

aisha kazembe

SOFT, RUBY RED PETALS of a thorned rose demand attention against smooth chocolate colored hands, placed in position to cover a face full of raw emotion. This lifelike portrait painted by Aisha Kazembe won the Best of Show in the Hani Elkadi Art Show in Iowa City last spring.

"It was a portrait of somebody I knew, so I thought it would be cool to paint him since he had a really unique look and a rose tattoo," Kazembe said. "I enjoy figuring out how to do lighting and figuring out how to make the lighting reflect off his skin. It took me a really long time, since I was figuring all that stuff out. But once I was done, I knew I wanted to do more [portraits]."

Although Kazembe has been creative since elementary school, she did not realize it was her passion until she took a painting class as a sophomore.

"I just started taking art classes so I wouldn't have to take P.E.," Kazembe said with a laugh, tucking her cornrow-braided hair behind one ear. "For our very last assignment, I painted a picture that I took at a concert from a band, Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros. I like painting people, and I tried to figure out how to do their faces. ... then I was just kind of got hooked."

Falling in love with art, she enrolled in AP Art as a junior and a senior.

"We have critiques and talks about your painting. I started getting good feedback on my critiques, which I wasn't expecting because I wasn't practicing art for very long," Kazembe said. "I really liked that it felt like a community and I could improve on what I was doing, but didn't have to feel bad about getting negative comments."

Besides art, she takes advanced courses such as AP English, AP U.S. History, AP Calculus and AP Physics.

"Yeah, it is stressful, but I always try to challenge myself with my classes," Kazembe said. "I lose a lot of sleep because of late nights, but it's just figuring out when to do what."

Kazembe carves out time in her schedule to fit in painting, which she says is a stress reliever from academics.

"I start with a picture I really like, and I'll sketch it out on canvas. If it is something I've never done before and I'm kinda nervous about it, then I use watercolors to get a color base. After that, I sketch it on the canvas and mix colors and just start painting," she said. "It's an easy thing to do before you go to bed because it doesn't make you super awake unless you lose track of time."

Practically 180 degrees from painting is her other new hobby: boxing.

"I started it because I was so stressed last year, and it was something I always wanted to do," she said. "Boxing itself is really stress-relieving. I mean, punching punching bags is fun."

With all her activities, Kazembe sets her mind to accomplishing a goal. She took part in the Women's March in January, and her self-expression is evident on the streets of Iowa City.

"There was a speaker at the Women's March that made me teary-eyed because she talked about how nobody can bring you down," she said. "Thinking about the condition the world is in now, and just knowing that there is so much to improve on it, makes me keep working. Because one day I'll be able to fix these problems that I am upset about now, instead of just complaining about them."

Bre Bradshaw '18 has known Kazembe since third grade, and said the two have been close friends for years.

"I got to see the amount of work she puts into each one of her paintings and how much time she spends on every detail," Bradshaw said. "She throws her whole self into whatever she's in love with. Anyone who sees her when she's in her zone knows how exceptional she is."

—By Krishna Vyas



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