



Brandy Gonzalez, 16, Gold Medal, Painting. Images courtesy of the Alliance for Young Artists & Writers and the Scholastic Art & Writing Award Winners of 2019.

Bold Shadows

How does Brandy compose this portrait?

This award-winning artist explores composition

Brandy Gonzalez strives to break new ground in photographs like the one above. “Without the abstract designs and unusual angle,” says Brandy, 16, “the portrait would be ordinary.” A junior at Pine Tree High School in Longview, Texas, she hopes to become an architect.

What inspired this award-winning work? It started with an assignment for digital photography. We were supposed to create stencil cutouts and project the design onto someone using light. Initially, I was going to do a traditional vertical portrait using indoor lighting. But that was boring. Instead, I tried shooting horizontal images outside. I had two people hold the stencil, and I loved how the sunlit shadows appeared as patterns on my model’s face. At one point, I came in close and shot from below the model. I loved how different and beautiful that perspective looked.

How did you create this portrait? First, I drew a mermaid, shells, plants, and a dolphin onto paper and cut them out with an X-Acto knife. As my model posed in the courtyard at my school, two friends held the stencil above her face, and I shot hundreds of photographs. I chose my favorite image and began working on it using Photoshop. I tightly cropped the image and adjusted the colors so they would pop.

How did you play with patterns? The tight, swirly circular shadows on her face play off her tight, curly black hair. All of the different patterns create energy and make the viewer’s eye move around the scene.

Do you have advice for aspiring artists like yourself? Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Many people want to support you—if you are struggling, let them. Learning to be humble and to take advice has helped me grow artistically.



Brandy won a Gold Medal for her artwork in the 2019 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. To learn more about this program, visit artandwriting.org.

Brandy Gonzalez

