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Cali Pargulski explored her family in drawings and photos included in the Port Washington High School “Thinking About Art” show. *Photo by Sam Arend*

Port High’s advanced art students aren’t just thinking about art, they’re creating it and displaying it in a remarkable collection in a temporary gallery at the lakefront

Port Washington High School advanced art student Chelsea Stietz used a bed sheet to create a collage of college catalogs to illustrate “The American Dream.”

Career decisions and financial pressures were keeping her awake at night, she told the class.

“I really like that it’s on a sheet,” a classmate commented. “It makes you think about how it’s invading your bedroom and causing you to lose sleep.”

That input prompted Stietz to expand her project and recreate her bedroom. She covered everything — bed, headboard, nightstand, lamp, chair and bulletin board — with glossy college catalogs and brochures.

“The sanctity of my bedroom is where I dream about my future, but also where I lose sleep over my future,” she said in the artist’s statement next to the exhibit.

Stietz’s bedroom project is in the Port High advanced art studio exhibit “Thinking About Art” in the Port Shopping Center in downtown Port. The temporary gallery is next to the Dockside Deli.

The exhibit is an amazing collection that challenges the viewer to think about the message the artist wants to convey. A variety of media, including videos and audio recordings, are used. The students explain their themes and the techniques.

Travis Sternhagen challenges social norms in his two works.

He received a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee $1,200 grant for his diamond series in which he contrasts four glamorous jewelry ads from Vogue magazine to four he created using photos of starving Africans and substituting facts related to mining diamonds for the original text.

“My intent is to get people to think about how ads sell us a fantasy and the reality behind our consumer-driven lives,” he wrote in his statement.

In a 7-foot-diameter hanging cylinder of mostly silhouettes, Sternhagen parodies the poses of female and male fashion models.

“We sexualize female models by posing them in unnatural and suggestive ways. In contrast, typically male models are standing in more natural, less contorted poses,” he noted.

Children’s fairy tales and whimsical drawings meet reality in Amelia Movrich’s work.

One of her favorite pieces is not in the exhibit, in part because it is so personal. She wrote and illustrated a book that describes her journey through depression. Soft pastel children’s illustrations stand in contrast to the intense subject.

FASHION POSES that question social norms encompassed student artists (from left) Bethanie Sherwood, Lauren Alioto, Zack Weber, Travis Sternhagen, who created the piece, Savannah Pierdzioch, Amelia Movrich and Melanie Kline (top photo). Movrich stood next to her fairy tale, “The Unwise Little Girl,” which questions if Prince Charming can live up to expectations (bottom

photo). *Photos by Sam Arendt* “My mother cried when she read it,” Movrich said.

It was too emotional for Movrich to read to the class, so each student read a line, and most cried, teacher Jane Suddendorf said.

“Everyone was very respectful,” Suddendorf said. “I think we felt honored that she trusted us enough to share that. When you share your art like this, it makes you much more vulnerable.”

Movrich’s fairy tale “The Unwise Little Girl” features photographs of a friend who had several bad relationships with boyfriends, but now has found her Prince Charming. The reader is left to wonder if she will live “happily ever after.”

Zack Weber used a layering technique to create portraits from photographs that reflect the subject’s mood — red for angry, blue for depressed and pink for happy.

In his triptych, a self-portrait is on the left, a portrait of his grandfather is on the right and he combined the two faces for a center portrait.

Melanie Kline covered shoeboxes with cut-up photographs of her classmates. She asked each student to put something inside their box that represents their insecurities. People can open the boxes.

“Some items are obvious, but I don’t know what all of them mean,” Kline said of the contents. “The box represents our outer shell or facade, and the inside represents what is not easily revealed.”

Heather Meyer said she can’t imagine life without music and lets the words of songs paint a picture in her mind. She translated those mental pictures into multimedia images to describe the songs “Parting of the Sensory” by Modest Mouse and “How is Your Life Today?” by Porcupine Tree. Visitors can listen to the songs while viewing her work.

Other works tell students’ stories, explore their interests or confront the viewers’ perceptions.

The college-level class requires each student to choose a theme and explore it in a variety of media. Each student makes 12 pieces, using a different technique for each.

“The best part is the critique,” said Savannah Pierdzioch, whose theme is mythical creatures. She made altered books that bring to life creatures found in the Harry Potter book series.

“There is a kind of synergy in the group. You tell what you did and why, and they give their input,” Pierdzioch said.

Weber added, “Sometimes people are seeing more than you see, but you say, ‘Yeah, that’s what I was trying to do.’ They helped a lot with my photo series.”

Students in the advanced class must produce 12 pieces based on a single theme, using different media and techniques during the year. The students’ portfolios are reviewed by college art instructors to determine if they receive college credit. Students must complete the basic studio art class to be in the advanced class, which delves more deeply into a subject.

Sherwood’s drawings based on photographs of her horses, including her first horse that died last year, are in the exhibit. Copying the photo helped her deal with losing her favorite horse, Sherwood said.

Making pieces based on a single theme for a portfolio is a challenge, she said.

“It’s a lot of work. You have to constantly be thinking of what you’ll do next while you’re working on your current project, and what you’ll say when Mrs. Suddendorf asks you what you’re working on and how it relates to your theme,” Sherwood said.

“She does this inhale thing and says, ‘Well, OK, I understand what you’re doing, but I don’t see how it’s relevant to your theme.’”

“I’m just always pushing you to do more,” Suddendorf said.

The students said the art room is a refuge for them when they’re having a bad day. Each has his or her own studio space in a former technical education room.

“I can come here and start painting or drawing and feel better,” Sherwood said.

“This is our home away from home. Mrs. Suddendorf is kind of like our mom.”

The students’ works are usually displayed in school at the end of the year, Suddendorf said. This is the first time students had a semester show in such a professional setting.

“We all are extremely grateful to Don and MaryAnn (Voigt) and Jim and Karen Vollmer for letting us use this space,” Suddendorf said. “They came in every day to see if we needed anything.”

The Voigts said they are happy to help and were amazed at how many people came to the opening night reception.

“We have been supporting this venture and will continue to support it as long as Jane and her wonderful students show the ambition to bring folks to see the work,” Jim Voigt said. “It’s not much — just the overhead of utilities — and it is so much that they bring to all of us.”

The exhibit begins with posters explaining the advanced studio art class and the current trend for artists to draw upon life experiences and popular culture for their ideas and art, often manipulating them to create a new meaning. The student artist’s photo, profile and a statement

explaining the theme and technique are next to each piece.

The students submitted two pieces for the show juried by Suddendorf and art student intern Ryan Krippendorf.

“Some got both in. Some only one,” Suddendorf said. “We wanted it to be like a real juried show. We wanted it to be a unified show because it’s a teaching show. It had to have a common theme.

“I think they did an amazing job. They rose to the occasion and upped the standard for next year’s class.

“We wanted this to be a show they felt good about because their families and friends and strangers were coming to see how awesome their works are.”

The exhibit, which opened with an artists’ reception Jan. 14, will continue through Wednesday, Feb. 2. The gallery at 222 E. Main St. will be open from 3 to 5 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.