

# Budding Artists

**Kids-Did-It! Properties** turns young artists' works into profitable works of art.

“Happy pictures make you feel happy, and don't we all want to be happy?” asks Michelle Abrams who, with her husband, Glenn, own Kids-Did-It! Properties. In her home-based art studio in San Diego, CA, Michelle teaches children the joy of creating fine art. Thanks to the Abrams, the fresh, inspirational and colorful works of these students – aged three to 14 – have found a niche in the social-expressions market.

Since 1996, Michelle and Glenn have been licensing the reproduction rights of their portfolio of Kids-Did-It! illustrations created by Michelle's young art students. “We began the business by licensing art from our portfolio for greeting cards with Gibson,” states Glenn. “The business grew from paper to other products ranging from books, checks, address labels, gift bags, holiday giftware and



Michelle and Glenn Abrams, creators of Kids-Did-It! Properties.

calendars.” Today, licensing partners include Jeanmarie Creations (which selected Kids-Did-It! illustrations for its Mother's Day 2004 gift bag line that was sold in Walgreens drugstores), Mead-Westvaco and Checks Unlimited. Other licensees have included Papel Giftware, PAK2000, Prentice Hall, Houghton-Mifflin Publishers, DayGlo Color Corporation and The Covenant House.

Michelle's credentials are substantial. She holds a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale University. Her broad range of experience in the creative arts includes animating for Sesame Street; serving as a multi-media creative direc-

tor; as well as managing her own illustration, design and animation studio. She also produces her own watercolor fine-art paintings. Glenn has a degree from the Rhode Island School of Design. He has produced, designed, directed and managed a variety of high-profile, creative multi-media and entertainment projects, including producing the Microsoft Windows95 launch event and broadcast with Bill Gates and Jay Leno.

Glenn came up with the idea for the Kids-Did-It! business by chance. “For some time, whenever I would walk through Michelle's art studio, I was intrigued by the unique color and quality of designs,” he relates. The children's works were rendered in a color palette of teal, magenta, golden yellows and fuch-

Young artist Stephen DeVito's watercolor “Flowers” was one of the designs on a Mother's Day gift bag collection for the Walgreens drugstore chain.



Five-year-old Elyse Bobczynski's watercolor "Frogs" is among 12 illustrations featured in MeadWestvaco's 2005 "Kids-Did-It! Designs" promotional wall calendar.



sia – not just primary colors – which Glenn found unusual for kids to use.

He recalls: "In 1996, I produced a new product introduction event for the Epson Ink Jet printer. I was excited to learn that Michelle and I now had access to inexpensive technology that could easily and accurately reproduce color artwork. Using the inkjet printer, we began to reproduce Michelle's students' artwork – first as greeting cards, then as prints and posters. Soon we were selling to California art galleries, drugstores and gift shops, including the San Diego Children's Museum gift shop."

In addition to children learning the fundamentals of art and design under the guidance of Michelle, the Abrams decided that the kids should also earn royalties for the reproduction of their work. "One young artist whose work has been part of the collection since 1997 has earned more than \$2,500," says Glenn. The checks are used by some kids as extra allowance. Others save the money for college tuition. Several children have even kept and framed their first royalty check.

In general, the children attending the art class are not aware that their work might be considered for inclusion in the collection. "I do not discuss licensing with the children because I do not want to influence the quality or content of artwork," states Michelle. "The real thrill is seeing the kids excited about being a published artist, and the surprise and delight from parents when their child's artwork is selected for publication." To

date, more than 42 students have been published, and the Kids-Did-It! collection of 300 images has rung up more than \$4 million in retail sales.

When asked what makes a good children's design, Glenn offers the following advice: "We believe the use of secondary and tertiary colors are the primary attraction. An energetic, uninhibited drawing

style also brings an innocence and inspirational quality to the work." This is exemplified by the "Big Red Heart" painted by Robert Hawk at the age of five. Although Hawk was not one of Michelle's students, his mother learned of Kids-Did-It! online and e-mailed his artwork for consideration. (The Abrams occasionally accept art created outside of Michelle's classroom that match the character of the collection.) Hawk's work of art became part of the portfolio the Abrams exhibited at SURTEX 2002 in New York City. That spring, when SURTEX management invited its exhibitors to submit designs for possible reproduction by greeting card publisher Avanti Press, Inc., the Abrams submitted Robert's heart. It was one of eight selected out of hundreds of submissions. Avanti Press published the eight cards as a collection to benefit NYC's relief and recovery after September 11.

As Picasso once said: 'It took me four years to paint like Raphael, and a lifetime to paint like a child.' The Abrams have captured that enthusiasm and inspirational appeal with Kids-Did-It! art. ■

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*The Business of Greeting Cards, Stationery Products and Party Goods*

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