



CELEBRATING the Creative Spirit

College of Visual and Performing Arts professor Ann Clarke has a deep passion for connecting with children with learning disabilities and drawing out their creativity. Clarke, chair of the Department of Art, wants these children to have a positive experience with art. Too often, she says, learning is difficult and frustrating for the kids, but she sees creating art as a way for them to tap into hidden talents, take risks, express themselves, and build self-esteem. “These kids are brilliant,” she says. “They really are. If you want creative problem solving or an unexpected angle on something, they are the oracles of Delphi.”

Clarke first worked with children with learning disabilities through an arts program of the Mohawk Valley Learning Disabilities Association and the Munson-Williams-Proctor Museum of Art in Utica. The idea was to introduce the children to museum artwork and let them create their own pieces. A few years ago, she established a program with the Learning Disabilities Association of Central New York (LDACNY), based in Syracuse, and the Everson Museum of Art. “Ann has an incredible, magnetic personality and an amazing way of helping these kids get in touch with their gifts and strengths,” says Aggie Glavin, co-executive director of LDACNY. “Lots of times these kids get so discouraged about learning that the spark in them gets squashed. Ann uncovers that spark.”

According to Glavin, the children bloom under Clarke’s

guidance—and the initiative has proven successful. The children’s artwork was printed on posters for display in their schools and featured in a recent Everson exhibition, *The Poster Project: See What Is Possible*. “How cool is that?” says Clarke, who received an SU Vision Fund grant to support the project. “We wanted this to be a celebration for them—and how many kids can say, ‘Have you had a museum show?’”

The exhibition was a culmination of months of work by Clarke, an interdisciplinary group of SU students who assisted her, and eight children, ages 10-15, from LDACNY. After giving the children a tour of the Everson, Clarke set up four Saturday studio workshops for them at the museum over the course of several months. During the five-hour studio sessions, Clarke and the SU students worked with the children as they produced art in different media for the posters. The kids drew, painted, made collages, and created figures with clay and pipe cleaners. They also honed their computer knowledge, learning about digital imaging, design applications, and Internet research. “Their artwork is incredible,” Glavin says. “You can see the free spirit in these kids that you just didn’t know was there.”

And that’s Clarke’s intention. She wants the children to develop their visual communication skills and discover that learning can be a fun experience. “It’s wonderful to see the evolution in the kids,” she says. “They’re fantastic.”

—Jay Cox