



Young Artists Earn Top Prizes for Celebrating Unsung Innovators in ARTEFFECT's 2026 Summer Competition

Twenty-four young artists receive a total of \$24,000 in awards for visual arts projects inspired by innovators whose ideas changed the world

[VIEW THE SUMMER 2026 AWARD RECIPIENTS](#)

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (October 19, 2026) — ARTEFFECT, a visual arts education initiative founded by international entrepreneur and philanthropist Lowell Milken, has announced the award recipients of its first **2026 summer competition**. The theme, "Innovation Generation," invited high school students internationally in grades 9-12 and recently graduated seniors to explore the remarkable stories of Unsung Heroes who were innovators that made a lasting impact on society through new inventions, discoveries, and research.

Twenty-four student artists were selected to receive a total of **\$24,000 in awards** across categories that include four Top Awards, six Spotlight Prizes, and 14 Certificates of Excellence. The awardees represent schools and independent programs across the United States, Canada, Hungary, Lithuania, Mexico, and South Korea.

Through paintings, drawings, digital art, mixed media works and sculpture, students explored the stories of over 40 innovators who made important contributions to the world of STEM, medicine, and the arts. Their artworks offer fresh perspectives on Unsung Heroes whose accomplishments have often gone largely unrecognized by society.

"Innovation begins with curiosity—the willingness to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and imagine what might be possible," said **ARTEFFECT Executive Director Dr. Toni Guglielmo**. "Through this competition, young artists visually explore the remarkable stories of innovators from history who brought new knowledge and technologies into the world. They also reflect on what innovation means to them, and their projects reminds us that positive change often begins with someone who is willing to see and do things differently."

"By having young people and educators engage with history through creative expression, they not only uncover the past—they discover the power within themselves to shape the future," said **ARTEFFECT and Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes Founder, Lowell Milken**. "The students participating in this competition have demonstrated that art can be a powerful way to explore the ideas, determination, and imagination behind some of history's most important innovations. By doing so, they also engage with the qualities that make innovation possible—curiosity, persistence, and the courage to challenge what is known—finding inspiration to shape what comes next."

TOP AWARDS RECOGNIZE FOUR OUTSTANDING YOUNG ARTISTS

The **Grand Prize of \$3,000** is awarded to **Grace Li**, a 10th grade student at Lakeside School in Seattle, Washington, who is a previous two-time ARTEFFECT Certificate of Excellence recipient in [2025](#) and [2026](#). Her acrylic painting, [A Path of Her Own](#), celebrates Susan La Flesche Picotte, the first Native American to earn a medical degree in the United States. Li's work reflects her interest in medicine and the lessons she drew from Picotte's commitment to serving her community.

"As someone who wants to work in the medical field, my hero's story taught me that advancing healthcare is not only about treating disease, but also about asking who is being overlooked, and how I can better serve the communities around me," Li writes.

The **Best in Show Award of \$2,000** is presented to **Serena Jung**, a 10th grade student at Bergen County Academies in Hackensack, New Jersey, for [Investigator of Workplace Hazards](#), a charcoal and pastel work honoring physician and occupational health pioneer Alice Hamilton. Jung depicts Hamilton actively investigating dangerous workplace conditions and using science to reveal hazards that ultimately contributed to improvements in occupational safety.

The **First Place Award of \$1,500** is presented to **Nihaar Pinninti**, a 10th grade student at Troy High School in Fullerton, California, for [A Stellar Impact—The Legacy of Gene Shoemaker](#), a colored-pencil and watercolor work inspired by planetary scientist **Gene Shoemaker**. Pinninti chose a highly detailed approach that he felt was fitting for an individual known for his devotion to detail. The ARTEFFECT team surprised Pinninti in person with the Award at his studio in Buena Park, the California School for Art and Design.

The **Second Place Award of \$1,000** is awarded to **Iyla Lada**, a 10th grade student at Palo Alto High School in Palo Alto, California, for [Tendrils of Legacy](#), a colored pencil and graphite work inspired by pioneering heart surgeon **Vivien Thomas**. Lada uses the imagery of tendrils connecting a heart to a mop to reference Thomas's early identification as a janitor and the beginnings of his extraordinary career.

SPOTLIGHT PRIZES HIGHLIGHT INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Six students received **\$1,000 Spotlight Prizes** recognizing two distinctive approaches to representing Unsung Heroes: polyptychs and data visualization.

Eva Aistė Špokaitė, a graduating high school student from Vilnius Lithuanian House in Lithuania, and previous ARTEFFECT award winner, received the **Spotlight Prize—Polyptych** for ["A" "P" "G" "A" "R"](#), a five-part oil painting exploring the newborn assessment criteria developed by physician Virginia Apgar. Each panel represents one of the five letters of Apgar's surname: Appearance, Pulse, Grimace, Activity, and Respiration.

Lily Manoochehri Farr, a ninth-grade student from San Diego, California, and [previous ARTEFFECT winner](#), receives the **Spotlight Prize—Polyptych** for [Puzzle of A Life](#), a mixed media work inspired by mathematician Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi. Farr compares researching al-Khwarizmi to solving a puzzle; assembling pieces of information to discover a larger picture.

The **Spotlight Prize—Data Visualization** is awarded to **Maria José Aguirre**, a 12th grade student from Picacho McGregor School in Mexico, for [Beneath the Spotlight](#), inspired by inventor and actress Hedy Lamarr; **Meena Parmar**, a ninth grade student from CV Art Studio in San Diego, for [Proofs Against](#)

[Convention](#), honoring mathematician Sofya Kovalevskaya; **Aleksei Yin**, an 11th grade student from Palos Verdes Peninsula High School in California, for [The Brightest Star](#), inspired by astronomer Henrietta Swan Leavitt; and **Mia Tsoi**, an 11th grade student from J Art Studio in Virginia, for [The Hidden Element: Alice Hamilton](#).

CELEBRATING INNOVATION ACROSS DISCIPLINES

The Certificate of Excellence awardees explored an equally broad range of innovators across various fields. These 14 young artists won for the following projects: **Hadley Nelson** for the colored pencil drawing [Beneath the Surface](#) about oceanographer Marie Tharp; **Loren Joung** for the acrylic and pencil artwork [Between Earth and Experiment](#) honoring chemist Justus von Liebig; **Benjamin Gu**, a [previous ARTEFFECT winner](#), for the watercolor [Bridges of Life](#) and **Szonja Sztanke** for the graphite drawing [Out of the Shadows and into History](#) both featuring pediatric cardiologist Helen B. Taussig; **Evan Tian** for the graphite drawing [Building Our Future](#) and **Joshua Lee** for the digital artwork [The Bridge Between](#) both inspired by architect Horace King; **Jasmine Ung** for [Hands of Hunger, Fields of Hope](#), an oil painting about agricultural scientist Norman Borlaug; **Olivia Sun** for the digital artwork [Reading the Stars](#) about astronomer Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin; **Hedi Jung** for the acrylic and graphite artwork [The Legend of Mazuha Hokshina](#) showcasing artist and educator Oscar Howe; **Juliana Pan** for the acrylic painting [The Stories Etched in Stone](#) and **Vera McClellan** for the digital artwork [The Unacknowledged Mary Anning](#), both about paleontologist Mary Anning; **Yuen Kiu Grace Lai** for the digital artwork [Where Sound Takes Form](#) about inventor Emile Berliner; **Eura Cha** for the acrylic painting [One Ocean One Health](#) inspired by marine biologist Isabella Aiona Abbott; and **Yiting Wang**, a [previous ARTEFFECT winner](#), for the multimedia artwork, [The Piece She Found](#) celebrating neuroscientist Patricia Goldman-Rakic.

The summer competition, which was open from May 15 through September 15, 2026, is part of ARTEFFECT's broader commitment to engaging students with the stories of Unsung Heroes through visual arts. ARTEFFECT's [annual competition](#), currently accepting submissions through April 19, 2027, is free to enter and open to all young artists in grades six through 12. Visit the [ARTEFFECT website](#) for more information.

2026 ARTEFFECT SUMMER COMPETITION AWARDEES

TOP AWARDS

Grand Prize — \$3,000, Grace Li, Grade 10, *A Path of Her Own*, Lakeside School, Seattle, Washington, United States

Best in Show — \$2,000, Serena Jung, Grade 10, *Investigator of Workplace Hazards*, Bergen County Academies, Hackensack, New Jersey, United States

First Place — \$1,500, Nihaar Pinninti, Grade 10, *A Stellar Impact—The Legacy of Gene Shoemaker*, Troy High School, Fullerton, California, United States

Second Place — \$1,000, Iyla Lada, Grade 10, *Tendrils of Legacy*, Palo Alto High School, Palo Alto, California, United States

SPOTLIGHT PRIZE— \$1,000

Maria José Aguirre, Grade 12, *Beneath the Spotlight*, Picacho McGregor School, San José del Cabo, Baja California Sur, Mexico
Lily Manoochehri Farr, Grade 9, *Puzzle of A Life*, Independent Study, San Diego, California, United States
Meena Parmar, Grade 9, *Proofs Against Convention*, CV Art Studio, San Diego, California, United States
Eva Aistė Špokaitė, Graduated High School, “A” “P” “G” “A” “R”, Vilnius Lithuanian House, Vilnius, Lithuania
Mia Tsoi, Grade 11, *The Hidden Element: Alice Hamilton*, J Art Studio, Chantilly, Virginia, United States
Aleksei Yin, Grade 11, *The Brightest Star*, Palos Verdes Peninsula High School, Rolling Hills Estate, California, United States

CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE — \$750

Eura Cha, Grade 10, *One Ocean One Health*, Saint Johnsbury Academy Jeju, Seogwipo-si, South Korea
Benjamin Gu, Grade 9, *Bridges of Life*, Prince of Wales Secondary School, Vancouver, Canada
Yuen Kiu Grace Lai, Grade 12, *Where Sound Takes Form*, Westmoor High School, Daly City, California, United States
Joshua Lee, Grade 12, *The Bridge Between*, Bellevue High School, Bellevue, Washington, United States
Loren Joung, Grade 11, *Between Earth and Experiment*, Kamiak High School, Mukilteo, Washington, United States
Hedi Jung, Grade 9, *The Legend of Mazuha Hokshina – Oscar Howe*, Havelock Early College High School, Havelock, North Carolina, United States
Vera McClellan, Grade 11, *The Unacknowledged Mary Anning*, Tallgrass Sudbury School, La Grange, Illinois, United States
Hadley Nelson, Grade 12, *Beneath the Surface*, Roosevelt High School, Seattle, Washington, United States
Juliana Pan, Grade 11, *The Stories Etched in Stone*, Issaquah High School, Issaquah, Washington, United States
Szonja Sztanke, Grade 12, *Out of the Shadows and into History*, Gorsium Secondary School and Arts Vocational High School, Székesfehérvár, Hungary
Olivia Sun, Grade 11, *Reading the Stars*, Bellevue High School, Bellevue, Washington, United States
Evan Tian, Grade 9, *Building Our Future*, Sally's Art Studio, New York, New York, United States
Jasmine Ung, Grade 10, *Hands of Hunger, Fields of Hope*, Pasadena High School, Pasadena, California, United States
Yiting Wang, Grade 11, *The Piece She Found*, Yun Hua Fang Art Studio, Saratoga, California, United States

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ABOUT ARTEFFECT

Established in 2016, **ARTEFFECT** is a visual arts education initiative founded by [Lowell Milken](#) with ties to the [Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes](#). ARTEFFECT offers student art competitions in which young artists in grades six through twelve build creative and critical thinking skills by crafting visual art submissions for the competition. ARTEFFECT also offers powerful professional development opportunities for educators including Ambassadors fellowships, as well as exhibitions, including an [ARTEFFECT gallery at the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream in Washington, D.C.](#) Through its many programs and activities, ARTEFFECT invites learners and communities to engage with the stories of 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.