2002

EDUCATION

THE HEARTS OF YOUNG ARTISTS: The assignment for advanced art students at Northampton High School was to draw a picture of what they would look like in 20 years. Jonah Susskind, a junior, drew a Buddhist figure, with a man crouched over in the background.

"I wasn't sure how to go about this project, but then I saw another student's portrait. I realized what I wanted to do for mine," Susskind said last month, as he and others attended a reception for an exhibit of their work at the Northampton Center for the Arts. The show came down May 30.

Susskind's inspiration was the work of Rose Barham, a fellow junior and advanced art student. She created a dual self-portrait for her assignment. In her painting, Barham is shown looking into a mirror. The work contains her likeness at age 17 and at age 37.

"I decided to take an abstract angle in the painting. The Buddhist figure is what I hope to become, which is to be at peace with myself. The man in the background is contemplating youth and where he is going to end up," Susskind said.

By surveying the works presented, observers could get a feel for the ways teachers tease talent out of their students. Often, they do so through specific assignments.

In one such assignment, advanced art students had to show, in a portrait, how they see themselves subjectively. Susskind's self-portrait reveals a solemn face with a mixture of black and blue around his eyes. "The exploration of color is the only way to express my feelings," Susskind said.

By showing their work at the center, and in another exhibit on the third floor of Thornes Marketplace, Lisa Leary's students joined the workaday world of artists. "We show their artwork in the school all of the time, but it is a different feeling when they see their work in the town. This makes the community aware of what our art program does for youth," Leary said.

"The arts inspire and generate our imaginations. This is vital to the student's esteem in school and the future. The arts are as important as any other subject in our school system," she said.

The exhibits presented a wide range of creations — including drawings, paintings, graphic design, book arts, ethnic jewelry and ceramics.

In one assignment for advanced art students, Penny King, a senior, and Kendra Rowan, a junior, took on the challenge of designing a deck of 52 cards. "The assignment was very broad and its main motive was to be creative," King said of the project.

King decided to cut pictures of body parts or facial features of women out of magazines. "Each card showed a different emotion and woman," King said.

Rowan took a different approach. "I took photographs of flowers and then replicated the image by painting them on 52 separate cards," she said. Rowan used different types of flowers to designate suits and face cards. "The face cards are images of flowers that are open or in bloom," Rowan said.

For another assignment, students with contrasting styles were paired up.

"Together, we had to produce a still-life painting using orange, red, black, and white," Rowan said.

"Group assignments are important in our program," Leary said. "Working with other students is challenging. They have to re-orient themselves and their styles."

Rowan tends to use soft colors, drawing inspiration from nature. Her partner, Huey Ting, has a different art style, opting for dark colors in works that are manifestly emotional.

The work combined styles. "The best thing about the assignment was that we both learned something about each other's painting styles," Rowan said.

— BROOKE LINDNER