For six years, the Ralph T. Coe Center for the Arts has grown its Hands-On Curatorial Program to one that is sought out by students.

The program provides an opportunity for students to work hands-on with the Coe collection of over 2,300 works of Indigenous art from around the world.

Through museum visits and weekly sessions, the curators learn how to create their own exhibition from the Coe collection by selecting objects, researching and drafting wall texts, writing press releases, designing graphics and the exhibition layout, as well as creating their own limited-run curator-designed T-shirts in collaboration with YouthWorks.

Veronica Silva, “Time Shift,” digital photo collage (New Media), 2020 (Courtesy of Ralph T. Coe Center For The Arts)
Bess Murphy has been at the helm of the program for five years.

Each year, the participants build their exhibition from the ground up.

Despite the pandemic, the students did just that in a different way with the online exhibit, “(I’m Nostalgic for) Memories I’ve Never Lived Before.”

“They are creating their vision,” Murphy says. “They work on their own creative projects. For this year, the students wanted to focus on nostalgia. It was so spot on.”

Murphy says being able to see the six high school students come up with ideas of what nostalgia is to them was amazing.

“How do objects come into play,” she says. “That’s what drove home into them. Whether it’s Disney movies or art from the films. It gave each a sense of nostalgia.”

This year’s program included students from the Academy of Technology and the Classics, New Mexico School for the Arts, and the Santa Fe Indian School.

Returning students Veronica Silva, Lesly Esparza, and Roan Mulholland were joined by new members, Cameron Hicks, Amanda Lomahfactewa-Singer (Santa Clara Pueblo), and Elysia Escobedo (Santa Clara Pueblo).

“For me, the most important part is finding their creative voices in the process,” Murphy says. “Supporting each other and feeling empowered, in a way, you don’t always get that in a classroom setting. Part of the project is each student gets to experience what curation is. That’s really exciting for them. It’s very creative and it’s just not doing research.”
My dad’s getting older. A belt buckle he wears that I never noticed before. This one, agate and gold, ages well and long. I hope my dad does too.

Roan Muholand, “Golden Age,” text and photograph, 2020 (Courtesy of Ralph T. Coe Center For The Arts)

The students were readying an in-person exhibit, but quickly pivoted to the online format.

Not only did each work on their own art, they built the website from the ground up.

The group of curators wrote, “When entering our website, keep in mind that it is still interactive. Feelings and memories are meant to surface and connect you to the Coe pieces. This is our primary goal – to bring the viewer (you) closer to these emotions. By making our own art inspired by these Coe pieces, we fuse together the idea of the object and our own personal meaning. It might not make sense at first, but the theme of nostalgia is present in the varying art created for this online exhibition. We urge you to look deeper. Whether a video, a diary entry, or a photo collage they are interconnected. Explore, be confused, and experience your own nostalgia.”

For More Visit
To view "(I'm Nostalgic for) Memories I've Never Lived Before," visit handson2020.wixsite.com/mysite