FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: https://bit.ly/AEA-2026-27-Press-Release
Media Inquiries: Sydnee Flotron, sflotron@mff.org, (310) 570-4773

Announcing the 2026-2027 ARTEFFECT Ambassadors Cohort, a Nationwide Visual Arts Education Initiative of the ARTEFFECTlmc Foundation

19 esteemed middle and high school educators selected for online professional development focused on Unsung Heroes will develop innovative capstone projects for their classrooms and communities

Santa Monica, Calif. (November 9, 2026) – The ARTEFFECTlmc Foundation has announced the 2026-2027 cohort of ARTEFFECT Ambassadors, an award-winning visual arts education fellowship for educators working directly with students in grades 6-12. The 19 fellows in the program's fourth annual cohort were selected from a competitive pool of nationwide applicants and hail from 16 states. The cohort includes 14 visual arts teachers, with 9 members bringing over 20 years of classroom experience. Members of the cohort represent diverse educational, professional, and geographic backgrounds, including specializations across the visual arts, social studies, and STEAM.

This year's ARTEFFECT Ambassadors will participate in a yearlong series of online professional development sessions, learning alongside other accomplished practitioners in a collegial community. These virtual sessions—four of which are also open to all interested educators and free to join—explore varied themes with a focus on Unsung Heroes including character education, American narratives, Holocaust education, and innovation. All modules are accompanied by visual arts lesson plans.

"Educators have the extraordinary ability to shape how young people see the world and their place in it," said **Dr. Toni Guglielmo, executive director of ARTEFFECT.** "Through the power of visual arts education, the ARTEFFECT Ambassadors program brings the remarkable stories of Unsung Heroes to life in classrooms across the country. Our Ambassadors inspire students to explore and celebrate these extraordinary individuals through original artwork and to see that they, too, have the potential to become the leaders, innovators, and changemakers of tomorrow."

In the online sessions, participants will:

- Explore creative approaches for interpreting the stories of Unsung Heroes as role models through the visual arts.

- Access lesson plans focused on Unsung Heroes that provide step-by-step modeling for young artists to create artworks in varied 2D and 3D mediums with impact statements.
- Engage with other educators nationwide to deepen their own instructional practices.

"In middle and high school, students are finding their voices as artists, and a great teacher knows how to guide that process without taking it over," said **Dr. Amy Charleroy, ARTEFFECT director of education.** "Ambassadors create the conditions for that growth, using the stories of Unsung Heroes to help students explore how to visualize ideas like heroism, compassion, and risk-taking, and to make work that is about something bigger than themselves."

In 2007, Lowell Milken established the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes (LMC) supporting educators and students to discover and develop the stories of Unsung Heroes—individuals not commonly known by contemporary generations who took extraordinary actions in service to others and society. In 2016, Lowell Milken founded ARTEFFECT to extend the Unsung Heroes mission through original visual art and reflection.

"The stories of Unsung Heroes remind us that individuals can make an extraordinary difference through courage, creativity, and conviction," noted **LMC and ARTEFFECT Founder Lowell Milken.** "By bringing these stories to life through the visual arts, ARTEFFECT empowers students and educators to explore the lessons of history, recognize the potential within themselves, and find inspiration to shape a better future. Their impact extends far beyond the classroom, helping ensure that the legacies of these remarkable individuals continue to inspire generations to come."

In addition to participating in professional development modules, Ambassadors develop learner-centered visual-arts-based capstone projects—such as developing a new lesson plan, an exhibition of student projects, a teacher-training program, a publication, or other activities. Ambassadors are supported through their capstone projects by program staff and ARTEFFECT Mentors, seasoned visual art educators with experience in ARTEFFECT's teaching and learning. The program runs through June 2027 and culminates with the presentations of the capstone projects that have been implemented effectively within their classrooms and communities.

The projects create new opportunities in visual art education by harnessing the inspiring stories of Unsung Heroes at the core of ARTEFFECT's offerings. Fellows receive an unrestricted stipend of $1,250, a $250 materials credit, and a Certificate of Participation upon completion.

In addition to the Ambassadors visual arts fellowship, ARTEFFECT offerings include visual art competitions for students in grades 6-12. In 2026, ARTEFFECT awarded over $70,000 in financial prizes across its annual and summer competitions. ***The 2027 ARTEFFECT competition is accepting submissions through April 19, 2027.*** ARTEFFECT also produces exhibitions including showcasing over 40 award-winning ARTEFFECT student artworks in a permanent gallery at the Milken Center for Advancing the American Dream in Washington, D.C.

Introducing the 2026-2027 ARTEFFECT Ambassadors

Jennifer Lee Allman
Visual Arts Teacher – Hickman County High School – Centerville, TN

Elizabeth Barker
Visual Art Teacher and Department Chair – Lebanon High School – Lebanon, MO

Keshna Donia Desir
Visual Arts Educator – Arts High School – Newark, NJ

Leigh Drake, Ed.D.
Visual Arts Educator – Virginia Beach City Public Schools – Virginia Beach, VA

Kellie Gedert
Visual Art Teacher – Pickerington High School North – Pickerington, OH

Melissa Hackett
Creative Arts and Design Instructor – Mahoning County Career and Technical Center – Canfield, OH

Garrid Halsey
STEM Teacher – Laramie Middle School – Laramie, WY

Diane Ho
Visual Art Teacher – Temple City High School – Temple City, CA

Jamie Karaffa
Social Studies Teacher – Bruce M. Whittier Middle School – Poland, ME

Holly Bess Kincaid
Art Teacher – Park Middle School – Beckley, WV

Christopher Long
Visual Art Teacher – Taylor County High School – Campbellsville, KY

Jeanette Main
Visual Arts Teacher – Goddard High School – Roswell, NM

James Miller
Visual Arts Teacher – Weslaco East High School – Weslaco, TX

Gina Mock
Visual Art Teacher – Walnut Grove High School – Prosper, TX

Beverly Owens
Science Teacher – Crest Middle School – Shelby, NC

Lane Marie Springer, Ph.D.
Social Studies Teacher – Calloway County High School – Murray, KY

Lillis Taylor
Art Teacher – The Altamont School – Birmingham, AL

Andrea Worthey
Upper School Art Faculty – University School of Milwaukee – River Hills, WI

Justina Zendrian
Social Studies Teacher – Jericho High School – Jericho, NY

2026-2027 ARTEFFECT Mentor

Matt Shain Young
Visual Art Teacher – Pickerington Central High School – Pickerington, OH

About the ARTEFFECTlmc Foundation

The ARTEFFECTlmc Foundation inspires and supports creative changemakers through the intersection of visual arts, history, and education. By connecting young artists, educators, and communities with the compelling stories of Unsung Heroes—individuals whose extraordinary contributions transformed society despite receiving little recognition—our initiatives demonstrate how one person's actions can create profound, positive, and lasting change. Through opportunities that foster critical inquiry, creative expression, and public engagement, we empower people of all ages to consider the difference they can make when challenges arise.

To learn more and view profiles of the ARTEFFECT Ambassadors, visit the ARTEFFECT website at www.arteffectlmc.org. Connect with ARTEFFECT on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Interested educators are welcome to join the ARTEFFECT Art Educators Facebook Group.