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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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COURIER photo/Gabriel Fenoy

Fourteen-year-old Ahmed Alrazaa works on a graffiti-art piece at Memorial park on Monday as part of the upcoming aRtPM exhibition. Students from the TRACKS Activity Center have been creating the pieces, which will go on display at the CMA on August 17.

Life experiences creatively expressed in street art

Students from the TRACKS Activity Center summer program were seen spray-painting graffiti at Memorial Park this week. And they were encouraged to do so.

The youngsters are taking part in the first cooperative effort between the city's Human Services Department and the Claremont Museum of Art to create aRtPM: A Student Graffiti Art Exhibition.

The work by the students, designed and discussed over the past several weeks, will be on display this Friday at the museum. The art projects reflect the individual characteristics and life experiences of the 13 El Roble and Claremont High School students.

"A lot of these students wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to express their artistic talents," said Lori Evans Lama, director of education and public programs at the museum. "This project has allowed them to do that."

To prepare for the event, the students were shown the James Heuter exhibit at the Museum of Art and watched videos of different street artists. "Most of them have never been in a museum before," Ms. Evans Lama said. "And they are learning that this project is not about tagging, it's about street art."

The students spent time at the TAC discussing plans for their projects and writing artist statements. Aside from their individual pieces, the students created a collaborative work called "One Peace" to show unity and teamwork.

"They've drawn from their experiences at home to come up with a word or phrase that reflects who they are," said Krista Dieringer, older youth program coordinator for the city. "They've learned how to use critical thinking to explain their work. Each one has a story to tell and the pieces definitely capture their reality."

On Monday and Tuesday, the students set up locations throughout Memorial Park to make their projects a reality. Using hand drawn designs as their guides, the students covered their faces with protective masks and began spraying their artwork.



COURIER photo/Gabriel Fenoy

Thirteen-year-old David Calzada of El Roble Elementary School spray-paints his art piece at Memorial Park. The piece, along with graffiti-inspired pieces will be on display at the Claremont Museum of art from August 17 through August 23.

Mario Chamorro, 12, chose to draw the word "Sk8te" to show his love of skateboarding. The "8" reflects those people and things he loves in life including his mother, father, 2 sisters, brother, music, sports and skateboarding.

Christian Barrientos, 14, painted the word "Creator" to pay homage to his faith in God. "I've been through some difficult times in the past few years," he said. "My friend invited me to go to church with him and [the minister's] words really spoke out to me. So I wanted to show my respect for the Creator. He created all things and gave me some direction in my life."

Robert Calzada, a TAC mentor for the younger students, also took part in the project. He used the word "Pride" to reflect his reality. "I am proud of many things in my life, like my nationality and ethnicity," Robert said.

Other students chose themes like "The Good Life," "A Struggling Soul," "No Limits" and "Loved."

Many of the students come from low income households or had difficult upbringings, Ms. Dieringer said. The TAC offers them creative and fun activities in education, sports and recreation all year round. During the summer, about 30 to 40 students visit the TAC each day.

The exhibition will be on display from 11a.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Friday in conjunction with the citywide First Friday of the month event where museum entrance is free. There will be a 5 p.m. mixer for the students, friends and family. Two of the students, William Soldridge and Christian Barrientos, will DJ the event.

The pieces can also be viewed the week of August 17 to August 23 during normal museum hours.

—Tony Krickl