

# Zoë Butler: A New Face Breaking into the Art Scene

By Zoë Miller  
A&E Editor

**W**ith focus in her eyes, Zoë Butler '18 brushes strong curves and crisp lines onto her page. As she paints, a face emerges. Finally, she tucks the number four into her piece. Butler's fixation with the figure comes from the connection she makes between colors and numbers.

"I saw the number four as a beautiful forest green. Four became a symbol for ultimate beauty. It was my Aphrodite," Butler said. "It was a way for me to express something that I was completely in love with."

Zoë Butler has spent many an hour doodling and creating but it was not until this past summer that she found her niche.

This previous summer on a whim Butler signed up for an art class at the Robert A. Lee Rec Center in Downtown Iowa City. Upon attending her first day she found she was the only student in the class taught by Mary F. Coats, a visual artist and teacher. Butler found Coats to be a supportive and encouraging person to work with who soon became a friend.

"We would talk and make art next to each other and [Coats] would recommend different materials and mediums," Butler said. "I spent that whole summer making my style. It felt so awesome to finally create it."

Butler based her style on contour lines and the way they can emphasize features. Butler spent time exploring different mediums to express her art.. She began with watercolors and soon branched out to acrylics. Finally she settled upon Indian Ink due to the crisp lines she could create with it. Similarly she branched out to painting on shoes, backpacks and screen printing.

Butler's work began gaining interest when she printed her first couple of T-shirts.

"My T-shirts opened up a lot of opportunities for me. [They] reached so many people and got [them] thinking about my art and wanting more," Butler said. "It was overall a super good experience for me,"

Butler's connections in the art community grew as she met and collaborated with Jason Smith, a videographer from Little Village.

Frankie Schneckloth, a colleague of Smith's, contacted Butler with an interest in her art. Schneckloth asked Butler if she would be interested in doing a window display for Velvet Coat, a clothing store in downtown Iowa City. Butler's idea for the project was to have enormous bald hanging faces in the window. The first time Butler saw her art presented in the midst of the downtown scene, she was stunned.

"[The window display] turned out so well," Butler said. "I had such a strong feeling of 'Wow, I actually did this and someone saw something in me and wanted the world to see my art.'"

Butler defines her style as using minimalism and details to point out what she finds beautiful in the human face. She found inspiration for faces in her own when she realized she had a crooked nose.

"I went through a hard freshman year where I built up a lot of insecurities. [Through my art] I was trying to find a way to express being more confident and trying to find the perfections in the imperfections," said Butler. "It made me feel so optimistic about life that I [could have] a lopsided nose...[that when] drawn on paper, was so beautiful."

Pablo Picasso is one of Butler's biggest inspirations. She first saw his art in person when she went to the Art Institute of Chicago.

"Pablo Picasso inspired me so much to experiment with color and lines and using contrasts. Looking at his paintings I was thinking, 'This is so wrong. This is so distorted and bold and crazy and confident and screaming in your ear-' and I loved [them]!"

Butler has a strong support system through her family and especially her father. The two them share a special bond because of their deep interest in art.

"My dad always pushes me to follow my passions and work hard for them," Butler said. "My art has proven that [by putting] hard work into something and [being] productive... it can get you somewhere."

Butler's strongest inspiration comes from experiencing life and being able to translate it onto paper. She believes that art will always be something she does with her life, even if it is simply in her spare time.

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ABOVE: Zoë Butler '18, Elise Heck '17, Gwennyth Durian '19, and Erin Crawford model Butler's designs around Iowa City. PHOTOS BY VIVIAN KOESTER '18

