



THE FACULTY CORNER

FROM THE ANACAPA SCHOOL VISUAL ARTS DEPARTMENT. . .

The important benefits of art education are fascinating. Brain studies document that developing the fine motor skills necessary to create art also creates key cognitive connections in the brain. Other studies demonstrate that art education has the ability to build bridges of cultural understanding, because exploring art increases students' skills of observation and expands understanding of different cultures, leading to greater appreciation and respect. At Anacapa we value these significant benefits, and we are proud of the opportunities our students have in the visual arts. This month you can read about how our Ceramics, Photography, Lower School Art of the World, and Upper School Studio Art classes incorporate cultural literacy into the curriculum.

Ceramics – Paula Campanelli

This year's Ceramics class has been focusing on the cultures of the world. Clay objects and instruction are, of course, at the heart of ceramic instruction. While our students are taught the basic skills necessary to manipulate clay, we also try to stretch the minds and develop an appreciation of the rituals and traditions connected with ceramics and world cultures. Building on the foundation set by our Synthesis Units last year ("Discovering World Religions") and this year ("Beyond Borders: Cultures and Conflicts in the Middle East"), our students are looking, analyzing, and discussing how different cultures created their ceramics and influenced the world of ceramic arts.

Last semester, students sculpted beautiful slip-glaze pottery with their own *sgraffito* designs, a technique used by potters from pre-historic times to the present. This semester, students had an opportunity to hear from Alexandra Schultz, a UCSB graduate student in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, who presented a wonderful slide show and lecture on the Introduction to Islamic Art and Architecture. In Ceramics class after her presentation, the students looked at more examples of these complexly designed tiles along with their use and influence around the world. This semester's first project has the students creating their own tiles incorporating *Iznik*-influenced designs with the intricate geometric patterns and floral motifs favored by the great Ottoman Empire. We plan on strengthening our students' global knowledge by continuing to explore the perspectives of various historical and cultural worlds through the ceramic arts. Who said history was boring?

Photography – Alison Nigh Strelch

Through study of photographic technique and history, students gain an appreciation for the quotidian and the extraordinary. Light, detail, and form begin to take on a new fascination. Our studies encompass not only the students' own lives but the lives of others around the world, past and present. For example, early in class, as the students study the elements of design and composition, they are introduced to the work of Henri Cartier Bresson. Bresson covered the Spanish Civil War, then World War II and its aftermath. As well, Bresson would be the last to photograph Gandhi, just an hour before the latter's death, and he went on to cover the frenzied aftermath of the assassination. Bresson also shot in China, Egypt, and Indonesia in the early '50's. His work is an excellent example of the range of studies the students are exposed to as history, geography, culture, and, yes, photography are discussed whenever we look at Bresson's work. When the students shoot their own work, they begin an exploration of their own: an investigation of self, of culture, of what it is to be a teen, in this place, in the second decade of the new millennium.

(over please)

Art of the World – Suzie Sichi

Lower School students all take a semester-long class, Art of the World, in both seventh and eighth grades. In a few short months, art from at least six of the seven continents (Antarctica is a stretch!) is investigated in depth. As students create different art forms, they also learn about the people who make them—for instance, Haitian artists who use steel oil drums and blow torches to make fabulous silhouette cut-outs with complex interconnected symbols of their spirits (*Iwa*). No, we didn't use blow torches in class, but nevertheless Anacapa students faced the artistic challenges and also gained an understanding of the life challenges of the people of Haiti. (You can see some of the students' striking cut-out creations on the cover of the school directory this year.)

Studio Art – Suzie Sichi

Upper School's year-long Studio Art class focuses on Western Art and helps students make connections within the rich variety of art within this culture. Students become proficient in the use of many different media as they work on class projects, such as "Five Related Words" and "Chair Master." In daily art appreciation sessions featuring examples related to current class assignments, the students learn to look at quality art with a discerning eye, beyond subject matter, and to recognize artistic elements such as value range, emphasis, composition, and style. Class discussions about the artworks begin with artistic and biographical information, but often include historical events and literary movements; I am consistently amazed at the students' abilities to make connections with their other studies. By the end of the year, students are able to recognize the work of more than 100 artists, an empowering accomplishment in itself! Students learn to move their own work forward by studying the well-known examples and by discussion among themselves, each offering something in terms of visual perception and/or artistic technique. The results are impressive and award winning!

The magnificent mixture of visual art forms on our planet is a reflection of one of the richest resources of the world—the diversity of its civilizations. At Anacapa, we strive to allot time to cultural literacy. Our students discover art's magic ability to touch the core of what makes each of us human and each of us unique, and to appreciate that uniqueness. We look forward to sharing the students' art accomplishments at the Art Show and Concert on campus May 20!