

High school students honor family ties in portrait exhibition

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Few bonds are as inspirational as the one between a child and a grandparent, something a new art exhibition at the Santa Barbara Public Library's Faulkner Gallery highlights.

The exhibition features more than 150 works by students from art classes at public junior and senior high schools across southern Santa Barbara County. Titled the Grandparent Portrait Show, the exhibition was organized by the Student Art Fund, a committee of the nonprofit Santa Barbara Art Association, and features depictions of either grandparents or elders significant in the lives of the artists.

Now in its fourth installment, this year's staging of the biennial exhibition attracted over 400 hundred entries.

"A lot of the teachers make it a project that's part of their curriculum," explained Sally Hamilton,

71, a member of the Student Art Fund committee. "An entire class will work on a pencil drawing of a grandparent for example. Other entries are more independent like the students at Visual Academy of Design and Art where they choose own their media and their teachers guide them."

After announcing the contest at the beginning of the school year, the Student Art Fund's committee started collecting submissions in January. The group narrowed the exhibition down to about 150 works that were matted and framed. Susan Savage, a recently retired professor of art at Westmont College and former art teacher at La Colina Junior High School, was invited to jury the show.

She told the News-Press the task of selecting the winning entries was not an easy one.

"The standard of the entries was incredibly high," Mrs. Savage, 67, said. "There were some unbelievable works and I could have given many, many more awards. The passion that went into creating these works was incredible. It was very difficult to single out 11 entries from all the other wonderful pieces."

The Santa Barbara Art Association Best of Show Award went to Hunter Scott-Bartz from Santa Barbara High School for a sculpture of his grandfather titled "Albert: Kind, Gentle Spirit." Mr. Scott-Bartz, who is currently taking three art classes as a senior at the school's Visual Academy of Design and Art, heard about the exhibition through his drawing teacher, Brooke Van der Kar.

Wanting to capture his grandfather's "quiet, kind, and stoic nature," he elected to use modeling clay and worked from an old photograph.

"I wanted to do a piece that was calming and my Grandpa is a very quiet person. I've never heard him yell or say anything mean about anyone," Mr. Scott-Bartz, 18, said. "He is retired and now has dogs and cockatiels and likes to read, so I added a dog and a book. It was a fun thing to do and gave me the chance to make a big sculpture, which is something I don't usually do."

For Mrs. Savage, what ultimately set Mr. Scott-Bartz's piece apart was a combination of prowess and use of space.

"Sculpture is not necessarily the most go-to avenue for an exhibition like this," she explained. "I was attracted to that artist's piece for several reasons. It was a beautiful three-dimensional form, and being able to view his interpretation from three dimensions is an amazing experience."

"Sculpture is a medium that a lot of students like to try, but for many it never goes beyond experimentation," she added. "This particular piece had scale and texture and perfect proportion, he really understood what he was doing. It is a really exceptional piece."

The Best in Show Award was accompanied by \$500 while 10 other students won Merit Awards, each worth \$150. They are: Giulia Castleberg, Ernesto T. Hurtado, Johanna Laraway, Susanna Lofvander, Aleeza Malik, Alisson Martinez, Daisy O'Mahoney, Katherine Rawlings, Chloe Stevens and Manon Taylor.

The winners were announced at a family reception April 10, where Mrs. Hamilton said there were some happy and proud parents and grandparents on hand.

"There were tears all over the place, it was so heartwarming to see," she said. "One grandmother was led in blindfolded by her family and when they took her up to one of the pieces they removed it. There was a drawing of the grandfather who died a couple of years ago. The exhibition brought out so many wonderful experiences and stories like that."

The Student Art Fund was founded in 2006 by a group of artists and retired school teachers in response to the ever-increasing shortfall in art budgets at local schools. Run by a committee of eight, the organization was started with the goal of raising money that could be channeled directly into the teaching of art in public schools in Carpinteria, Goleta and Santa Barbara.

"As well as supporting their programs, we also wanted to show all of the good work that was being done in our public schools," said Mrs. Hamilton, who was an elementary school teacher in Goleta Union School District for 29 years. "That is how The Grandparent Portrait Show and the other exhibitions we organize came about."

In addition to the Grandparent Portrait Show, the Student Art Fund organizes traveling and online exhibitions of art by middle and junior high school students in fields such as drawing, jewelry, ceramics, photography. Not only are the exhibitions a means for local art students to see what their colleagues at other schools are creating, they also offer the public an opportunity to experience the creativity that is blossoming within its local schools.

"Having been a teacher, I know how unaware a lot of people are of all the great things going on in public schools," Mrs. Hamilton said. "This is a way for us to help show people the wonderful things that our teachers and students are doing."

The exhibition will be on display in the Faulkner Gallery at the Santa Barbara Public Library through April 29.

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Santa Barbara High School's Visual Academy of Design and Art student Hunter Scott-Bartz shows the sculpture he made of his grandfather titled "Albert: Kind, Gentle Spirit" that won the Best in Show Award in the "Grandparent Portrait Show" staged by the Student Art Fund. The show is currently on display at the Santa Barbara Public Library's Faulkner Gallery.
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