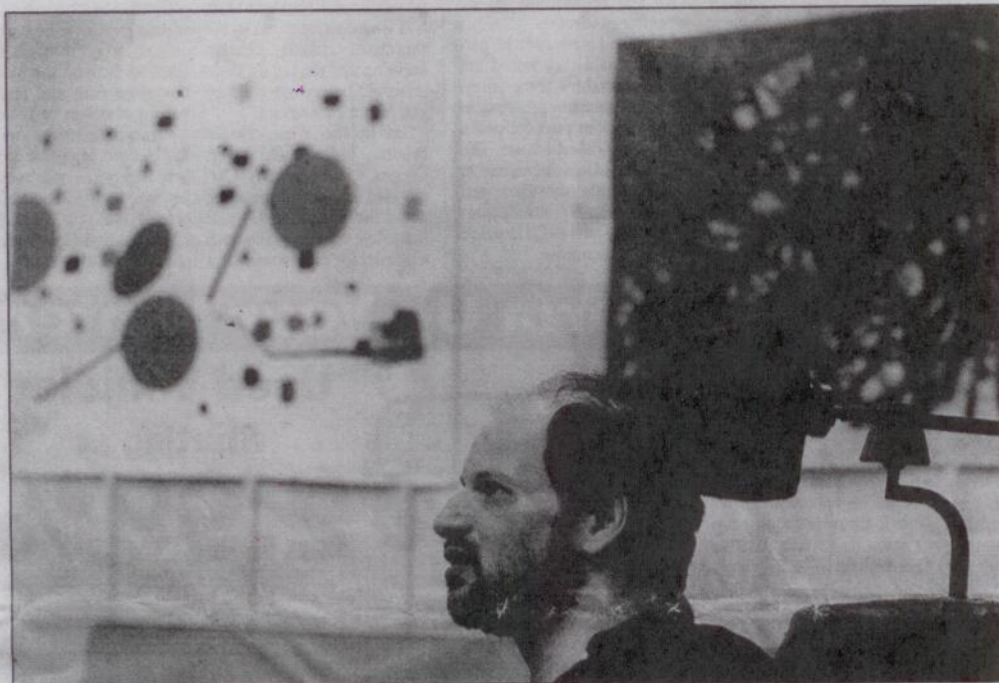


An artist in all of us



Photos by Stephanie Zolishan / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Myles Tosk sits in front of his paintings Tuesday in a gallery show at the Lee Library of works of art created by artists with disabilities. Tosk said he hoped one of his two abstract pieces on display 'helped people out.'

Setting creative minds free

By Adam Poulisse
 Berkshire Eagle Staff



Cathy Crofut sits in front of her painting of geometric shapes during the gallery show. Crofut's work was one of 33 on display.

David Gardner can hardly speak on his own, but his artwork says plenty.

Gardner, who uses a wheelchair and has limited physical mobility, worked with an able-bodied artist to paint, exactly, whatever Gardner asked.

The final product: A car made of basic geometric shapes, with splashes of paint dribbled around the cloth canvas.

"He likes drawing cars," said Ebenezer Yankey, Gardner's caregiver. "Last year he drew a police car that sold for quite a bit."

Gardner's work is just one of 33 hanging in the gallery of the Lee Library through the end of the month. The exhibit, hosted by Community Access to the Arts (CATA), showcases work from artists with physical disabilities. It was made possible by a \$200 grant from the Lee Cultural Council.

A reception was held for the artists and their work Tuesday. Many of them

were there, and almost all of them were in wheelchairs.

The theme of the artwork is "Vital Signs," and "everybody here has a different interpretation of what vital signs are," said Sandy Newman, the founder and executive director of CATA.

Artists who don't have the physical capability to paint on their own use an approach called Artistic Realization Technologies, or A.R.T. A trained artist, or "tracker," does exactly as the disabled artist tells them — they paint exactly what the artist wants, where they want it on the canvas, and in whatever color the artist wants.

"The tracker acts as the artist's hands," Newman said.

An entire wall of the gallery is comprised of paintings that utilized A.R.T.

"It's a project to make it happen," said CATA development and marketing director Liana Toscanini, "but once you get used to it, you start making amazing pieces."



Stephanie Zolishan / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Cathy Marden stands in front of her painting of flowers, lower right, in a gallery show at the Lee Library of works of art created by artists with disabilities.

Disabled artists show works

ARTISTS from A1

Carol Neuhaus, one of the A.R.T. artists, gave props to CATA and its teachers for showing her how to pursue art despite her physical limitations.

She took pride in her work on display: A canvas painted blue, peppered with different-colored stars.

"When I first started, I didn't think I could do it," Neuhaus said. "If you put your effort into it, you never know what's going to come out of the painting until it's dry."

Myles Tosk, another one of the artists in a wheelchair, was a man of few words, but said he hoped one of his two abstract pieces on display "helped people out." He said he wasn't sure how, though.

"It makes me feel joyful when I look at it," Newman told Tosk while surveying the A.R.T. work.

The other walls showcased art by those with physical disabilities, but who have the ability to draw or paint them-

selves. Jewelry and stationery featuring some CATA artwork were also available.

The pieces were hung in the library's gallery at the beginning of the month, but the reception was held off so people could settle back into the Berkshires after the holidays.

"We haven't done anything in Lee for a while," said Jeff Gagnon, the program and marketing associate for CATA. "The more eyes on [the artwork], the better."

At least one of the pieces sold by the end of the reception.

For 20 years, CATA has provided access to creative visual and performance arts to Berkshire residents with physical disabilities.

"Everybody can be an artist, and that's what the message is here," Newman said.

"Everyone involved with [the program] is an artist in their own right."

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ARTISTS, continued on A3