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Preschoolers paint mural bound for auction block

BY MIKE MARTINDALE / THE DETROIT NEWS

Pontiac — Painter Tim Yanke didn't mind if his class of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds made a mess of the canvas stretched before them at the Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency.

In fact, he encouraged them.

The abstract artist smiled approvingly as he watched several dozen chattering, giggling children put their colorful marks on the swirling, paint-coated canvas with brushes, pencils and their own stubby fingers.

"We knock the creativity, the emotional drive out of children before they ever get to adulthood," said Yanke. "These kids *get it*. Art is supposed to be emotional. Art isn't something within boundaries or a border on a piece of paper. It's something to be felt."

For Yanke, one might be a potential Jackson Pollock or a future Pablo Picasso. As he sees it, much depends on whether they are inspired to express themselves. "The idea is to teach them to be themselves," said Yanke. "Art should be from the soul."

The scene Wednesday was on the second floor of the human services agency on Cesar E. Chavez Avenue, normally reserved for physical education by Pontiac Head Start preschoolers.

During the frenzy, Aniya Johnson, 3, somehow escaped getting a drop of paint on herself.

"I painted circles and circles," she grinned proudly. "I try not to get dirty. It's fun."

The activity, which eventually involved four groups of 17 children, was to express "winter," Yanke said, but will eventually be broadened with other paints and colors to also reflect the seasons of spring, summer and fall on a 13-foot long piece of canvas.

When finished, the work will be auctioned off, likely at the Southfield-based Park West Gallery, which provided the art supplies, with all proceeds going to the human services agency.

Aniya's teacher, Debra Edwards, said the children would normally have been involved in other activities, including playing with a make-believe kitchen, building blocks or other games.

"This means a lot to them, you can tell," said Edwards, who has worked with preschoolers for 17 years at Pontiac Head Start.

mmartindale@detnews.com

(248) 338-0319

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