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Press Release

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Bird Paintings by VCS Students On Exhibit at Shelburne Town Hall

Six weeks ago, the Shelburne Art Center kindly offered us space to show an exhibition of students' work. The space they offered is located on the second floor of the Shelburne Town Offices, and it is here that I exhibited a series of work by Vermont Commons School students called "Bird in Stasis (ode to space)".

Students try to contain movement everyday. They sit at their desks, read repetitive anthologies and systematically analyze and consider the hackneyed media of the hyperactive cyberspace world. In a studio art class the students are the movement. Paint rushes across surfaces, splatters on the floor (or the ceiling) and creativity is distilled and harnessed into a raw energy. It was with this raw energy that I witnessed students fashion paintings of contained birds using acrylic on canvas in my "portfolio building" class at the end of last semester at Vermont Commons School.



For this assignment, VCS students were asked to create a composition using an Audubon bird field book as a basis for their drawings. The bird needed to be contained on an 18" x 24" piece of canvas. It could not escape the confines of its enclosure-- it needed to be pushing against at least three sides of the canvas. This made for a form that was once graceful and moving to be twisted and contained. Physical attributes like the pattern of the bird became abstracted; the long legs of the crane broke onto themselves, cascading, bending and broken against every boundary of the pictorial plane, and the wingspan of a



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turkey vulture was stunted into a quarter of its potential. Movement ceased, and the birds themselves took on a peaceful yet uncomfortable look – as if they were caught in a stasis that they thought we should not be aware of.

I enjoy the movements that my students' make in the studio everyday. They paint like cats chasing birds in bright colored trees. They listen to Miles Davis play "Pharaoh's Dance" and draw pictures from a stream of consciousness on a size of paper longer than they are tall. Most importantly, they are not contained. I admire their courage to explore every medium and concept that we work on, from painting self-portraits with oil on canvas to drawing lemons from observation while they savor a section of the fruit in their mouths. I am confident that a conceptually based studio program as a foundation for a high school and middle school arts curriculum is the best way to harness the intellect and creative confidence of every student. If you make your way into the village, please visit our exhibition of birds in stasis and, possibly, you, too, will be longing to be painting, uncontainable, in a studio.

Written by Ben Patrick, Artist in Residence at Vermont Commons School

About Vermont Commons School: Vermont Commons School is an independent day school for students in grades 7 – 12. The school offers a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum that includes a focus on community service and experiential education. The mission of the Vermont Commons School is to provide a vision of education that crosses traditional boundaries and develops ecological citizenship, with the goal of empowering students with the knowledge, character, skills, and moral vision necessary to become responsible, pro-active members of the world community. For more information, please visit www.vermontcommons.org.

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