

Youth Participate in ArtWorks Project

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HUNTINGTON -- It's not about the product. It's the process.

That's what Brent Patterson says of the ArtWorks project, a biannual program that takes at-risk kids out of negative environments and lets them be creative.

More than a dozen Huntington students are participating in the 16th ArtWorks Project at the Huntington Museum of Art this week. The project has been sponsored by the Huntington Housing Authority for more than eight years.

On Monday morning, the students were wrapping themselves and each other in plastic, part of a plan to make molds of their bodies.

The projects differ each year, and this year the students are working on Connections -- a video installation that fuses performance, craft and history. Students work with three artists to make masks, construct armor, form clay pots and dance. The finale will be presented at 1 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 12, at Marshall University's Birke Art Gallery.



Patterson, a professor of new media at Marshall University, calls the project a creative outlet that's not destructive.

"This project exposes them to art and lets them do things that are a little different," he said.

Through art and other exercises, like writing letters to ancestors and their future selves, students begin to understand their place in history, Patterson said.

"They're not just floating through time," he said. "They start to see themselves, their lives and what they do in a broader context."

The project also shows the youths that they are significant, important people, while encouraging them to think deeply and be respectful, said Katherine Cox, director of education at the Huntington Museum of Art.

It's also a chance to work with different role models, she said.

"We find great people, Brent being one of them, who know how to work with kids. It's so much more than teaching them art," Cox said.

This year is the third year 14-year-old Jewel Webb has participated in the project. She said she looks forward to the positive activities each year.

"It keeps us active and you learn stuff," she said.

This year, Webb has enjoyed the dancing and learning how to work with clay.

Barry Westmoreland, 14, is also a Huntington High School student. He is in his second year in the program.

Westmoreland said the creative environment is relaxing. Last year, he also enjoyed learning to cook, making things like lasagna and macaroni and cheese.

"Just coming here and having fun, you can be yourself around people. There's a lot of laughter, too," he said.

Cox said the program has grown over the years, and it changes depending on students' needs.



Some of the students who participated when the program first started are now in college, she said.

"That's really gratifying -- that they've developed a vision for their lives," she said.

Traci Fisher and Kathleen Kneafsey also are instructors in this project.

AND THE FINALE...

The 16th ArtWorks project will be on display beginning at 1 p.m., Tuesday, Aug. 12, at Marshall University's Birke Art Gallery.

This finale will include a reception with a video installation and art exhibition.