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Art in another world



Troubled youth explore Warhol

By LIZ ROBERTSON

Staff Writer

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It could have been an art class in any school where the students were turning out colorful creative projects, each unique to the individual artist. But these students would not go home at the end of the day. They were residents of the Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility where a visiting artist from the Wexner Center's School Outreach initiative visited to instruct troubled teens in the two-layer silk-screen process of Andy Warhol.

The Wexner Center for the Arts, currently featuring an exhibition of Warhol, sent contract artist Aaron Thomas to visit the class and teach them Warhol's two-layer silkscreen process. Thomas also works with ArtSafe, a non-profit organization that works with at risk youth in neighborhoods, schools and institutions. Because they could not duplicate the actual twolayer silk-screen process at the juvenile facility, Thomas used acetate sheets to mimic the process.

While Warhol used block drawings to transfer his images, a copier was used to transfer a picture of a personality selected by each student onto a piece of acetate. From there, using the drawing on the sheet of acetate, they traced the image of the person onto another sheet of paper. Next, the choice was up to each student whether to turn the piece into a collage

using cut pieces of colored paper or using pastels to color either the top, bottom or both layers.



Combinations of all techniques were used on some pieces by some students while others chose only to use a couple techniques on their projects. The end result was colorful depictions of famous people that all bore a resemblance to the Warhol silkscreen process.

Mike Rodgers, who teaches art to the 14- to 18-year-old students said he had been “prepping them for a while” on both Warhol and the process. The visit by Thomas was a culmination of the four week session. Thomas began the session with a demonstration of the technique; then the students

got to work creating their own art.

The artist, who paints, draws and sculpts, shared one of his own paintings with the class. “That’s the bomb,” one student said of Thomas’ piece. Chuck Steinbauer, librarian with the institution, said he had been working for about a year with the Wexner Center to arrange the visit. He said the school had a partnership before with the Wexner Center about two years ago.

One young girl was hard at work tracing her project. “I like art,” she said. “You can be very creative.” She pointed to several images on the wall behind her, obviously proud of her work, showing the different techniques she had used on a depiction of Michael Jackson. Across the room another classmate said she had not done anything like this before. “It calms me,” she said.

Before the silkscreen process, she said they were creating cartoon characters, pointing to the SpongeBob SquarePants drawing she created that was hanging on the wall. She said the silkscreen process is something they are just learning. “I like it,” she said.

Thomas moved around the room, answering questions and advising students on their pieces. He explained the possibilities of what they could do, telling them the decisions were left up to them to create their own designs. “I want a collage,” said one. He advised her on various ways to create the effect. “Trace the outlines of the eyes and then cut them into shapes,” he said was one option, adding it would then make her piece look more abstract. Another student talked briefly about Warhol. “I think he’s very creative,” she said, as she worked on completing her composite of Beyonce.

And so were the students at the juvenile center as they created their own pieces, each a reflection of themselves.

lrobertson@delgazette.com