

Photos Rose Lincoln/Harvard News Office



Cecilia Thai, 11, looks happy with the product of her artistic labors.

Sackler Museum, Gutman Library ‘Step Into Art’ with children



Meagan McIntosh, 11, a student at the Mother Caroline Academy in Dorchester, works on a piece inspired by images at the Sackler.

By Lauren K. Terry
Special to the Harvard News Office

“Look at that blue! Look at it! Isn’t it pretty?” exclaims Adriana, a sixth-grader from Mother Caroline Academy in Dorchester. Four of Adriana’s peers rush to see the plastic paint tray she’s pointing at. They’re eager to share in Adriana’s excitement: after all, she’s just discovered a new shade of blue. This color, a luminous aqua, quickly makes it onto Adriana’s painting, titled “Me, Myself, and I.” This self-portrait, along with 15 others created by the students at the school, will be on exhibit at Harvard’s Gutman Library from Dec. 14 to Jan. 5.

The exhibit is the culmination of an innovative, four-tiered partnership between Harvard’s Sackler Museum, Mother Caroline Academy, the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE), and Step Into Art, Inc., a Newton-based nonprofit led by founder Abby Rischin that provides dynamic art education programs for children.

Rischin first collaborated with HGSE two years ago as part of the School’s Field Experience Program (FEP), which requires arts and education students to obtain practical training outside the classroom. Graduate students from HGSE assist in creating and teaching Step Into Art programs in exchange for class credit. Last year, Rischin’s partnership with Harvard further expanded when the Harvard Art Museum opened its doors and lent its exhibition space to Step Into Art students. This year, Gutman enthusiastically offered to host the students’ works, which were created in re-

sponse to emotionally compelling portraits in the Sackler Museum’s current “Re-view” collection, from John Singleton Copley’s “Mrs. Boylston” to Pablo Picasso’s “Mother and Child” to Vincent van Gogh’s “Self-Portrait.”

“Working with Harvard’s Sackler Museum has been such a great experience,” says Rischin. “The collection is beautifully maintained, and its environment is so receptive to teaching and student learning. It has a very personal feel to it; there’s no bureaucracy. I feel that it’s a real symbiosis, because [the museum is] dedicated to expanding [its] outreach efforts, and we want to bring the kids there. The excitement of seeing art that’s part of a great university like Harvard is just a very powerful thing for the students.”

The Step Into Art program uses the extraordinary resources of the Sackler in a comprehensive, 10-week-long learning experience that allows children from economically disadvantaged families to encounter great works of art, often for the first time. For Rischin, the choice to partner with a privately funded, tuition-free middle school like Mother Caroline was an obvious one. “I feel it’s really important to reach the kids who would not otherwise have access to these kinds of experiences,” she says. “I see great opportunities to help kids build cultural capital. Learning your way around an art museum, feeling at home there, and being familiar with great works of Western culture is a way for these students to gain social mobility. When you feel like you’re serving a need in that way, it only nourishes your own motivation.”

HGSE graduate Susan Foster, who origi-

(See *Artists*, page 32)

‘Step Into Art: Mother Caroline Students Respond to Art from Harvard’s Sackler Museum Exhibition of Student Artwork and Writing’ will take place at the Gutman Library from Dec. 14 to Jan. 5. Opening reception for the community is on Sunday (Dec. 14) from 2 to 4 p.m.

Artists

(Continued from previous page)

nally met Rischin through the FEP program in 2007 and now works for her as a teacher, agrees: "I've found that in our middle-school programs, kids have already learned to be afraid of museums and afraid of art. You can tell when students walk into a museum that they are nervous, and don't know how to be, and feel out of place. But the activities are so kid-friendly and so much fun that the students are able to engage with the art in a really fun way that makes it personal."

In the museum, the students are encouraged to create sketches of works of art that appeal to them. Back at Mother Caroline, the sketches become the basis for their own paintings, rich in personality and emotion, under the supervision of the school's art teacher. The students are then required to write a short reflection paper on their work that accompanies their exhibition piece. Finally, the students attend the exhibition's opening to share and discuss their work with others.

Foster believes this is a particularly powerful learning method for middle-school students. "The students create such beautiful, remarkable paintings. ... They're having fun painting, but their emotions are enough on the surface at that age that they are able to capture everything that they're feeling. The portraits give you a window into their lives. ... And the fact that they are able to exhibit their work at such a prestigious school as Harvard really affirms for them the value of their own creative process — a process that truly emulates the artist's journey: observing works of art, creating art, assessing one's work, and then sharing it with the world."

The thoughtfulness of the students as they paint their Sackler-inspired portraits confirms Foster's sentiment. Adriana's custom aqua-silver color is applied next to a green hue that is similar to the green found in van Gogh's "Self-Portrait," a color that Adriana thinks represents van Gogh's temperament. "I thought a lot about van Gogh and chose green and aqua because with both colors, it's as if one minute you're sad and then you're OK and happy." For Adriana, colors are key components to her painting because of her different ethnic backgrounds. "My painting is of my nationalities. It's who I am. I'm white, European, Cape Verdeian, and Haitian ... and proud of it."

Through Harvard's partnership with Step Into Art, the Mother Caroline students are given the opportunity to "find their vision as artists and find their voices as writers," says Rischin. Adriana, however, defines the process more simply: "I'm happy because I'm representing who I am: Me, myself, and I."

For more information about Step Into Art, visit www.stepintoart.org.

Step Into Art employee Susan Foster (far right) was a student at the HGSE who became acquainted with Rischin through the School's collaboration with Step Into Art. She chats with Jerusha Graham, 12.



Photos Rose Lincoln/Harvard News Office

Alexia Vernet, 10, (above) sketches a picture that may end up in an exhibit at the Gutman Library. Director of Step Into Art Abby Rischin (below left) works with a student.



Harvard connects children to the arts in a variety of ways. Here are just a few examples.

Harvard Art Museum collaboration with the Edison School in Brighton, The Citizen's Schools project: This fall, after visiting the Harvard Art Museum weekly, 10 to 12 middle school-age students created a museum handbook guide for their peers. They will present their work at the Sackler Museum Lecture Hall and the galleries on Dec. 16.

Harvard Art Museum collaboration with the Kennedy/Longfellow and Amigos schools in Cambridge: Third-graders from these Cambridge public schools come to campus for a yearlong program, now in its ninth year, in which they learn to view art through thought and expression.

Harvard Art Museum collaboration with the Gardner Pilot Academy in Allston: Second- and fifth-graders participate in this multi-visit program, with museum staff providing in-school sessions prior to museum visits.

Harvard Art Museum collaboration with the Samuel Brown School in Peabody: In its 10th year, "Fabulous Fakes and Poignant Poetry" has fifth-graders "adopt" a painting in the collection, creating their own work inspired by their chosen piece. The artwork is then hung in an on-campus exhibition.

Harvard Art Museum collaboration with Epiphany School in Dorchester: Sixth-graders visit the museum to focus on works by Copley, Picasso, van Gogh, Nolde, and Pollock. Inspired by these masters, the youngsters create their own artwork, which is then presented in an exhibition with an artists' reception at the end of the year.

Jazz Artist Visits to Boston Arts Academy and Cambridge Rindge and Latin: The Office for the Arts' Learning From Performers and Jazz Masters in Residence programs, in collaboration with the Harvard Jazz Bands, sponsors visiting jazz artists at Harvard and coordinates their classroom visits to the Boston Arts Academy and Cambridge Rindge and Latin School.

CityStep links Harvard undergraduates with Cambridge public school children through dance: For more than two decades, CityStep has tapped hundreds of Harvard undergraduates as teachers of the yearlong dance theater curriculum for thousands of Cambridge public school students. The twice-weekly classroom visits culminate each year in an original dance performance choreographed by CityStep members and performed by the children.

Harmony teaches music to Cambridge public school children: Harmony is a nonprofit community-service program associated with Harvard's Phillips Brooks House Association. Student volunteers teach music through instrumental and voice lessons to children ages 5 to 18 at Cambridge public schools. About 50 children and youth at the Fletcher-Maynard Academy School, the Andrew Peabody School, and Rindge and Latin School participate in one-on-one instruction or group lessons.

Learning about theater through the A.R.T.'s "The Island of Anyplace": The Harvard-affiliated Institute for American Repertory Theatre and Institute for Advanced Theatre Training have put on this child-focused performance for more than 17 years. It has been seen by children from elementary schools all over New England. "The Island of Anyplace" introduces children to all aspects of theater. In addition, Harvard sponsors classes from local public schools in Cambridge and Boston to attend the performance.