Eric Staib tackles dyslexia and being labeled with art

College of Arts and Letters alumnus Eric Staib exhibited his painting "Labeled" from September 24–October 12, 2014, at the sixth annual ArtPrize competition in Grand Rapids, Michigan. An Okemos (MI) Public Schools visual arts teacher, a practicing artist and former recipient of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Power of Art Educators Award, Staib displayed his work in DeVos Place Convention Center.
The original painting of Labeled, that Staib describes as his "inner-self portrait depicting his life being dyslexic," is on permanent display in the MSU College of Education. Commenting on the ArtPrize website, one student wrote of Labeled that it is a:

"VERY moving portrayal of the artist's struggle with dyslexia throughout his life … The middle is a vortex of insults and thoughts to himself. Around the edges are the hands of his peers and colleagues and the names they called him as he grew up, pointing to the inner vortex: a representation of himself. Some of the insults include 'Retard,' 'Poison,' 'Freak,' 'Dense,' 'Weak,' and more. Thoughts in the vortex and top of the painting include 'Why is God punishing me,' 'Why me,' 'Would somebody please help me,' 'What did I do wrong,' and 'Why can't I just be like everybody else.' Very powerful, very interesting."

Says Staib of his art-making, "In order for me to accommodate my dyslexia, I break down my artistic ideas into a process. Essentially, it's a continuous series of actions meant to accomplish some result. That process is regulated by a sequence. In all my works of art, the sequence is manifested in my assigning a number to each step of the process. Thus, process and sequence are integral and apparent, like a map into my creative thinking."

As for his preferred methods and materials, Eric says he is open to practically anything. "As long as I'm incorporating my use of sequenced numbers to represent order, the methods are endless," Staib says, "and the medium and materials include any and all, whether purchased, second-hand or found. In that respect, it's a game for me to use what one thinks of as trash or recyclable by-products for inspiration."

What I hope to achieve with my work is to challenge myself. After a step is complete and the number is added, I never go back and add more. That would be dishonest to me as well as the art's viewer."

Current MSU connections
In addition to having his painting Labeled on display in Erickson Hall, Staib has had his life story featured and studied nationwide in the college textbook Reflect & Relate by MSU communication Professor Steven McCornack. And in fall 2005, Eric and his third-grade classes were asked by the University of Notre Dame Nuclear Astrophysics Department and the Michigan State University Cyclotron Department to create a large mixed media painting representing galaxies, nebulae, and stars. The painting is on permanent display at the MSU Cyclotron.

Eric has also served as the keynote speaker for the Michigan Dyslexic Institute summer camp, public school professional development events, Michigan Works, Hospital Doctors in Residency, and various MSU College of Education undergrad and master's classes. Most recently, in 2014, a new initiative, Eye for Broadway, a collaboration between Staib and the MSU Federal Credit Union Institute for Arts & Creativity, was unveiled. Eric and his various students throughout the Okemos school district are creating art for the Wharton Center lobbies that relates to the family-focused Broadway shows being presented in the performing arts center. Eye for Broadway is generously supported by Capital Region Community Foundation, the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts. http://www.whartoncenter.com/education-engagement/eye-for-broadway

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