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11th ANNUAL

ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE

Every year in our Artistic Excellence competition, we extend our creative horizon beyond the West, inviting emerging and established artists alike to showcase their unique perspectives on genre, medium, and style. They never fail to impress. As we step into the second decade of the competition, we're again honored and humbled to witness the talent displayed in the hundreds of inspired submissions—and delighted to share the 13 award winners that have captured our souls.

BY ALLISON MALAFRONTA AND BETH WILLIAMS

GRACE FLOTT

FIRST PLACE

WITH ITS STRIKING SUBJECT depicted in exquisite colors and delicate light, GLOW UP, PORTRAIT OF ALIZÉ takes the top prize in this year's Artistic Excellence competition. In addition to the painting's aesthetic appeal is the equally moving story behind it. "I am beginning a collaborative portrait project documenting and celebrating burn survivors in my community," says artist Grace Flott of Spokane, WA. "Alizé is an incredible young woman I met a few years ago when I volunteered at a camp for kids with burns. I am very humbled that she was willing to participate. I feel so uplifted by the audacity and resiliency of my fellow folks with scars. We are redefining beauty and challenging ableism in our everyday actions."

Flott is actively giving back to the artistic community, too. A graduate of the University of Washington and the Aristides Atelier, today she teaches at local art centers and academies—including the Gage Academy of Art in Seattle—and offers private online classes.



Glow Up, Portrait of Alizé, oil, 24 x 20.

She continues to refine the classical realist approach she learned, pursuing her own nuanced contemporary sensibility.

Although GLOW UP, PORTRAIT OF ALIZÉ was created in much the same way as many of Flott's portraits, this particular piece called for a few departures. "Alizé and I began by working from life outside on a typically cloudy Northwest day, and then I relied on color studies, memory, and photos to finish the piece," she says. "I added some

embellishments to emphasize the glow of light around her, as well as the thick textures of the background and edges. I like how the surface texture mirrors the glorious imperfection of her skin. None of us fit neatly into normative beauty standards, and it's important that we see more faces like this and begin to celebrate our physical differences." Find Flott's work at Figure | Ground Art Gallery, Seattle, WA, and www.graceathenflott.com.
—Allison Malafronte