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Lowell alternative school students' art graces vacant storefronts

REBECCA LIPCHITZ, Sun Staff

Jerry Beck, artistic director of the Revolving Museum, saw potential in the empty storefronts in the heart of the downtown. He also wanted a way for students to express some ownership of the neighborhood. He got \$8,000 in grants from Lowell schools and began an art program with students at the alternative high school at the Molloy School.

"We put our best workshop artists on it," he said, referring to Pat Pollard and Alison Nesbit.

A junior at the Molloy School, Jacqueline Gardner said it took a while for students to get their ideas out onto paper, but working with Beck made it come together.

"Jerry just said a bunch of stuff, and it all clicked," she said, adding that some students were skeptical when Beck told them their artwork would be displayed throughout downtown.

"We're kind of in shock that it's up there," Jacqueline said. "A lot of what we want doesn't actually happen."

But after a month of workshops, the students and staff held a pizza party in the empty La Moda building to celebrate their art "opening."

The class of 26 students spent a month working on posters (mostly painted but some drawn) that express their feelings about the city.

Some images represent the Lowell they know City Hall, the river. Other images, such as a skate park in Centralville drawn by Joey Moscato, represent what they hope will be in Lowell's future.

One poster makes a human profile out of sonnets, all composed by students in Jen Hartigan's English class.

Not everyone was thrilled about the "giant head" theme of the first exhibit, said student Terry Zapata, so they created the two-sided block-party poster featured in the La Boniche window. But when it came time to add his stamp to the citywide poster, Terry put his mental map of his hometown right in the mouth of one of the big heads.

High-school students are now creating sculptures from cardboard tubes and translucent colored tape, which is promised to be artful despite the mundane nature of the materials. Sculptures will also be featured in empty storefronts, Beck said.

Artist Anna Isaak-Ross is working with students on the sculptures. After working with them for a 90-minute session, she was exhausted.

"The kids are pretty well-behaved and full of creative energy," she said.

Another round of projects will be produced by middle-school students at the Cardinal O'Connell School. They will likely appear in storefronts in April.

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