



Young at art

Story and photos by Andrew Cassel

UAF alumnus in this story: Todd Sherman, '79





Inspiration is the bridge between an object in the real world and the piece of art it can become. Some may see, say, a simple ball of wire, but an artist's inspiration can change that ball into a sculpture.

Each summer the Visual Art Academy teaches students in the sixth to 12th grades how to fan the spark of an idea into the blaze of inspiration needed to create a piece of art.

Professor Todd Sherman has taught many of the nearly 400 students who have attended the academy over the last six years. "The best way to teach inspiration," Sherman says, "is to show them things that have inspired me."

Sherman says a roadblock to artistic inspiration is the world around us. At the academy students leave behind the

distractions of 21st-century life and immerse themselves in an environment of creativity. Professional artists surround them, and they are exposed to images unlike anything they may have seen before.

Academy members then begin to make their own works. Ryan Burke, who was 14 when he participated in the academy last summer, says finishing a piece of artwork "felt good because I made it with my own two hands."

Sherman says that when students see a peer painting or sculpting or carving, that student realizes that the potential to create beauty lives inside them. "I learned that no idea is a bad one," Burke says. "The other [students] had a lot of interesting and different projects."





Sherman doesn't consider himself separated from the creative process while he is leading the classes. "Teaching art is making art," he says, "and making art is about sharing ideas." Sherman says that while this process can be slow at first, "the more they create the more ideas they will get."

Those ideas, Burke adds, are all around us. He says the experience helped him realize that ideas "come from your imagination, others and your surroundings." Isaac Newton got an idea from his surroundings: he wondered why an apple fell the way it did. That idea changed science.

Burke and the other students learned how to follow an idea from inspiration to realization. Any of them now have the power to change the way we think about the world and ourselves.



Since he moved to Alaska, Andrew Cassel has been a radio DJ, TV news anchor, fish processor, movie theater manager, friend, lover and acclaimed actor. A senior theatre major, Andrew is the multimedia coordinator for UAF Marketing and Communications.



See more of the academy at
www.uaf.edu/aurora/.

The teachers and the taught make art side by side. A student-crafted bird perches to the left, above, while a wire figure made by instructor Kate Schroeder surveys the room.

Opposite: Ryan Burke gets wrapped up in his next art project to take home: a life-size body cast. Now, his mom wonders, where are they going to keep it?



