

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

CONTACT: Michelle Yadoo
Marketing Communications Coordinator
(516) 922-4100, ext. 231

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Art Appreciation and More
Mill Neck Manor Students Look at Deaf Artists

Among the goals of studying art is promoting an appreciation of creative expression. Realizing that this expression is often a result of an individual artist's characteristic experiences further enhances this appreciation. Recently, 6th, 7th and 9th grade students at Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf had the opportunity to look at the work of several Deaf artists. In the art classes held during Deaf Awareness Week, students discovered that the deafness of these artists didn't hamper their artistic expression; instead, it supplemented their talent by adding an interesting dimension.

Sixth and seventh graders studied the art of Tony McGregor, who counts among his influences the culture and folklore of the Southwest. Images of this region, in addition to hands, figure prominently in much of his work. Using McGregor's art as inspiration, the students made paper mache gourds embellished with hand prints and Southwestern visuals. The high school class looked at works by sculptor Douglas Tilden, and contemporary artists Vanessa Vaughan and John O'Malley.

The student-artists emulated Tilden, famous for bronze pieces of a classical nature, by creating individual clay sculptures. Specializing in portraiture, Vaughan uses vibrant color relationships to create texture and mood in the facial expressions of her subjects. Here, the student assignment was to paint a watercolor face based on a picture cut out of a magazine. In a nod to O'Malley, who incorporates ASL (American Sign Language) signs, as well as hands, in making his landscape pictures, students created their own "handscapes" using ASL hand shapes.

Collectively, the students looked at the work of Chuck Baird, who also includes ASL signs in his drawings and subsequently, made their own individual name signs. Baird breaks down the symbols into slow motion to show hand shape, location, movement and orientation (the four basic components of ASL). He is a proponent of a unique and vibrant genre of art, known as Deaf View/Image Art or DE'VIA, which arose from Deaf culture and uses traditional art elements to express innate cultural or physical deaf experiences.

For years, most Deaf artists avoided the inclusion of their distinctive experiences or topics in their work, believing this would make it easier to compete with hearing artists for the general public's attention. Beginning in the 1980s, however, many Deaf artists began including their particular experiences in their artwork. Some of the ideas these artists incorporated then, and continue to address: the beauty of sign language; frustration in communicating; stresses within families when hearing parents have difficulty communicating with their deaf offspring; school life; and technology for the Deaf community (videophones; closed captioning).

Throughout the school year, students at Mill Neck partake in ongoing Deaf Awareness events. These events typically run an entire week, with each day featuring lessons exploring the visual and performing arts as they pertain to Deaf culture. In addition to presentations of Deaf fine and visual artists, past events have included performances by The Little Theater of the Deaf and a variety of workshops and discussions. To round out their experiences, students are invited to create their own unique interpretations of what they learned.

Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf is part of the Mill Neck Family of Organizations, a not-for-profit group dedicated to serving Deaf and hard of hearing individuals through educational, vocational and spiritual programs and services. For more information about any of its programs, please call (516) 922-4100 or visit <http://www.millneck.org>.

Photo Captions:

- 1) In this drawing, a student incorporates the sign for the letter "E."
- 2) Some of the clay pieces students created after studying the art of sculptor Douglas Tilden.
- 3) Paper mache containers enhanced by hand prints and Southwestern-style images.
- 4) Emulating the style of artist Vanessa Vaughan's portraiture, students created their own artwork based on chosen magazine photos.
- 5) A "handscape" fashioned out of hand shape cut-outs.
- 6) Mill Neck high school students proudly showcase their artwork.



