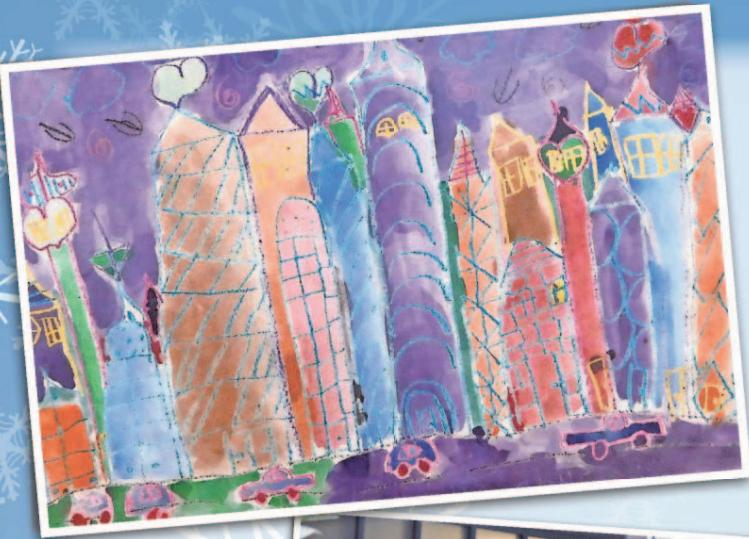


SCHOOL & FAMILY
TALLAHASSEE
 LOCAL

'POWER TO DO GOOD'

STUDENT TALENT HELPS PUT SPARKLE INTO WINTER FESTIVAL



ABOVE: Cityscape by Egypt Bennett, 2nd Grader at Bond Elementary School
 COCA RIGHT:
 Honorable mention middle school award winner Torkayla Phillips with Rocky Hanna and art teacher Nikki Nicolas.
 BARBARA DAVIS



AMANDA KARIOTH THOMPSON
 COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

The City of Tallahassee celebrated the first Winter Festival in 1986. What began as a small event meant to show off newly purchased holiday decorations has evolved into a communitywide festival enjoyed by thousands of residents and visitors every year. Now featuring a parade, the Jingle Bell Run, several entertainment stages and food vendors, the event serves to engage families and kindle the spirit of the season.

For more than 25 years, the Council on Culture & Arts has partnered with the city's Parks and Recreation department to bring even more creativity and holiday cheer to the festival. COCA presents the annual Winter Festival Youth Art Exhibition, which showcases the work of local student artists in kindergarten through 12th grade. On display at the City Hall Art Gallery until Jan. 9 are more than 80 artworks selected by local art teachers on behalf of their students. The

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Festival

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entries include a wide variety of media and represent more than 40 area public, private and home schools.

Being chosen to participate in this exhibition is a coveted honor, and the student artists swell with pride to see their artwork displayed in a professional gallery space. Even more exciting is to share that feeling with family and friends during the exhibit reception. The event culminates in an awards announcement where select middle school and high school artists are recognized with additional kudos. This year Rocky Hanna, the newly elected superintendent of schools, was on hand to offer congratulations to all the artists involved.

More than 250 students, parents, siblings, teachers and administrators attend the event each year and they are treated to more than just visual artistry. COCA also coordinates a student musical performance for the reception, and this year, the Rickards High School Raider Jazz Combo shared their talents.

Jeremy George is the director of bands at Rickards. He appreciated the opportunity for his students to perform publicly and said that "music is definitely important all year, but I think involving our students in this holiday performance helps to add just a little more joy to the holiday season."

Tenth-grader Kaleb Thompson plays guitar in the ensemble and he feels obligated to share his music abilities with others. "Being a musician, it's a responsibility to the world, you're a healer. Music heals people. You can change somebody's life and their emotions in three minutes, with one song. For you to have that much power to do good, it makes me feel good."

Seventh-grader Torkayla Phillips has

also found power in the arts. A visual art student at Griffin middle school, she sometimes questions her own abilities, especially her drawing skills.

In an effort to introduce different techniques, her art teacher, Nikki Nicolas challenged students to make a collage with bits of paper. "They had to create something that was interesting enough to be seen through just one color because there wasn't going to be any detail added." Torkayla's resulting artwork received an honorable mention award, providing her with a confidence boost. "I learned that art is not always about drawing stuff. It makes me feel like I can do more than I think I can."

Eleventh-grader Joanna Wang's main focus is drawing and her artwork was recognized with the Mayor's Best in Show award. She is an Advanced Placement art student at Chiles High School, and her art teacher, Kelly Little, said part of these students' experience is developing a personal concept. "It allows for exploration of media choice, theme, and I require them to personalize it in some way so that it's more meaningful."

Joanna's artwork is done in charcoal and it features a figure in a floating bubble. It also includes a teddy bear,

which "symbolically represents connections to childhood." She adds that "the surrounding bubble illustrates a sense of innocence and protective layer from adult cares, pressures and responsibilities."

When reflecting on why she gravitates to the visual arts, Joanna shared: "Every time I draw something, it is unique to me. No one has created it before. It is a process that is not common in other academic assignments it and allows me to be centered in the moment."

That sentiment is clearly illustrated in the diversity of artwork on display in

the Winter Festival Youth Art Exhibit. Each student's personality and creativity is evident, and the expertise of our area art teachers shines through.

The show will remain until Jan. 9 at City Hall Gallery, 300 S. Adams St., second-floor lobby. It is free to the public and open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Parking is available in Kleman Plaza.

Amanda Karioth 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.tallahasseedarts.org).

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AMANDA THOMPSON
Joanna Wang's artwork that won the Mayor's Best in Show award



The Rickards High School Raider Jazz Combo performs for reception guests.

BARBARA DAVIS