



Voices from the 'pipeline': Shuman students tell their stories through art

Making art offers the kind of probing self-analysis and deep reflection that can prove transformative



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Allegheny County government and courts systems are turning a spotlight on the “school-to-prison pipeline” in a particularly poignant way: an art project by troubled students who exemplify the problem.

“Faces of the Pipeline” will be on display through April 26 in the Allegheny County Family Division Courthouse rotunda on Ross Street.

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The school-to-prison pipeline refers to a link between A.) removal of students from classrooms as punishment and B.) those students ending up in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems. This pipeline is a national trend and has emerged as a social justice issue as the pipeline seems to flow more freely from minority and impoverished communities.



Shuman youth — already part of the pipeline — were invited to express their thoughts on the subject artistically through hand-designed masks, drawings, poetry and essays. The artwork initially was displayed in the lobby of the City Theatre in the fall in conjunction with the theater's production of "Pipeline" by playwright and actress Dominique Morisseau of Detroit. Allegheny County Common Pleas Judge Jennifer S. McCrady, a longtime child advocate, extended an invitation to Shuman to exhibit the work at the Family Division courthouse. The invitation was accepted and the show opened March 5.



self-portraits. Those who were so inclined were invited to draw or write. The idea was to allow the student-artists to reflect on the “pipeline” and the people who are sucked into it, people like themselves.

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This isn't the first opportunity for Shuman students to be artistically self-expressive. Shuman has a vibrant art program: Studio Blue. Other Studio Blue projects include revamped furniture that was displayed at this year's Pittsburgh Home & Garden Show at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center. “Many of our residents had almost no exposure to art ... before coming to Shuman, and Studio Blue provides them a great opportunity to express themselves artistically and to discover a little bit about themselves in the process,” said Shuman director Rich Gordon in a statement about the pipeline exhibit.

“Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time,” said the writer, monk and theologian Thomas Merton. Shuman's Studio Blue is giving youth a chance at the kind of probing self-analysis and deep reflection that can prove transformative. The potential for transformation isn't limited to the artists. It can be transformative for the audience. That's why Allegheny County should consider a permanent exhibit space for Shuman artists in the highly trafficked Grant Street courthouse/

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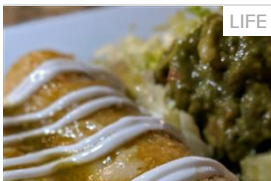
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