

Native Agents hope kids take art for a ride

By Emily Winter

Correspondent for The Capital Times

Normally, being told to "shove it" isn't exactly a confidence booster.

But Sunday, a group of American Indians taught Madison area kids to "pop shove it," "kick flip" and "ollie," among other skateboarding tricks, as part of an effort to acquaint Madison youths with urban art forms.

About 60 people, half of them kids, turned out to skate, listen to tribal music and participate in a poetry slam. They also painted a bright, eclectic mural that will be showcased Tuesday in an exhibit called "Pop Life III" at Fitchburg's life sciences company Promega, 2800 Woods Hollow Road.

The Native Agents, a young art collective based out of Arizona, brought art expertise and cultural knowledge to Madison thanks to a Promega sponsorship. Typically, Promega schedules an annual art show, but this year it aimed to make its art more participatory.

"This is a lot more interactive. It's more about the events than the art," said Daniel Swadener, curator for the Promega display.

At the Lussier Teen Center, 827 E. Washington Ave., members of Dane County Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Madison's Youth Speak and Title VII Indian Education Program brought volunteers and kids to meet the Native Agents and local artists.

"It's a perfect example of when the community appreciates art and youth," said Nichelle Nichols, a Big Brothers/Big Sisters coordinator.

Though skateboard designer Douglas Miles created the Native Agents in Arizona only three years ago, his seven volunteer artists hail from different parts of the U.S. and various American Indian tribes.

Between intense, pendulant trips on the youth center's graffiti-covered skate ramp, Native Agents skater and photographer Irwin Lewis explained that the bumps and bruises produced by skateboarding are a small price to pay for inspiration.

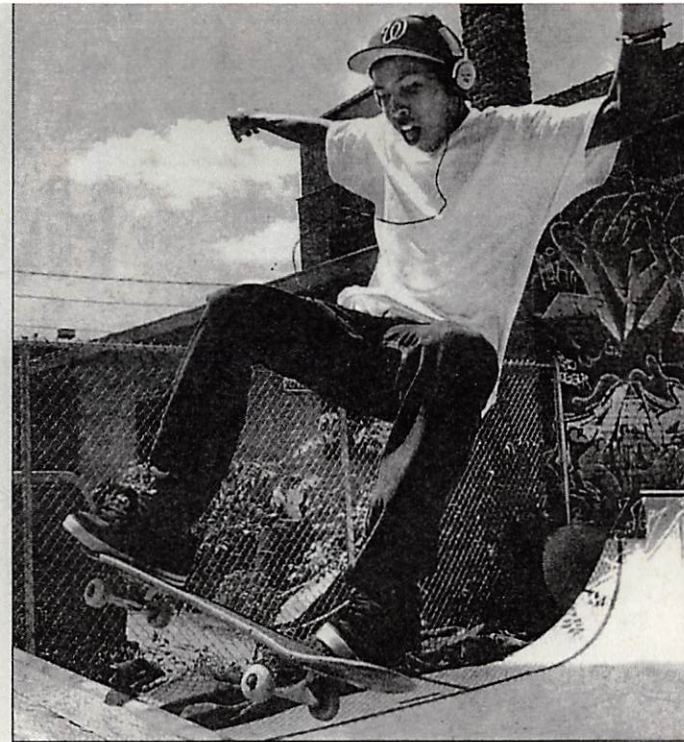


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Timothy Byington-Fish of Madison contributes to a mural that will be part of the "Pop Life III" exhibit that opens Tuesday at Promega in Fitchburg.

"I don't drink or do drugs. It will slow me down," the 22-year-old said.

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Doug Miles performs a trick Sunday on the skateboard ramp at the Lussier Teen Center. Miles, from San Carlos, Ariz., is a member of the Native Agents, a youth art collective.

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Lewis said his passion for skating led him to return to college to pursue skateboarding photography. Some of his skating photos will be on display Tuesday.

Though many of the children there were initially shy about participating, by the end of the afternoon Madison youth were showing their artistic sides in the teen center's colorful courtyard.

New York City artist Yatika

Fields of Native Agents let the children have free rein on a huge canvas.

"You have it stronger when you're a kid — the creativity," Fields said, and explained that self-expression is more important than technique for children. "It's amazing what some kids will paint."

A public reception for the Native Agents artistic showcase will take place Tuesday at Promega from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Slam poetry, skateboarding and displays of paintings and photos will be part of the event. The exhibit will be open to the public Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.