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Intro to Photojournalism

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Feature Assignment



Evanston artist Val McCune, 62, sits on the couch in her home office below some of her artwork.

“I wanted to go to art school when I was a kid and graduated high school, and my parents kind of kiboshed the idea,” she said. “Here I am moving back into this house in Evanston, and I go back to school in my 50s to finish my degree in art.”



Evanston artist Val McCune arranges a collection of paintings in her home – the mural is made of one painting divided into different pieces that can be rearranged to form new images. McCune said she doesn't feel her art is finished until people see it and create their own interpretation of it.



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Val McCune works on an abstract painting in the basement studio of her Evanston home. She said the painting was inspired by a photo she took of her laundry on the floor. “I decided to take a couple classes at the Evanston Art Center,” McCune said. “I’ve made some friends in this class, which is so great – in my 60s and still making friends.”



Val McCune talks through her artistic process, which involves spontaneity, like using the back of her brush to carve lines in the paint. McCune said that she's a "second-generation feminist," which shows in her mixed media art. "I was (creating) collages about feminism and women and how things haven't really changed," she said. "My feminist side also comes from (how) I've been a single mother for longer than I was married."



Val McCune leads a class on carbon paper drawing and gelli printing at Thursday evening's Art Club, a program for adults with disabilities and a partnership between Art Encounter and Center for Independent Futures. McCune said she started teaching when she saw the bad quality of her parents' nursing home's art classes. "I've always had this thing in my heart to be a teacher and to kind of do it my way," she said.



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Val McCune smiles as she introduces gelli printing to her students at Art Club. “I feel like everybody walks in and is afraid of art,” she said. “I know at the end, I’m going to be able to bring out some creativity that’s gonna make them happy.”



Val McCune helps Art Club participant Alan C., who prefers for his last name not to be included for privacy concerns, create his gelli printing of the Mona Lisa. “I think Valerie’s an incredible teacher,” Alan said. “Art club has given me a chance to measure my creativity... and to express myself.”



Art supplies at Art Club, including a carbon-traced, gelli-printed version of the Mona Lisa McCune created as an example for the class. McCune teaches various courses, from classes for seniors to sip and paint classes. "I'm kind of a traveling art party," she said.



Val McCune listens to one of her Art Club students talking about her favorite artist, Edvard Munch. McCune said she appreciates creating discussions in her classes. “Everyone has a story to tell,” she said. “There’s so many wonderful stories to hear.”



Val McCune smiles with her students and co-teacher Traci Laffey as she teaches Art Club on Thursday evening. McCune said her classes are full of “feel-good moments” of seeing one’s artistic capabilities. “It normalizes a situation. I’m coming in, I bring in music, I bring in humor, and we don’t take it so seriously,” she said. “We forget about our troubles... and I feel like that’s my contribution to the world.”

Bonus Images (Credit: Val McCune):



Val McCune, 62, with her two children, Sean McCune, 31, and Chloe McCune, 27. “It was a tough job, having to be a single mother, go back to school, work my job, and find time for my creative side,” McCune said. “Sometimes I would just have my kids be creative with me, you know, we would paint on the garage walls.”