

A person is painting a mural on a wall. The mural features large, stylized green letters 'SKO' and a character with a mechanical arm. The person is wearing a white shirt and is holding a paintbrush. The background is a dark, textured wall.

SKO SANDLER

Senior Ivan Sandler's strong dedication, creativity and passion for art is evident in his murals, character art and published portfolio.



At five years old, senior Ivan Sandler picked up a pencil, sparking a love for art that would evolve into a dedicated passion for various mediums of art. Since then, Sandler knew he wanted to pursue a career where his love for art could thrive.

"Honestly, I couldn't tell you why I started," Sandler said. "I remember from a really young age that it was an interest of mine. I was around five when I first got a set of colored pencils, and I would always draw during school, at home, everywhere."

What began as a simple sketch blossomed into a dynamic, multifaceted and artistic journey; while some of Sandler's pieces are bold, vibrant and meant to grab attention, others offer a more personal glimpse into his thoughts and identity. However, some pieces serve different purposes for Sandler.

"I definitely have pieces that talk about myself or communicate my identity," Sandler said. "But I wouldn't say every piece is a commentary on myself. ... Sometimes I just draw to draw, and sometimes there's little meaning [or] sometimes there's a lot."

While Sandler's artwork may seem simple to some, those closest to Sandler have witnessed his artistic journey unfold from the very beginning. Tatiana Sandler, Sandler's mother, watched

with pride as her son's artistic abilities grew over the years.

"As a mom, I'm very proud of his artistic prowess [and] his talent," Tatiana Sandler said. "It's nice to observe it, [and] to be part of it. We've tried to support him throughout the years, and we're blessed to be able to do that."

Today, Sandler showcases his evolving portfolio on his website, ivansandler.com, where his work spans from digital illustration and 3D modeling to street art and character design. One of Sandler's favorite styles featured prominently in his sketchbook is his signature character art.

"I'd say the style similar to my mural is my favorite," Sandler said. "Those characters are quick to create, and I feel

like I can accomplish a lot in a short amount of time, which is really nice. I tend to draw those characters when I'm uninspired or unsure what to draw because it comes naturally to me."

This signature character art is a key element of Sandler's new mural project at Palo Alto High School, where he uses the style

to bring his vibrant characters to life in a larger-than-life form. Sandler's mural reads 'SKO VIKES' in a bold green, representing the school colors, located near the science building.

"I thought its central location would attract a lot of foot traffic, and it could help encourage a sense of community, which is sometimes lacking at our school," Sandler said.

Within the mural, Sandler aimed to capture not just school spirit, but also a sense of unity.

"My mural is meant to show four students collaborating to create the artwork," Sandler said. "I chose this design because that area has been associated with the float building over the years, and my design reminded me of it."

Sandler's journey to creating the mural was not without its challenges: While his vision for the project was clear, gaining approval for it proved to be a lengthy process. Initially, he faced rejection from both the city and school district, but his persistence and positive feedback on his early work by

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Brent Kline [Palo Alto High's principal] ultimately led to the creation of the mural.

"When I first had the idea for the mural, I contacted Palo Alto's public art account, but they denied me because I was not 18," Sandler said. "Then, I approached Mr. Kline, who initially turned me down and suggested I create banners instead. After completing the banners and receiving positive feedback, he gave me approval to move forward with the mural." Despite the initial setbacks, Sandler's journey was supported by those around him. His friends and teachers stood by him, offering encouragement and guidance throughout the process.

Rahul Shetty, a senior at Palo Alto High School who assisted Sandler with his mural project, saw Sandler's dedication firsthand.

"Ivan's been trying to get this mural up with Mr. Kline for about two years," Shetty said. "Ivan was very consistent, and eventually, it happened for him."

Shetty believes the mural reflects the strength of the community by visually connecting people through shared experiences and emotions, highlighting the unity and collaboration that define the school's spirit.

"The mural itself

took about three, four weeks, and multiple people contributed to it," Shetty said. "Just that alone built a small community. So many people came up and complimented it. All credit to Ivan, definitely."

As the project progressed, it was clear it would become a collective effort from Sandler's community.

"Ivan has had a lot of support, not just from us [Sandler's parents], but from his teachers and his friends, who always encouraged his creativity,"

Tatiana Sandler said.

"He wasn't alone working on

it. He always had someone with him, and that's another important aspect of art — it brings people together."

Another key figure in Sandler's journey is Tracey Atkinson, a Visual Arts teacher at Palo Alto High School who has guided him throughout his high school years.

Over this time, Atkinson has witnessed Sandler not only refine his creative skills but also

evolve into an artist with a unique style and a deep passion for his work.

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Ivan Sandler, 12

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**Tracey Atkinson,
Visual Arts Teacher**

"This year, he was really interested in doing more experimental work," Atkinson said. "I began to see what direction he wants to go into, and more of what his style is — bold, cartoon-like characters with expressive features that blend street art energy with digital techniques."

As Sandler continues to create new artwork, Atkinson is looking forward to seeing what he accomplishes beyond high school using the elements he creates and improves upon.

"He's going to do well in the future, and I'm really excited to continue to see Ivan's work," Atkinson said.

After graduating from Paly, Sandler plans to attend Northeastern University and will major in physics and design. While he is unsure exactly what role art will play in his future, he knows that he wants to continue his passion either as a hobby or a career.

"It's always been a dream of mine to be a creative director or someone

who can run marketing for companies, push new products and

be the creative behind all that because it definitely plays a role in all of the marketing that you see," Sandler said.

Reflecting on his journey, Sandler feels grateful for the role art has played in shaping who he is today — a source

of creativity, resilience and self-expression that he will carry with him into whatever path he chooses.

Sandler's biggest piece of advice to someone looking to pursue a new interest is to give in to the desire to try something new because it could turn into a passion.

"I don't know if I'd be drawing today if I didn't find that interest when I was young, so I'd say just start," Sandler said. "Give it a shot. A lot of the time, trying is all it takes to get hooked on something."

Text and design by KAITLYN GONZALEZ-ARCEO, LILY JEFFERY AND DISHA MANAYILAKATH • Art by KAITLYN GONZALEZ-ARCEO, LILY JEFFERY, DISHA MANAYILAKATH AND IVAN SANDLER • Photo courtesy of GABE BOUDTCHENKO

