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Working artists visit Rockland Country Day for a drawing jam

By [RANDI WEINER](#)
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CONGERS - Alan Darer stood at the classroom table with a piece of art chalk in his hand staring at the silver-haired, Rubenesque woman in Spandex as she turned her head and raised one arm.

Like the dozen other high school-age students in the room, he was trying to capture her pose with a few quick marks before she moved. The 14-year-old Rockland Country Day School ninth-grader admitted he wasn't much of an artist, but he was trying his best to do what professional artist and class guest Pam Sheehan wanted.

"I'm not a future artist," he said with a grin. "I just thought it would be interesting and fun to try it. She's trying to teach us a whole different mindset on it, seeing the different lines and shapes."

For a video on yesterday's third annual Spring Art Day, visit LoHud.com

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Yesterday was the third annual Spring Art Day when students at the private school spend a day immersed in art. Two years ago, the students concentrated on Japanese art and culture; last year it was American Indian art and culture.

This year, the artistic director changed the format, creating a Spring Art Day dedicated not to a culture but to a method: drawing.

"I draw a lot," said Michele Sommer, who has been Rockland Country Day School's artistic director for nine years. "Drawing is really important for me, that's why I thought it would be fun to do a drawing jam."

Six professional artists whose specialities include graffiti, gag cartooning, animation and computer-assisted drawing were invited to give workshops to the 116 students in the school's middle and high school grades. The nearly 70 younger children joined their older schoolmates for a lecture by **special guest and graffiti artist Andy Golub**, then returned to their classes while the older students cycled through three workshops.

Sommer, who led the botanical drawing workshop, said the guest artists were chosen by serendipity; it depended on who among the area's local artists with ties to the school or its staff was available. Sheehan taught a figure-drawing class; Grace Knowlton taught contour drawing; Martha Gradisher led a gag-cartooning workshop; Golub worked with the students on graffiti art; Jeff Lindberg taught animation; and a pair calling themselves the Nerdy Duo led a computer-centered animation class.

"I love doing workshops," Sheehan said as she walked around the art tables of her second workshop class, giving advice and praise to the students trying to draw the stance

of the professional model she had brought with her. "They're great. You never know what they're going to come up with."

Simone Signorelli, 13, a seventh-grader, said she was attracted to Sommer's botanical drawing class.

"I love still lifes. I love being kind of precise with my drawing," she said. "It's fun. I like it a lot. I like the stillness and being able to precisely draw what I see, but there's also an abstract feeling about it. It's the best of both worlds."

Classmate Eli Chang, 13, said he also enjoyed the botanic drawing workshop, mostly because he likes plants. Spending the day drawing was fun, he said, "since I don't do this kind of thing a lot. There's some types of art I just really can't stand. I'm a perfectionist, and I can't stand imperfection."

Lydia Viscardi, Rockland Country Day's upper school art instructor, said the students also participated as a group in a team drawing game called Exquisite Corpse, where a piece of paper was folded into four sections and different children drew a body from the top down without seeing the whole figure until the last section was completed. The finished characters were taped to the walls of all the workshop classrooms.

"Drawing is not only a useful tool for communication but it's provoking, playful, intelligent and it uses the brain in a different way than students use their minds in the classroom," she said. "It's the most immediate of mediums because your hand is right in there."

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