



Sadie Hamner's monster (left) interpreted by artist Jamey Grimes (right) using his skills as an artist and the advanced technology of a 3-D Printer.



Monster Makeover

by Margaret Clevenger

A child's imagination has no boundaries and conjuring monsters can be fun for children and adults. The reception for the fourth annual Monster Makeover was held last October 24, and those who were fearless enough entered a world of gnashing teeth, popping eyeballs, and long hairy legs.

"I was part of the group at The Tuscaloosa News that started the Monster Makeover," said Shweta Gamble. "It was me, Tony Bratina, Mark Hughes Cobb, and Robert Sutton. The News sponsored it that first year and the Tuscaloosa Arts Council jumped in the second year. We planned the first one in three weeks and we only had ten artists and twenty kids, but it went over so well and got bigger the next year and has continued to grow."

One school class is chosen each year for the project. The Westwood Elementary first graders were the most recent group to participate.

At the beginning of the school year the fifty-four students were given an hour to draw whatever type of monster they wanted. "We give them no guidelines," Gamble said. "We tell them to come up with their own monsters and not to worry about getting it right." Then each child wrote a brief story that relates the tale of the monster he or she drew.

Eighty-five artists from the Tuscaloosa area chose which drawing they wanted to interpret or makeover. As with the students, the artists were given no guidelines. "We want them to be just as free as the kids were," Gamble said.

Painters, potters, and sculptors used colorful acrylics,

oils, clay, wood, and cloth to fashion their visualizations of the scary critters the children had written about and drawn.

Jean Ignatz, owner of Riverport Gallery in Northport, was inspired by first grader Amelya's monster, Sara. Ignatz sculpted polymer clay into her own version of Sara, a doll with fangs and spider eyes and a penchant for the University of Alabama. The doll sported red shoes and cape as she gripped the leash that restrained her pet spider.

Six-year-old Spencer said his monster was a "Tyranosaurus Rex," a dinosaur who possessed vampire teeth and legs of electricity. Furniture maker Ed Potter made it over as an Electrosaurus Box. The piece, fashioned from tiger maple and walnut, was an eye-catching yellow and orange with a small drawer.

"It is a way for local artists to find each other," Gamble said as she explained the Monster Makeover. "And it becomes a friendly competition between the artists. We have more artists than children

so we may place one child's drawing with two artists. So they are both interpreting the same drawing, though sometimes in different mediums." Cash prizes are awarded to the artists who place first through third.

Gary Chapman, a UAB professor of painting, and Phillip Lackey, a graphic designer in Tuscaloosa, took on the challenge of making over Aubrie's drawing of "twin monsters" who have sharp teeth and bite kids on the arms and legs.

Chapman said he was inspired by Aubrie's statement, "They don't have names!" So he made a few changes and called his work *These Boys are CRAZY!!!* "Everyone knows the tiniest thing can set them off," Chapman explained. "Like the time when the monster twins attended orientation and were forced to wear name tags!"

Lackey's interpretation of the same work manifested itself in two paintings, one on canvas, the other on wood. "I wanted the viewer to peek into two separate scenes simultaneously: the reality

Amelya Russell's monster came to life through the work of artist Jean Ignatz.





Aubrie Tucker's monster was interpreted by artist Gary Chapman.

where children sit listening to a scary monster story around a campfire, and then the fantasy where we see the monsters come alive in the children's imagination," Lackey said. "I appreciated Aubrie's use of color, so I made sure to incorporate it into the swirling pattern that connects the two scenes."

Jamey Grimes, an instructor of art at the University of Alabama,

Local musician John Holaway from the band The Voodoo Saints and Rachel Edwards who sang with the advanced band for the Blues Project, both created a monster makeover.

"The students are so excited to see what the artists have done," said Sandra Wolfe, executive director of the Tuscaloosa Arts Council, which along with The Tuscaloosa

only art teachers who are eligible to seek one of the grants.

"Any teacher in Tuscaloosa can apply for a grant," said Sharron Rudowski, the education director at the Tuscaloosa Arts Council. "But the idea has to have an art component to it. It could be in music, theatre, dance or the humanities."

The money raised at Monster Makeover goes into a fund at the Community Foundation of West Alabama and grants from that fund are administered by the Tuscaloosa Arts Council. The event has grown over the last four years with more and more artists eager to get in on the action. As word has spread about the event, more money has been raised to go toward grants for teachers in K-12 in the Tuscaloosa public and private schools. Monster Makeover IV generated more than \$10,000 for the fund.

"We established a fund through the Community Foundation of West Alabama so that contributions had a place to go, and

"It is a way for local artists to find each other," Gamble said as she explained the Monster Makeover. "And it becomes a friendly competition between the artists." - Shweta Gamble

worked with UA's College of Engineering and a 3-D printer to create an oversize insect which hung from the ceiling, at the ready to buzz the head of an unsuspecting passerby.

Many of the participants are professionals in the art field while others possess high level artistic talents but make a living outside the art arena. "They are really good artists on the side," Gamble said. "Some of them have put away the arts for a while and this refreshes them and brings them back into it."

Even musicians lent a hand to fashion a creepy crawler or two.

News again sponsored the event. "Many of the students and artists come in costumes the night of the reception and it's a big party." Spirit Halloween provided animated mannequins and a fog machine to ratchet up the spooky atmosphere.

Every year all the artwork hangs in the galleries at the Bama Theatre throughout October with a reception and silent auction at the end of the month. Proceeds from the auction, the sale of T-shirts, and sales of a book featuring the art and accompanying stories, go toward grants for teachers. And it is not

so that contributors could receive the appropriate tax deduction," said James Harrison III, a member of the board of directors of the foundation. "Setting up the fund gives us the opportunity to raise money for arts in education throughout the year and not just when we've got the Monster Makeover going on."

Harrison had an entry in this year's makeover. "I approached it with the child in mind," he said. "I tried to be respectful of what the child was expressing, then tried to enhance it from my point of view. The little guy I picked

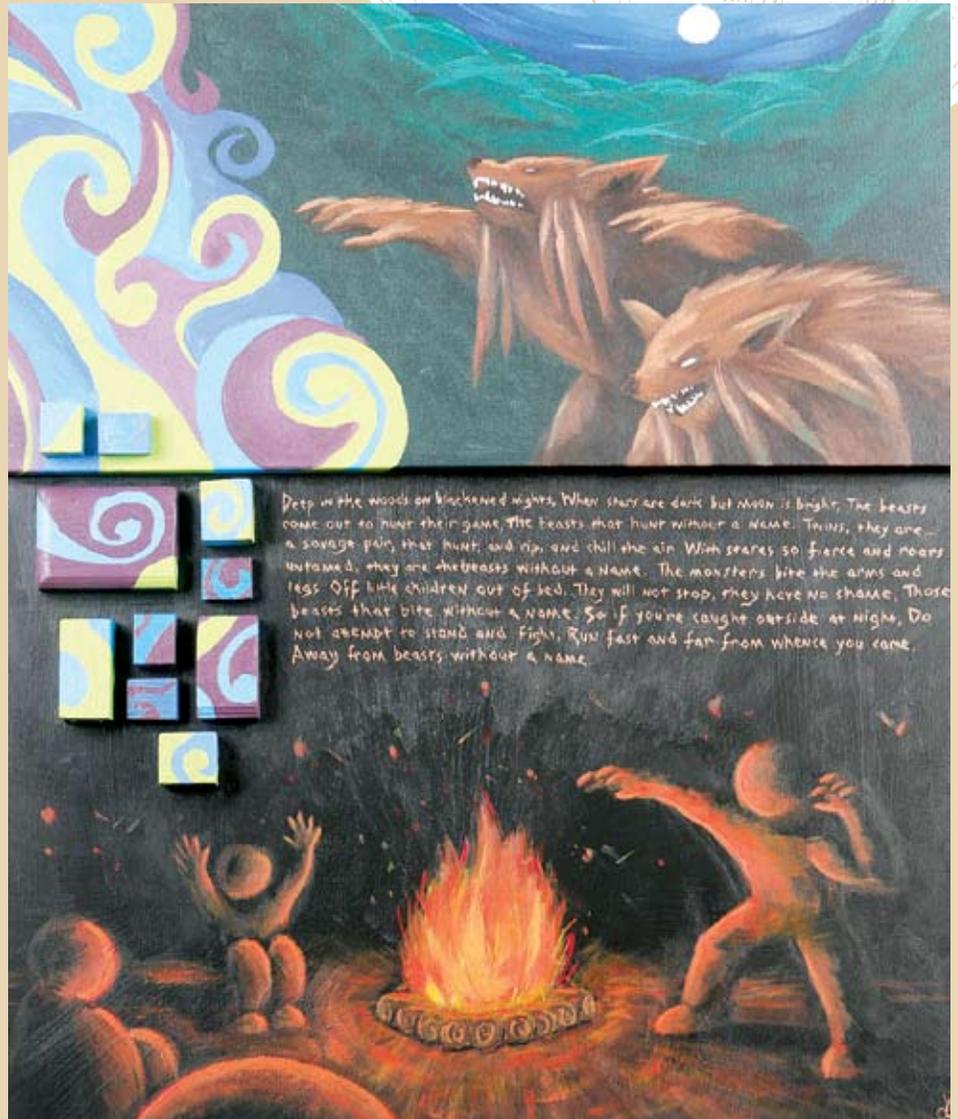
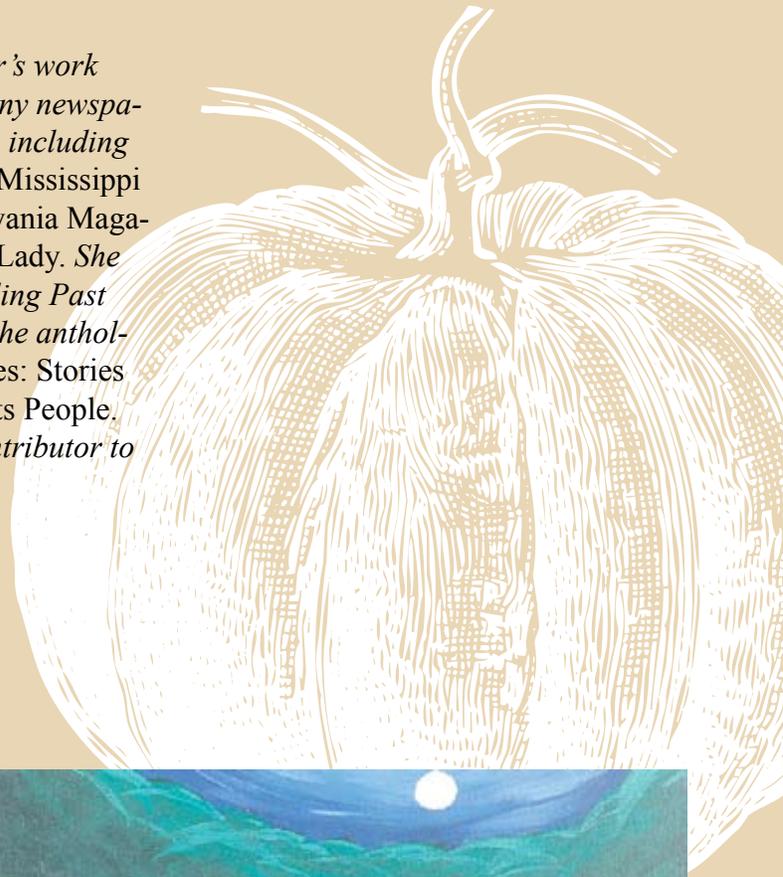
was Buddy and his monster was Sharkpuss. I didn't know at the time that Sharkpuss was a movie but I Googled it. I then knew what he was basing it on, so I took that as my initial inspiration and went from there."

This was the second year that Harrison had a piece in the makeover. "It's always a heck of a lot of fun," he said. "And you're in communication with other artists who are participating in the contest and everybody is curious and excited about each other. Everybody wants to make sure that they do something that their child is happy with. Some of these kids can be pretty stern critics. They'll let you know if you get it right or not."

Monster Makeover provides an opportunity for youngsters to let their imaginations run wild, although that usually is not a problem for young children. But with this project they can see their creative efforts hanging in an official art gallery and within the pages of a full-color book. Quite a coup for a six-year-old. The project also allows the adult artists to loosen the restraints on their own inner fancies.

According to Gamble, choosing such young children is intentional. "One reason we choose first graders is because their imaginations are still raw," Gamble said. "Their drawings don't have to be perfect and we don't want them to be competing for a prize. We put their artwork up on the wall and I think it is really rewarding to them to come and see their art on display." ■

Margaret Clevenger's work has appeared in many newspapers and magazines including Alabama Heritage, Mississippi Magazine, Pennsylvania Magazine, and Southern Lady. She has a story, "Whistling Past the Graveyard" in the anthology Tuskaloosa Tales: Stories of Tuscaloosa and its People. She is a regular contributor to Jubilation.



A second interpretation of Tucker's monster by artist Phillip Lackey.