



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 10, 2024

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Bonita Unified Teacher Receives Ruth Jansen Distinguished Art Educator Award from CAEA

SAN DIMAS/LA VERNE – As a member of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles’ (NHM) teacher advisory council, San Dimas High School art teacher Dominic Black has created art projects and curriculum designed to give students of all ages access to museum exhibits – both in-person and online – and inspire them to learn more about the art process and natural history while creating their own original work.

In the earliest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black’s ideas on curriculum allowed art students from across L.A. County and beyond to continue their education virtually, through books like “Art Inside and Out” and personal story projects, including a cultural self-portrait assignment where students reimagined a mural by L.A.-based artist Barbara Carrasco.

For his dedication to art education and enthusiasm in the classroom, Black has been recognized with the California Art Education Association’s (CAEA) Ruth Jansen Distinguished Art Educator Award. The prestigious award is presented annually to art teachers in CAEA’s three regional divisions; Black is the Southern California recipient. He will receive his award at the CAEA state conference in November.

“I am greatly honored to receive this award, which is even more rewarding as it comes from my peers in art education,” Black said. “I dedicate this award to my students, who continually amaze me with their talent and enthusiasm, and keep pushing me to develop new projects that can help them find their artistic voice and create their own styles.”

Black joined the advisory council in 2019, working with teachers from across the L.A. area to brainstorm ideas on how to increase museum access, how museums interact with their communities, how exhibits should look for students from elementary to high school, and to provide curriculum for school projects.

Though most of the teachers on the advisory council came from science backgrounds, Black quickly realized how much the museums – which include the Page Museum and the La Brea Tar Pits – lend themselves to art instruction. Black began creating curriculum that could be adapted for art classes at any school level, using the nearly 35 million specimens and artifacts displayed at the NHM.

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“Art Inside and Out” directs students to take a deep dive into museum collections to learn about art concepts like shape, form, and line, while encouraging them to draw what they see. The book’s lessons can be used to navigate any museum that has a virtual capability.

“While on the advisory council, I saw that every room at the museum was an art lesson. As I went from room to room, I got very excited,” Black said. “At San Dimas High, my students have also been able to take advantage of an NHM specimen lending program where we can bring items to class, like stuffed animals, fossils, non-precious gems, and minerals.”

Black, who has been teaching at San Dimas High for 23 years, continually pushes his students to go beyond their comfort zone to produce iconic work that makes an impact. During the 2023-24 school year, San Dimas High senior Peter Fang won the CAEA Banner and Flag program contest for his artistic depiction of California, and represented the state at the National Art Education Association’s Youth Art Month convention in April.

Two other art students – Class of 2024 graduate Sophia Cabalfin and senior Vanessa Hoyt – won cash prizes for portraits they created for the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes ninth annual ARTEFFECT competition in June. Cabalfin won second place in the high school category and a \$2,000 award, while Hoyt won a \$750 prize.

Ruth Jansen was a longtime art educator and advocate for art instruction. After her death in 1981, the CAEA created the Ruth Jansen Foundation, which established an endowment to provide cash prizes for both art students and their teachers. The Ruth Jansen Distinguished Art Educator Award was established in her honor to recognize art instructors throughout California.

PHOTOS:

BUSD_BLACK_CAEA1: San Dimas High School art teacher Dominic Black was recently recognized by the California Art Education Association with its Ruth Jansen Distinguished Art Educator Award for his dedication to art education and enthusiasm in the classroom. As a member of the Natural History Museum’s teacher advisory council, Black provided art curriculum that could be used in-person or online.

BUSD_BLACK_CAEA2: San Dimas High School art teacher Dominic Black chats with senior Peter Fang. Black recently received the California Art Education Association’s (CAEA) Ruth Jansen Distinguished Art Educator Award for the Southern California region. In 2024, Fang won first place in CAEA’s Flag and Banner contest for his depiction of California.

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