

Ridgeline High School's "Ridgeline Presents" Art Exhibit Now Open in the Lyndsley Wilkerson Gallery in the Sorenson Center

11/15/2024



Ridgeline High School's ceramics teacher Dave Christopherson with student Ambria Hutchings at the artist reception on November 11, 2024

"Ridgeline Presents," an exhibition that features artworks created by students enrolled in ceramics and 2-D art classes at Ridgeline High School in Millville, Utah, is on display in the Lyndsley Wilkerson Gallery. The gallery is located on the first floor in the Sorenson Legacy Foundation Center for Clinical Excellence housed in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at USU. The exhibit is open to the public Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and will run through January 16, 2025.

"Ridgeline Presents" is an opportunity for peers, family, and members of the community to view the creativity of some of Ridgeline's finest artists. The theme-free exhibit showcases the artworks of some 40 students that were selected by the high school's two art teachers, Jaycie Self (2-D art) and Dave Christopherson (ceramics). "This year the range of work was so varied we decided to let the student work speak for itself and just present the work as it is," explains Self. "The only connection is that the students come from the same school."

Exhibit attendees will see a variety of mediums on display. "We have a range of ceramic and 2-D art," says Self.

"Everything from ink to watercolor to oil paint is on display. Our ceramics work is all clay, but the clay bodies (type of clay) and methods of making are also quite varied."

The relationship between Ridgeline's art program and the Lyndsley Wilkerson Gallery began seven years ago about the same time Self and Christopherson were reinventing the school's art program. "Jaycie and I decided that we were going to push hard to improve the art program," explains Christopherson. "We wanted our students to excel; we wanted to raise the bar from what we felt like average high school artwork was. We started to rebuild our curriculum so students would have multiple pathways to achieve the requirements for the class. We felt that they could be more expressive with what they wanted to pursue if their passion was there. And if they are passionate about something they're going to work harder at it."



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The teachers' efforts have made a big difference over the years. Self recognizes the constant upward trend in her students' level of professionalism. Since its inception, hundreds of student artworks have been on display for the public to view. "They take the prospect of having artwork displayed pretty seriously and tend to work harder on their pieces," she says.

"This exhibit keeps our program strong," adds Christopherson, Ridgeline's ceramics teacher and USU alumn. "It keeps our students engaged because they know there's a chance their work will go out to a show. When school starts, the students ask, 'Are we making stuff for the art show this year?'"

While most artworks come from more experienced students, students of all grades and class levels are

eligible to participate. "If a student does exceptional work in our more beginner classes, we consider it for the show," explains Self. "We largely just watch for artwork that catches our attention."

Some Ridgeline students have changed their life trajectory due to their participation in this exhibit. "For some students, the show opens their eyes to the possibility of their artwork being taken seriously," says Self. "I've seen a handful of students choose to pursue the arts as a direct reaction to their participation in this show."

Ambria Hutchings, a junior and second-year ceramics student at Ridgeline, is exhibiting a two-piece ceramic skull that she envisions will serve as both an eyeglass holder and a jewelry dish. Using an advanced process that is rarely seen in typical high school art programs, Hutchings painted cobalt onto the clay, which reacted to the transparent glaze.

For her senior year, Hutchings plans to fill her schedule with art classes and has her sights on a possible art degree. This is the first year her artwork has appeared in the gallery. "It makes me happy to see my work next to this really cool art that people get to look at," she says. "That's something I never thought would happen, and it makes me excited for what I can do in the future."

Under the direction of Self and Christopherson, Ridgeline's reinvented art program has garnered national attention in recent years. More than \$500K in scholarships have been awarded to Ridgeline's art students and one national art competition has featured more than 20 percent of its high school-level exhibit solely on Ridgeline's entries.

When members of the Cache Valley community enter the gallery, Self and Christopherson are confident they'll experience something special. "I hope they see the value in artwork, not only from Ridgeline, but from the world at large," says Self. "I think looking at art and then being inspired to create art has the ability to give meaning to life's experiences."