

Connecting to Place: An Artistic Response

Pam Stephens

During a recent visit to one of the artrooms at Mingus Union High School in Cottonwood, Arizona, I was taken by a large multimedia collage propped against a wall. This eye-catching piece contrasted a near life-sized human figure surrounded by found objects such as plastic bottles, candy wrappers, egg cartons, and chip bags. Curious, I asked about the piece and was directed to the artist, Aubrey Wilson.

Aubrey's Art Story

Aubrey Wilson, now a junior at MUHS, wanted to make an environmental statement to show the contrast between human beings and the products they consume then often thoughtlessly discard. The story goes like this:

One day after school, Aubrey looked across the expansive lawn of her school and could not help but notice litter on the ground and against the fence line. While the trash was not pervasive, it was nonetheless an unsightly blight upon an otherwise well-kept property. Choosing to address the problem rather than overlook it, Aubrey began to pick up the discarded paper, plastic, and cardboard. Before long, Aubrey targeted her own neighborhood. As she beautified her community through this small but significant action, Aubrey began to contemplate how she could encourage



others to be more responsible towards the environment and the ecology of the community. The answer, it seems, was through her art.

Aubrey could have taken a traditional route such as making posters to display around the school, but she wanted to make a larger and more

personal impact. She wanted her peers to see a real product created from careless actions—actions that negatively impacted her school, her neighborhood, and the environment.

After gathering bags of trash, Aubrey set to work on her art. She first stretched canvas that was almost twice her height. Some of the trash she had collected was then carefully arranged on the canvas so that it encircled a human silhouette. In the final piece, the human form seems to be protecting itself from the encroaching and overpowering litter. A stark contrast between the cleanliness of the silhouette and the spray-painted dark rubbish serves as a chilling reminder of the environmental consequences of poor choices.

Aubrey is obviously connected to her place. Through her connection and art she has brought awareness about the environment to her community. How have you or your students connected to place? Please share your stories of connecting to place on the

SchoolArts Facebook page.

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