



BEASTS FOR ART

DESOTO TRAIL STUDENTS EXPLORE PAINTING IN THE WILD

AMANDA KARIOTH THOMPSON
COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

The fifth-grade art students at DeSoto Trail Elementary School are working diligently on becoming wild beasts, or followers of Fauvism.

In the early 20th century, a group of French artists began experimenting with a new way of painting. Their bold brushwork and vivid colors, often straight out of the tube, were striking but not to everyone's taste. One critic referred to the group as "wild beasts," or "Les Fauves," a term that became the title for a new, avant-garde, modern art movement.

Key concepts included an emphasis on color, balanced compositions, individual expression, and an emotional response to nature. Following the likes of Henri Matisse and André Derain, Kim Salesses, DeSoto Trail's art teacher, was eager for her students to become scholars of the movement and learn from contemporary, local artists who exemplify similar philosophies.

"Before I send them to middle school, I really wanted them to think about how to express themselves a little differently," said Salesses. "Fourth and fifth grade tend to be very concrete. I wanted them to express themselves by showing emotion through their art."

To do this, Salesses worked with students for several weeks. She introduced new concepts and delved deeper into familiar ones. "We've talked a lot about atmospheric perspective, we've got nine or 10 tricks for composition so that we have unified compositions. We went in depth with the rule of thirds because this is an extended project, I just keep building on it."

She showed students examples of work created by

artists from long ago as well as pieces by those living and working now, in our own community, like Julie Bowland who was invited to DeSoto Trail as a guest artist. During multiple visits, she shared her artwork with students, as well as the work of her mentors. She discussed her inspiration, her process, and after the students sketched and created small-scale oil pastel artworks, she came back to paint with them "en plein air," or "in the open air."

With funds awarded from the Council on Culture & Arts through an Arts Education Grant, Salesses was able to provide each of the 128 fifth-grade students with a 16" x 20" canvas and acrylic paints. "They love having this full-size canvas. They have never had that and they felt so special. It was a big deal. I think it's important for kids to feel like you're looking into getting the best resources and experiences for them. Even some of the reluctant artists are really getting into this. They're more serious now," said Salesses.

Students were well prepared and excited to take on the challenge of painting from observation alongside a professional artist. Currently the Fine Art Gallery director and a faculty member at Valdosta State University, Bowland has been a significant contributor to the area's cultural scene. During her career, she has managed the City Hall and airport art galleries, taught art at both FSU and TCC and has served as the director of 621 Gallery. Her artwork has been exhibited in many regional venues including the Gadsden Art Center, Jefferson Art Gallery, and the Thomasville Cultural Center.

Reflecting on what she'd like the students to gain from this experience, Bowland shared that she hopes they "see that it's OK to be a grown up artist and still have fun. They're about to enter middle school and they're about to really worry about making it look right. This is giving them permission to just enjoy. That's what I love about kids' art is that it is so free and spontaneous and so colorful. I'm sure that subconsciously that's what I strive for in my grown up art. If I can help them realize that's what it should be, that's cool."

For this particular lesson, the students had a luxurious 90 minutes to work on their underpaintings, a far cry from the normal 45. In that time, Bowland explained how she sets up her palette and uses paint

See Fauvism, Page 2C



AMANDA THOMPSON
Students were excited to use the full size canvases and bright acrylic paints.



Julie Bowland and DeSoto Trail art students show off their work.

AMANDA THOMPSON

Fauvism

Continued from Page 1C

extender. She also described her method for planning the painting's composition, simplifying the shapes in her underpainting, and working with an eye for balance. The fifth-graders then scurried off to find a pleasing spot to work and began laying the foundation for their own expressionistic paintings.

Nia Hajdukiewicz showed her observation skills and chose an unusual perspective from which to paint one of DeSoto Trail's oak trees. "If you look backward you can see all these little openings through the branches. You can use an abstract view to catch the viewer's eye." Applying what she'd learned about color, Amelie Garcia said, "I want to paint my feelings and I'm using mostly blue and pink to make purples."

Tate Dixon expanded on the lessons about color



and contrast and said, "I keep on adding colors and it just looks so pretty and I feel like I should improve it more and more." His classmate Billy Monroe explained what he'd learned from this unique project. "I just take it all in, have a feeling of nature, and work to be able to express that in the picture itself."

No doubt, the wild beasts would be proud.

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).