



Jaeryung Park
 & her mother in front
 of her award-winning
 artwork.

AMANDA THOMPSON

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Middle School students learn technical and social skills preparing for art exhibition

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 COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS

There was plenty to celebrate on the 20th anniversary of the Annual Middle School Art Exhibition. From sculpture to cut paper, monoprint to colored pencil, gallery goers had more than 70 pieces of artwork to enjoy. This exhibition represented seven schools and illustrated the wide variety of materials and techniques that our students can explore in their art classes. It also afforded these young artists the chance to have their artwork displayed in a professional gallery space.

Born in Korea, Jaeryung's family moved to Tallahassee last year. While she has always taken art classes in school, she notes some differences between the two countries. "In Korea, they teach us about art but we have to do it by ourselves. Here, they actually teach us how to do it and we have all kinds of materials. In Korea we have to bring our own materials."

Mackenzie Wilhelm, a Deerlake eighth-grader, also took home an award for her artwork and she is equally energized by access to unique materials. "In art, I get to enjoy projects that I wouldn't be able to do otherwise because I have a bunch of materials that I didn't even know existed. We're currently doing a basket weaving project and we're using



core," a stiff, rope-like material that provides a sturdy structure for basketry.

In addition to gaining experience with specialized materials and techniques, Mackenzie realizes that she is acquiring other skills that will allow her to more nimbly navigate her interactions with others. "One skill that you end up learning in the art room is how to give your opinion on someone's project but in a nice way. You're not just saying 'I don't like your project,' but you're giving a reason why and how you believe they could improve it."

Linda Johnson is the art instructor at Deerlake and co-founder of the Annual Middle School Art Exhibition. "I'd been thinking about the fact that the high schools have their annual show at LeMoyné and the elementary schools have their show at the library but there was no show for the middle schools." Johnson gathered her middle school art colleagues together to discuss the possibility of an exhibition, and they were all enthusiastic about the idea. Though the show's first venue was the FSU Oglesby Gallery, for the past 10 years, FAMU's Foster Tan-



PRENISHA REID

ABOVE: Guests at student reception for 20th anniversary of the Annual Middle School Art Exhibition. RIGHT: Artwork by Kendall Bodner, a student at Swift Creek Middle School

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ner Gallery has served as the home to this student exhibition, and in that time the show has expanded to fill both floors of the gallery.

Johnson underscored the importance of the venue. “The kids come in and they see their work in a professional gallery. To give the kids a chance to see their work hanging, not in the cafeteria, not in the halls or front office at school but out in the community where other people can see the work, what a thrill that is.”

One of the most anticipated components of the show is the exhibition reception and awards announcements, and this year was no exception. Johnson takes full advantage of the event as it gives her an opportunity to make connections with her students’ families. “I had an interesting conversation with one of the parents who told me that her daughter is working on one of our art projects and she can’t put it down. To have something that they are so excited about that they want to keep doing it, it is a good thing for them to experience that drive, that stick-to-itiveness.”

Johnson adds that her art class “is not just about learning about the artwork and making the artwork, it’s also about learning about yourself and what you’re capable of. The end product is important but it’s not as important as the process. I might have a kid who at first thinks, ‘I don’t come up with very good ideas,’ but then they learn how to come up with good ideas because they’ve had practice at it. It’s real cerebral, it’s real tactile, it’s product, it’s process; it’s all of that and more.”

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.tallahasseearts.org).