

# Teen of the Week: Louis Fratino

By WENDI WINTERS, For The Capital  
Capital Gazette Communications  
Published 10/08/10



Mention the word Renaissance and most people think of RenFest - not Michael Bell, chair of Southern High School's Art department. He is contemplating Southern High senior Louis Fratino's artworks.

Tracy's Landing resident Louis Fratino, 16, a senior at Southern High School, displays several of his recent artworks. His younger brother Tony posed for the painting over Louis' left shoulder. Louis appears in a self-portrait in the canvas behind his right shoulder.

"He reminds me of a High Renaissance artist. Louis has a lot of the techniques of a Caravaggio," said Bell.

Picking up one of Louis' art journals and leafing slowly through it, the instructor noted: "The illustrations in his sketchbooks are similar to Leonardo da Vinci. You can see where he's experimenting with things that will be on a canvas later on. His sketch books are works of

art. He's further along than anyone I've taught before."

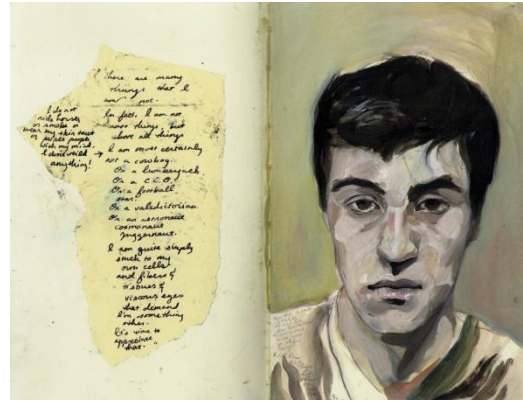
"He is already one of the top artists in Anne Arundel County and throughout the state of Maryland," he added.

Bell is proud of Louis' accomplishments and quickly extols the student's highlights. As a junior, Louis scored a perfect 5 on his AP portfolio. He joined four Southern High seniors, now graduates, who also achieved 5's. No other student in the county earned a 5 last year. Three fellow juniors who took the exam passed with scores of 3's and 4's.

Several of Louis' best works are currently on display in the lobby of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Building in Washington, D.C., headquarters of the U.S. Department of Education. A member of his school's chapter of the National Art Society, he was one of 36 Maryland students selected for the exhibit during a juried statewide competition.



Louis and Mr. Bell at USDE Show in Washington D.C.



A Page from Louis' Sketchbook Visual Journal

Right now, his focus is on developing a portfolio for this year's National Foundation for the Advancement in the Arts competition, one of the most prestigious arts competitions for teens. Its young ARTS program is the sole nominating organization for the Presidential Scholars of the Arts. A lot is at stake: Out of over 7,000 entries, the few dozen winners and finalists vie for millions of dollars in scholarships. A portfolio is also being readied for presentation to a new program called the Creative Arts Alliance School Program in Manhattan.

He has exhibited at the Muddy Creek Artist Guild Show and also brought home an armload of first- and second-place awards from ArtQuest 2009 and 2010. ArtQuest is an annual art show at Southern High School, one of the largest professionally juried student art shows, both in Maryland and nationwide.

Louis doesn't neglect his other studies. He's currently ranked 12th in his class with a weighted grade-point average of 4.2.

"Ever since I can remember, I have always been fascinated by art," recalled Louis. "I had Ms. Jean Orzech as my art teacher in middle school. She was really encouraging in what I did. She recognized I was going somewhere with it."

In seventh grade, he began attending the Gifted and Talented Visual Arts Program at Southern High School, taught by Bell. "I got here and Mr. Bell had an open environment. It is open-ended to what you want to do and how you want to do it. I've developed technically and been exposed to so many things, like oil paints," Louis said.

He works diligently on his art journals, putting down a sketch or three every day. "I put in text drawings, smaller versions of paintings I plan to do."

The past few years, after stretching his canvases on frames and applying gesso or a primer coat, he's painted portraits of family members and classmates willing to sit still. Sometimes, he painted small images around his subjects' heads, a way of symbolizing their thoughts and emotions.

For his AP art test, he had to produce 12 images that had a common theme or narrative thread. "Mine was about being comfortable with who you are, not being restricted," said Louis.

The teen's life is not confined to a paintbrush and canvas -he is also a lector at his church, St. Anthony's Catholic Church in North Beach. For his first three years of high school, he was a member of the cross-country team. Junior year, he was the team captain. This year, he had to put athletics aside temporarily to focus on preparing his portfolios and college applications.

"I think Louis puts his soul into everything he does, you can see it in his artwork and here in his music," said theatre instructor Diana Martin, who feels Louis is an accomplished pianist.

"He played Lt. Joseph Cable in 'South Pacific' last spring and amazed everyone with his clear tenor voice. Louis always wants to know what he can do to improve. He is a student who always wants to learn." She added: "He has designed the T-shirts, poster and program cover art for the past three musicals. The 'South Pacific' shirt was so popular, we had to reorder more. He is also a member of the International Thespian Society."

Looking ahead, Louis plans to study illustration in college and is considering several top fine arts schools on the East Coast from Rhode Island School of Design to Virginia Commonwealth University. "You look at an image and it wraps you up. I feel that way about fine art, but love illustration when it's directed towards children and is a learning experience," he said. "I want to be a book illustrator. Of course, that could change!"

His father, Daniel, is a driver for Ikor, a construction supply house, delivering equipment to job sites in the Washington area. Angie, his mother, works for the U.S. Census Bureau at its Suitland office. Big brother Nick, 20, is an architecture major at Anne Arundel Community College. Angie, 14, is a sophomore at Southern High, and 12-year-old Tony attends Southern Middle. Sophia, 9, goes to Deale Elementary School.

"As an artist, I'm still feeling my way into what works best for me. I'm not a virtuoso," said Louis. "I'm still trying to find out what makes my art ... art."