

Pop Go the People of Loudoun County; Students Paint Them Warhol- Style



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Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor, make way for the good people of Loudoun County.

When Andy Warhol created his iconic style of pop-art portraiture in the 1960s, he couldn't have guessed that it would enjoy a resurgence decades later at a small private school in Leesburg.

But last week, 100 portraits of Loudoun people appeared on the walls of the Loudoun Country Day School, all in the style of Warhol's psychedelic likenesses of celebrities.

Painted by the school's fifth- through eighth-graders, each portrait is accompanied by a biographical essay. An exhibition of the portraits, "100 People of Loudoun County," opened at the school Friday evening.

The show is part of a larger international project called "100 People Around the World," which provides a demographic snapshot of what the world's population would look like if reduced to 100 people (17 would speak Chinese, 15 would be overweight, and so on). The school has presented a similar analysis of Loudoun residents, finding, among other things, that 47 would have college educations and 33 would be overweight.

Schools are participating from countries around the world, including Bulgaria, Saudi Arabia and Sierra Leone, and some of the students' works will appear on the project's Web site, www.100people.org/schools.php. Loudoun County High School is another participant.

The Loudoun Country Day students were assigned to paint someone who is making a difference in the life of the county. They could choose anyone.

Often the students incorporated elements of the subjects' personalities into the portraits. Jack Forrest, 11, painted Purcellville Mayor Robert W. Lazaro Jr. in various

shades of blue, the mayor's favorite color. A portrait by Tiffany Newman, 13, of retired school librarian Eleanor Fall shows encyclopedias in the background.

Many of the subjects are mayors, judges and other community leaders. Sam Rossi, 11, chose Loudoun Circuit Judge Thomas Horne, but not so much for his judicial skills as for something a lot closer to Sam's heart.

"He brought lacrosse to Loudoun County when he moved from Baltimore," said Sam, who plays the sport. That was in 1972, when there were barely enough interested people to form a team. "It was rough the first few years; he had to bring the equipment for everybody," Sam said.

Other students chose neighbors, friends, teachers or coaches they admired.

Emerson Curtis Fennell, 12, wrote about Terry Lee Fairfax, who works at the Loudoun Valley Community Center in Purcellville. "He does lots of wonderful things for little babies," Emerson said, adding that Fairfax planted a tree for Emerson's grandmother when she died.

But what struck him most was Fairfax's personal story. "He told me how his sons died, and that got me all emotional, and I actually started crying."

Kathryn Brown, 13, picked astronaut George David Low, her next-door neighbor and best friend's father. Low died of cancer last year, but Kathryn knew him and his family well and was able to piece together a portrait and biographical essay.

"When I talked to him, he said he loved space," she said. "He said when he was up in space he grew three inches taller and when he came back he went back to his normal size."

In class last week, students were putting finishing touches on their portraits. Art teacher Silvia Souza advised them, suggesting a darker red for the eyelashes on one portrait, and reminding students of the striking effect of putting a complementary color in the background.

The technique they were using -- tracing the face from an enlarged photograph and painting light and dark shades over the tracing -- helped some students feel more confident.

"Some of them felt enormous pressure to make it look like the person," Souza said. "Everyone has to take art, from the ones who are very talented to the ones who struggle with it. For some, it was a scary process."

But Emily Cleland, 11, was more worried that her subject, Leesburg Mayor Kristen C. Umstattd, might not like the written part. "She might be a little embarrassed of the compliments I give her in the report, where I talk about how she's a modest person and she doesn't like to brag about herself -- which she is."

Kathryn, who wrote about the astronaut, didn't know what his favorite color was. So she chose blue.

"Not because he was sad, but because blue's kind of quiet and calm," she said. "And blue's kind of like space."

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