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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Colorfully-painted desks brighten some Boston University classrooms

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(Kamen Kozarev)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

School desks all look the same. They're rigid, uninviting, cold, boring.

For years, students have tried, albeit lackadaisically, to jazz up their desk's appearance with things like daydreamed drawings, chewed gum and the occasional hand-carved profanity.

But, it's unlikely anyone has ever made over a bunch of desks like Hila Landesman and her creative recruits.

The Chair Project, a functional art installation at Boston University, recently brightened a number of campus classrooms with 22 desks colorfully hand-painted by students and other local artists.

"Little things make a difference," said BU alumna Landesman, who came up with the idea for and led the project. "I wanted to bring some life to these classrooms."


The university donated the desks, which had been tucked away in storage, dusty from years of not being used.

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Landesman scraped gum and other marks off the decommissioned desks and then coated each in primer.

When she first started the project in the spring of 2012, she planned to paint between 30 and 40 desks by herself by that fall. But, she said she quickly discovered how laborious and time-consuming the process was.

“The hardest thing about the project for me was sticking to it and following through to the end,” she said. “There were several times where I was so ready to give up.”

She reached out to see if others were interested in helping by painting a desk of their own. As more people signed-on, Landesman said much of her motivation for the undertaking returned.

“The moment I started involving other people it really grew into something special,” said Landesman, who lives in Manhattan and is working on a similar chair project with high schoolers there. “I love collaborating with people, and it was exciting to see how other artists went about their process.”

She recruited several BU students, her two sisters, and other friends and artists she knows to make their own chairs. She then found another friend to professionally varnish the desks after they were painted.

Landesman also worked closely with some university officials, including the registrar’s office and facilities management personnel to get approval and supplies for the project and to work out the logistics of getting the desks into the classrooms.

Teaming up with others became the main theme of the project.

“I want to break down the notion that only artists make art or only artists want art,” said Landesman.

“I think a lot of times people stick within their own disciplines and they don’t look left and right and they don’t collaborate, yet I think the best projects are where people work together and come together,” she said. “I really hope this project helps people at BU and even outside BU work together and to not be afraid to reach out or across the hall to other departments.”

In mid-October, the revamped desks were installed overnight inside classrooms in the College of Arts and Sciences building. Landesman spent much of her time there before she graduated in January and always found the building was a bit barer than most others around campus.

After the installation wrapped up around 1 a.m., Landesman peaked in classrooms to watch as students saw the desks for the first time.

“It was kind of like a surprise, and it was so exciting to see their reaction,” she said.

Some students excitedly sat on the special desks. Others shied away.

“They were like this is art we can’t touch it. That was funny. People gave it a lot of respect,” she said.

Attached to each desk was a tag with the Twitter hashtag #thechairproject. Landesman watched on social media as people began to Tweet and Instagram about the desks.

“There was one person that wrote this is brightening their day and this is a good reason to come to class,” Landesman recalled.

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at mjrochele@gmail.com. Looking for more coverage of area colleges and universities? Go to our [Your Campus pages](#).



(Zara Tzanev)

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