 worldwide to explore and celebrate the extraordinary stories of individuals who have improved the lives of others. These Unsung Heroes are role models whose extraordinary courage, character and service to others have made a lasting impact on society, often without widespread recognition. In total, ARTEFFECT awarded \$49,750 in financial prizes across multiple categories to 46 winners in the middle and high school divisions of the 2026 competition. *See the complete list of winners at the end of this release.*

The students' chosen subjects represented a range of fields and historical periods, including civil rights, medicine, innovation, STEAM, wartime history, and environmental advocacy. Participants interpreted the inspiring stories of their Unsung Heroes through original works of art accompanied by artists' impact statements reflecting on the significance of the individual's lasting impact as well as their own artistic vision and creative process.

"In bringing these overlooked stories to life through art, students deepen their understanding of history and demonstrate the power of creativity as a tool for empathy, reflection and positive change," says ARTEFFECT Executive Director Dr. Toni Guglielmo. "These visual arts projects highlight how individual acts of courage and compassion can inspire future generations to thoughtfully interact with the world around them."

Steve Han, a 10th grade student at Beckman High School in Irvine, California, earned the **\$6,000 Grand Prize**. Han's colored pencil, marker, and pen work on paper, [*The Hands of Reconstruction, Frances Perkins*](#), depicts Frances Perkins, the first woman to serve in a U.S. Cabinet position and a driving force behind landmark labor reforms that reshaped workers' rights and social protections during the New Deal era. In his impact statement, Han describes how the imagery of his artwork celebrates Perkins' leadership: "In the center is Perkins who lifts a torn American flag. The flag shows a nation hurt and sunken by poverty, exploitation, and instability, but she still lifts the flag. Through this gesture, I wanted to express Perkins' determination not to let suffering define the future."

“The ARTEFFECT competition is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for young people to consider, interpret and create original works of art about Unsung Heroes and the invaluable lessons their heroic deeds exemplify,” says Lowell Milken, founder of ARTEFFECT and the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes. “By giving visual form to acts of heroism, students deeply engage with their subject, asking questions not only of themselves as artists but also of themselves as human beings. This process unleashes the power of art to inspire ARTEFFECT participants to celebrate the past and discover their potential to influence the future.”

The **\$3,000 High School Best in Show** prize was awarded to **Paulina Ausucua**, a 12th grade student at Stratford High School in Houston, Texas, for her acrylic painting on canvas board [The Shape of Growth](#) about American plant scientist Norman Borlaug. The young artist depicts Borlaug amidst the wheat fields where he developed ultra-resilient grains fueling the Green Revolution that led to global food production. “His life is one of resilience, determination, and the idea that it is important to continue looking for solutions and pursue them, despite any challenges,” reads Ausucua’s impact statement.

Winning the **\$2,500 High School First Place** prize was **Melvin Yoo**, a ninth grade student from Chadwick International in Incheon, South Korea, for [Running Against Cancer](#), inspired by the Canadian athlete and cancer activist Terry Fox. In his artwork made of gouache and colored pencil on paper, Yoo presents a victorious figure of Fox, whose Marathon of Hope grew into one of the world’s largest fundraisers for cancer research. “The artwork represents not only the significance of Fox’s journey across Canada, but also his influence as a symbol of perseverance, hope, and worldwide action against cancer,” Yoo writes.

The recipient of the **\$2,000 High School Second Place** prize was **Halyn Oh**, a ninth grade student at Seoul Scholars International Art & Design in South Korea, for [Butterfly’s Rebirth](#), a deeply layered work featuring human rights activist Kim Hak-Sun. Oh says, “I wanted to share Kim Hak-Sun’s courageous action as my role model because she was the first one who broke the shame and came out to the public to reveal the truth and give a positive social impact.”

The **\$2,000 Middle School Best in Show** prize was awarded to **Eleanor Zhang**, an eighth grade student who attends the Yun Hua Fang Art Studio in Saratoga, California. Zhang chose Holocaust survivor and chronicler Pavel Weiner as her Unsung Hero: “Pavel Weiner, a living boy in a dying environment, brings us the thought that even when life may seem hopeless at times, it is worth powering through and maybe, the future just might possibly be very bright.” Her artwork, [The Inside](#), made with colored pencil and marker on paper, captures the emotional intensity of Weiner’s desire to survive the darkness of the Holocaust and uplift others through his writings.

Liam Schell Arias, a sixth grade student from Hausburgschule in Berlin, Germany, received the **\$1,000 Middle School Second Place** award for his project [Where are the Candy Bombers Today?](#) Created with marker, pen, and acrylic on canvas, the artwork honors Colonel Gail Halvorsen, a U.S. Air Force pilot during the Berlin Airlift who became known as the “Candy Bomber” for dropping candy to children trapped during the Soviet blockade of West Berlin. “I want to show two sides: On the right there is the story of Halvorsen and the candy bombers and on the left side there are ruins of the wars of today,” explains Arias. “There are still many wars in the world today, and I wonder where the people are giving hope and happiness to children today?”

The **Spotlight Prize-Unsung Hero** was awarded to seven students who chose Unsung Heroes from a rotating list in this category. **Motiejus Butkus**, an eighth grade student from Vilnius, Lithuania, created the artwork [*A Glimpse from the Ocean*](#) using colored pencil, watercolor and ink on paper to celebrate oceanic cartographer Marie Tharp. **Tina Chen**, an 11th grade student from Issaquah High School in Issaquah, Washington, made [*Hope Before Cure*](#) celebrating pathologist Dr. Sidney Farber. **Vicky Ding**, a 10th grade student from Shin Studio in Bellevue, Washington, imagined the Holocaust survivor, resistance fighter and actor Curt Lowens in her artwork, [*A Light in the Dark*](#). **Philip Jeong**, an 11th grade student from Hongik Art in Suwanee, Georgia, honored WWI nurse Emma Darling Cushman in his work [*Unbreakable Hope*](#). **Sue Lee**, a ninth grade student from Marlborough School in Los Angeles, California, created [*An Unwavering Heart*](#) inspired by officer Tran Ngoc Hue in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. **Kevin Chen**, a 10th grade student and 2025 ARTEFFECT winner from Shin Studio in Bellevue, Washington, made [*Shaping Sound Through Innovation*](#) championing inventor Emile Berliner. **Grace Zhang**, a ninth grade student and 2025 ARTEFFECT winner from Jericho High School in Jericho, New York, painted [*Fierce Science*](#) honoring microbiologist Dr. Maurice Hilleman.

The **\$1,000 Spotlight Prize: 3D/Sculpture** was awarded to two students from Harriton High School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: **Atlas De Pasquale-Stern**, a 10th grade student who created the necklace [*Cliffs*](#), inspired by paleontologist Mary Anning; and **Owen Pierson**, an 11th grade student who created [*Inventor of the Record*](#) inspired by inventor and audio pioneer Emile Berliner.

The **\$1,000 Spotlight Prize: Large Format** for works greater than 24 x 36 inches was awarded to **Bea Holmberg**, an 11th grade student from Washington Waldorf School in Bethesda, Maryland, for [*Leavitt's Standard Candle*](#) commemorating astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt; **Marilyn Sommerville**, an 11th grade student from King School in Stamford, Connecticut, for [*The Heart of a Hero*](#), depicting pediatric cardiologist Dr. Helen Taussig; **Eva Aistė Špokaitė**, a 12th grade student from Vilnius, Lithuania, for [*A "No" that Saved Thousands*](#) honoring pharmacologist Dr. Frances Kelsey; and **Joey Szpilczak**, an 11th grade student at Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for [*The Resonance of Care*](#) inspired by physician and cancer researcher Dr. May Edward Chinn.

The 27 young artists chosen as **Certificate of Excellence** awardees selected Unsung Heroes from many different eras and professions. Several **\$750 Certificate of Excellence** awardees created remarkable artworks inspired by women in STEAM who worked in the ocean. Three students were inspired by ethnobotanist Dr. Isabella Aiona Abbott: **Chloe Chen**, an 11th grade student from Watchung Hills Regional High School in Warren, New Jersey, created [*Beneath the Surface*](#); **Annie Hong**, an 11th grade student from The American School in Chofu, Japan, created [*Abbott's Ocean*](#); and **Meimei Zhang**, a seventh grade student from Luckie Art Studio in Lexington, Massachusetts, created [*Drifting Among the Corals*](#). **Vlada Stinerman**, a 12th grade student from Castro Valley High School in Castro Valley, California,

sculpted [*A Dive Through Reality*](#) inspired by marine biologist Dr. Sylvia Earle. **Tina Zhao**, an 11th grade student from Forest Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bellevue, Washington, won for [*The Unextinguishable Deep*](#), honoring ichthyologist Dr. Eugenie Clark.

Unsung Heroes who worked across the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math were also popular with the **Certificate of Excellence** awardees: **Isabelle Lee**, a 10th grade student from BC

Collegiate in Gangnam-gu, South Korea, for [The Woman the World Didn't Hear](#), and **Trevor Robertson**, an 11th grade student from Houston Christian High School in Houston, Texas, for [Frequency Unheard](#), were both inspired by actor and inventor Hedy Lamarr; **Sophia Sterling**, a 12th grade student from Maret School in Washington, D.C., for [The Helmet She Never Wore](#) celebrating aviator Jerrie Cobb; **Lily Burkett**, an 11th grade student from Scio High School in Scio, Oregon, for [Mother of the Mesozoic](#) honoring paleontologist Mary Anning; and **Eileen Wang**, an 11th grade student and 2025 ARTEFFECT winner from The Overlake School in Redmond, Washington, for [Sunrise of Hope](#) inspired by environmental activist Jacob Valentine.

Certificate of Excellence awardees were also inspired by Unsung Heroes who advanced civil rights and social justice: **Aleena Rafi**, an 11th grade student from British International School Riyadh in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, for [Breach of Peace](#) inspired by civil rights activist Dion Diamond; **Grace Li**, a 10th grade student and 2025 ARTEFFECT winner from Lakeside School in Seattle, Washington, for [Look How Far We've Come](#) honoring abolitionist and author Olaudah Equiano; Climate activist Lois Gibbs inspired both **Jiyoo Kim**, a 10th grade student from Seoul Scholars International Art & Design in Seoul, South Korea, for [Mother of Love Canal](#), and **Yiting Wang**, a 10th grade student from Yun Hua Fang Art Studio in Saratoga, California, for [She Stood Between](#); **Isabelle Chung**, an 11th grade student from Mercer Island High School in Mercer Island, Washington, for [Swinging Toward Freedom](#) honoring civil rights activist Sheyann Webb; and **Yana Lei Gould**, a 12th grade student from White Knoll High School in Lexington, South Carolina, for [The Revolutionary Salon](#) celebrating civil rights activist Yuri Kochiyama.

Certificate of Excellence awardees choosing Unsung Heroes who demonstrated wartime courage and valor included **Kaixin Bian**, an 11th grade student from JHL Studio in Bellevue, Washington, for [Beneath the Flag, the Music Rose](#) honoring WWI officer and conductor James Reese Europe; **Oliver Cho**, a 10th grade student from Studio JHL in Bellevue, Washington, for [The Ink Remembers](#) inspired by WWII Polish intelligence officer Witold Pilecki; and **Priyam Kashyap**, a 12th grade student from St. Francis de Sales Higher Secondary School in Guwahati, India, for [The Weight of a Silent Decision](#) remembering lieutenant colonel Stanislav Petrov; and **Iryna Zlomynoha**, an 11th grade student from North Surrey Secondary in Surrey, Canada, for [La Galerie de Courage](#) inspired by WWII secret agent Noor Inayat Khan.

Unsung Heroes who documented truth and shaped public understanding inspired **Certificate of Excellence** awardees **Fiona Xian**, an 11th grade student from Redmond High School in Redmond, Washington for [American Photographer and Photojournalist Overview](#) based on Margaret Bourke-White; **Jackson Park**, an 11th grade student from North London Collegiate School Jeju in Jeju, South Korea, for [Let the World Know](#) inspired by Will Counts; **Seyoon Byun**, an 11th grade student from Newton, Massachusetts, for [Where Silence Breaks](#) inspired by Gareth Jones; and **Annie Liang**, a 10th grade student from Branham High School in San Jose, California, whose [For Those Who Were Finally Seen](#) honored Corky Lee.

These **Certificate of Excellence** awardees created remarkable artworks honoring people who saved lives through medical research: **Charlotte Zhang**, 12th grade student from Appleby College in Oakville, Canada, created [Our Terry Fox Run](#) inspired by Terry Fox; **Daisy Tang**, eighth grade student from We Art Education in Garden City, New York, created [The Generational Guardian of Children](#) inspired by

bacteriologist Pearl Kendrick; and **Zainab Belgaumi**, 11th grade student from Dubai College in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, created [We Managed the Best We Could](#) inspired by May Edward Chinn.

Participation in the ARTEFFECT annual competition is free to enter and open to all young artists in grades six through 12. The 12th ARTEFFECT annual competition will open for submissions in October 2026. ARTEFFECT is currently running a new [summer competition](#) for high school students focused on Unsung Heroes who were innovators. Visit the [ARTEFFECT website](#) for more information.

2026 ARTEFFECT COMPETITION AWARDEES

TOP AWARDS

Grand Prize, \$6,000, **Steve Han**, Grade 10, *The Hands of Reconstruction*, Frances Perkins, Beckman High School, Irvine, California, United States
High School Best in Show, \$3,000, **Paulina Ausucua**, Grade 12, *The Shape of Growth*, Stratford High School, Houston, Texas, United States
High School First Place, \$2,500, **Melvin Yoo**, Grade 9, *Running Against Cancer*, Chadwick International, Incheon, Yeonsu-gu, South Korea
High School Second Place, \$2,000, **Halyn Oh**, Grade 9, *Butterfly's Rebirth*, Seoul Scholars International Art & Design, Seoul, South Korea
Middle School Best in Show, \$2,000, **Eleanor Zhang**, Grade 8, *The Inside*, Yun Hua Fang Art Studio, Saratoga, California, United States
Middle School Second Place, \$1,000, **Liam Schell Arias**, Grade 6, *Where Are the Candy Bombers Today?* Hausburgschule, Berlin, Germany

SPOTLIGHT PRIZE - \$1,000

Motiejus Butkus, Grade 8, *A Glimpse from the Ocean*, Vilnius Jesuit High School, Vilnius, Lithuania
Kevin Chen, Grade 10, *Shaping Sound Through Innovation*, Shin Studio, Bellevue, Washington, United States
Tina Chen, Grade 11, *Hope Before Cure*, Issaquah High School, Issaquah, Washington, United States
Atlas De Pasquale-Stern, Grade 10, *Cliffs*, Harriton High School, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, United States
Vicky Ding, Grade 10, *A Light in the Dark*, Shin Studio, Bellevue, Washington, United States
Bea Holmberg, Grade 11, *Leavitt's Standard Candle*, Washington Waldorf School, Bethesda, Maryland, United States
Philip Jeong, Grade 11, *Unbreakable Hope*, Hongik Art, Suwanee, Georgia, United States
Sue Lee, Grade 9, *An Unwavering Heart*, Marlborough School, Los Angeles, California, United States
Owen Pierson, Grade 11, *Inventor of the Record*, Harriton High School, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, United States
Marilyn Sommerville, Grade 11, *The Heart of a Hero*, King School Stamford, Connecticut, United States
Eva Aistė Špokaitė, Grade 12, *A "No" that Saved Thousands*, Vilnius Lithuanian House, Vilnius, Lithuania
Joey Szpilczak, Grade 11, *The Resonance of Care*, Germantown Friends School, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States
Grace Zhang, Grade 9, *Fierce Science*, Jericho High School, Jericho, New York, United States

CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE - \$750

Zainab Belgaumi, Grade 11, *We Managed the Best*, Dubai College, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Kaixin Bian, Grade 11, *Beneath the Flag, the Music Rose*, Studio JHL, Bellevue, Washington, United States
Lily Burkett, Grade 11, *Mother of the Mesozoic*, Scio High School, Scio, Oregon, United States
Seyoon Byun, Grade 11, *Where Silence Breaks*, Independent Study, Newton, Massachusetts, United States
Chloe Chen, Grade 11, *Beneath the Surface*, Watchung Hills Regional High School, Warren, New Jersey, United States

Oliver Cho, Grade 10, *The Ink Remembers*, Studio JHL, Bellevue, Washington, United States
Isabelle Chung, Grade 11, *Swinging Toward Freedom*, Mercer Island High School, Mercer Island, Washington, United States
Yana Lei Gould, Grade 12, *The Revolutionary Salon*, White Knoll High School, Lexington, South Carolina, United States
Annie Hong, *Abbott's Ocean*, Grade 11, The American School in Japan, Chofu, Japan
Priyam Kashyap, Grade 12, *The Weight of a Silent Decision*, St. Francis De Sales Higher Secondary School, Assam, Guwahati, India
Jiyoo Kim, Grade 10, *Mother of Love Canal*, Seoul Scholars International Art & Design, Seoul, South Korea
Isabelle Lee, Grade 10, *The Woman the World Didn't Hear*, BC Collegiate, Gangnam-gu, Seoul, South Korea
Grace Li, Grade 10, *Look How Far We've Come*, Lakeside School, Seattle, Washington, United States
Annie Liang, Grade 10, *For Those Who Were Finally Seen*, Branham High School, San Jose, California, United States
Jackson Park, Grade 11, *Let the World Know*, North London Collegiate School Jeju, Jeju, Deajeongeup, South Korea
Aleena Rafi, Grade 11, *Breach of Peace*, British International School, Riyadh Province, Saudi Arabia
Trevor Robertson, Grade 11, *Frequency Unheard*, Christian High School, Houston, Texas, United States
Sophia Sterling, Grade 12, *The Helmet She Never Wore*, Maret School, Washington D.C., United States
Vlada Stinerman, Grade 12, *A Dive Through Reality*, Castro Valley High School, Castro Valley, California, United States
Daisy Tang, Grade 8, *The Generational Guardian of Children*, We Art Education, Garden City, New York, United States
Eileen Wang, Grade 11, *Sunrise of Hope*, The Overlake School, Redmond, Washington, United States
Yiting Wang, Grade 10, *She Stood Between*, Yun Hua Fang Art Studio, Saratoga, California, United States
Fiona Xian, Grade 11, *American Photographer and Photojournalist Overview*, Redmond High School, Redmond, Washington, United States
Charlotte Zhang, *Our Terry Fox Run*, Grade 12, Appleby College, Oakville, Ontario, Canada
Meimei Zhang, Grade 7, *Drifting Among the Corals*, Luckie Art Studio, Lexington, Massachusetts, United States
Tina Zhao, Grade 11, *The Unextinguishable Deep*, Forest Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, Bellevue, Washington, United States
Iryna Zlomynoha, Grade 11, *La Galerie de Courage*, North Surrey Secondary, Surrey, Canada

###

ABOUT ARTEFFECT

Established in 2016, ARTEFFECT is a visual arts education initiative with close ties to the [Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes](#) (LMC)—both founded by [Lowell Milken](#). ARTEFFECT offers student art competitions, professional development including an Ambassadors fellowship, and exhibitions, including an [ARTEFFECT gallery at the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream in Washington, D.C.](#) ARTEFFECT invites learners and communities to engage with the stories of the LMC Unsung Heroes—individuals who took heroic actions that made a positive and profound impact on the course of history. These stories span centuries and multiple disciplines, including education, civil rights, innovation, healthcare, STEAM, and wartime history. Young artists in grades six through 12 build their creative and critical thinking skills by crafting visual art submissions for the competition. The ARTEFFECT initiative affirms the founder's belief that one person has the power to make a positive and profound difference in the lives of others. Connect with ARTEFFECT on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#) and [YouTube](#).