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b l a f f e r g a l l e r y

The Art Museum of the University of Houston

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Blaffer's Young Artist Apprenticeship Program Named Coming Up Taller Finalist

***At the White House, First Lady Michelle Obama
Presented Prestigious Award to Blaffer Staff Member, Former YAAP Student***

HOUSTON (Nov. 4, 2009) – The Young Artist Apprenticeship Program organized by Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston, a six week comprehensive art-making workshop for teenagers from neighboring Houston Independent School District high schools, earned national endorsement by winning a Coming Up Taller award from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. In a ceremony at the White House on Nov. 4, 2009, First Lady Michelle Obama presented two representatives from YAAP—Blaffer curator of education Katherine Veneman and former YAAP participant and current Texas A&M freshman Jessica Flores—with an individualized plaque denoting the prestigious award. Blaffer Gallery also received \$10,000 in support of the program.

Each year, the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities recognizes 15 outstanding after-school and out-of-school arts and humanities programs nationwide that provide young people with learning opportunities and the ability to contribute to their communities. Chosen from a pool of 420 applicants, YAAP is the only program from Texas to be named a finalist in 2009. In the award's 11-year history, YAAP is the first program from Houston to be recognized. The President's Committee partners with the Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities to administer the Coming Up Taller award.

Since the program's inception in 1998, YAAP has been enriching the lives of Houston area teenagers by providing them with an after-school program that fosters creativity, independent thinking and a spirit of collaboration. "Whether or not the teenagers choose art as their ultimate career path, the Young Artist Apprenticeship Program exposes students to the intense level of dedication required of higher education and encourages them to contemplate their educational destinies," stated Claudia Schmuckli, Blaffer

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Gallery's director and chief curator. "Recognition from the White House confirms the success of YAAP, and we are proud that a program so valued by our community has been honored as one of the top programs in the nation."

The Coming Up Taller award also recognized the importance of YAAP at a time of great challenge. On Sept. 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike made landfall on the Texas Coast, and overcoming adversity as a team became the theme of YAAP during fall 2008. Despite the obstacles students faced due to the aftermath of Ike, the YAAP participants successfully carried out the program, culminating in an exhibition of their works at Blaffer in October. The students also collaborated on a mural which incorporated tree limbs broken by the storm and was permanently installed in the foyer of the Graduate College of Social Work building at the University of Houston. It stands as a testament to the students' strong will to succeed.

Flores, who accepted the Coming Up Taller award in Washington D.C. on behalf of YAAP, participated in the program during Ike. "I am truly grateful for the invaluable experience I acquired from taking part in the Young Artist Apprenticeship Program," stated Flores. "In addition to expanding my artistic creativity, I honed my leadership abilities and learned the value of collaboration in the face of misfortune, all skills that will serve me well during college and beyond." Flores plans to study veterinary medicine and is in the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets. Upon completion of YAAP, she was awarded a first place Martha Meier Scholarship, a \$1,000 partial college scholarship, for her superb achievement during the program.

Blaffer Gallery invites the public to celebrate the Coming Up Taller award by coming to the Young Artist Apprenticeship Program fall 2009 exhibition opening at the museum on Friday, Nov. 6, 2009, at 5:30 p.m. Admission is free, and refreshments will be provided.

About the Young Artist Apprenticeship Program:

Established in 1998, Blaffer Gallery's Young Artist Apprenticeship Program brings an intensive art-making experience to area high school sophomores, juniors and seniors. YAAP matches eight to 12 teenagers with two artist mentors, accomplished professional artists and teachers who devise individual and collaborative art projects informed by current Blaffer Gallery exhibitions. The goals of the comprehensive six-week workshop are to build critical thinking, problem-solving and collaborative skills; nurture creativity and independent thinking; raise self-esteem; and help students develop good work habits and improve artistic skills to better prepare them for college. Over the course of the program, students have the opportunity to engage with University of Houston students, meet museum staff, and take field trips to local museums. YAAP culminates in an exhibition at Blaffer and awards ceremony, during which two students who excelled in the program receive partial college scholarships.

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About Blaffer Gallery:

Founded in 1973, Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston, was named in honor of the late Sarah Campbell Blaffer, a noted Houston arts patron and collector. Since its inception, the museum has been a vital force in the presentation and promotion of contemporary visual arts in Houston. Blaffer Gallery is located in the Fine Arts Building on the University of Houston's central campus, entrance 16 off Cullen Boulevard. It is free and open to the public Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed Sundays, Mondays and University holidays. The museum is ADA compliant. For general inquiries, please call 713.743.9530, or visit the museum online at www.blaffergallery.org.

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The Young Artist Apprenticeship Program's scholarships are provided by the Martha Meier Memorial Scholarship Endowment Fund, established in 2006.

The 2009 Young Artist Apprenticeship Program is sponsored by the Travelers Foundation, the charitable arm of Travelers.

