



From top left, clockwise: Blair Katherine Betik, Qiong (Voyo) Wu, Natalia Gabrielsen, Lauren Blankenship and Mekia “Machine” Denby.

The White House Historical Association, Artsy, and Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Announce Winners of “This Art is Your Art” Video Competition

Five winners will have their videos on view at the White House Visitor Center

July 5, 2016 (New York, NY) – Today the White House Historical Association, Artsy, and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation announced the winners of the *This Art Is Your Art* competition.

This Art is Your Art was an unprecedented opportunity for university students in the United States to engage with the artwork in our country’s home—the White House—by creating a short video about the historical and artistic context of one particular work in the White House. Students chose from a selection of seventeen works from the Association’s collection, and their videos responded to six specific prompts.

The winners are: **Blair Katherine Betik** of Southern Methodist University, **Lauren Blankenship** of Portland State University, **Mekia “Machine” Denby** of Columbia University, **Natalia Gabrielsen** of the University of Arizona, and **Qiong “Voyo” Wu** of Sotheby’s Institute of Art.

The jury for the competition was comprised of eight renowned artists, educators, museum professionals, and public figures—**Caroline Bauman**, Director of the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum; **Melissa Chiu**, Director of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; **JiaJia Fei**, Director of Digital, Jewish Museum; **Agnes Gund**, Chairman of the Board of MoMA PS1 and President Emerita of MoMA; **William Kloss**, Art historian and author of “Art in the White House”; **Jan Krawitz**, Professor of Documentary Film and Video at Stanford University; **Earl A. Powell III**, Director of the National Gallery of Art; and **Kehinde Wiley**, artist.

“I was so impressed by the responses to this competition, and the way in which students naturally leveraged video and technology to demonstrate the lasting impact of artwork in the White House collection,” wrote **JiaJia Fei** in response to the process of judging. “The competition reminds us that all art was once contemporary, and the importance of collecting to preserve stories of the past and inspire conversation about the future.”

The judges selected five final winners of the competition. The winners were chosen on the basis of meeting three criteria: creativity, relevancy to their selected question, and overall production value. The winners come from institutions and hometowns around the country, and each offered their unique perspective on a selected work in an array of creative video submissions.

The winning videos will be on display at the White House Visitor Center, in a special installation organized by the Rauschenberg Foundation and the White House Historical Association, from July 15 to September 30, 2016.

“This Art is Your Art” Winners

Blair Katherine Betik is a rising junior studying Art History at Southern Methodist University, hailing from Ennis, Texas. She chose to create a video based on an Albert Bierstadt painting from 1870 called *Rocky Mountain Landscape*. Her final product, titled “Rapturous and Romantic: Albert Bierstadt and Christina Rossetti’s Natural World” featured a voice-over of the 19th century British poet’s “Who Has Seen the Wind?” as well as historical information on the paintings of the Hudson Valley School, coupled with shots of a serene woodland setting.

Lauren Blankenship took a different yet similarly personal approach in her video reflection on Georgia O’Keeffe’s *Mountain at Bear Lake – Taos* (1930). As a local student at Portland State University, she drew on the personal connections she felt to

O’Keeffe’s nature-based painting by recording her grandfather singing a traditional logging song while showing scenes from her local landscape. This “soundtrack of the past,” as she called it, helps to express her relationship with her surrounding environment today.

Choosing to reflect on a much more recent acquisition to the White House’s collection, **Mekia “Machine” Denby** filmed the process of rendering “Alma’s Portrait,” a painting produced by the videographer herself that depicts artist Alma Thomas, whose *Resurrection* hangs in the newly-renovated Private Dining Room of the White House. Denby was enrolled at Columbia University as a political science major in fall 2005, when she left school to teach music to children. She has since re-entered the university in the Visual Arts department, and her video featured a song called “The Sunshine” by her young music students.

Natalia Gabrielsen, a graduate student of Art History at the University of Arizona, was eager to use the competition as an opportunity to investigate O’Keeffe’s artistic practice through the lens of her native environment in Arizona. “The first paper I wrote in graduate school addressed art in the Oval Office as a vehicle of political display, so I was thrilled to work on this project,” Gabrielsen wrote in her accompanying personal statement. “As someone who has spent a significant portion of my life in the Southwestern United States, *Mountain at Bear Lake – Taos*... deeply resonated with me. I wanted to speak to my region and represent its beauty to the country.”

Sotheby’s graduate student **Qiong “Voyo” Wu** chose the most contemporary of the works, Robert Rauschenberg’s *Early Bloomer [Anagram (A Pun)]* (1998), to inspire her video “America = Combines.” In comparing Rauschenberg’s “combine” technique to America as a whole, she argues that his amalgamation of different media into a cohesive piece parallels the way the country is composed of immigrants from different backgrounds and cultures that form one diverse community.

White House Historical Association

The White House Historical Association is a nonprofit educational association founded in 1961 for the purpose of enhancing the understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the Executive Mansion. It was created with the support of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. The Association also sponsors lectures, exhibits, and outreach programs.

Artsy

[Artsy](#) is the leading resource for learning about and collecting art from over 4,000 leading galleries, 600 museums and institutions, 60 international art fairs, and select auctions. Artsy provides free access via its website (Artsy.net) and iPhone and iPad apps to 400,000 images of art and architecture by 50,000 artists, which includes the world’s largest online database of contemporary art. Artsy’s encyclopedic database spans historical works, such as the [Rosetta Stone](#) and [the Colosseum](#), to modern and contemporary works by artists such as [Pablo Picasso](#), [Willem de Kooning](#), [Richard](#)

[Serra](#), [Sarah Lucas](#), and [Cindy Sherman](#). Powered by The Art Genome Project, a classification system that maps the connections between artists and artworks, Artsy fosters new generations of art lovers, museum-goers, patrons, and collectors.

Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

The [Robert Rauschenberg Foundation](#) fosters the legacy of the life, artistic practice, and activist philosophy of one of the most important artists of the 20th century. Through exhibitions, scholarship, grants, and a residency program, the Foundation furthers Rauschenberg's belief that art can change the world, while ensuring that his singular achievements and contributions continue to have global impact and resonance with contemporary artists.

The White House Visitor Center

The Center, operated by the National Park Service, just completed a \$12.5 million renovation through a public-private partnership with the White House Historical Association to create more educational and interactive exhibits. In the last fiscal year, the Center welcomed nearly 40,000 visitors through its doors to teach them about the history and significance of the White House.

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