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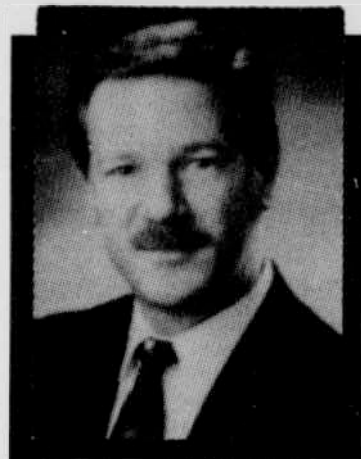
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THE EMERGING I

Blue Sky Gallery shows the work of young photographers
from rural and urban Oregon through July 27

by Inga Sorensen

Onerous circumstance, the theory goes, informs art, and perhaps even necessitates the craving to create.

Krista Heinze isn't sure how true that is. What the Oregon City resident does know, however, is that at 16 she has already encountered ample trials, including the death by car wreck of her birth mother when Heinze was in elementary school.

In 1993, her stepmother, Ramona Heinze, was

"It's very interesting to see the focus of these young people's work," she continues. "A couple of years ago there was a strong focus on gang-related activities—guns and things like that. Last year many of the photos had to do with families, including migrant-worker families. This year there are lots of pastorals, and a couple of youth [including Heinze] took shots of [cross-dressing] subjects."

One of Heinze's subjects is a 16-year-old gay youth and cross-dressing enthusiast named Keith who lives in Oregon City.

"I'm not gay but many of my friends are, and so is my brother, who isn't allowed in the house with his boyfriend," says Heinze, who hangs at The City Nightclub. "Kids at school tried to beat Keith up because he's gay, but since I get along well with all sorts of people I was able to step in and basically save his butt."

The duo, who have known each other since eighth grade, decided to do Keith in drag because, says Heinze, "it was interesting and fun."

"I've done stage makeup before, and Keith is

very colorful. There's one shot of him where he has that Betty Boop look. He also crafted his own flamboyant headdresses, including one made of tin-foil."

Heinze's subjects also include flowers and her baby nephew Cody: "He looks like a little bunny with those ears," she says.

And why flowers? "Because they're pretty," she laughs, as though it were the dumbest question in the world.

"These young people have such an open way of looking at things," echoes Meredith Marsh, 25, a professional photographer who works for the Canby-based publishing company, Hot Off The Press, which specializes in craft books.

Marsh was Heinze's mentor.

"When I was her age, I had a [photography] teacher who took me under his wing and it made a tremendous difference," says Marsh, who had not mentored one-on-one prior to Straight Shooting.

"I admit I was a little nervous at first, because I wanted this to be a good experience for Krista. I thought, 'Am I going to teach her correctly?' 'Will she look back at this experience in a positive way?' " says Marsh, adding, "It's been marvelous. I think photography has given Krista something she can dive into—plus she's very good, particularly at capturing the human form."

Marsh says she would like to mentor again, and credits the project with "putting the fun back into photography."

Heinze, who recently completed her General Educational Development high school equivalency exam, says she'd like to attend community college this fall and study photography.

"Fashion photography sounds pretty good to me," she says.

"Straight Shooting '96" runs through July 27 at Blue Sky Gallery, 1231 NW Hoyt St., in Portland. Severson says the commission is always looking for professional photographers who would like to become mentors. Those interested should contact Straight Shooting, attn: Jeff Nunn, Oregon Commission on Children and Families, 530 Center St. NE, Suite 300, Salem, OR 97310.

Visual arts

killed in a highly publicized head-on collision caused by a drug suspect fleeing police. As an eighth-grader, the youngster attempted suicide by gobbling down vast quantities of aspirin and Tylenol.

At the same time, Heinze has done more than simply exist—or not exist, as the case may be. She has been a model, makeup artist, friend to many, and a poet.

"I used to write a lot about dying and stuff. I say 'used to' because I'm not doing that anymore," she says.

What Heinze is doing these days is swapping destructive exercises and forlorn prose for photography. She is one of a handful of teens, considered to be at risk, whose photography is showcased in "Straight Shooting '96," an exhibit currently on view at the Blue Sky Gallery in Portland.

According to project manager April Severson, Straight Shooting, which is in its fourth year, is designed to provide a positive and supportive learning experience for at-risk youth and increase community awareness of the issues facing these young people through exhibits of their photographs.

The project, a public-private partnership, is coordinated by the Oregon Commission on Children and Families; it is co-sponsored by the Regional Arts and Culture Council, Portland Community College, SERA Architects, PacificCorp Foundation, and other business contributors.

Straight Shooting, which is modeled after a similar project on the East Coast, currently matches youth from Baker, Clackamas, Malheur, Marion, Multnomah and Washington counties with photographers in a mentor-protégé relationship.

For three months each spring, professional photographers volunteer to be mentors; they introduce at-risk youth to photography and work one-on-one in the darkroom. The young people shoot, develop and print their own work—culminating in an artists' reception and exhibit.

Severson says the principle is a simple one: Put cameras in the hands of youths at risk, teach them how to use the cameras and let them explore.

"Sometimes the results can truly be magical," says Severson, who tells the story of a 17-year-old whose mentor entrusted him with a camera.

"The young person was told to take the camera home. The youth was so shocked and moved by that because no one had ever exhibited that trust in him before," says Severson, adding that a sense of trust—and synergy—can boost self-esteem.



"Stressful Glam" by Krista Heinze