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News Release

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IU Kokomo students and faculty lift a print from its block at the imPRESSed with Art event.

Students create art with steamroller at IU Kokomo

KOKOMO, Ind. — Dusti Speight smiles with delight as a steamroller runs over the wood block she spent 36 hours carving.

This was no accident — Speight and classmates in the advanced printmaking class at Indiana University Kokomo created their blocks, up to four feet by eight feet, to make prints using the steamroller as their press.

Just minutes before, she and four other students positioned her board on the parking lot outside the Fine Arts Building, then fought the wind to lay a sheet of

muslin over it and smooth it down, adhering it to the ink. She covered that with a layer of foam and another board, and then stepped away, motioning to driver Jody Mitchell-Heath that she was ready.

“Fire in the hole,” Mitchell-Heath called, slowly driving the steamroller forward. Several students stood on the top board, stepping away as the steamroller inched over it, and then backed over it for good measure.

Then it was time to lift away the board and foam, and carefully remove the muslin. Speight peeked under it for her first glimpse of the completed print, and whooped out loud.

“That’s a good one,” she said, helping carry it away to dry on a clothesline inside the Fine Arts Building.

Eight students, one faculty member, one alumna, and visiting artist Bryan Tisdale carved the blocks for the advanced printmaking class, taught by Minda Douglas, assistant professor of fine arts. They created designs on Photoshop, printed them in sections, and then transferred them to plywood or medium density fiberboard (MDF) before carving out the parts they did not want to print. Essentially, they created large-scale stamps. Sunbelt Rentals donated use of the steamroller. Speight, from Kokomo, plans to exhibit one of her four prints in her senior thesis show, and said campus officials want one to display in the Cole Room, in Upper Alumni Hall.

“I’m proud and excited that the school will have some of my work in its permanent collection,” she said. “That’s pretty cool to think something I created here will still be on campus after I graduate.”

Working on such a large piece provides a good lesson in perspective, she said, adding that two of her four prints are good enough to display. They learned early in the process to slather the blocks in ink, because the muslin soaked up more than they expected, and some of the first prints were lighter than intended.

Abby White’s block was one of the first to print, and she was upset at first that it was lighter than she wanted. Then she decided it went with the meaning of her piece, a print of a woman’s head.

“It’s all about my grandmother, who has Alzheimer’s disease,” she said. “It shows the chaos in her head, and how she’s slipping away. This print has a lot of meaning for me.”

It was a labor of love, as she spent 36 hours using a dremel and wood burner to create her design.

At a nearby table, Mark Thompson slathers turquoise ink onto his board, preparing to make his third print of the day. He was relieved the rain ended shortly before they were scheduled to begin printing, at 10 a.m.

“I woke up to the sound of rain, and I was not happy,” he said.

Douglas watched the weather carefully all morning, and decided to go forward with their plans. It was windy, but clear, the entire time the class worked in the parking lot.

“These students were too excited to wait,” she said. “The weather is cooperating. We’ve had to watch for stuff being blown onto the blocks, but it’s going great. The prints look great.”

Tisdale, a graduate of the IUPUI Herron School of Fine Arts, worked with the students as a visiting artist in September. When he heard about the steamroller project, he had to create his own wood block and come back.

“This is the one thing I always wanted to do, and I’ve never had the chance,” he said. “Dreams are coming true today. This is an experience these students will never, ever forget.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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