

# Guilford native spearheads student-pro artist initiative

EAST HAVEN — Human hands emerging from a building of warm, red tones. An upside-down eye. A rendering of blue painter's tape. Push pins.

"This began as a sort of industrial structure," said New Haven artist Steven DiGiovanni at an opening reception last Wednesday night at Gallery 35, the art space at East Haven High School, last Wednesday night.

The unexpected 2016 death of his friend, the artist Levni Sinanoglu, in his New Haven studio, transformed "The Great Metaphysician (for KLS)," which he named the painting. The human hands and eyes are from a photo he took of Sinanoglu. The blue painter's tape and pushpins are a homage to the tools Sinanoglu used in his work.

The painting is part of "Harmony and Discord," an exhibit of DiGiovanni's work curated by EHHS art teacher and Guilford native Matt Stevens. It's the first show this year in an initiative that rotates the work of professional and student artists in an effort "to connect East Haven students to the larger arts community," according to Stevens.

Freshman Ashley Murphy, an aspiring animator, found herself drawn to "The Great Metaphysician." "It makes me realize how an artist might think a painting is one thing and then something happens and it can change into something else," said Murphy, calling the work "inspiring." The rich interaction between DiGiovanni and Murphy is exactly what Stevens was after with the creation of Gallery 35 last year.

"When students get to meet an artist like Steven or just have the opportunity to look at



Lisa Reisman / For Hearst Connecticut Media

**From left, East Haven High School Assistant Principal Sue Harkins, senior Freddy Mascola, art teacher Matt Stevens, artist Steven DiGiovanni, and East Haven schools Superintendent Erica Forti at the opening reception of an exhibit showing DiGiovanni's paintings at Gallery 35.**

his art, they're seeing how they can use art as a form of expression, or as a form of healing," he said. "It might stimulate them in their own work or even have them consider art as something to pursue long-term."

East Haven superintendent Erica Forti had a similar take. "As educators, we're not just preparing our kids for jobs and to be responsible citizens," she said. "We're teaching them to be well-rounded individuals. This kind of exhibit will, I hope, help them appreciate how art can enhance their lives, and that can be a lifelong lesson."

The exhibit will run through Dec. 16.

Gallery 35 is located at East Haven High School, 35 Wheelbarrow Lane, East Haven. For information, contact Matt Stevens at [mstevens@east-haven.k12.ct.us](mailto:mstevens@east-haven.k12.ct.us).

-Lisa Reisman