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**Mark Randall:**

Thank you, everybody. Thank you, AIGA, and thank all of you for being here tonight because your presence at this gala will help support the next generation of creative talent through the Worldstudio AIGA Scholarship program. The primary goals of the program are to increase diversity in the creative professions and to foster social and environmental responsibility in the next generation of artists, architects, and designers. In part, through the funds raised at last year's AIGA Gala, this year we awarded 24 scholarships and 13 honorable mentions for a total of \$57,500.

[ Applause ]

So none of this could happen without the support of people like you and from these amazing sponsors. Do we have a great slide of our sponsors? There we go, so let's give a round of applause to the sponsors.

[ Applause ]

So the students are not only awarded for their talent, which they have in abundance, but for their demonstrated desire to give back to their communities in some way. Ethan Bodnar, a sophomore in graphic design at Hartford Art School, is one of the rising stars of our profession. For his Eagle Scout community service project, Ethan created the Historical Town Walk, a self-guided tour of historic places in his hometown. Now, my nephew built benches for his local park. Ethan's probably the only one who's done a graphic design project as an Eagle Scout community service project. Ethan also just published, now I say published — he's a sophomore — his first book, *Creative Grab Bag*, which was on sale in the Silent Auction. And not only that, he will be speaking from the main stage with industrial design great Charles Harrison at the upcoming AIGA conference in Memphis. So he really exemplifies the kind of students that we're supporting through our program.

Along with a portfolio of work, each student is asked to write a short essay. The stories and viewpoints offered up are truly amazing. Maria Franco, a senior in fine art at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, recounts this chilling experience in her essay. "When I was young my father took his life savings and built a little summer house outside of Bogotá, Colombia. After it was finished, more than 20 men with guns surrounded the house. They called out my father and took him into a car and left. These days were the worst days that we had ever had. No one could sleep or eat, and the anger and anxiety were consuming us. Days later my father came home, and we could not believe it. It was the best thing that could have ever happened to us. But then I realized that life could be very contrasting sometimes. I have a strong need to communicate to others that life can be better. I also believe that art offers the opportunity to teach young generations how we can contribute to stopping inequality. My goal is to develop a body of work that informs the public and helps them to break through ignorance and start change."

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Bonnie Mills, a freshman in photography at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, writes, “Where I live, things are so narrow. Every community has its own bubble with no room for difference. I want to break out of that. I want to learn more and be heard. I have often been invisible to my school peers, but I won’t be invisible to the world. I want to be a photojournalist to make others see.”

I encourage all of you to visit the AIGA website to see this amazing student work and to read their compelling essays. The goal of these awards is to create a more diverse and socially creative community of the future. In order for the creative professions to continue to succeed and to respond to the ever-changing and challenging nature of our society, we must inspire and reward a new generation of artists and designers — a generation that represents the diversity of our planet and a generation that can help to make the world a better place. Thank you.