

Taos Students Learning Art of the Human Form

By Matthew Van Buren
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Michael Hensley, center, a Taos artist, works with students in the Taos Municipal School District in a free class on “Artistic Anatomy” he teaches Mondays.

Local artist Michael Hensley is teaching Taos students how to draw one of the most difficult subjects to master — people.

In his “Artistic Anatomy” class, offered for free to students from grades 6-12, Hensley said it is important to give students confidence and encouragement.

“I try to really simplify some of it initially,” he said. “Sometimes it can take years to get halfway decent. It’s certainly a challenge.”

The class is held each Monday at Taos High School but typically includes students from all over the district.

“We usually average between 28-36 kids a session,” said Hensley, who is also a soccer coach. “We have kids from quite a few different schools, which is nice.”

At the Feb. 28 class, the lessons focused on drawing the human arm, from muscle structures to skin surface. A life-size skeleton and smaller statues showing detailed layers of muscle and bone stood in the middle of the group.

Hensley gave the students instructions and time to work, moving from student to student and giving individual pointers while they worked. He also quizzed the young artists on muscle groups — from biceps and deltoids to pronators and the “clavicular portion of the pectoralis.”

Difficult Subject



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Michael Hensley, a Taos artist, holds a detachable arm in the artistic anatomy class he teaches for area students, while Djuna Carlton looks on.

Hensley said Taos High School senior Zoe Larsen initially invited him to teach the series of classes for the Taos Arts Club. “Michael is my soccer coach, so I always ask him for help during the soccer season,” she said.

Larsen said she was excited when Hensley offered his expertise to the club; she said drawing is a hobby she wants to continue to pursue, and if she can master drawing the human form she thinks she could draw almost anything.

Hensley said hands and faces can be particularly tough to draw realistically. According to a release he prepared about the class, “accurately depicting the human form is arguably the most difficult task an artist will encounter.”

Besides examining physical aspects of the human figure such as musculature and facial structure, the class analyzes topics such as gesture, facial expressions, shading, action and emotion.

“Everyone knows what the figure looks like, and if it doesn’t look normal it’s pretty obvious,” Hensley said.

He said he’s been teaching some “extremely talented” students, even from the lower grades.

“The progress is really starting to show,” Hensley said.

He said he hopes to keep the program going over the summer and during the next school year. Hensley said he sees the after-school class as a good option for many students, particularly those whose advanced-placement or honors classes’ conflict with arts classes during the day.

“This is a nice option for the kids that are really serious,” he said.

Djuna Carlton, a seventh grader at Taos Charter School, said she has learned a lot from Hensley’s instruction.

“I’ve been drawing a long, long time,” she said. “It’s a really great class.”

The students’ work will be showcased at the Millicent Rogers museum for a month, with an opening to be held April 11 from 5-6 p.m.

For more information, visit www.artistanatomy.com .