



ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH-LED FUTURES

An Invitation to Young People and Organizations Worldwide

PRESS RELEASE

From Art to Agency: Youth Social Art Award Announces 2026 Awardees on International Youth Day

49 submissions from around the world, 11 shortlisted works and three awardees explore what peace means today – as a new community of young artists continues its journey towards COP31 and beyond.

Berlin, 13 August 2026 – What does peace mean to a generation growing up amid conflict, climate change, inequality, displacement and profound social transformation?

On **International Youth Day, 12 August 2026**, young artists, partners and jury members from across the world came together for the first **Youth Social Art Award (YSAA) Ceremony**, celebrating artistic responses to one deliberately open question:

What does peace mean to you?

The Youth Social Art Award is an initiative of the **Alliance for Youth-Led Futures (AYLF)**, an international alliance bringing together more than 40 organizations and initiatives across youth empowerment, global health, climate action, education, social innovation, arts and culture.

The Award grew from a shared conviction: young people should not only be invited to participate in conversations about futures that affect them. They need spaces, agency and opportunities to shape those futures themselves.

Under the theme **“Peace and Health for All,”** the 2026 Open Call received **49 submissions from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas**, spanning visual art, poetry, film, music and open artistic formats. Eleven works were ultimately selected for the shortlist.

Eleven artistic perspectives on peace

During yesterday's ceremony, the shortlisted artists were invited to speak about the experiences, questions and hopes behind their work.

Their responses revealed how differently peace can be understood.

For **Uthsari Gunathilake from Sri Lanka**, peace emerged through the patient repetition of thousands of small lines and forms in *Doodle Mandala* – reflecting her belief that peace is not created in a single moment, but through small actions repeated over time.

In *I dream of...*, **Adebisi Amori from Nigeria** connected peace to freedom of movement, dignity and access, drawing on the uncertainty and vulnerability of navigating international visa processes. Her work asks us to consider peace not only between nations, but in people's everyday lives.

In *Peace Forward: A Peace of Art for Syria*, **Lana Koubaitary, Raneem Koubaitary and Ahmad Aqraa** transformed the Damascus Sword through 1,000 handmade paper cranes. Drawing on a Japanese tradition in which folding 1,000 cranes carries a wish, the work expresses a collective hope for lasting peace and prosperity in Syria. During the ceremony, Lana described how origami had helped her and her sister navigate the experience of war: each fold of paper became, in her words, “a breath.”

Other shortlisted works explored peace through attention and community care, intergenerational relationships and forgiveness, disability and climate justice, inner transformation, and trauma-informed work with Afghan refugee and host-community children.

Together, they demonstrated that peace has no single form.

“There is no single architecture of peace. Peace has to be imagined, experienced and created again and again, from many different perspectives,” said **Nicole Loeser, Director of the Institute for Art and Innovation (IFAI) and co-initiator of the Youth Social Art Award**. “This is why we hope the Youth Social Art Award can become much more than an award: a space where young artists meet one another, ideas can travel and new collaborations can emerge.”

The Youth Social Art Award 2026 Awardees

Following an international jury process, three works received the first Youth Social Art Awards.

Gold Award

EducArte, Honduras

Young Artists in Rural Honduras Paint for Peace

The Gold Award recognizes a **21-metre-long collectively created mural** in Trinidad, Honduras, developed through EducArte with young artists from rural communities. The project uses art not simply to represent peace, but to practise it. In communities where young people are strongly affected by violence, inequality and limited access to opportunities, the initiative creates spaces for them to see themselves differently: as leaders, agents of change, peacebuilders and advocates for gender and climate justice.

During the ceremony, EducArte co-founder **Antonia McGrath** described the mural as much more than a painting: it allows young people to discover the power of their own voices and make their ideas and visions for a better world visible within their community.

Silver Award

Siddhi Joshi, India

A Search for The Architecture Of Peace

The Silver Award went to a deeply personal poetic exploration connecting inner experience with the wider structures of society.

Developed over several years, Siddhi Joshi's poem moves between personal struggle, mental wellbeing, collective memory, social injustice and experiences of peacebuilding. Rather than offering simple answers, its fragmented structure reflects some of the fractures it explores while retaining a deeply human and hopeful voice.

The jury particularly valued the work as an example of how poetry can become **social inquiry and quiet activism** – creating space for reflection while showing how vulnerability, imagination and care can themselves become ways of shaping peace.

Bronze Award

Sadiya Adado, Nigeria

P3 – Pen a Piece for Peace and Planet

The Bronze Award recognizes a participatory artwork that began with a simple piece of white cloth.

Growing up amid conflict and climate pressures in Northern Nigeria, Sadiya Adado asked how people could express disagreement and call for change when conventional forms of public protest could themselves become dangerous.

Her answer was **P3 – Pen a Piece for Peace and Planet**: a travelling canvas onto which people add signatures, messages and small artworks. What began with an inexpensive piece of fabric has already accumulated hundreds of contributions and is intended to continue growing as a collective expression for peace and planetary wellbeing.

As Sadiya explained during the ceremony, peace is not a luxury but “a daily necessity” – and every mark on the canvas becomes part of a shared commitment to creating it together.

A jury process combining evaluation and dialogue

The 49 submissions were reviewed through a two-stage process combining quantitative and qualitative assessment.

Jury members first evaluated the works independently according to five weighted criteria: Relevance, Social Impact, Artistic Quality, Narrative and Innovation. The individual assessments were then brought together for comparative analysis, followed by two jury deliberation sessions in which the artistic approaches, contexts, potential impact and future development of the works were discussed before reaching consensus on the three awardees.

The international jury brought together perspectives from the arts, youth engagement, sustainability, social innovation and systemic change, including representatives connected to **Youth4Planet, Institute for Art and Innovation, The Futuring Alliance, ARTPORT_making waves, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Catalyst Now, Masterpiece for Good and ALL FOR ONE – All People for One Earth.**

The 2026 Shortlisted Works

The Youth Social Art Award celebrates its three awardees, and the entire 2026 shortlist:

Uthsari Gunathilake — *Doodle Mandala*

Adebisi Amori — *I dream of...*

Lana Koubaitary, Raneem Koubaitary & Ahmad Aqraa — *Peace Forward:*

A Peace of Art for Syria

Joel Christoph — *Peace Is the Work of Attention*

Smaranda Maria Frunza — *Prayer for Forgiveness*

Iftikhar Ahmed / Youth Association for Development (YAD) — *Voices Unbroken*

Hilary Ségolène — *Peace Begins Within*

Puneet Singh Singhal — *Green Disability*

Sadiya Adado — *P3 – Pen a Piece for Peace and Planet* — **Bronze Award**

Siddhi Joshi — *A Search for The Architecture Of Peace* — **Silver Award**

EducArte — *Young Artists in Rural Honduras Paint for Peace* — **Gold Award**

Their works can now be explored through the **Youth Social Art Award Online Gallery**, creating an international space for the artists' stories and perspectives beyond the ceremony.

The award is only the beginning

The ceremony deliberately did not end with the announcement of the winners.

Instead, all 11 shortlisted artists were invited to become part of the AYLF Youth Collective – a growing space in which young people can connect internationally, initiate collaborations, co-create future AYLF activities and help shape the future of the Youth Social Art Award itself.

The three awardees will additionally receive mentoring and artistic development support from members of the Alliance. Opportunities for interviews, international visibility and collaborative artistic development are also being prepared.

The intention is to move from recognition to relationship, and from participation to agency.

From Youth Social Art to COP31

The next major opportunity is COP31 in Antalya, Türkiye, in November 2026.

AYLF and its partners are currently developing ways to connect Youth Social Art with activities around the climate conference, including the **AYLF Youth Camp, public exhibitions and creative programmes, artistic interventions, mobile media formats and potential opportunities connected to the Blue and Green Zones and partner spaces.**

During the ceremony, ARTPORT_making waves founder **Anne-Marie Melster** emphasized the importance of bringing artistic and youth perspectives into spaces normally dominated by policies, negotiations and institutional language. **Joerg Altekruse, president of Youth4Planet** also presented emerging plans for youth-led media activities in Antalya that could bring the artists' works and messages into public spaces and international climate communication.

The question guiding this next stage is:

How can art bring peace, health and regenerative futures into the spaces where global decisions are made?

For the Alliance for Youth-Led Futures, this is also part of a larger experiment: exploring how international platforms can become spaces in which young people are not merely represented, but actively help shape the narratives, encounters and possibilities that emerge there.

From individual voices to collective agency

The first Youth Social Art Award began with a question:

What does peace mean to you?

The 49 submissions showed that there is no single answer.

Peace can begin with a line drawn patiently on paper. With a poem. With a piece of cloth carried through a community. With children finding ways to express trauma through art and music. With 1,000 paper cranes carrying a wish for Syria. Or with twenty young people painting a wall together in rural Honduras.

What connects these works is the conviction that peace is not simply something to wait for.

It can be imagined, practised and created.

And with the first Youth Social Art Award now concluded, the next question for the artists, partners and wider AYLIF community is already emerging:

What can we create together?

About the Alliance for Youth-Led Futures

The **Alliance for Youth-Led Futures (AYLF)** is a growing international alliance bringing together young people and organizations across health, climate, education, arts and culture, social innovation and youth empowerment. It seeks to move beyond youth participation towards structures in which young people can actively co-create initiatives, narratives and futures together with partners across sectors and generations.

Explore and connect

Youth Social Art Award Online Gallery:

<https://catalystnow.net/what-does-peace-mean-to-you/#GalleryAYLF>

Alliance for Youth-Led Futures:

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/alliance-for-youth-led-futures>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/alliance4youthledfutures/>

Press & partnership enquiries:

Alliance for Youth-Led Futures

Elpida Dalietou & Nicole Loeser

institute@art-innovation.org