

**ArtsAll Florida  
Student of the Month  
September 2021**



15-year-old **Valentina Elias** was nominated by Ruby Issaev, the Executive Director and owner of Vladimir Issaev School of Classical Ballet. Since the age of 9, Valentina joined the Vladimir Issaev School for dancing, piano, and singing lessons. Ruby writes, “she has always impressed us with her tenacity and her passion for the arts.”

Valentina is a sophomore at Miami Arts Charter (MAC) High School in Miami-Dade County. She participates in the Musical Theater Program at MAC and the Broward Center for the Performing Arts after school programs. Ruby described how Valentina is consistently ready to help with the younger students at the Ballet school, organizing them, playing games, and taking care of them backstage before their performances. “Valentina has always been very involved in the community and [is] always looking into ways to help others.” Arts4All Florida was wowed not only by Valentina’s various talents but also her commitment to helping others on and off the stage.

Valentina was born with profound unilateral hearing loss and thus works to raise awareness of the challenges that the Deaf and hard of hearing community experience. Her latest project has been founding her own company, Smile Guard <https://smileguard.me/>. As part of a school assignment, Valentina created a homemade mask with a clear window to help the Deaf and hard of hearing to read lips and facial expressions. After much research and development with her family, she founded Smile Guard last year and now sells the masks online. Valentina donates masks to health professionals and educators in the community while raising money for the Starkey Hearing Foundation. One of her goals is to save up for college to attend New York University. She plans to pursue a degree in the arts, specializing in musical theatre, and continue to help her community.



13-year-old **Isaac Vazquez Cruz** was nominated by Jillian Larriviere, the Visual Art Teacher at Taylor Middle-High School. Ms. Jillian writes, “I have seen Isaac's creativity shine through; he lights up when he creates his creatures, and he really enjoys talking about them and giving the facts about them. You can see his love of drawing when he is working and it is a joy to see!”

Arts4All Florida was impressed by Isaac’s talent as an illustrator but more importantly, how he leans towards his art for enjoyment and de-escalation. His teacher shared how “Isaac shares his love for drawing with his peers and teachers and uses the arts to demonstrate his understanding of curricular topics along with social and emotional outlets.” This is emblematic of the important role the arts can play in and out of the classroom for students with disabilities.

Ms. Jillian also described how Isaac is consistently drawing and shares this passion with others. “[Isaac’s] talent is apparent, and he creates various dinosaurs and prehistoric creatures...his drawings are meticulous.” We reached out to his mom, Mrs. Cruz and she added, “Isaac is the strongest, smartest, bravest, funniest, and blessed kid in the whole universe. He has overcome so much at a young age [with] a smile.” Mrs. Cruz shared how Isaac has always loved drawing and with his attention to detail, he has continued to improve.