

Artful determination

Franklin fourth grader a creative achiever

By Jon Pompia
The Pueblo Chieftain

The blank canvas taped securely to the table, Ethan Yang deftly scoots up in his motorized wheelchair.

“So what are you going to draw today?” poses paraprofessional Lydia Portillos.

“A shark,” Ethan replied, his bright eyes steeled to the construction paper that soon will be transformed into a deep sea scene. “Let’s start with pencil.”

Ethan is a charming and motivated fourth grader at Franklin School of Innovation. Born with arthrogryposis — a muscle disorder that causes multiple joint contractures and severely impacts the use of fingers and hands — the 10-year-old has nonetheless distinguished himself as a young artist of note.

His classic still life crafted with oil pastels was one of Franklin’s 15 entries — selected from a pool of 2,000 entries — into the Pueblo City Schools (D6o) district-wide art show.

Another piece, a depiction of the Denver Broncos helmet logo created with markers, was submitted for consideration in the annual Colorado Kids Create, which pairs student artwork with stories in a book format. Although Ethan’s drawing wasn’t selected, he had the honor of having his creation judged on the state level.

“He just really loves art and is really interested in it,” said Ken Thompson, Ethan’s art instructor at Franklin and one of his biggest champions.

“I like to draw: sometimes markers, sometimes paint,” Ethan said. “But I only draw at school. Mr. Thompson got me interested in art. He told me I could be a good artist.”

Positioning the pencil between his index and middle finger, Ethan drops his wrist onto the construction paper, the table serving as the anchor as the shark begins to take shape.

“He’s had surgeries on both wrists, thumbs and ankles,” explained his mother Kristeen Xiong. “He doesn’t have control over his shoulders and can’t really bend his elbows. And since it’s hard for him to use his fingers, he uses his wrist and gravity to move the pencil or marker.”

The precisely-drawn outline of a great white shark complete,

See ETHAN, A2



Franklin School of Innovation fourth-grader Ethan Yang, 10, works on a depiction of a shark, which he later gifted to his parents. [CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/STEPHEN SWOFFORD]

“Ethan is so skilled that I told myself, ‘I need to watch this, to see if it’s really coming from him.’ Not that I thought someone else was doing it, but the work is that good.”

Ken Thompson, Ethan’s instructor

“What’s my favorite thing to draw? Anything.”

Ethan Yang



Ethan Yang’s still life was one of Franklin’s entries into the annual D6o art show. [COURTESY PHOTO]