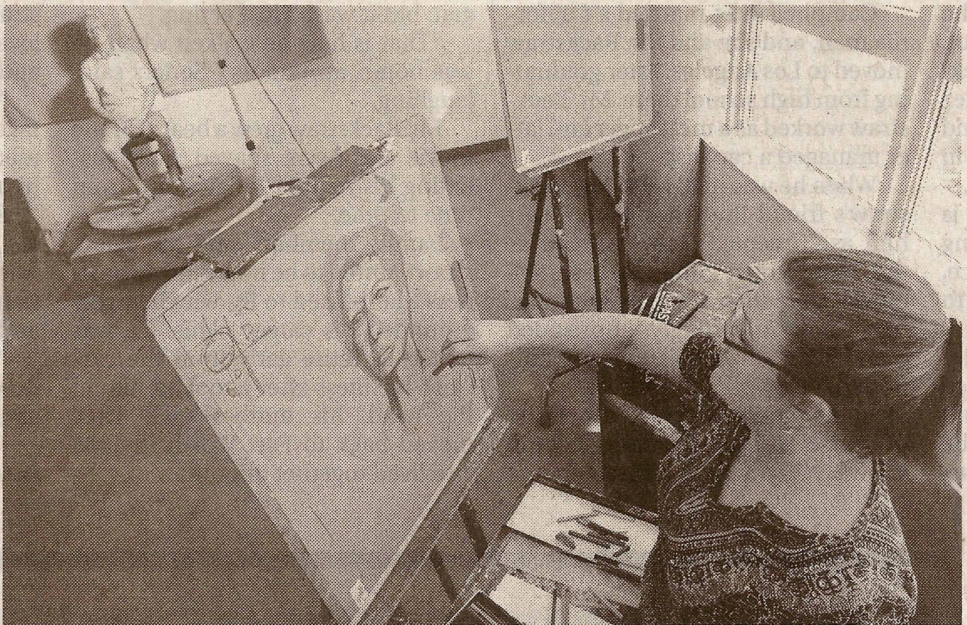


EDUCATION



Vickie Austin of Trimble Tech High draws a portrait of model Jeannie Bishop during a professional development workshop at TCU for Fort Worth district art teachers. STAR-TELEGRAM/JILL JOHNSON

Art teachers go back to school

The Fort Worth district teachers hone their talents in the summer in hope of inspiring students in the fall.

By **DIANE SMITH**
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FORT WORTH — Yolanda Darden uses a canvas to instill respect among her middle-schoolers.

When the Dunbar art teacher gets in her zone, subtle layer upon layer of shapes and colors become faces. Her students like to watch her fingers create images.

Darden likes to show them how to use their artist eyes so they can put their own fingers to work.

"I can do it," Darden said. "But when they learn to do it, they are like: 'Oh, yeah! I'm bad!'"

Creating more of these classroom connections is one reason Darden and nearly two dozen other art teachers in the Fort Worth district went back to school this week. The elementary, middle and high school teachers attended a week-long summer institute at Texas Christian University in hope of taking their artistic talents to new levels.

"This is my passion,"

said Linsey Sappington, an art teacher from S.S. Dillow Elementary. "I think when you grow personally, it makes you a better teacher."

The institute was a collaboration between the Fort Worth school district and the TCU department of art and art history. The session came together in part because area art teachers asked TCU for more professional development opportunities.

Under the tutelage of Master Artist Vilas Tonape, the teachers became students. They practiced looking at shapes instead of facial features. They used pastel chalk to work on the dark and light tones that can make a face appear more three-dimensional.

"Every time I teach, it's my oxygen," said Tonape, who earned a Master of Fine Arts in painting at TCU.

The institute ended Friday with a critique and discussion session. But the teachers are already hoping

to attend another institute next year. Tonape has assigned homework: one or two portraits or self-portraits a week.

"If I get bored with myself, I put on a hat or scarf," he told the class Thursday as he stressed practice.

A native of India, Tonape is a figurative artist living in Savannah, Ga., but his ties to Fort Worth run deep. He wanted to teach this class so he could give back to the community.

He said he builds his lessons on the premise that art is made with the eye.

"They have the skills," Tonape said. "All I'm trying to tell them is to ignore your mind and listen to your eyes."

Darden can already envision some student pride during a future portrait lesson. Triangles, ovals and squares will likely turn into famous faces such as NBA star LeBron James.

"If you can see the shape, then you can draw," Darden tells her students. "Shapes with skin — that's what it is."

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