

Overture exhibit highlights Antarctic art from Monona Grove teacher, graduates



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For three months, Juan Botella took hundreds of pictures a day, including 500 of one phenomenal moonrise, during an Antarctic expedition in 2011.

So picking 12 photos for the upcoming exhibit “ArtArctic Science” at the Overture Center was a “very grueling process for me,” said Botella, a science teacher at Monona Grove High School.

The purpose of the trip through the PolarTREC program (Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating) was to gather information about the water around Antarctica to learn how properties in the water have changed because of global warming.

During the expedition, Botella blogged, interviewed team members and built lesson plans, which he has since incorporated into his classes on climate and weather.

“The reality was more amazing than what I thought it would be,” said Botella, who was chosen to help more than 30 researchers collect and study water samples from the Antarctic region.

The environment was “very quiet, very white,” he said. “The glaciers just extend forever.”

Botella also developed hands-on activities for his students based on water and ice formation and changes and how that’s being modified because of climate change.

“I think students enjoy knowing it’s a very current and cutting edge,” he said.

He has also given several talks about his experience at places like the Madison Children’s Museum and on the UW-Madison campus.

He had hoped to display some of his work in a local coffee shop, but after getting several positive responses, he decided to shoot big. The result is the Overture exhibit opening May 5 and running through June.

The exhibit will include a dozen of Botella’s pictures and 11 pieces of art by four Monona Grove students and two recent graduates.

Jenna Farnsworth, who graduated from Monona Grove last year and is now studying at UW-La Crosse, painted mostly landscapes based on Botella’s pictures.

“I knew this was going to educate a lot of people,” Farnsworth said. “I wanted to be a part of

that.

“I took the pictures pretty literally ... (but) I kind of put my own flair into it a little bit.”

Beth Racette, program manager at Overture, said she liked the idea of showcasing Botella’s photos and student art as a way to educate the public about Antarctica.

“People are very much aware and concerned about the Earth and learning about the Earth,” she said. “Even though Antarctica is so far away, it really has a big impact on our lives and on the Earth. Art is a great way for exploration.”

In the three months Botella spent on the boat, he said the crew left it only twice. Once was to test a one-speed transport boat, during which Botella was able to get photos of the icebreaker.

The other occasion was toward the end of the trip when the ship was trying to get close to shore, but the ice wasn’t breaking. The boat went only 2 miles in 18 hours.

At the end of the day, everyone on board essentially went out on the ice to play, Botella said. Some researchers brought their instructional equipment, while another person brought his saxophone to play on the ice.

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