

# My voice

***My Voice* is an asset-based arts program fostering youth confidence, creativity, and skill-building presented by the Des Moines Art Center, By Degrees Foundation, and the Principal® Foundation.**

## **2026 FEATURED ARTISTS**

### **FINDLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Langston  
Henderson Weber (4th)  
Natalin Lakham (5TH)  
Yaretzi Martinez (4TH)

### **HARDING MIDDLE SCHOOL**

William Kay (8TH)  
Htoo Paw (7TH)  
Kew Paw (8TH)  
Zyrell Simmons (7TH)

### **NORTH HIGH SCHOOL**

Jakai Fielder (12TH)  
Kimber Jacobs (11TH)  
Daniel Ketman (11TH)  
Paola Mayorga (11TH)  
Meztli Ortiz (11TH)

DES  
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ART  
CENTER





The *My Voice* project, created in 2022, is an innovative collaboration between the Des Moines Art Center, By Degrees Foundation, and the Principal® Foundation, dedicated to amplifying the unique creativity and skills of Des Moines students through mentorship, inspiration, and artistic resources. Now in its fifth year, the *My Voice* program invites youth to gather, question, and experience the ways that museums and art can serve as tools for creative and critical thinking, self-reflection, mindfulness, and shared human connection.

Educators from the three Des Moines schools that comprise the By Degrees Foundation program – Findley Elementary, Harding Middle, and North High – identified and nominated passionate and creative students to be a part of this fifth cohort of the *My Voice* project. The twelve students, ranging in age from 9 to 17, participated in six visits to the Des Moines Art Center to explore ideas around expression, inspiration, and art-as-voice, led by Senior Museum Learning and Engagement Manager Mia Buch.

The students worked closely with their mentors from the By Degrees Foundation and the Art Center to identify one artwork in the museum to serve as the inspiration for an original piece of their own. Mentors helped them plan and order supplies and provided encouragement and guidance while the students worked independently on their artwork.

The project culminated in a celebratory reception and exhibition of the participants' works at the Des Moines Art Center on May 7, 2026, for an audience of family, friends, educators, and supporters. Insightful artist's statements displayed alongside participants' creations expressed the ideas of reflection, perseverance, and confidence.

MY VOICE IS PRESENTED BY THE DES MOINES ART CENTER, BY DEGREES FOUNDATION, AND THE PRINCIPAL® FOUNDATION



**"I'm grateful I got to be a part of this. It challenged me, helped me show my emotions through art, and became one of my favorite memories of 8th grade."**

MY VOICE STUDENT PARTICIPANT

OPPOSITE *My Voice* artist Natalin from Findley Elementary School, explores Aliza Nisenbaum's painting *Ofrenda, Day of the Dead Committee Members*, Des Moines Art Center.



**“My Voice has changed everything about how I see art.”**

**WILLIAM KAY 8TH GRADE**

ABOVE My Voice artist Yaretzi shares a moment of awe with Fred Wilson's *Iago's Mirror*.

OPPOSITE My Voice artist Langston spends focused time in the studio working on his inspired drawing.

**My Voice artists are encouraged to investigate new techniques and develop their ideas during their time creating art in this year-long program.**



## Inspiring Community Together

The By Degrees Foundation is proud to partner with the Des Moines Art Center and Principal® Foundation for the fifth year of the *My Voice* program. This partnership between nonprofit organizations and local philanthropic and corporate leaders exemplifies the spirit of our community. All of us – nonprofits, businesses, donors, and neighbors desire a thriving, strong community, however, we all approach that goal with slightly different methods. At By Degrees, we work to help more students graduate from high school to be ready for college and careers. The Des Moines Art Center, through *My Voice* and all of its community programs, connects people and ideas through art. The Principal® Foundation understands that our businesses and corporations have a unique opportunity to convene diverse stakeholders and invest in the community.

It is inspiring to watch as students participating in *My Voice* learn how powerful art can be. The final piece each student creates is consistently unique, full of creativity, and surprising in so many ways. *My Voice* is truly a transformative experience.

The By Degrees Foundation board and staff are immensely grateful to the Principal® Foundation and Jo Christine Miles and her team, and to the wonderful staff of the Des Moines Art Center, including Dr. Kelly Baum, and the inimitable Mia Buch whose direct work with our students is truly a joy to witness. Mia, along with the Art Center education team, and Kelly's staff have changed the trajectories of our students' lives with their commitment to helping students explore art as a medium for telling their stories.

### EMILY WESTERGAARD

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, BY DEGREES FOUNDATION



**Learning about the Des Moines Art Center's permanent collections helps *My Voice* artists explore how art can tell stories – their stories.**

OPPOSITE Findley students admire Georgia O'Keeffe's *From the Lake No. 1* with Art Center mentor Mia Buch.  
ABOVE *My Voice* artist Metzli reflects on b. Robert Moore's *A Kin to War*.





**“Art is important because it can be anything and it helps people express their emotions, like happiness, sadness, and stress.”**

**NATALIN LAKHAM, 5TH GRADE (ABOVE)**

## **Creativity and Collaboration**

Many congratulations are due to the student artists who participated in the *My Voice* program in 2025–2026. You deserve our respect and admiration. Art is a contradiction, a form of private speech that is usually shared in public settings. It is no easy thing to express yourself, to give shape to your thoughts, feelings, and identities, especially when the results are on display for all to see. It takes creativity, of course — but first and foremost, it takes bravery and perseverance.

At its heart, *My Voice* is a collaboration between a group of visionary partners who are united by their commitment to equity, their belief in the power of art, and their desire to expand access to the means of creative expression among school-age children in the Greater Des Moines area. *My Voice* is made possible by the Principal® Foundation, led by Jo Christine Miles, Director of Principal® Community Relations and the Principal Financial Group Foundation, Inc. Jo Christine and the Principal® Foundation make many great and noble things possible: *My Voice* is one of them. Thanks are also due to the incredible staff of the By Degrees Foundation who partner with us from beginning to end: Alyssa Zimmerman, Program Manager at Findley Elementary School, Jacob Sund, Program Manager at Harding Middle School, Kahara Hunafa, Program Manager at North High School, and Heather Isaacson, Program Director at North High School. This effort would not have been possible without their generosity, care, and enthusiasm. The art teachers and building administrators at Findley, Harding, and North schools also play an enormous role in supporting the *My Voice* Program. We owe a particular debt of gratitude to Mia Buch, Senior Manager of Museum Learning and Engagement at the Des Moines Art Center, who oversees the program’s every logistical detail and who is, even more importantly, its guiding light. Embodying the very definition of a purpose-driven life, Mia creates a safe but rigorous space for the student artists in *My Voice* to grow, experiment, and soar.

As the world has changed, so too has the purpose of museums like the Des Moines Art Center. Education and enlightenment are lofty, admirable objectives, and they remain much needed today. The Art Center is proud to offer opportunities for both. Today, though, visitors to museums need even more from their art institutions. They also require uplift, well-being, and caretaking, goals the Art Center pursues through programs like *My Voice*, which is fundamentally motivated by the belief that providing outlets for creative expression enables both self-awareness and empowerment.

### **KELLY BAUM**

JOHN AND MARY PAPPAJOHN DIRECTOR AND CEO, DES MOINES ART CENTER





**“Being at the museum made me feel happy...  
That felt really special.”**

LANGSTON HENDERSON WEBER, 4TH GRADE

ABOVE North High School senior Jakai takes time to reflect in the museum galleries.

OPPOSITE Artist Natalin and By Degrees Program Manager Alyssa Zimmerman take in the expansive canvas of Roy Lichtenstein’s *The Great Pyramid*.





**"I loved looking in the vault and seeing everything the Art Center holds. It was so eye-opening."**

MY VOICE STUDENT PARTICIPANT

**"Art is a way to express feelings and thoughts. Even if something doesn't turn out the way you expected, it still means you tried — and that's something to be proud of."**

MY VOICE STUDENT PARTICIPANT

ABOVE My Voice student artists experience a behind-the-scenes tour of the museum's vault.  
OPPOSITE My Voice artists Yaretzi and Natilin and Art Center staff Mia Buch are collectively curious about Anselm Keifer's monumental painting *Untitled*.



## Why art?

The Principal® Foundation's mission is to foster a world where financial security is accessible for all. To advance our mission, we fund a variety of programs across the United States, and, increasingly, the world, that provide basic needs support, promote financial literacy and health, and support the arts. The latter focus area, the arts, often elicits a skeptical question: what does art have to do with financial security? I would point to a project like *My Voice* to provide an answer. But first, let's take a quick look at the research.

Art, many studies have shown, is a way to enhance the educational experience. Art engages students, encourages them to persist in their studies, improves their motivation, concentration, and confidence. Involvement in the arts is also associated with gains in math, reading, cognitive ability, critical thinking, and verbal skill. According to a recent study of the effects of arts education,<sup>1</sup> students receiving arts education experienced a 3.6 percentage point reduction in disciplinary infractions, an improvement of 13 percent of a standard deviation in standardized writing scores, and were more likely to agree that schoolwork is enjoyable. Research demonstrates that completion of high school and, better still, completion of higher education, increases one's salary potential<sup>2</sup> directly impacting one's financial stability and security. Given the relationship between education attainment and higher earnings, an initiative that supports education also advances students' earning potential and future financial security.

The education and correlated financial gains alone are good reason to support the arts, but the research shows another social benefit — art creates community. A 2005 report by the Rand Corporation about the visual arts<sup>3</sup> argues that the intrinsic pleasures of the art experience do more than sweeten an individual's life — according to the report, they “can connect people more deeply to the world and open them to new ways of seeing,” creating the foundation to forge social bonds and community cohesion. As Rand's *Gifts of the Muse*<sup>4</sup> report explained, among adults, arts participation is related to behaviors that contribute to the health of civil society,<sup>5</sup> such as increased civic engagement, greater social tolerance, and reductions in other-regarding behavior. To summarize, art brings people together physically — at galleries, museums, performance spaces — and

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**“Anything is art — and any kind of art can tell a story.  
It doesn't take the whole world to share one.”**

**MY VOICE STUDENT PARTICIPANT**

OPPOSITE Findley 4th grade artist Yaretzi Martinez explores new mosaic techniques.





**In addition to providing avenues for young artists to discover and learn about the museum and the art in the collections, *My Voice* creates a space for conversations and the opportunity to develop relationships around shared discoveries.**

ABOVE Des Moines Art Center mentor Mia Buch discusses inspiration with Harding Middle School artists in the museum.

culturally, through its capacity to tell a community's shared story, to inspire reflection, and to form connections that transcend differences. From Minneapolis's *Irrigate* program<sup>6</sup> that leveraged the creative skills of residents to mitigate the disruption of a major infrastructure project, to Providence, Rhode Island's *WaterFire* project<sup>7</sup> that stoked the revitalization of the city's waterfront, to the global *Inside Out* initiative<sup>8</sup> started by French artist JR that has mobilized and united communities around the world, time and time again art demonstrates its power to support positive life and community outcomes.

Given the findings cited above, it was an easy decision for the Principal® Foundation to support the development and the continuation of *My Voice*. The students' artist statements provide a glimpse of the joy, discovery, and boosted esteem the students experienced during the project and carried back to their classrooms. It is the Foundation's sincerest desire that the *My Voice* artists continue to bask in their experience and that the *My Voice* project continues to captivate and challenge, inspire and enthrall, and to clear the path for participants to build both their community and their futures.

#### **JO CHRISTINE MILES**

DIRECTOR

PRINCIPAL® FOUNDATION AND PRINCIPAL® COMMUNITY RELATIONS

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- 1 Bowen, D.H. & Kisida, B. (2019). Investigating Causal Effects of Arts Education Experiences: Experimental Evidence from Houston's Arts Access Initiative. <https://kinder.rice.edu/research/investigating-causal-effects-arts-education-experiences-experimental-evidence-houstons-arts>.
  - 2 Wolla, S.A. & Sullivan, J. (2017). Education, Income, and Wealth. <https://research.stlouisfed.org/publications/page1-econ/2017/01/03/education-income-and-wealth>.
  - 3 McCarthy, K.F., Ondaatje, E.H., Brooks, A., & Szanto, A. (2005). A Portrait of the Visual Arts Meeting the Challenges of a New Era. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG290.html>.
  - 4 McCarthy, K.F., Ondaatje, E.H., Zakaras, L. & Brooks, A. (2004). Gifts of the Muse — Reframing the Debate About the Benefits of the Arts. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Gifts-of-the-Muse.pdf>.
  - 5 Leroux, K. & Bernadska, A. (2014). Impact of the Arts on Individual Contributions to US Civil Society, *Journal of Civil Society*, 10:2, 144-164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2014.912479>.
  - 6 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQmUICGjKrk>.
  - 7 <https://waterfire.org/>.
  - 8 <https://www.insideoutproject.net/en/>.

“Seeing our student’s artwork on the wall and watching people feel moved by it was unforgettable. She was encouraged to go beyond what she thought she could do.”

PARENT OF MY VOICE PARTICIPANT

BELOW My Voice artist Langston (left) posing for a photo with family celebrating his work and accomplishment.



UPPER Guests at the celebration explore Kew Paw's painting.  
LOWER Kahara Hunafa, My Voice Program Manager at North High School, speaks during the reception.

At the My Voice reception, family, friends, and community members get to see and learn about the artists’ creations.





LANGSTON HENDERSON WEBER



NATALIN LAKHAM



YARETZI MARTINEZ



HTOO PAW



ZYRELL SIMMONS



WILLIAM KAY



KEW PAW



JAKAI FIELDER



KIMBER JACOBS

"Art is another form of communication and expression that we enjoy seeing my daughter use more often. We love seeing her creativity through art."  
PARENT OF MY VOICE PARTICIPANT



DANIEL KETMAN



PAOLA MAYORGA



MEZTLI ORTIZ



## FINDLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

LANGSTON  
HENDERSON WEBER (4th)

NATALIN LAKHAM (5th)

YARETZI MARTINEZ (4th)

## HARDING MIDDLE SCHOOL

WILLIAM KAY (8th)

HTOO PAW (7th)

KEW PAW (8th)

ZYRELL SIMMONS (7th)

## NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

JAKAI FIELDER (12th)

KIMBER JACOBS (11th)

DANIEL KETMAN (11th)

PAOLA MAYORGA (11th)

MEZTLI ORTIZ (11th)





**LANGSTON  
HENDERSON WEBER**

4TH GRADE  
FINDLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**MR. RED FACE 2026**

At first, I was really confused about what I was supposed to do. I didn't really have an idea. But now that I'm done, I'm actually kind of surprised I was able to make it.

Being at the museum made me feel happy, especially because I got to see my cousin's artwork. That felt really special. I was inspired by Jordan Weber's artwork titled *Chapels (series)* that looks like a broken wall. It made me wonder how long it took to make — like how many days or years.



**INSPIRATION ARTWORK**

Jordan Weber (American, born 1984)  
**Chapels (series)** 2017  
Marble, earth (Charleston, SC Emanuel African Church shooting), wood, plastic packaging, resin  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with Director's Discretionary Fund, 2018.1

In my artwork, I added cracks like my inspiration, but I also made it my own. The red arm is inside the cracks helping to tell a story.

The process was a lot of thinking and making a bunch of drafts — like five. The hardest part was trying to make it look good but also kind of like a little kid made it.

I think art is life. Art is love. Art is everything. It gives people something to do and something to connect with.



**NATALIN LAKHAM**

5TH GRADE  
FINDLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## Summer Days 2026

I really love sunsets and sunrises. I think they're really pretty and they make me feel happy. I also like colorful things, so it was important to me to make the whole piece bright and full of color. I love the beach and included the ocean in my artwork.

Every year my family goes to Florida. That's my favorite place and being there makes me really happy. I also added a boat and birds because I thought they would fit. For the water, I used dark to light blue and added white strokes for texture, to show the ocean moving.



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Marsden Hartley (American, 1877–1943)  
**Mont Saint-Victoire** 1927  
Oil on linen  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bohen, 1958.63

I was inspired by *Mont Saint-Victoire* by Marsden Hartley, which shows a colorful nature scene with mountains and trees. I liked how it was both nature and really colorful, and I wanted to do that too.

Art is important because it can be anything and it helps people express their emotions, like happiness, sadness, and stress.





**YARETZI MARTINEZ**

4TH GRADE  
FINDLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## Color Park 2026

My artwork is colorful and pretty, with purple and orange turtles in it. I wanted to make a nature park picture because I like water. I like going to parks to walk around, play on the playground, and go with my parents.

I was inspired by *Bethlehem-In-The-Galilee* by Jordan Nassar in the museum because of the pattern, animals, and materials. Working with mosaics took a long time, but now that it's finished, I feel happy and proud of myself.

Through art I can be creative and make stuff I like. Art helps us express ourselves and see what we like.



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Jordan Nassar (American, born 1985)  
**Bethlehem-In-The-Galilee**, 2025  
Smalti tile mosaic on aluminum  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with funds from the Des Moines  
Art Center 75th Anniversary Campaign,  
2025.42.a-e



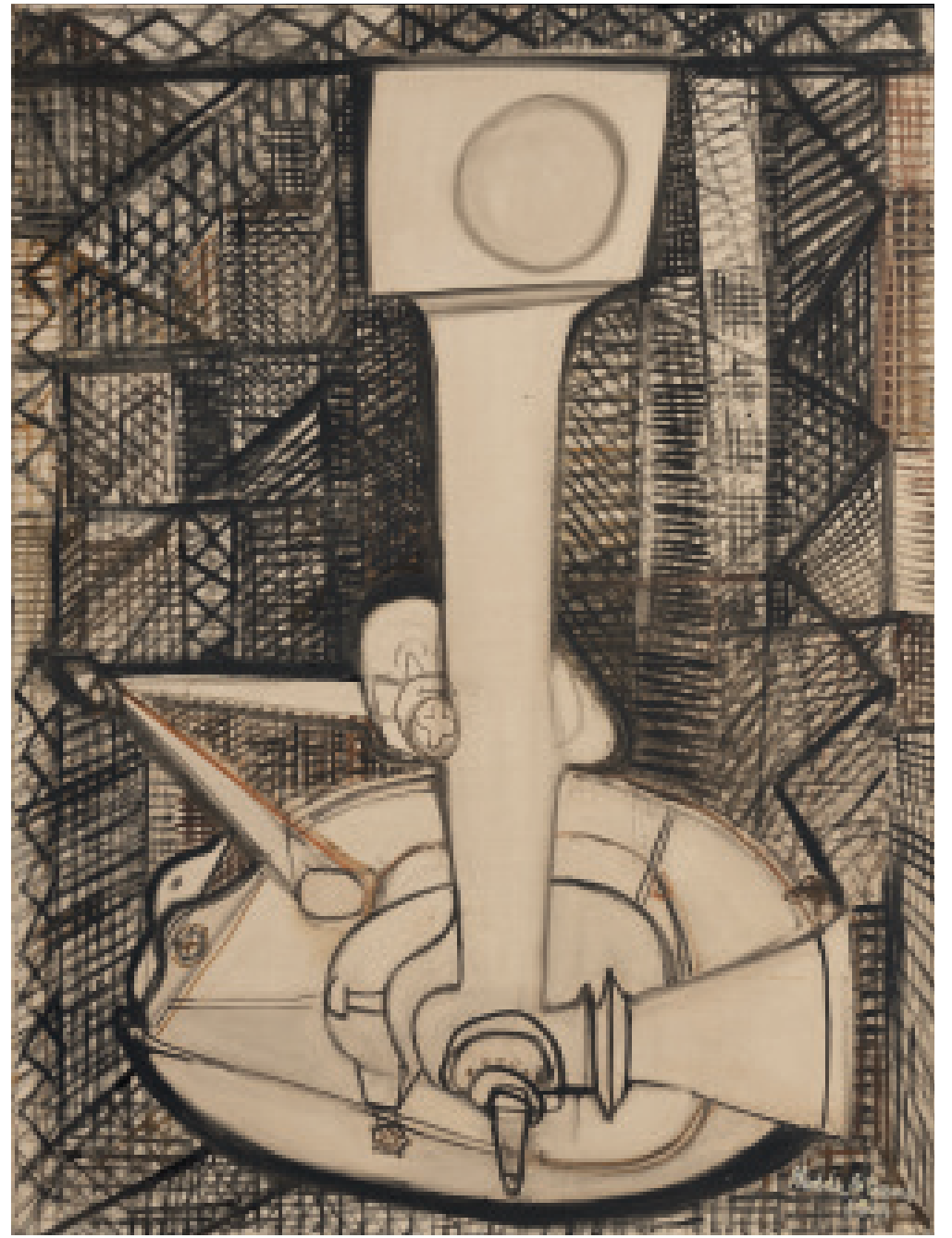
**WILLIAM KAY**

8TH GRADE  
HARDING MIDDLE SCHOOL

## The Eclipse Titan 2026

Creating this art was kind of difficult because you really have to know what you want to draw first and then work on the background. I decided that I wanted to draw something big and cool looking at the earth – not future giants, but old ones, like how people once believed that giants and Titans were real.

I looked through old images and decided to use a knight's armor because it reminds me the most of a Titan. After so much thinking, I decided to call my artwork *The Eclipse Titan*. I also gave it a Spartan



appearance to match how old it was. *Anthropograph #19* by Hedda Sterne inspired me to create a different kind of line, with varying thicknesses, as the background for my art.

*My Voice* has changed everything about how I see art. It was really hard at first, but just like Bob Ross said, "There are no mistakes, only happy accidents." I am learning how a little mistake can make the art perfect.

## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Hedda Sterne  
(American, born Romania, 1910 - 2011)  
**Anthropograph #19** 1949  
Oil on linen  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with funds from the Edmundson  
Art Foundation, Inc., 2020.2



**HTOO PAW**

7TH GRADE  
HARDING MIDDLE SCHOOL

## Drowning 2026

The artwork I was inspired by is Firelei Báez's *A most curious manifestation (or a boat sailing the great rapids of time)*, which has a ton of colors popping out like fireworks. It felt happy, but instead of giving my artwork the same emotion, I wanted it to represent something different. My message is to not be afraid to speak up.

Báez's work is loud and expressive, and I personally struggle with that. I wanted my art to relate to me. This was my first time painting on a canvas and I had a ton of



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Firelei Báez (Dominican, born 1981)  
***A most curious manifestation (or a boat sailing the great rapids of time)* 2024**  
Oil and acrylic on archival canvas  
Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 2025.6

challenges. There was a lot I didn't know, which made me nervous that I couldn't be successful.

Because of all of this being new to me, it impacted me a lot. I went beyond my art skills in ways I didn't know I could and it helped me a lot.





**KEW PAW**

8TH GRADE  
HARDING MIDDLE SCHOOL

## Reclaimed 2026

My painting was inspired by *Iago's Mirror* by Fred Wilson at the Des Moines Art Center. The artwork gave off a mysterious, dark, eerie feeling and reminded me of Maleficent from Snow White. It really attracted me and made me more and more interested and curious.

My art is usually what inspires me and makes me feel like it's beautiful and good. I tried to show anger in my piece.

In my painting, I drew a golden crown surrounded by dark energy. The dark and creepy aura is bursting through the jewelry, tearing it apart to take over what's finally theirs. I used pencil to sketch it out, then painted it layer by layer with gold and black acrylic paint.



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Fred Wilson (American, born 1954)  
**Iago's Mirror** 2009  
Murano glass  
Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 2013.3

Some challenges that came across my journey were definitely perseverance. I didn't even want to continue, but I had to in order to finish my creation. This journey has helped me to trust the process and believe in myself.



**ZYRELL SIMMONS**

7TH GRADE  
HARDING MIDDLE SCHOOL

## Desert Pyramids 2026

My artwork looks like a pyramid in the desert made of cloth. I was inspired by *Brick Blossom* by Charles Frederick Simonds at the Art Center. Visiting the museum, I liked the paintings, and then I saw *Brick Blossom*, and I wanted to make something like that because I thought it was cool and looked like it took a long time to make.

When deciding my project, I didn't know I could get a sewing machine, which is something I have wanted for a long time. When I learned that I could, I decided to make my artwork out of cloth, using colors and shapes inspired by Simonds' artwork. I can finally make



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Charles Frederick Simonds (American, born 1945)

**Brick Blossom** 1981

Mixed media (clay, sand and sticks)  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with funds from the Gardner and  
Florence Call Cowles Foundation, 1982.1

the things I want to, like plushies with my new sewing machine.

I have been making things since I was nine, and at 11, I switched to using pipe cleaners to make my own toys and animatronics when I was encouraged by my teacher. I have a whole box of self-made plushies at home.

I'm proud of all the effort it took to make my artwork. It was really hard to learn how to use a new tool, but I would remind myself that Charles Frederick Simonds did not give up when making *Brick Blossom*, so why should I?



**JAKAI FIELDER**

12TH GRADE  
NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

## Untitled 2026

The most obvious elements of my work are the contrast between the brighter opening and the darker room. I usually work in monochrome and so light and dark contrasts are something I have to work with and something I really enjoy about pieces I make.

I loved the oil paintings at the museum. I wanted a human focus and something with an older feel, which is what drew me towards Robert Henri's *Ballet Girl in White*. The works all had such a softness to them that I wanted to achieve, but I don't know if I did.

There were so many pieces I wanted to do, but I wanted to take a piece towards a more serious route



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Robert Henri (American, 1865 – 1929)  
**Ballet Girl in White** 1909  
Oil on canvas  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent  
Collections; Gift of the Des Moines  
Association of Fine Arts, 1927.1

rather than something more humorous. At the Art Center, they have so many inspiring pieces, I can't help but wonder what else I could've created for this project.

I learned that oil paint is so stubborn and takes so much time to perfect a singular detail, and I wanted to do lacing in a dress and kind of forgot that it takes a while to dry oil paint, so it was a disaster. Human proportion was a question for me. I wanted to stick to a sort of realism, like the inspiration piece, but I also wanted to have fun, which led to a lot of mental debate.





**KIMBER JACOBS**

11TH GRADE  
NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

## Siren 2026

My artwork is called *Siren*. I was inspired by *Water Woman* by Wangechi Mutu for its connection to water and women. Understanding the connection in my piece requires understanding the animal. Tigers spend a lot of their time in water, which is why there's no water in its liquid form in my piece — the key to the connection is knowing what tigers are like. The tiger eye I painted specifically references Tigris, which ties it even more to the inspiration piece.

Bengal tigers often spend hours in the water. It's a large part of their lives. They are excellent swimmers, capable of swimming up to four miles at a time at speeds of 3–4 miles per hour. They are known to hunt prey in water, which made me



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Wangechi Mutu  
(Kenyan, active United States, born 1972)  
**Water Woman** 2017  
Bronze  
Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with funds from the Edmundson  
Art Foundation, Inc., 2017.25

think of tying that into being a siren. Tigers are beautiful animals that I admire greatly.

I created this piece to show my love of animals. I hold big cats, and cats of all shapes and sizes, close to my heart. When I read the title *Water Woman*, my mind immediately thought of a tiger. The original inspiration was the artist's depiction of a siren, and this art piece is my interpretation of a siren.

My process making this piece was incredible. I was scared I wouldn't be able to do it, but it turned out so much better than I thought. I feel a bit remorseful putting my paint-covered clothes in the wash, but I will always remember this piece.



**DANIEL KETMAN**

11TH GRADE  
NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

## You 2026

With this painting, I knew I wanted to use oil paints, something I didn't have experience with before I had any idea what to paint. Because the *My Voice* program requires an inspiration piece, I looked for a painting that deeply intrigued me, which led me to choose *Hurricane of the South (Horse riding with my mother)* by Arnaldo Roche-Rabell because of its unique style and grotesque vibe. I also admired its chaotic and messy look and evoking of big emotions.

Although I struggled to find something I cared about enough to paint, none of my ideas were personal and I knew I didn't want a painting that didn't have meaning to me, so I took multiple days until I had a solid concept.



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Arnaldo Roche-Rabell (American and Puerto Rican, 1955 - 2018)

**Huracán Del Sur (Cabalgando junto a mi madre)**

**[Hurricane of the South**

**(Horse riding with my mother)]** 1991

Oil on canvas

Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 2021.22

I remember that particular week felt very dreadful. I was already upset and tired and no one took the time to ask me, "How are you?" or, "How was your day?" instead choosing to talk about themselves. This pushed me to paint something representing how I felt: upset and tired, yet not allowed to show it. Being forced to stay as stone-faced as possible because any show of negative emotion would be invalid.

Ultimately, the painting shows the feeling of bottling up your emotions in the face of someone else who forces your mood to worsen, without care for your emotions. With the colors from *Hurricane of the South*, I felt like I could express an uncomfortable painting with emotional meaning.

remove extra space after hyphen in stone-faced



**PAOLA MAYORGA**

11TH GRADE  
NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

## The Box 2026

When I saw my inspiration, I couldn't help but think about the struggles of identity; more specifically labeling yourself. On one hand, finding a label that resonates with you can build a form of security and support, while the other hand holds a scary reality of judgment and malice.

My multimedia art piece is inspired by Joseph Cornell's shadow boxes; they made me reflect on struggles of identity — more specifically labels in the LGBTQ+ community and how they're used.

The hands inside the piece represent two throngs. Love and community are shown by the hand up above with the colors correlating to the LGBTQ+ flag. The hand below, with eyes and teeth, represents hate and judgment from those who oppose our identity. All the while, the wooden figure stands in the middle with their hand pressed against the window, longing for when they will no longer fall under a category, but rather be seen as a person.



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Joseph Cornell (American, 1903 – 1972)  
**Habitat Group for a Shooting Gallery** 1943  
Mixed media  
Purchased with funds from the Coffin Fine Arts Trust; Nathan Emory Coffin Collection of the Des Moines Art Center, 1975.27

I wanted this piece to reflect the people I've met who have faced both of the reaching hands and how social media tends to neglect the person themselves and the journey it took to understand who they are, rather than the label they identify themselves under.

Having many friends who have felt both immense support and faced backlash for their identity inspired my piece. Opposite reactions for someone just sharing a small part of themselves to the world — to those who understand and to those who don't.

It's brave, raw, difficult, and admirable for someone to be faced at odds with someone seeing them as just a label or a person.





**MEZTLÍ ORTIZ**

11TH GRADE  
NORTH HIGH SCHOOL

## Apathy 2026

My artwork is made up of acrylic paint with cool-toned shades. I have a lot of inspirations when it comes to art, however, during an Art Center visit, I felt drawn to *Automat* by Edward Hopper and the feeling it brings. While my inspiration was based on the artist, the main subject was my dog.

I decided to choose my dog as the focus because it reflects how I see an example of my dog's day being gray. My dog loves to eat, especially foods that aren't in his bowl. Whenever he is fed meat, fruit, or whatever he finds, he is happiest. On days he doesn't get human food, he expresses himself as if he's having the worst day of his life.

I feel I learned how similar we are when we receive food we don't like – whether it's adults, kids, or dogs. They are



## INSPIRATION ARTWORK

Edward Hopper (American, 1882–1967)

**Automat** 1927

Oil on canvas

Des Moines Art Center Permanent Collections;  
Purchased with funds from the Edmundson  
Art Foundation, Inc., 1958.2

quite the same as humans in how they react. By humans demonstrating happiness towards our favorite foods, I see dogs also do the same.

This is not how I wanted my final project to be; I added a dog version for my dog to visualize the colors properly. In conclusion, I think my artwork in the future will be influenced by this experience, because throughout the process I was able to understand color theory more and better understand the concept of paint and time management, while also inspiring me to explore the subject of animals more.



The program has had an amazing impact on my son. He is even more excited about art than he was before. It has built his confidence up, knowing he can do anything he sets his mind to.

PARENT OF MY VOICE PARTICIPANT





2026 My Voice student artists tour the museum

#### **CURRICULUM**

November 2025 – February 2026

#### **ARTWORK CREATION**

March 2026

#### **ARTIST STATEMENTS**

April 2026

#### **RECEPTION**

May 7, 2026

#### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

Artwork: Rich Sanders, Des Moines

Reception: Erik Brockmeyer

#### **DESIGN**

Connie Wilson

#### **PROJECT FUNDING**

provided by the Principal® Foundation

#### **THANK YOU**

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MY VOICE IS PRESENTED BY THE DES MOINES ART CENTER, BY DEGREES FOUNDATION, AND THE PRINCIPAL® FOUNDATION

