

Fast Forward

Mayor's Show of Teen Art at Maude Kerns.

The annual Mayor's Art Show also includes "Fast Forward: The Mayor's Show of Teen Art," a juried exhibit on view at the Maude Kerns Art Center through Oct. 8. This year, 37 young artists (ages 13-18) from a dozen schools and home schools in the greater Eugene area were accepted into the show.

Not just a great opportunity for adolescents to experience the professional side of art, it is also an occasion for viewers to glimpse the world of a varied group of adolescents. Through their art-works and written statements, these students express some of their concerns, aspirations, views of themselves and the world. Above all, they tell what art means to them, how they relate to art, and what role it plays in their lives.

In an era of severe funding cuts in education, such an exhibit is a reminder of what is lost when programs from art to athletics that previous generations enjoyed must be treated as a luxury to be trimmed. These young artists all concur about the value of art as a means of self-expression — both an emotional, creative outlet and a reflection of their thoughts and feelings.

"When I work on my art," Shawna Marie Clifton wrote, (18, Riverfront), "I try to think of the most creative way to express my feelings, whether I'm in a bad or good mood."

Such self-expression is associated with an experience of freedom for some teens. Ari Werthamer (15, Sheldon) said art "is an activity where I can be myself and do anything I want." Shannon Sullivan (15, Crow) said, "Art is the freedom of self-expression."

However, self-expression means something different to each individual.

Self-expression may mean exploring an interest in some aspect of the world around them. Art becomes a way to study the natural world by making realistic renderings of its fauna, flora and landforms. This process requires keen observation.

Ansel Atkinson (13, Crow Middle) wrote, "When I go out into the wilderness and shoot some pictures with my Pentax K1000, it is a way for me to experience nature and share its wonders with other people." Atkinson's black and white photography already evinces a good eye and sense of composition. Reflecting on the nature of art, he also wrote: "I take my pictures in B&W for its effect. The subject that I take the picture of is still there, but at the same time the colorless subject is now something new."

Many of the other photographers are aware of the role of the artist in controlling how reality is ultimately portrayed, and that creativity is as necessary an ingredient for a realistic piece to touch us as for an imagina-

tive one. With his macro-photography of flowers and dripping water, Owen Garrity (13, home school) focuses on what's going on in the moment.

Nature is also the subject in Amy Caves (16, North Eugene) and Jessica King's (16, Crow) skillful studies of wild animals, Shannon Sullivan's (15, Crow) charcoal of penguins, and Samantha Westrope's (16, Crow) watercolor landscapes. Jaimie Lewellyn's (14, Crow) watercolors of birds, flowers and edible plants show a bright sense of composition and color. Jesse Spivack (13, Kennedy Middle) depicts her beloved fowls in lovely woodcuts full of zest and humor as well as great observation.

Others use the art of landscape and still-life as a way of imaginatively reinterpreting the natural world around them. Alisa Caves turns natural elements such as trees, rocks and sky into animals. And Lily Robertson (15, South Eugene), who paints colorful still-lives wrote, "If I am painting a scene, and part of it is too drab or dull, I like to change its color to my own interpretation and create my own beauty."

A group of young artists from Gateways Learning Center painted 6 matching vertical panels in black, green, yellow and blue, collectively creating a mysterious universe that evokes at once the underworld of the deep sea and the far reaches of outer space.

In his B&W landscape photography, Wesley Curtis (16, North Eugene) experiments with multiple exposures to create surreal effects. With their geometric perspective, his roads in the sky emerge from clouds like sunrays. Besides using multiple exposures, Julie Warren (16, North Eugene) also manipulates her pictures through the darkroom process of solarization, of which *Pebbles* is an excellent example.

Other artists choose to explore the human realm. Liesel Sylwester's (15, North Eugene) watercolors imaginatively tell about the world of childhood in excellent illustration style. Mica Russo's (13, Fern Ridge Middle) *Glam-Glam* is a well-crafted, elegant shadow box involving acrylic and collaged photographs.

Kevin Henry (16, North Eugene) and Cassidy Langendoerfer (17, North Eugene) make sensitive portraits of people in their B&W photography, while Brendan Albano (15, South Eugene) uses Photoshop to transform a portrait into a bold digital design. Tilly Anya Hamachek (14, The Village) tells us about the world of "rocker chicks" through fashion design. Martial arts inspired Eli Werthamer's (Sheldon) drawings and paintings.

Some works are prompted by the world of

art itself. Such is Ren Rossini's (17, South Eugene) *Monet*, in which the painter is represented by floral magazine clippings. Jessica Williams' (18, Sheldon) *Marilyn* is an acrylic version of Andy Warhol's famous silkscreens, while her tiny but expressive pen-and-ink *Frankenstein* derives from literature and film.

The artist may also take the concept of self-expression literally to show how she views herself. The self-portrait becomes an opportunity for self-study, not so much through appearance but as a means to define one's identity.

About her colorful mixed-media assemblage, *Laa-Laa-Land*, Jaymi Lawrence (16, Riverfront) said, "My sculpture represents my personality: full of color and the things I love most. I think my personality is colorful, bright, happy, and very shy."

Mary Redmon (17, Riverfront) wrote, "One of the things I am inspired most by, are the woods and the living things who dwell in them. *Mary and Brandon Forever* is one example of my connection with nature. I incorporated many different animals into my self-portrait."

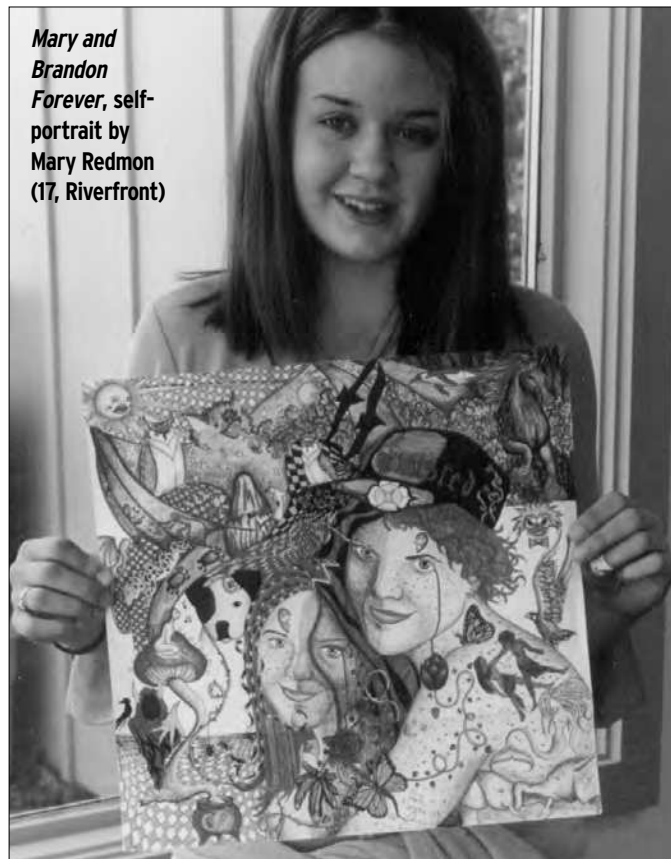
Sometimes, the stakes for creating art are high. Mara Thygeson, art teacher at the alternative Looking-Glass Riverfront School and Career Center, which serves at-risk youth, prepared her students for the mayor's show. "So many of [the students] have the deck stacked against them that it's a miracle, an amazing achievement, that they're able to create art and write so eloquently in their statements," Thygeson said. Many have known severe economic stress, experienced family trauma and dealt with uncertainty and an absence of structure, she said.

Despite her sensitivity to the challenges of some of her students face, Thygeson will no longer have the opportunity to work with them at the school. Her position at Riverfront was cut last June due to lack of funding.

Riverfront Program Director Cheryl Zwillinger emphasized the cathartic nature of art for at-risk students. "Art is a way to express their issues and traumas. They don't have any other way to do that."

For instance, Christine Akin (18, Riverfront) mourned the fact that she can no longer attend art classes, which she loved,

Mary and Brandon Forever, self-portrait by Mary Redmon (17, Riverfront)



because she's already taken the required number of electives. "Since I've stopped taking art," Akin said, "I'm in anger management class."

Shawna Marie Clifton (18, Riverfront), author of the striking colored-pencil *Good Against Evil*, also finds art therapeutic. "Most of the time when I develop a picture it shows how I want to feel rather than how I actually feel. So if I'm depressed and down, I will create something very cheerful."

The process of self-examination can be painful and the therapeutic result hard-won. Brandon Gubred (16, Riverfront) had to surmount frustration and self-doubt to achieve his self-portrait. His parents were getting a divorce, which he represented by an image of them tearing apart.

Like many of their fellow-students, Greg Hessel (17) and Matt Mercer (16), both of Riverfront, created self-portraits that show the pull of opposites, which leads to so much anguish during adolescence.

Particularly vivid is Rachel Reininger's (16, Riverfront) *Reflection*, a colored-pencil self-portrait. "This project really helped me to express and understand myself," she wrote. Reininger had to overcome fear and self-doubt, re-examine her struggle with anorexia and depression, her feelings of being judged by others and destructively objectified by men.

Art is humanity's common language. Cutting across ages, classes and cultures, art is of value to both individuals and society. For teens as for adults, it is a way to experiment, express ideas and emotions, seek and find. Art is not a luxury but a necessity. **EW**

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