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Don't Miss the Stunning Display of High School Art in the iCreate Exhibit at the Bruce

By Greenwich Sentinel | Featured Articles, News, ZApp Highlights

First Place winner "SOS" by Albert Chen, Grade 9, The Hotchkiss School. Contributed photo.

By Anne W. Semmes

For over a month there have been 60 extraordinary artworks on view at the Bruce Museum less visible in a hallway gallery alongside Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman's electrifying "Journey to Nature's Underworld" exhibition. What is astonishing is those 60 artworks were created by high school students – their artworks accurately described as "breathtaking," with "stunning technique and thought-provoking content."

What is also uncanny is how a number of these young artists have chosen subjects for their art addressing similar themes exhibited in the Dion/Rockman show, such as climate change and natural disasters.

The students range from some 59 schools located in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. The 60 on view were chosen from 850 submissions for the Bruce's Annual Regional Juried High School Exhibition – iCreate, held at the Bruce since year 2008. Students were able to submit up to three entries digitally. Of 100 selected, we see 60. And of those 60 three distinguished judges (including Anne von Stuelpnagel, Bruce Director of Exhibitions) have awarded a First (\$500), Second (\$300), and Third (\$250) place winner, a Youth@Bruce Awardee (\$350) and three Honorable Mentions (\$100).

But hold on – there is a People's Choice Award of \$250 to be awarded with your choice listed online of your favorite artwork of the 60. The deadline for submitting your vote is next Friday, August 11, with the winner to be awarded on Sunday, August 13. The tough part is that choosing of one from such a stupendous selection of originality, imagination, and artistic skill!

To that end this reporter selected a half dozen artworks to show just how hard that choosing is! And reading the artist's thoughtful take on his or her artwork is a necessary part of that choosing process.

By chance the first artwork that captured the eye was by a student from Greenwich Academy – 10th grader Zara Kurbanov, Hers is a still life of crystal-clear wine glasses tumbled amongst stunning red apples – drawn with colored pencils!! The title is "Mirror, Mirror." Zara states her desire to "inquire further into the nature of reflections." She created first, "an intricate composition...of stacked glasses, bowls, a reflective gold candle, and an apple for color," then "layered different colors using colored pencils," then "accentuated the highlights and deepened shadows..." Marvelous! Luminous was that oil painting of a girl lying down "In the Trees" by New Canaan High School senior Julia Waetzig. She chose Taylor Swift as her muse in her "exploration of realism." "More specifically," she wrote, "the feelings and imagery invoked in her 2020 album "folklore" greatly inspired this painting. This piece began with raw canvas and stretcher bars that I assembled by hand...this was my first experience with assembling a canvas... I spent 6 weeks on this painting...It is to this day, my proudest achievement. This work was recently purchased by my school and will now feature as a permanent installation."

Honorable Mention "Breakfast Table" by Katie Yang, Grade 10, The Hotchkiss School. Contributed photo.

Surely relating to the climate change work of Mark Dion and Alexis Rockman was Cresskill High School junior Emily Han's "Un-Happy Earth Day," an ingenious composition of a white frosted birthday cake lit with forest fire, composed with acrylic and gel medium on a board. "This piece asks," she writes, "What can be done to resolve the wildfire? Through the news and media, I came to realize that wildfires and individuals are inevitable...The girl [with gas mask] represents the hopelessness of being completely safe from the wildfire. Wildfire is a continuous issue that we as a society have to solve."

So, who doesn't love that beautiful face of a hungry dog eyeing the pile of bacon on the "Breakfast Table" amazingly captured by colored pencil on paper by Katie Yang, a tenth grader at The Hotchkiss School, deservedly earning an "Honorable Mention." Yang shares the rushing morning days before the pandemic compared to the quarantine days spending "small yet significant moments" over breakfast with her family. "My dog sat at my side, patiently waiting for me to 'accidentally' drop a piece of food to the floor. He brightened the long days of quarantine...greeting me with tail wags and often intruding on my online classes. I wanted to make a piece to reflect on this time."

Talk about riveting! That ninth grader from the Academy of the Holy Angels, Esther Kim has created an image with acrylic on paper and collage, that AI could turn into a series on television called "Skeletons!" But Kim has more worthy intents as expressed by her title, "Democratic Utopia." She explains, "All people are equal in this world with skeletons...In this world there is no race, religion, gender...The skeletons are picking out who they want to be and the body part and items are all different types of personalities people could have...They are not conforming to society's norms."

So, the last choice here was voted the best – ninth grader Albert Chen of The Hotchkiss School, won First Place for his singular artwork of oil on Masonite board with its title of SOS in morse code. He has depicted "the tense silence following a sudden tragedy... The Statue of David, which represents hope and bravery, has fallen down and cracked all over the floor. Its stare at the viewer is an expression that forms when tragedy hasn't fully sunken in, but the emotions have reached the eyes." Though only 15 he confesses to having had "many moments of this quiet, paralyzing panic." He wants us "to hear the piercing cries of the stone making contact with the ground, feel the grimy crumbs and dust left in the wake of the turmoil." He has succeeded.



"Mirror, Mirror," by Zara Kurbanov, Grade 10, Greenwich Academy. Contributed photo.



"In the Trees," by Julia Waetzig, New Canaan High School. Contributed photo.



"Democratic Utopia" by Esther Kim, Grade 9, Academy of the Holy Angels. Photo by Anne W. Semmes.



"Un-Happy Earth Day" by Emily Han, Grade 11, Cresskill High School. Contributed photo.

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