

Alabama Contemporary Art Center partner's with the Strickland Youth Center

Alabama

Contemporary Art Center has partnered with Strickland Youth Center for the third year to bring art education to court-involved youth through Strickland Youth Center's Summer Art Program - now on its ninth year. This year, Amanda Solley (AS), local artist and Curator of Education at Alabama Contemporary Art Center, worked with Judge Edmond Naman and Strickland staff to develop a project that would benefit both the young adults involved and the public. The focus for this year's project was "community and collaboration through art", which was explored through the creation of two murals and an interactive chalkboard for the public to express their favorite aspects of their city.

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Downtown community has been increasingly active in Alabama Contemporary's green space on Dauphin Street over the past few months with the expansion of community gardens and small mural panels, and the contemporary arts organization has had hopes to include an installation similar to the popular "Before I Die" installation of 2012. After a series of meetings between the two organizations, it was decided that something celebrating the city of Mobile would be a positive addition to the park, so they worked with the kids to develop the idea further. What emerged was a semi-permanent installation featuring a chalkboard that reads "I Love My City Because _____", and two murals (one on either side) that illustrate community, collaboration, and the arts.

The

program, held at Strickland from July 25 - August 6 on weekdays from 1:30 - 4:30, was a reward for the participants, not a punishment or extra detention. Each day of the camp was planned to ensure the installation would be completed, but allowed time for changes to the project in the spirit of collaboration. As an icebreaker, the students were divided into two smaller groups and were encouraged to select imagery from books and magazines that reflect aspects of themselves that they were proud of. Each student selected around three images, and was then encouraged to create a unique image inspired by what they chose. For example, one young lady was inspired by the patterns of a map in an old magazine. After discussing how this would be integrated into a mural, she decided she would like to paint a map of the United States. Another student was inspired by flower doodles in a grown up "anti-stress" coloring book; the simple doodle he first saw was the catalyst for the three-dimensional flowers that act as the focal point of his group's mural.

Amanda

Solley; "When the students met in their groups, they were instructed to work as a team to ensure everyone's image was represented in the painting. This led to many of the participants changing or modifying their ideas in order to deliver a more cohesive work of art. Witnessing this was the most rewarding aspect of the program, as the primary goal of the project was not only to teach them about art, but to show them the value of collaboration and community, and how ideas can evolve for the better when shared with others. It was also very impressive to see the kids organically settle into roles within their groups. For instance, one young man was nicknamed 'The Foreman' by his group due to his delegation skills. Another student displayed a talent for identifying and matching colors and became the official 'paint-mixer' of the group."

Over

the course of the two-week program, the students learned technical aspects of painting such as idea development through sketches and drawings, the color wheel/color mixing, the value scale, and proper usage of painting tools. Other, more abstract lessons were also explored such as self-expression, and respect for others, ourselves, and our environments. The participants of the program are all in their teens, so the value of creativity in future professions was touched upon as well, which ignited discussions about the group's future aspirations.

As an

art educator, I hear the phrase, 'I can't draw', 'This stinks/doesn't look right', and the dreaded, 'I quit', time and time again. Witnessing the sense of pride from these young adults after they pushed past the self-doubt that plagues even the most prolific artists was remarkable and inspiring. The arts are finally being studied and turned to as a means of reducing recidivism through increased self-expression and confidence; I cannot yet speak to the former, but the increased confidence of the students was evident, and I believe many, if not all, of them now see the value of the humanities as a result."

A

celebration for the artists accompanied the unveiling of the installation during Artwalk on August 12. The green space is located beside the Downtown Alliance at 261 Dauphin Street (a block from Alabama Contemporary Art Center). All are encouraged to support these children and the future impact they will have on the arts in Mobile.