

Students use art to get over rough spots

Exhibit of work at Phoenix High goes on display at U-M Media Union

By EMMA JACKSON
NEWS SPECIAL WRITER

Art teacher Paul Fortier says of a wood surface used by a student to paint a mural, "It's a lot like life — you paint over the rough spots."

And certainly the students Fortier works with at Phoenix High School in Brighton, an alternative school for at-risk youth, have overcome challenges to present an exhibit that is on display at the University of Michigan Media Union.

The students began the art project back in February, before they learned that their high school — after 12 years in operation — would

permanently close this month. The exhibit's name seems appropriately titled "Transitions."

Batik, claymation, photography, poetry, sculptures, paintings, pencil drawings — some of the work computer-enhanced — show off the talents of the dozen students who often spent their own out-of-class time completing their efforts.

"Only one student had computer experience before this project," says Fortier. "They really exploited the tool and did some great stuff. Many of the students begged me to meet them after school and on weekends to work on the computers. It's given them a new tool to pursue their art."

Monica Purdy, 17, of Brighton, is one of the student artists that says the project has given her a new direction.

"I've learned a lot," says Purdy. "Working on the computer has allowed me to explore options. (The experience has) made me take a step forward. Before I wouldn't have had as many options."

She now has hopes of continuing her art education at the University of Michigan next year.

Nik Lang, 18 of Green Oak Township, continues to drop in at the U-M North Campus media lab, even though school is out for the summer.

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Phoenix students, from left, Joe Ormanian, Ian Rowlette, instructor Paul Fortier, Nik Lang and Monica Purdy gather in front of Lang's display at the University of Michigan.