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Show opens door on NHS creativity

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NORTHAMPTON — Later this week, the Northampton Center for the Arts' two galleries will display floor-to-ceiling art by high school students, part of an annual spring exhibit that opens Friday and will run through May 26.

Northampton High School art teacher Lisa Leary, who is a painter, said the center's third-floor galleries will be "jam-packed" with students' paintings, drawing, jewelry, graphic designs and sculpture, all "representative of what we do at the high school."

The show also will feature student performances on May 21 during an opening reception, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The performances will take place from 7 to 9 p.m.

In the 15 years the exhibit has taken place, Leary said visitors have always been surprised by the quality of the work. "There is a lot of really great artwork and a lot of really strong performances," she said.

Although budget cuts have reduced the number of arts courses in Northampton schools, Leary said they remain a crucial part of students' education. Today's fast-paced technology of cell phones and video games has made it difficult for many young people to focus long enough to complete a still life drawing, said Leary.

"I'm concerned we will lose some of those skills we've had for centuries," she said. At the same time, arts provide students with an alternative way of using their imagination to solve problems, said Leary.

"You can reach so many kids through the arts. Everybody has a different style" of learning, she said. Some students' strengths lie in the arts, she said, rather than math or English or science.

"A lot of these kids are artists — they don't have a choice," said Leary.