



May 17, 2021

Dear Town School Community,

It is my great pleasure to share the below article and video slideshow on the arts at Town School this year. As was the case across the entire school, our art teachers have made herculean efforts to adapt their curricula in order to meet safety requirements. We aren't able to host you for the traditional Festival of the Arts, but we can celebrate the creativity and resilience displayed by our boys and teachers. While the classrooms may look different, profound learning happens every day at Town. I hope you will enjoy reading about the art program and watching the below slideshow highlighting the wonderful projects your boys have undertaken this year.



Please join me in thanking our extraordinary art teachers, Susan Turner, Dylan Jones, and Caitlyn Harvey!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lorri H. Durbin'.

Lorri Hamilton Durbin
Head of School

Celebration of the Arts at Town School

Traditionally in the month of May at Town School, student art adorns nearly every inch of available wall space. Lovingly installed by parent/guardian volunteers, the murals, charcoal drawings, paintings, weavings, clay sculptures, and more showcase a year's worth of the creativity and hard work that pulses from within the art studio. On a spring evening in an ordinary year, parents, guardians, siblings and friends descend upon the building to admire the projects. While we are unable to host a Festival of the Arts at Town this year, we are thrilled to honor our students and their work and to recognize our fabulous art teachers: Susan Turner, Lower School Art Teacher; Dylan Jones, Upper School Art Teacher; and Caitlyn Harvey, Resident Art Teacher. We hope this article will take you on a journey to learn more about the year in art for your boys.

At the close of the 2019-20 school year, following three months of online instruction, it remained unclear whether this school year would involve online, hybrid, or on-campus learning – or a combination of all three. As plans for the year took shape over the summer, it became apparent that extensive shifts to the art program would be required. In planning for this year, a few of the many considerations included an adjusted schedule, physical distancing requirements, and the relocation to Morton Field for one division per cycle, with all of the complicated logistics that entailed.



The scope and sequence for learning in art, this year and in previous years, includes artistic skill-building, experimentation with techniques and materials, and self-expression and reflection. For Upper School students, the focus shifts increasingly to skill-building. From kindergarten through eighth grade, the curricula encompass how we make art and why we make art. So how to preserve these essential learning experiences under challenging new circumstances? Mr. Jones put it succinctly: "I threw my curriculum design out the window." While including the same skills and concepts, the art curriculum had to essentially be recreated: the teachers made new lesson plans, adapted their teaching approach, and used different materials to accommodate outdoor teaching - often shifting plans on short notice given weather conditions when working from Morton Field. Lessons had to be further crafted into three modalities: online, outdoor, and art studio instruction.

The school year began fully online, with students receiving materials kits that Ms. Turner and Mr. Jones had assembled over the summer. Assignments encouraged students to be creative and self-express. Projects were structured so that the teachers could, rather than floating around the room and making ad hoc comments, check in virtually with students at key intervals to provide feedback and support. Third graders created stop-motion videos using colorful balls of clay. Fifth and sixth grade students honed their drawing skills by creating two-point perspective drawings. With the reopening of the school campus, each division has alternated cycles conducting art class during Outdoor Studies and in the art studio in order to maximize studio function.



On Sunday nights this fall and winter, Mr. Jones would uninstall his daughter's car seat so he could turn it back into a mobile art room for the week. Upper School art class took place at Morton Field, and students were creating a collaborative mural. The mural, which will soon find a long-term display location at Town, addresses the changes that Upper School students would like to see in the world, country, city, and our Town community. They began by learning about the history of murals and street art, created mind maps and shared ideas using Town's newly-adopted Civil Discourse framework, then selected one idea that they were passionate about and created a drawing to represent their idea for change. Employing the building blocks of a Town School art education – development of artistic skills, exploration of techniques and mediums, and the opportunity to express oneself – Mr. Jones and Ms. Harvey learned that the reimagined curriculum brought with it new opportunities for connection and discovery.

Over the winter, students painted their work onto the mural. Each grade would work on the mural during their dedicated Outdoor Studies day, and every week the other grades would cycle through and add their contributions. With each passing week, students got to see firsthand the work of students across the upper grades and its evolution over time. As the mural took shape, Mr. Jones noticed that the boys began to examine other students' work-in-progress, particularly that of students from other grades. Perhaps with just a hint of middle school sass, they would ask Mr. Jones and Ms. Harvey questions like: "What is that?" and "What does this thing mean?" Without knowing it, students were doing what people do at museums – that is, looking at art and asking, "What was the artist trying to communicate when he created this?" Students would

develop theories about what an image on the mural might mean, talking about it with friends and their teachers. Despite their separation, our students were able to meaningfully engage with each other in powerful ways through their artwork.



This spring, Mr. Jones and the sixth and seventh grade students had a chance to revisit projects that had been halted the previous March. Sixth graders returned to a project from their fifth grade year in which they created a custom license plate out of clay. (Because what kid doesn't dream of driving a car one day!) The students selected a state and wrote their messages in a "code" language of their choosing using incised and reductive sculpture techniques, carving designs into their clay slab. Seventh graders, too, were able to reprise a project designed to reinforce their learning in sixth grade humanities which had been interrupted last school year. Building on the skills they had gained over the course of their Town School art education, they applied the three major handbuilding construction methods – coiling, slabbing and pinching – to create castles featuring elements of medieval structures. Having stopped Mr. Jones repeatedly in the hall to ask about the castles this spring, the boys were eager to get their hands on their sculptures, and have been glazing them during their art periods at Morton Field.



Across the Lower School, students enjoy the opportunity to tinker and iterate in their art. With less time spent focusing on creating polished portfolios this year, students have had time to create explorative projects that, in some cases, they can take home the same day. Second grade students recently layered tempera paint sticks and oil pastel to create colorful, abstract designs on poster tubes and then used wires and clips to form a ball run on the Morton Field fence. Working with their cohorts, they created the designs and tested out the chutes. Having

experimented and tinkered, gotten something not-quite-right and tried again, their minds were primed for creative thinking and problem-solving. Each group created a unique shape from their individual tubes rather than a simple continuous line, and while they hoped their ball runs would "work," they realized they might not. Students decided that they would rather try something bold and unexpected than something they knew would convey the ball from one side to the other. After taking down their ball run installations, they turned them into musical instruments by filling them with dried beans, adding rubber bands to pluck, or affixing sticks to tap.



Some of the best moments this year have occurred when the students have dived into their artmaking and found a creative flow. Ms. Turner designed the sequence in each grade to balance structured projects with more open-ended ones. First grade, for example, had a unit on Abstract Expressionism following their coil pots unit. Even though coil pots offer plenty of room for creativity and experimentation, they do have to comply with some fundamental rules in order to maintain structural integrity. What better, then, than getting bold and physical in the next unit by painting in the style of Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell? More recently, they decorated and painted koinobori, or carp streamers, which symbolize strength and perseverance in Japanese culture. These beautiful artworks are currently hanging in Town's lobby, swaying gently with the breeze. Third graders, too, have seized on the chance to focus deeply and enter a state of flow with their artmaking. They recently created mosaics using dried beans and lentils, painstakingly affixing their beans to paper plates, creating beautiful patterns ranging from spirals to sunbursts.



Just as Upper School students were able to connect across distance through their mural, Lower School students have interacted in new and fun ways. In kindergarten art, students used air dried clay to create a small animal of their choice. Unbeknownst to them, their fourth grade buddies, who were learning about the idea of scale in art, worked off of these sculptures to create larger replicas. Kindergarteners then received their buddy's animal as a gift and painted them both in matching designs. As with the mural project, this past year has shown the boys the ways in which we can be together while apart. With great pride, the kindergarteners carefully shepherded their animal "buddies" home after completing the project.

Art has given Town students a space to introspect, to work quietly and joyfully, to feel a sense of calm and self-care, and to connect across our community. We encourage you to ask your sons about their experience in art, what they enjoyed, learned, and found challenging, and we look forward to celebrating the arts and your sons in person and on campus next year during our traditional Festival of the Arts.