

**60 ASPIRING ARTISTS NOMINATED FOR  
2018 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS IN THE ARTS**

**Highest Honor Bestowed to Talented High School Seniors from  
25 States and Representing 9 Artistic Disciplines**

**MIAMI, FL (January 31, 2018)** –The [National YoungArts Foundation \(YoungArts\)](http://www.youngarts.org) today announced the nominees for the **2018 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts**, one of the nation’s highest honors for high school students who exemplify academic and artistic excellence. YoungArts is the sole nominating agency for this high honor and the 60 candidates, representing 25 states and nine artistic disciplines, are all YoungArts winners. The students have been nominated to the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program for their artistic achievement on the heels of the organization’s annual signature program, National YoungArts Week, which concluded in Miami on January 14.

The candidate applications will be reviewed by the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, which will ultimately select 20 high school seniors to be recognized as U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts for their academic and artistic accomplishments, demonstrated leadership, community service and outreach initiatives, and overall creativity. In June, the 20 arts scholars will join the other 141 U.S. Presidential Scholars from across the country in Washington, D.C. for the **National Recognition Program**. During the program, all scholars receive a Presidential Medallion presented on behalf of the President of the United States and participate in several recognition activities while in Washington, D.C. The 2018 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts will present their work at the **John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts** through a special exhibition curated by YoungArts Exhibition Manager **Luisa Munera**, and a performance directed by YoungArts alumnus and Theater National Selection Panelist **Michael McElroy** (1985 Winner in Theater).

“The National YoungArts Foundation is proud to partner with the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program to acknowledge our nation’s most talented graduating high school seniors,” said Carolina Garcia Jayaram, YoungArts President and CEO. “These young leaders excel in everything that they do, from their artistry and inquisitiveness, to their academics and activism. YoungArts congratulates each of the nominees on their accomplishments, and we look forward to announcing the selected arts scholars this spring.”

The 2018 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts nominees are:

<i>Name</i>	<i>School City, State</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>YoungArts Winner Year and Discipline</i>
James Balo	Miami, FL	Design & Architecture Senior High School	2018, Visual Arts
Lillian Benkoil	New York, NY	Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School for Music	2018, Cinematic Arts
William Brandt	Los Angeles, CA	Alexander Hamilton High	2017, Voice
Sydney Burtis	Kissimmee, FL	Homeschool	2017, Dance
Willem Butler	Huntsville, AL	Virgil I. Grissom High School	2018, Theater
Benjamin Champion	Idyllwild, CA	Idyllwild Arts Academy	2018, Classical Music
Perry Chen	San Diego, CA	Canyon Crest Academy	2018, Cinematic Arts
Aaron Choate	Lexington, KY	Lafayette Senior High School	2018, Dance
Natalie Choo	Cincinnati, OH	Seven Hills School	2018, Voice
Athena Chu	Watertown, MA	Buckingham Browne & Nichols School	2018, Writing
Gabriel Costache	Interlochen, MI	Interlochen Arts Academy	2018, Classical Music

Juliana Cuevas	Lake Elsinore, CA	Lakeside High School	2018, Theater
Zoe D'Andrea	Santa Monica, CA	Santa Monica High School	2018, Theater
Cyan D'Anjou	Atlanta, GA	The Westminster Schools	2018, Visual Arts
Sophia Dion	Irwindale, CA	Opportunities for Learning – Baldwin Park	2018, Voice
Audrey Emata	West Chester, PA	Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School	2018, Classical Music
Melissa Fernandez-Flores	Miami, FL	New World School of the Arts	2018, Visual Arts
Aidan Forster	Greenville, SC	South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities	2018, Writing
Isabella Franco	Los Angeles, CA	Marlborough School	2016, Dance
Nathan Ginter	Interlochen, MI	Interlochen Arts Academy	2018, Cinematic Arts
Jayden Goldberg	Fort Worth, TX	Fort Worth Academy of Fine Arts	2018, Voice
Elena Gonzalez	Miami, FL	New World School of the Arts	2018, Theater
Ishmael Gonzalez	Miami, FL	New World School of the Arts	2018, Theater
Claire Griffin	Brevard, NC	Brevard Senior High School	2018, Voice
Vako Gvelesiani	New York, NY	Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts	2018, Dance
Amal Haddad	Kensington, MD	Albert Einstein High School	2018, Visual Arts
Francisco Haye	New York, NY	Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts	2018, Voice
Jacqueline He	San Jose, CA	Harker School	2017, Writing
Megan Hostetler	West Palm Beach, FL	Alexander W. Dreyfoos School of the Arts	2018, Visual Arts
David Hou	Lincolnshire, IL	Adlai E. Stevenson High School	2018, Classical Music
Christina Im	Portland, OR	Sunset High School	2017, Writing
Christopher Jensen	Los Angeles, CA	Los Angeles County High School for the Arts	2018, Theater
Taylor Kurtz	Temecula, CA	Great Oak High School	2016, Dance
Lauren Lam	Lakeville, CT	The Hotchkiss School	2018, Design Arts
Noah Lee	Ramsey, NJ	Don Bosco Preparatory High School	2017, Classical Music
Sanna Legan	Santa Monica, CA	New Roads School	2018, Visual Arts
Xavier Lightfoot	Milwaukee, WI	Pius XI High School	2018, Photography
Leanne Lin	Miami, FL	Design and Architecture Senior High School	2018, Design Arts
Anilee List	Los Angeles, CA	Los Angeles County High School for the Arts	2017, Voice
Claire Manning	Boise, ID	Boise High School	2018, Visual Arts
William McGregor	West Chester, PA	Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School	2018, Classical Music
Shreyah Mohanselman	Gahanna, OH	Columbus Academy	2018, Dance
Perry Naseck	Dallas, TX	Saint Marks School of Texas	2018, Design Arts
Jackson Neal	Sugar Land, TX	Stephen F. Austin High School	2018, Writing
Oliver Neubauer	New York, NY	The Dalton School	2018, Classical Music
Brian Niles	Los Angeles, CA	Los Angeles County High School for the Arts	2018, Cinematic Arts
Liam Oh	Winnetka, IL	New Trier High School	2018, Theater
Ameya Okamoto	Portland, OR	Catlin Gabel School	2018, Visual Arts
Madelyn Paquette	Sudbury, MA	Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School	2017, Voice
Emir Price	Dallas, TX	Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts	2018, Theater
Julian Rhee	Brookfield, WI	Brookfield East High School	2018, Classical Music
David Sacks	Stanford, CA	Stanford Online High School	2017, Classical Music
Nicolas Savignon	Albuquerque, NM	Eldorado High School	2018, Writing

Christian Smith	Las Vegas, NV	Las Vegas Academy of the Arts	2018, Dance
Frances Timberlake	Cincinnati, OH	School for Creative and Performing Arts	2018, Writing
Felipe Urrutia	Coconut Grove, FL	Ransom Everglades School	2018, Photography
Jace Weyant	Winston Salem, NC	University of North Carolina School of the Arts	2018, Dance
Liza Wimbish	Midlothian, VA	Midlothian High School	2018, Photography
Alisha Yi	Las Vegas, NV	Ed W. Clark High School	2017, Writing
Bianca Zhou	San Ramon, CA	Dougherty Valley High School	2018, Writing

*\* Interviews can be facilitated upon request.*

The U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts nominees are actors, dancers, singers, classical musicians, photographers, filmmakers, visual artists, designers and writers. Once selected, the 2018 awardees will join an illustrious group of YoungArts and U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts alumni including Tony Award-nominated performer and choreographer **Desmond Richardson**; Los Angeles Music Center President **Rachel S. Moore**; novelist and National Book Award Finalist **Allegra Goodman**; Grammy Award-nominated violinist **Jennifer Koh**; BRAVO’s “Work of Art” winner **Abdi Farah**; OBIE Award-winning actress **Donna Lynne Champlin**; and RCA Records award-winning singer-songwriter and Grammy Award-nominated artist **Chris Young**.

The 2018 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts, and details regarding the National Recognition Program will be announced in the coming months. For additional information, please visit: <http://www.ed.gov/psp>

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**BECOMING A U.S. PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLAR IN THE ARTS**

The first step to becoming a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts is to apply to the National YoungArts Foundation, which is the nominating agency for this honor. To be eligible for the YoungArts program, applicants must be 15–18 years old or in high school grades 10–12. To be further considered for a nomination as a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts, applicants must be high school seniors and meet all of the U.S. Presidential Scholars requirements.

YoungArts winners demonstrating excellence in the visual, literary, performing or design arts are selected annually through a blind adjudication process. This year, 757 YoungArts winners were selected. In January, approximately 171 Finalists from across the nation were invited to National YoungArts Week in Miami, where they participated in a week of intensive master classes and workshops with internationally renowned artists, and shared their work through performances, readings, exhibitions and screenings that were open to the public.

During National YoungArts Week, eligible participants are further evaluated, award levels are determined, and nominations are made for that year’s U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts candidates. After a rigorous selection process, YoungArts nominates 60 candidates for an invitation to apply to the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program. Finally, the Commission on Presidential Scholars selects 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts each year.

**ABOUT U.S. PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS**

In 1964, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program was established by executive order of President Lyndon B. Johnson to recognize and honor the nation’s top graduating high school seniors. In 1979, the program was extended to recognize students who demonstrated talent in the visual, creative and performing arts. In 2015, the program was again extended to recognize students who demonstrate ability and accomplishment in career and technical education fields.

Scholars are selected annually by the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by the President, based on academic achievement, personal characteristics, leadership and service activities, and writing ability. This year, almost 5,000 candidates qualified for the 2018 program determined by outstanding performance on the College Board SAT and ACT exams, through nominations made by Chief State School Officers, or other partner recognition programs or the National YoungArts Foundation.

Since its inception, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program has honored more than 7,000 of the nation's high-performing students. During the National Recognition Program, scholars are flown to D.C. to receive a Presidential Medallion, which is given to honorees during the annual ceremony in Washington, D.C.

The 161 2018 U.S. Presidential Scholars are comprised of one young man and one young woman from each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and from U.S. families living abroad, as well as 15 chosen at-large, 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts, and 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in Career and Technical Education.

#### **ABOUT THE NATIONAL YOUNGARTS FOUNDATION**

The National YoungArts Foundation (YoungArts) was established in 1981 by Lin and Ted Arison to identify and nurture the most accomplished young artists in the visual, literary, design and performing arts, and assist them at critical junctures in their educational and professional development. Through a wide range of annual programs, performances, and partnerships with some of the nation's leading cultural institutions, YoungArts aspires to create a strong community of alumni and a platform for a lifetime of encouragement, opportunity and support.

YoungArts' signature program is an application-based award for emerging artists ages 15–18 or in grades 10–12 from across the United States. Selected through a blind adjudication process, YoungArts winners receive valuable support, including financial awards of up to \$10,000, professional development and educational experiences working with renowned mentors—such as Debbie Allen, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rebecca Walker, Plácido Domingo, Frank Gehry, Jeff Koons, Wynton Marsalis, Salman Rushdie and Carrie Mae Weems—and performance and exhibition opportunities at some of the nation's leading cultural institutions, including the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The Museum of Modern Art (New York) and New World Center (Miami). Additionally, YoungArts winners are eligible for nomination as a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts, one of the nation's highest honors for high school students who exemplify academic and artistic excellence.

YoungArts winners become part of a thousands-strong alumni network of artists, which offers them additional professional opportunities throughout their careers. YoungArts alumni who have gone on to become leading professionals in their fields include actresses Viola Davis, Anna Gunn, Zuzanna Szadkowski and Kerry Washington; Broadway stars Raúl Esparza, Billy Porter, Andrew Rannells and Tony Yazbeck; recording artists Josh Groban, Judith Hill and Chris Young; Metropolitan Opera star Eric Owens; musicians Terence Blanchard, Gerald Clayton, Jennifer Koh and Elizabeth Roe; choreographers Camille A. Brown and Desmond Richardson; visual artists Daniel Arsham and Hernan Bas; internationally acclaimed multimedia artist Doug Aitken; New York Times bestselling author Sam Lipsyte; and Academy Award winners Doug Blush and Tarell Alvin McCraney.

For more information, visit [youngarts.org](http://youngarts.org), [facebook.com/YoungArtsFoundation](https://facebook.com/YoungArtsFoundation) or [twitter.com/YoungArts](https://twitter.com/YoungArts). To watch a brief video about YoungArts, [click here](#).

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