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Arend also notes that a kid's name can be a good way to keep track of his esteem and progress. "When they start reforming they sometimes say: 'You can call me Mike again. My name is Mike.'"

At Kitman's table, Odessa is surrounded by photos, writing implements and stick-on alphabet letters. She adds an occasional well-directed comment to the conversation but is otherwise engrossed in her collage. Adrian wipes off the canvas he varnished the previous day. Sitting between them, Tuesday eats her lunch, donated by a Portland eatery. (In a show of remarkable community support for p:ear's mission, some of the city's best restaurants donate breakfast and lunch daily.)

The youths' conversation turns to everyday matters: where the best trash bins are (Haight Street in San Francisco, where someone once found a full set of *Wizard of Oz* figurines), meeting T.S. Eliot's grandson, reading Saul Williams' poetry aloud on the bus, disappointment that a friend skipped town with a girl ("I really wanted to see him go to college," laments Tuesday).

Adrian, with 100 bucks in his pocket as evidence, offers to take me to the adjacent gallery space to show me the two paintings he sold in the last show. We walk from the main room through the back room, which houses all the donated art supplies. Easels, paint tubes, pastels, paper, canvases, glitter, glue and markers litter the area, a pigmented free-for-all. The kids have unrestricted access to the supplies—a decidedly different approach from other programs where almost everything is under lock and key. The p:ear directors believe art supplies aren't half as valuable as the autonomy and sense of responsibility instilled in kids who can use them freely.

During the downtown art world's First Thursday gallery walk, p:ear exhibits work by p:ear youth alongside work by visiting artists such as Henk Pander, Lauren Mantecón, Benjamin Alexander Clark and Nicholas Walker. These artists often conduct workshops with the youth during the month prior



"Contentment" by Lauryn, a p:ear youth, is on display at the gallery and is a steal at \$55

to the show so that the exhibit has a unifying theme or style.

The kids are given 90 percent of the sale price of their work, while the professional artists get 50 percent of their slightly higher tags. The rest goes to keeping the program going. Other financial support comes from individual donations, corporations, foundations, small businesses and fund-raisers. (See sidebar.) Many are monetary contributions, but p:ear also receives in-kind donations.

"We are able to function on a pretty small cash budget because we have this kind of support," says Burns.

It is through the gallery that p:ear has constructed a bridge between homeless youth, who generally feel alienated by society, and society itself.

"P:ear is a raw, direct route for the community to give back to these youth through a non-profit," says Arend. Plus, she says, "It supports the idea that yuppies are people, too, which is a huge step in the life of a punk teen-ager."

A Fragile Blossoming

Arend, Burns and Cartier have gone unpaid since p:ear's inception.

"There was one point when we had \$1.57 between the three of us," says Cartier.

The women cite "strange streams of good luck" as what helps them get by. When asked how they manage to devote their lives to a job that provides them with no income, scrappy ingenuity and a sense of humor seem to be the answers. Burns points to a hole in her Chuck Taylors and laughs.

"See this sweater?" says Cartier. "I got it from one of the kids."



Beth Burns checks out the latest creation by p:ear youth Ameh

P:ear hasn't always gotten the recognition it deserves, in large part because it doesn't measure success in the standard charts and numbers. Arend, Burns and Cartier don't spend time poring over statistics about how many of their kids get GEDs (a lot), how many find housing (many) or how many land jobs (quite a few).

"I was thinking about a guy I've been working with since he was 15 who is now 23," says Cartier. "Does this person still use drugs? No. Is he still homeless? Yes. Any closer to finding a job? No. Would I consider that a positive outcome? Yes, because that person isn't dead."

For the participants at p:ear, success is made up of many intangibles.

"These women have instilled more integrity in me than even my parents. They do things for us that they're not supposed to do, but they do," says Odessa. The p:ear directors took a couple of road trips to visit Odessa while she was in prison.

The outlook for homeless kids can be grim once they "age out" of the system: Some will successfully re-enter society, but many will be incarcerated and a few will die.

"If it weren't for Pippa Arend, Beth Burns and Joy Cartier I would

be dead...definitely," says Odessa. "They literally pushed me back from the brink of destruction. They have done things for me that I will never forget." □

J.B. RABIN is a Portland free-lance writer.

p:ear blossoms II—growing upward

From 6:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. May 1, p:ear raises the rafters at Holocene, 1001 S.E. Morrison St., in celebration of two years of bringing art to homeless youth in Portland. The event is inspired by the growth and aspirations of the organization and the youth it serves.

A series of dance performances will begin on the ground and move up into the air above the audience. Highlights include dynamic dance by Argentina's Tango Twins, plus excerpts from "ten tiny dances" by Mike Barber and aerial audacity by Portland's own Aviator. Other performers include Anne Furfey, Gabriela on the Trapeze and The Atlas DJs.

The performance starts at 6:30 p.m. Food (provided by Gretchen's Kitchen, William's on 12th and Pazzo Ristorante), drink (with or without olives) and DJ grooves will be served up at 9:30 p.m., with a special appearance by the March Fourth! stilts-bound marching band.

Tickets for the whole shebang cost \$60 each or \$100 for a pair. Those entering at 9:30 p.m. pay \$10.

For more information call 503-228-6677 or e-mail info@pearmentor.org. □

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