At Milne Home

By Betsy Petersen

A half-dozen boys are bent over makeshift plywood drawing boards in a harshly lighted workshop at Milne Boys' Home in Gentilly. As they earnestly apply charcoal to big sheets of paper, they glance for reference at another boy stretched out on a table, his chin resting on one hand.

"Okay, guys, if you're not through you should be," Rel Guillory, an interior designer during the day, teaches this class one evening a week. "Change position," he tells the boy on the table, and the boy assumes the stance of a baseball player waiting for the pitch. The other boys take fresh sheets of paper and start drawing the new pose.

"Get this big," Guillory tells them. "We've got big paper so we can have big drawings. Draw the whole body, not the fingernails—we want freedom and movement, not little things in the corners."

He walks around the room, making an occasional comment. One young artist looks up, says sadly, "This is terrible," and Guillory replies, "That's not ter-

Continued On Page 26
Jerry Syvick poses for the other students. Above, Rocky Miles works on a quick figure study. Below, Mike Mohren looks from model to paper as he draws.
Rei Guillory works with Mike Mohran during a class on drawing in perspective.

**Continued From Page 22**

rible at all—see how it looks like he’s moving?” Then, in response to a mumbled opinion from the boy, “That doesn’t matter—I don’t care if one leg is bigger than the other. That’s for photographers to be accurate; art is not to be accurate.”

The boys—sometimes as many as 15, sometimes as few as 6—have been taking the class for eight months, and Guillory is enthusiastic about the results. Although he says he’s “not really concerned with excellence,” he feels the boys’ work is “very good quality for kids without any training.” His boys range in age from 10 to 17.

“It’s very satisfying,” Guillory adds, “especially for the kids who aren’t super-athletic. This is a good way for them to have status: ‘I can do a painting and you can’t.’”

He says the art classes have had a good effect on some boys’ behavior. “One boy has had a terrible speech problem and has been given to violent fits of temper, but since he’s been doing this—and has been so darn good at it—he’s been more rational toward the other kids, and they’ve been more respectful of him.”

And David M. Dahlgren, superintendent of the municipality-operated home for neglected boys, says of another boy, “The minute this art class started, he came out of his shell.”

The boys work in several media: acrylics, pastels, charcoal casein, paper collage. And Guillory gives them assignments with plenty of variety. In one class, the boys might begin with a study of perspective, drawing two boxes stacked on top of each other, viewing them from several angles. Figure study might follow, one boy acting as model; and the class might conclude with Guillory saying, “I want your impressions of what holidays can be—whether they are sunny or rainy or bright red or whatever.”

The class operates on a small budget, with the instructor donating his time. (The boys also attend on a “volunteer” basis—nobody comes unless he wants to.) “The ladies auxiliary has been very helpful in providing money and plywood boards,” Guillory notes, “and they gave prize money for four kids who showed inherent ability and a willingness to learn.”
Some of the art students show unusual talent, like the boy who made this drawing.

Rocky Miles, David Patterson work on plywood drawing boards at Milne.

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