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# Museum exhibit honors inspiring art teachers

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By David M. Brown  
Special for The Republic | azcentral.com  
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Guidance, instruction and nurturing will spark inspiration in young artists.

Five art teachers in metro Phoenix — including two from the Southeast Valley — who excel at applying those traits in their teaching are the subject of "Inspire," an exhibition of artwork from their classrooms, Friday, Sept. 27, through Sunday, Jan. 5, at the young@art gallery of the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, 7374 E. Second St. in Scottsdale. The gallery is in the adjacent Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts.

Teachers Shelley Richardson of Mesa and Jasen Evoy of Tempe were chosen by their respective school districts for high levels of contribution to art education. Evoy has taught ceramics and advanced-placement art history at Marcos de Niza High School for 15 years. Richardson, an art teacher for 27 years, inspires fourth- to sixth-grade students every week at Hawthorne, Jefferson, Serrine, Edison and MacArthur elementary schools. Even her 30-minute after-school program has a waiting list.

Most student-art shows focus solely on the students — and "Inspire" contains numerous student works — but this innovative exhibition celebrates in particular the creative direction from the teachers and how they instill the value of art education in every child regardless of talents.

"Art education challenges students to push their creative boundaries, think critically to find elegant solutions and use math, science and language skills," said Laura Hales, curator for "Inspire" and associate curator of education at SMOCA.

"Art teachers understand that art provides a touchstone to many diverse subjects and experiences, and skilled teachers create curricula that challenge students to think deeply and critically about the world around them."

The process of inspiring students is beneficial to everyone.

"My students are the reason I do what I do," said Evoy, who was inspired by teachers at Corona del Sol High School in Tempe, Mesa Community College and Arizona State University. "They give me inspiration, they reward me daily

with their growth and [energy](#), and they provide me an opportunity to make a lasting impact."

In turn, he helps them think critically and solve problems, providing an encouraging environment that supports growth personally, artistically and academically.

"I think that art creates a window to the world," Evoy said. "You can study history, chemistry, psychology, math and just about anything else you can think of through the lens of art. I want my students to gain the confidence in themselves that allows them not only to make creative and skillful art but to think about their lives and make connections to the world around them."

Through the visual arts, Richardson provides information and hands-on experiences and skills that young people can utilize through their lifetimes. Watching students' exposure to the work has helped her learn how to organize those learning experiences.

"As a teacher, it's important to know how to break down large tasks into smaller, more manageable ones," she said.

As a child, Evoy was passionate about art.

"I spent countless hours drawing, often in class when I should have been doing something else, and by high school I was certain that I wanted to be an artist," he said.

He worked at [Home Depot](#) teaching do-it-yourself projects until he could teach in school.



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"Of course, this was almost completely derailed the first time I actually found myself in front of a full class of third-graders," he said, but I stuck with it and could not imagine doing anything else."

Also from a young age, Richardson liked creative projects. Although her school did not have an art teacher, in the classrooms students always were making things as a way to learn — what is known today as art integration. In high school, she managed the town library and spent hours drawing during downtime at work.

"Those drawings helped me to earn an art scholarship for college, and I've been involved in art education since," she said.

Because of budget cuts and district priorities of "teaching to the test," art and art teachers are particularly important in our [high-tech](#) society, experts in the field agree.

Through their art classes and their inspiring teachers, students experience a comprehensive arts environment, which emphasizes creating work of their own, said Hales, the associate curator of education at SMOCA.

"They learn about the elements and principles of design as well as technique and craftsmanship. They become more visually literate than those without art education," Hales said.

Art education is more important now than ever, according to Evoy.

"Art is not an esoteric, abstract concept without real-world relevance," Evoy said. "It is concrete, central to our human experience, and from an outside perspective, it is often the measure of a society."

For years, researchers have been uncovering evidence that supports positive connections between the arts and cognitive development, Richardson adds.

"Art has been a method of communication since the time of the caveman. I say: 'More art, more often,'" she said.

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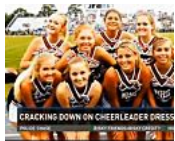
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