

# Art students get their monsters on at SAIL

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

High school can be scary. Higher expectations, social pressures, and worries about the future produce stress and anxiety. It's not uncommon for students to feel uneasy and vulnerable during this transition to young adulthood. Though guidance counselors and caring teachers are in place to provide support, sometimes students simply need an artistic outlet to express their fears creatively.

SAIL high school art teacher Sheri Nilles developed a project that challenges students to build their own monsters. She said "it gives them an opportunity to explore what they think is scary in this bigger way. They can let loose and have fun and start to feel out three-dimensional design. Whatever they can dream up, we try to make it happen."

Eleventh-grader Carter Magar and two other classmates built a pair of alien glitter monsters. Carter felt that "everybody should make a monster. A lot of people don't allow their creative side to show. They say I'm not good at this but it's a monster, no one has a reference for it. You just kind of go for it."

Because the only limitation for the monster project is the students' imaginations, there are no right or wrong answers. Though Nilles did set specific criteria for assessment, she emphasized, "it's about the process and about exploring the fun side of art. That gets lost a lot as people get older and as they study art, the fun gets taken out of it."

Teresa Fondo and Leah Simmons had no shortage of fun while collaborating on their monster. Both 10th-graders, they chose to work together because "We bounce ideas off each other well," said Teresa. Leah added, "Even if we didn't come to an agreement, we still compromised and all our ideas came to life."

Their mermaid monster, named Kla'risha, exudes a maniacal glamour. Students were required to develop a descriptive backstory for their monsters and Teresa explained, "we were thinking about her being in Wakulla Springs and what would happen if there was pollution in the water. How would it affect her? It might make her evil." Because of the water's imagined contamination, Kla'risha has developed murderous tendencies and a disturbing habit of taking selfies with her victims. "It's environmental and a social commentary. Cute but killer, it's a deceiving thing," said Leah. "Just because she's beautiful doesn't mean she's not capable of doing bad things," added Teresa.

In addition to exploring larger themes, students had the opportunity to experiment with a variety of sculpture techniques and materials. Kla'risha was built with an armature of chicken wire, poles, and broken gardening equipment. "We use these really long strips of packaging paper. I stripped them down to make a wig. Then we spray painted it and that's the day we learned that spray paint melts Styrofoam," said Teresa. "But it

looks really cool and it works with the toxic theme. It was a happy accident."

Teresa found a lesson in that happy accident. "If you think it's not going to work, try it anyway. If it doesn't work out, just do something else, it's not the end of the world." This is something that Nilles tries to impart to her students but she knows it only comes from firsthand experience. "You learn just as much from failing as you do from succeeding and you're only going to get better from it."

While Nilles' students were creating three-dimensional monsters, SAIL's photography teacher Becki Rutta asked her digital art students to take a virtual approach to monster making. Eleventh-grader Dylan McBride explained the process. "These are photos that I've taken myself, mixed with other images from the internet." Dylan's monster resembles a skeletal Santa Claus making deliveries.

Using digital software, Dylan "started putting the images together and I saw I could make his legs look like a huge wheel and I can put an arm behind his back and soon I started creating a little bit of lore for him." Dylan enjoys digital design and is looking forward to mastering new techniques. He said, "I'm trying to get myself more used to drawing on tablets because I want to be able to start drawing comics on the computer."

Rutta has noticed that some of her digital design students don't yet see the possibilities for creativity. "I don't think they realize they can actually put together things that are original works; that they can create and be an artist themselves." This monster project allows them to experiment with their own imagery.

Regardless of whether they're working on the three-dimensional or the digital monster project, students gain a great deal more from the process than technical skill. Rutta shares, "they're

learning how to work together and how to be patient. They're working through problems and having things fail and having that happen in a safe place where all they have to do is try again, and when that doesn't work, they have to try again. Just getting through that itself is an exercise that's going to help you succeed at

life. I don't think we're allowed to do that in many other classes."

Amanda Kariooth Thompson is the Education and Exhibitions Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).

## LEON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Renaissance Center – 2nd Floor Conference Room  
435 N. Macomb Street  
Wednesday, November 16, 2016  
1:30 p.m.

### APPLICATION REVIEW MEETING:

#### OLD BUSINESS

1:30 p.m. Project Name: Bianca Commercial Development  
Type "A" - Final Design Plan Approval (FDPA) Track  
Project ID#: LSP160006  
Applicant: Bianca Properties, LLC  
Agent: Carmen Green, P.E., Magnolia Engineering  
Parcel ID#: 21-30-20-616-000-0, 21-30-20-634-000-0, 21-30-20-638-000-0 & 21-30-20-639-000-0  
Location: 5869 West Tennessee Street

This project was continued from September 28, 2016 to date certain of November 16, 2016. The proposed project consists of a 1,800 square foot auto sales building and a 9,600 square foot commercial retail building. The project will be reviewed through the Type "A" Final Design Plan Approval (FDPA) Track.



AMANDA THOMPSON  
SAIL Art teachers Sheri Nilles and Becki Rutta in costume.

