

Press Release

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Judges Announced for SPA's 22nd Annual Student Art Contest



(Judges Eepi Chaad, Jamal Cyrus, and Emily Fens)

HOUSTON (February 19, 2020) – Society for the Performing Arts (SPA) is pleased to announce **Jamal Cyrus, Eepi Chaad, and Emily Fens** as judges of the **22nd Annual Student Art Contest** sponsored by **Wells Fargo**.

Jamal Cyrus is a Houston-native and visual artist who sees his work as “a form of self-education.” Cyrus received his BFA from University of Houston and MFA from University of Pennsylvania. His work has been shown both nationally and internationally, and he has won several awards including the **Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award**, the **Artadia Houston Award**, and the **Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship**. Cyrus is also a member of the artist collective **Otabenga Jones and Associates**. Cyrus’s and Otabenga Jones's work has been reviewed in Artlies, The Houston Chronicle, Houston Magazine, and The New York Times.

Eepi Chaad is a multi-disciplinary artist who investigates the relationship between humanity and the environment and believes “art is for every community and creativity is in every human”. Chaad is currently Director of Community Engagement at **Art League Houston**, as well as serving on the board for **Artists for Artist** and the steering committee for **Houston Museum Educators Roundtable**.

Emily Fens is a visual artist who received her formal training from the **Glassell School of Art** and holds a degree in Neuroscience from UCLA. In addition to Fens’ ongoing works on paper series, her project *Brainbloom* combines art and science to create fantastical, polychromatic explorations of the brain and has been exhibited for **MFAH’s Music on the Plaza** program.

“This year’s judges are active, influential leaders of the Houston arts community. We are thrilled to deepen our partnerships with local artists and visual art organizations through the Student Art Contest,” says Claire Williamson, SPA’s Manager of School & Community Partnerships. “All

three judges prioritize being educators in addition to artists, and this is a quality that stood out to us during our selection process.”

The theme for this year’s contest is ***Ingenuity***, the quality of being clever, original, and inventive. The theme is inspired by SPA’s presentation of two performances during the 2019-2020 season: ***Manual Cinema: Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*** and ***EMN- Ensemble Mik Nawooj***. Both performances showcase unique ways of presenting their craft and bringing art to the masses. Ingenuity is all around us.

SPA’s Art Contest offers all students Pre-K through 12th grade in the greater Houston area a chance to showcase their talents and gain acknowledgement from our acclaimed panel of judges, while learning more about the performing arts. The deadline for entries is Friday, March 13, 2020.

All submitted artwork will be judged on creativity, skill and interpretation of the theme ***Ingenuity***. Works on paper, including photography, are permitted. SPA allows only one entry per student and one artist per entry. For rules and submission guidelines, including more information regarding this year’s theme and drop off locations, please visit **spahouston.org/artcontest**

Winning entries and honorable mentions will be displayed in the Wells Fargo Student Art Contest Exhibit at **Phoenicia MKT Bar** from late May through late August 2020. Winning artists, along with their families and teachers, will be invited to an awards ceremony to celebrate in May 2020. Winners will be notified in early April. Senior contest winners will be awarded scholarships in various amounts. One “Best of Show” award of \$2,500 will be given to a graduating high school senior. All winners, including the honorable mention recipients, will receive prizes ranging from tickets to a performance provided by SPA to art supplies, to scholarship funds. Those with questions regarding SPA’s 22nd Annual Student Art Contest sponsored by Wells Fargo may e-mail **education@spahouston.org**.

About Society for the Performing Arts

Founded in 1966, Society for the Performing Arts (SPA) is the largest independent non-profit presenting organization in the Southwest. Since its inception, SPA has sponsored more than 1,000 performances of the world’s finest music, dance and theater events, in adherence to the belief that the arts are fundamental to the overall enrichment and quality of life within a community. In addition to presenting artists, SPA seeks to provide a variety of learning experiences for adults and children through master classes, lectures and special student performances, as well as build relationships between the performing arts and other interests within the greater Houston area and throughout the state of Texas.

Jamal Cyrus Bio

Jamal Cyrus (born 1973, Houston, TX) received his BFA from the University of Houston in 2004 and his MFA from the University of Pennsylvania in 2008. In 2005 he attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, and in 2010 he was an Artist in Residence at Artpace San Antonio. Cyrus has won several awards, including the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award, the Artadia Houston Award, and the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship. He has participated in national and international exhibitions, including The Freedom Principle: Experiments in Art and Music, 1965 – Now, Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, Chicago, IL (traveled to ICA Philadelphia, 2016); Arresting Patterns, ArtSpace, New Haven, CT (traveled to the African American Museum in Philadelphia, 2016); two exhibitions at the Studio Museum, Harlem (both 2013); the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston (2012); the New Museum, New York (2011); The Kitchen, New York (2009); the Museum of London Docklands, London (2009);

and The Office Baroque Gallery, Antwerp (2007). In 2006 Cyrus was included in Day for Night, the 2006 Whitney Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Cyrus is also a member of the artist collective Otabenga Jones and Associates. As a member of the collective, Cyrus has exhibited at Lawndale Art Center, Houston (2014), Project Row Houses, Houston (2014), the High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2008), the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, DC (2008), the California African American Museum, Los Angeles (2008), the Menil Collection, Houston (2007), the 2006 Whitney Biennial, and Clementine Gallery, New York (2006). Cyrus's and Otabenga Jones's work has been reviewed in Artlies, The Houston Chronicle, Houston Magazine, and The New York Times. Cyrus participated in the New Orleans triennial, Prospect.4, with Otabenga Jones.

“I see my work as a form of self-education. Due to the illegality of teaching the enslaved to read and write, and the subsequent lack of access to education following Emancipation and well into the middle of the 20th Century, the action of teaching oneself has a long history within Black culture. This concept, is of course, multidisciplinary, appendaging itself through practical, political, and spiritual import. Hence, some of Black America's most progressive and impactful thinkers have been autodidacts. I try to make my work operate in a similar fashion. To rectify the gaps in my own understanding of the cultural and national heritage of which I am a part, as well as catching up on the lessons my parents and schools to which I belonged, could not, would not, or found most expedient to remain silent about, is the impetus that propels my search.”

- Jamal Cyrus, Artist Statement

Eepi Chaad Bio

Eepi Chaad is a multidisciplinary artist, advocate, and environmentalist who tells stories using textiles, fibers, metals, places, and people. Her work investigates the relationship between humanity and environment. Eepi worked with a coastal margin preservation non-profit in Galveston prior to serving as one of the first resident artists for the City of Houston. Eepi now serves as Director of Community Engagement at Art League Houston and is part of the team of facilitators for the Artist INC Houston program. Eepi is also board vice president of Artists For Artists and serves on the steering committee for the Houston Museum Educators Roundtable. Eepi believes art is for every community and creativity is in every human.

Emily Fens Bio

Emily Fens is a Houston-based visual artist who received her formal training from the Glassell School of Art and holds a BS in Neuroscience from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). In her artistic practice, Fens dissolves hierarchical scale of neuroscience to create fantastical, intricate, polychromatic explorations of the brain through projects such as *Brainbloom* for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston's Music on the Plaza (2019) as well as her ongoing works on paper series. In addition to her artistic practice, Fens is the Community Engagement Manager at Lawndale.

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Photos of our 21st Student Art Contest winners' work may be found [here](#).