

# Montessori Student Paintings Ride the TCAT Buses

By Marjorie Hoffman, Art Teacher



There is a tradition among the Upper Elementary students at the Elizabeth Ann Clune Montessori School of Ithaca: every fall they participate in a community project. As their art teacher, I have been highly involved with these happenings. We have accomplished many communal art works over the years including such projects as painting window murals of native plants and animals; designing and stenciling T-shirts for all the students; tie-dying placemats and napkins used at lunchtime; and building primitive play structures

outdoors. In the fall of 2007, we took the word “community” to another level.

The plan developed over the summer of 2007 with the help of my family and the staff at Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (TCAT). My husband, Lenny Rosenfield, installs the advertising signs that are mounted inside and outside of the TCAT buses. My daughter and I have helped him to mount these signs on many an occasion. Before becoming involved with this work, we had never been inside the TCAT bus depot, nor had we ever thought about how the large signs were applied to the buses, who the bus drivers were, or how the buses were dispatched, maintained or even washed. Learning about your own community can come about in surprising ways.

It was my husband who first suggested that I mount a traveling exhibition of my students' work. The idea was a perfect one for the Montessori school and, after gaining the consent of my principal, Andrea Riddle, and the classroom teachers, I approached James Bratton, the marketing director at TCAT. From the very start, we had a positive reception from TCAT. Mr. Bratton encouraged the idea and helped me to work out all the details.

When classes began in September, I announced the project to the 61 students, ages eight to twelve, who would be participating. I asked them to choose a painting theme from one of three choices – Underwater Life, Outer Space or Mythical Creatures. All of these topics are included in our school curriculum. The students were very enthusiastic and became more excited as the paintings were completed.

We worked in acrylic paints on heavy tag board that I cut to the exact size for mounting inside the buses. Once the paintings were completed, they were boldly labeled and then laminated for their protection. Meanwhile, Mr. Bratton and the staff at TCAT were developing an educational program to present to my students when the paintings were ready.

One day in November 2007, two TCAT buses drove up to our school on East King Road. All Upper Elementary Level students, their classroom teachers and the 61 paintings, boarded the buses and were driven down to the depot on Willow Avenue. Students had the opportunity to present their paintings to TCAT and mount several in some of the buses. We were then taken on a tour of the depot where different staff members taught us many things. We learned about the advantages of public transportation and the new hybrid buses; we saw how the bus drivers check out their buses for safety; we talked to the bus dispatcher and learned how the bus routes are organized and maintained; we saw the maintenance shop where the huge buses are hydraulically lifted for repairs. After many questions and answers, the TCAT staff hosted our school to a pizza lunch. We then piled back into the buses, went through the TCAT bus wash and were driven back to school. It was a wonderful field trip for all involved.

My husband and I “mounted the exhibit” later that night when the buses were asleep in the depot. We put two paintings to a bus. This did not allow us to place a painting in every TCAT bus, but it seemed more appropriate to have more than a single painting in a bus.

The next day, a wonderful article and photos appeared in the Ithaca Journal. It was clear that our school community and the public were truly in for a treat. Since November, we have received so many positive comments on the traveling art exhibit. The art has brought pleasure to TCAT riders and drivers throughout the school year. The exhibit was a very successful way for our students to become part of the larger Ithaca community.



Samples of student work that rode the bus, from top to bottom: Cyrus Bhiladvala, Ella Sarachan, Gray Glaubitz, and Eva McLafferty. Previous page: Alex Steelman.