RATIONAL:
Rainbow Café LGBT Youth Center in Carbondale is partnering with community artists to create a group exhibition this spring. The show will feature at least 10 anonymous LGBTQIA+ youth artists as well as 5 community artists A.B. M.A., Whitney Beaver, Jonathan M. Gray Ph.D., Mississippi Sands, and Colin Whitworth M.A.. Over the next several months, these artists will partner with Rainbow Café and hold workshops and demonstrations to help foster the creativity and skills of R.C. youth. The art works created through this process will be published in the next edition of the Rainbow Café Youth Art-Zine THE CLOSET and be featured in a week-long exhibition in the Surplus Gallery that will culminate in a gallery reception/fundraiser that will benefit Rainbow Café. The following pages will detail information about R.C. and its mission, THE CLOSET, the artist partners that will be featured in this exhibition, and a copy of the first edition of THE CLOSET that offers samples of our youth artists and their bios.

RAINBOW CAFE:
At Rainbow Café, our mission is to provide a safe and welcoming environment for youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans/gender expansive, queer, intersex, asexual, or questioning their orientation and/or gender identity, and their friends, by creating a space in which they are affirmed and offered non-judgmental support and access to personal, community, spiritual, and health resources. Every week Rainbow Café serves between 30-40 youth LGBTQIA+ from the Southern Illinois Region.

THE CLOSET:
Recently, Rainbow Café has been expanding its arts programming to create space for LGBTQ youth to express themselves in a variety of forms. THE CLOSET is Rainbow Café’s youth art-zine that features original drawings, comics, paintings, poetry, digital art, and music created by our youth. This publication is an extension of Rainbow Café’s queer creative space in print/digital form. It celebrates the creativity of our youth and their expressions of voice, identity, and aesthetics.
was born Ashley Beard, in Los Angeles, CA with art supplies in both hands. Her mother is a glass artist, her grandmother a painter, her father and grandfather are printers, and they taught her the fundamentals of her artistic practice and to never fear new materials. Since she was small child, she was obsessed with drawing cartoons, she has signed her artwork with the moniker A.B. which she now uses as her name. A “Jill of all Trades” she uses collage, installation, live performance, graphic design, poetry, photography, and anything else she can get her hands on. Her goal is to try to make performance/art that makes that world a little better, safer for people who are different, and hopefully a bit more creative. Currently, A.B. is an award-winning Ph.D. Candidate in performance studies at SIUC, writing her dissertation on the aesthetic possibilities of performative writing. A.B. will share her textual portraiture with the youth at R.C. teaching them to blend photography and language in graphic form.
ARTIST PARTNERS:

WHITNEY BEAVER

is a self-taught Carbondale artist whose drawings, paintings, and mixed-media collages have been a part of the Southern Illinois art scene for the last several years. For Whitney, art-making is an extension of her meditative practice and her way to reflect on the relationship between personal and creative discovery. Whitney began painting in 2014. Drawn to wood and acrylic, her early work features graphic line work and geometric shapes. Recently, her work has taken a more sculptural turn incorporating wood cut outs to lend a more three-dimensional effect to her paintings. Whitney’s work has exhibited recently at the Salon Euphoria, Thai Taste, Love at the Glove, Hair Brains Salon, Scratch Brewery, Plaza Records, Cristaudo’s, the Mitchell Museum at the Cedarhurst Center for the Arts, and she was the first place winner of the 9th Annual Critical Forum juried exhibit in the Morris Library at S.I.U. Whitney will share her artistic process with they youth teaching them to sketch and paint abstract shapes and designs as a form of personal expression.
is an Associate Professor of Communication Studies at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. He currently holds the William and Galia Minor Professorship in Creative Communication. He received his B.A. from the University of North Carolina in Speech Communication and Dramatic Arts (1987), his M.A. from the University of North Carolina in Speech Communication (1990) and his Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in Speech Communication (1999). Dr. Gray's interests include activist rhetoric and protests, nature writing and performative writing, and cultural criticism. Dr. Gray has been recognized for his work in the field on many occasions, including one of four top papers in Environmental Communication at the 2002 National Communication Association conference. He has had featured performances such as “Trail Mix: A sojourn on the Muddy Divide Between Nature and Culture” and “Cross Walking” presented at numerous professional conferences and festivals. Dr. Gray has also had various publications in professional journals, most recently Rhetoric and Society Quarterly in 2017. He will be sharing his digital art-making skills with R.C. youth.
MISSISSIPPI is a Minnesota native who has been painting, stitching, sculpting, and constructing since she was old enough to steal her mother’s scissors. They have lived, worked and played in the arts community in Paducah for the past several years until they recently relocated to the Carbondale area. Mississippi’s work spans several media including: metal work, stenciling, painting, ceramics, music, fibers and more. Much of this work features powerful women, bright colors, and celestial iconography that connects the personal to the political and the local to the global. Currently, Mississippi is an undergraduate student, majoring in Spanish, at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. They will be teaching the youth stencil making techniques and how to do acrylic pour paintings this spring.
COLIN WHITWORTH:
is an artist-scholar living in Carbondale, IL where he is pursuing his Ph.D. in Communication Studies with an emphasis in Performance Studies at SIU. He pursues art through many mediums—mostly performative—while asking questions about queer identities. Pieces from his solo show, ‘Bless Our Hearts: An Oral History of the Queer South’ have toured to the Petit Jean Performance Festival, Southern States Communication Association’s Conference, the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, and will soon appear at the National Communication Association’s conference. In addition to the intersections of Southern and Queer identity, Colin is also interested in the relationships of gender, sexuality, and drag performance. Drag is a reoccurring theme in his performances, publications, and visual art, appearing in several recent art exhibitions in the Carbondale area. Colin will share his skills as a queer writer, illustrator, and drag performer with the youth at R.C.