

Kids learn art by seeing bigger picture

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TEACHERS tend to concentrate on the process of learning techniques, while an artist looks at the bigger picture and incorporates the presentation of the art piece into their overall plan.

By melding both approaches, a child learns not only about the process but also the end-product.

That is why each year artists are invited to work with children at the French School in Gardens on long-term creative projects to add a different dimension to their schoolwork.

Every year, the various grades at the French School work on a different creative project. While the older children combine creativity and technology, the younger children concentrate on creativity to learn techniques, teamwork and have fun.

This year's Grade R class worked with Pinelands-based artist Sylvie Groschatau-Phillips on a ceramic mosaic bird.

Grade R teacher Sandrine Jordan's 16 five-year-olds worked on the theme *dessine-moi un oiseau* (draw me a bird) which culminated in a new symbol for the school.

Jordan said "draw me a bird" referred to Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince's command "draw me a sheep". The bird theme was also drawn from the school's association with Francois le Vaillant, a French explorer of South Africa in the 18th century who had a special interest in birds.

The children learned about time constraints, calculating how much work each one had to do and how to research a project.

Jordan said the children



Make me a bird: five-year-olds Amélie de Champs and Gershom Usabuwera inspect their handiwork at the entrance to the French School in Gardens.

enjoyed working on the project because it was about something tangible. One of them mentioned to her when the bird was mounted on the wall outside the entrance to their classroom that he couldn't remember which feathers were his work, but that it was OK because it felt like the entire bird was his.

She said the children also responded well to working with a real artist.

While Groschatau-Phillips was quite strict about teaching correct technique, the children were allowed freedom in

choosing colour and shape which helped them to learn about working within rules.

Based on the research the

'Children grasp the process and also the end-product'

children did about birds, they chose the shape of the bird and then had to make the ceramic "feathers". Each child also

made a ceramic figure representing themselves which decorates the bird's neck.

Groschatau-Phillips handled the firing and glazing process, but the children had to make the individual mosaics. Once the children had stuck the feathers on to the wooden bird, she finished off the grouting, tiled the edges with the help of fellow mosaic artist Adrian du Plessis and covered the entire bird with a finishing varnish.

In addition to working with ceramics, Groschatau-Phillips is also a dab hand at batik and

sometimes uses art therapy when working with children with learning and cognitive problems.

Fluent in English and French, Groschatau-Phillips said art is a useful means of expression when you don't understand your students' language as she has found when working with Xhosa children.

Jordan said she also used the project to teach the children about expectations.

"We compared what they eventually experienced with what they thought it would be," she said.



Talented: Anja Maclachlan, 15, with her *Portrait of a Lady*; Anathi Tyawa, 15, and his *Feast of Colour*; and Retha Engelbrecht, 5, with her *World of Wonderful Colour*.

Child Art Project brings joy of creation to thousands

WHEN the organisers of the Child Art Project started asking money for their calendars some people balked at even a rudimentary donation, but today the calendars are collector's items that people will pay double the price for.

Nine years ago, the organisers realised that the submissions were not truly representative of all South Africans because only children who attended art schools were entering.

So Santam started asking for donations when selling the calendars made up of the winning artists' work and used the money to sponsor art classes in previously disadvantaged areas.

Today about half of the more than 5 000 submitted artworks are by children from areas considered previously

marginalised and the money raised by the sale of calendars is used for art classes in more than 30 art centres and schools around the country.

Schools and art centres whose pupils' works are selected for the calendar each receive R2 000 and the winning artists, ranging in age from five to 15, each receive a medal and a certificate of recognition.

Last year's theme was A Feast of Colour and seven-year-old Salusiwe Zomfo from Despatch in the Eastern Cape decided to draw her mother "because she's special".

Anja Maclachlan, 15, from Vredenburg High School along the West Coast decided to paint a blue portrait of a woman, but with her fingers not a brush. "I had blue hands for five days," said Anja. Fellow winner Anathi

Tyawa, 15, of Zola High in Khayelitsha is considering turning his interest in art into a career. He has already sold a painting before winning in this competition and is tickled by the idea that this particular painting will be auctioned.

The 13 paintings chosen for the calendar will be auctioned later this year. Last year one painting by a 10-year-old fetched R16 000.

Another winner from Cape Town was then five-year-old Retha Engelbrecht from Laerskool Mikro in Kuils River. Her art teacher, Christa de Kock, said she considered art to be worthwhile therapy for schoolchildren.

"It's the one place where they can be themselves and the emphasis is on something beautiful," said De Kock.

BRENTON GEACH