

Passion for expression



Lincoln senior David Conley is garnering attention for his artworks. MARILYN PROCTOR-GIVENS

Lincoln senior looks to art ‘to get my point across’

Amanda Karioth Thompson Council on Culture & Arts

David Conley has been drawing nearly his entire life. “My mom has baby pictures of me with a pen and a sketchbook,” he said. His innate talent has blossomed over the years through a mixture of hard work and expert guidance.

Now a senior at Lincoln High School, his art is not only a passion and method for self-expression, it has also become a coping strategy.

Just after recuperating from two serious injuries that sidelined his high school football career, David found himself in the midst of the pandemic, quarantined at home. “We’d just sit there and watch the clock go by,” he said. “There are a lot of thoughts racing in your head and there’s not much to do but take those thoughts and put them on a

sheet of paper. I used that time to draw.”

David chose to see the situation as an opportunity to continue perfecting his craft and experiment with different media. Though graphite pencil and charcoal are his go-to materials, he has pushed himself to try new media including alcohol ink markers which can be used to achieve a painterly effect through layering and blending techniques.

His first attempt with the markers, a self-portrait, has already received critical acclaim.

His piece was selected as the first-place award winner for high school in COCA’s annual Winter Festival Youth Art Exhibit. The drawing was

See CONLEY, Page 2C

Conley

Continued from Page 1C

submitted by David's art teacher Marilyn Proctor-Givens who is proud of his tenacity. "He works all the time on his art. He beats himself up a little bit because he wants to grow as an artist, but you need that. He doesn't give up."

Others have also taken note of David's talents and are mentoring him in a more permanent art form. As an 18-year-old, he's currently working as an intern with Empire Tattooz and he's investing the same commitment to hone his skills. "To have a steady hand, I do these exercises where you take a pen and drag a straight line across paper without a ruler. You keep going until your lines get straighter and straighter."

David is planning to study art in college and is eager to support himself by tattooing while he's in school. "I want to have a sustained income creating art. After college, I'd like to study entrepreneurship, start my own business, create a brand for my artwork, and make a name for myself. I know art will carry me in the long run."

For now, his thoughts are focused on his senior portfolio project which is inspired by the central theme of Black history. "I've been studying it since I was in sixth grade and I'm very knowledgeable about it. Since the recent protests and riots, everybody thinks it's new. This is stuff that's been going on and the only thing that's changed is it's been broadcast more."

Through these artworks, David hopes to dispel confusion. "There's a lot of misused information, a lot of propaganda and I want to put out truth, have my say in it, and get my point across. I feel like I've done my part once I do that."

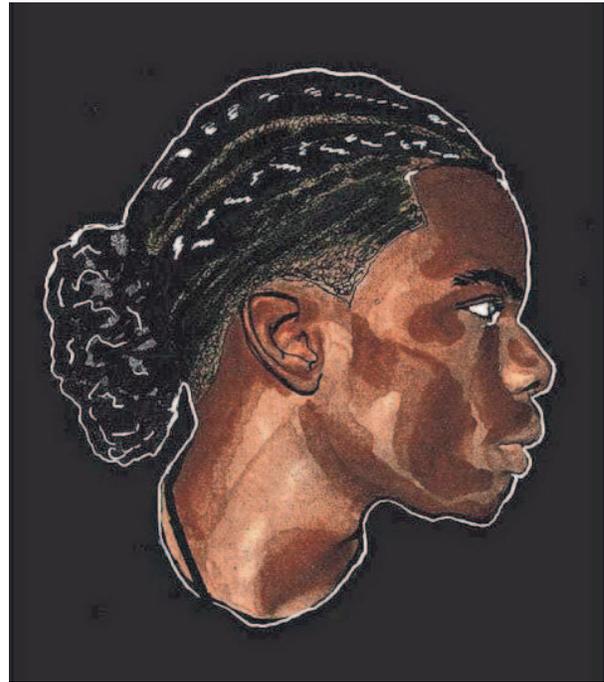
David is exploring a variety of social justice issues including police brutality and systematic racism. "Young Black males like me, we've been dealt an uneven and unfair set of cards and are expected to make it at the same rate of success as other people who have different opportunities. Mentally, it binds young Black men and women. It's all about overcoming that adversity and creating change."

Proctor-Givens is helping to guide David through his creative process. "For young Black men his age it's tough. This is really tough," she said. "What's been going on with Black Lives Matter has spoken to him. He's got all these ideas that are surfacing. I see him being more conscientious about what's going on right now as a Black male and being able to represent that in his art. He sees his voice coming through in his art and that's important."

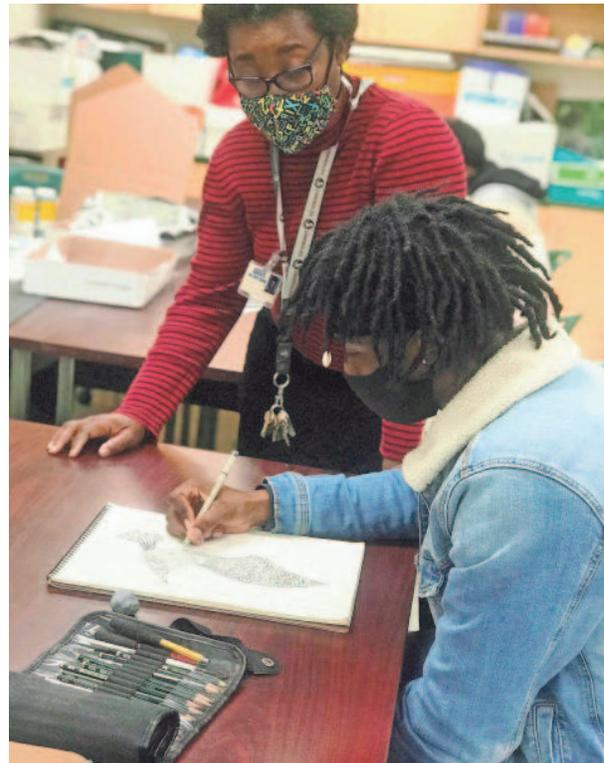
When reflecting on his artistic journey so far, David offered, "I wasn't born good. I had to get good. I make mistakes and I improvise. I'm always willing to learn and be intrigued because it's so interesting."

He offered advice for other young artists. "Keep going and do not compare your pieces to other people's pieces. There's no wrong way, there's just different ways of creating. I truly believe in the process itself rather than the product. The process is motivation, the product is just something to reflect on when you're done. Be your own motivational speaker. It starts when you start and it ends when you end."

To see David's and all the other students' artwork in the annual Winter Festival Youth Art Exhibit, visit COCA's Online Gallery at cocaonlinegallery.zenfolio.com.



High School, First Place: Self Portrait by David Conley, 12th grade, Lincoln High School, Art Teacher, Marilyn Proctor-Givens. SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT



Marilyn Proctor-Givens looks on as David adds detail to one of his artworks. JADEN STORY

This article is part of COCA's Creativity Persists collection and highlights how area arts educators are continuing to teach and inspire during the COVID-19 pandemic. Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).