

CONSERVATORY NOTES

Kindergarteners Become Visual Artists

By Avis Goldstein

How blessed I am to be able to share my love for the visual arts with young children! Last Wednesday I had a most remarkable, wonderful day, spent with my kindergarten class at South Shore Conservatory (SSC). We had spent several weeks discussing and sharing images and photographs of the artist Josef Albers, who is very well known in the art world for his work on colors and particularly on squares. Imagine, squares! Who could possibly be interested in squares?

Well, as it turns out, kindergarten children are interested in squares, particularly if introduced to them in a most compelling and relatable way! My children loved hearing about this artist, his love of squares, and how he loved children's ideas and work. After a while we proceeded to cut different sized squares, paint them, paint huge cube boxes to which our other painted squares were attached, creating lovely moveable sculpture/structures for the Conservatory lobby.

This may sound relatively routine in the life of an art teacher, but in addition to learning, a beautiful, magnificent surprise took place. In pretending to be Josef Albers, adding their own ideas, cutting out smaller squares without pencils, just scissors, there was a Fourth of July explosion! The children squealed with delight. "Look at those colors!" they

exclaimed, as they created new language-color combinations-dimensions. There was a noticeable flurry of excitement that filled the room while they worked on this project, all the while conversing about their work, their choices, comparing, contrasting. Not one said "I can't do it."

This visual arts component of SSC's kindergarten program is unique in the world of early childhood education, yet in our arts-based school, it is very appropriate. Our children learn about visual artists, and literally "become" the artist. The information they receive is relevant, meaningful to the learner and to the teacher. Together we learn, so it becomes a shared experience of excitement and joy. Until I started looking for paintings the children might find interesting, I had never heard of Josef Albers. Taking the core curricula, shapes, color, line, texture, I found hands-on ways for children to experience these concepts throughout the year, depending upon what the kindergarten curriculum is doing at the time.

The children's interpretation of the artist's work is so special, that I couldn't bear to be the only one to appreciate what I and the other teachers saw. So, color copies are made, we find the museum where the painting "lives," and I send the artwork with a letter to the Curator explaining what the children have done. Without fail, we hear back from the museums with much praise



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and appreciation for the children's work.

Here's an example of a letter from the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington: *"Thank you very much for sharing with us your paintings inspired by Lee Krasner's Composition. I have them hanging in my office for all my visitors to enjoy. We are very happy to learn you are studying color, line, texture, value, form and space. When we have kindergarten students visit us at our Museum, those are the same ways we look at art with them!"*

It's very special to know that the Conservatory environment supports this kind of arts education. It's also very special for me to follow my bliss, and that bliss is teaching these young children.

Avis Goldstein is the beloved visual arts specialist for SSC's arts-integrated full-day kindergarten program.