

Framingham Library hosts Advocates artists with extraordinary talents



Photos by Kathleen Culler/Daily News correspondent

Framingham resident Bruce Harrington shows his work, "The Chinese Cat Seek to Fish in Bowls," at the exhibit sponsored by Advocates, Inc. on Wednesday, May 13, at the Framingham Public Library.

Framingham, it has more than 100 residential homes and facilities in 80 communities.

The Advocates 10th annual Art Exhibit features a wide assortment of paintings, drawings, photographs and a film that reveal the joys of creativity and self-expression.

Sarah Calderon employs bold, thickly layered colors to paint portraits of Jesus, Mary and the angel Gabriel. Outpatient Clinician Jane Orenstein uses delicate watercolors to capture the serenity of a quiet woodland scene. And Cindy Wheaton, who's painted since she was 4, paints curious, masque-like faces that appear more friendly than frightening.

The exhibit was organized by Advocates staff in partnership with library personnel and Alexis Silver, the town's human services coordinator in conjunction with Mental Health Awareness Month. The exhibit runs through the end of the month.

Exhibiting his art for the first time, Dowe said, "I just like to draw.

"It makes me feel happy and relaxed," said the 34-year-old resident of Natick Village. "I'm proud to be in my first show."

Exhibited in the Costin Room through the end of the month, it features about 60 different works made by Advocates residents and staff and will run through the end of the month. The majority of artists on display are clients.

By Chris Bergeron/DAILY NEWS STAFF
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FRAMINGHAM — From his wheelchair, George Russo grips a brush in his strong left hand and paints vivid landscapes where the sun always shines. Deaf since childhood, Bruce Harrington draws just about everything from Hollywood stars to raccoons in the moonlight. Using art to overcome obstacles, Kevin Dowe relaxes by painting Halle Berry's portrait.

They are just some of the 22 people receiving services from Advocates Inc. who are showing artworks in an exhibit at the Framingham Library.

Based in Framingham, Advocates provides treatment and varied services to more than 10,000 people with mental health and developmental disabilities. Headquartered in



Natick resident Kevin Dowe shows his art work at the exhibit.

Struck by a car at age 2, Russo suffered a traumatic brain injury that severely limits his mobility, use of one arm and speech. He's enjoyed art most of his life and taught himself to paint by watching art teachers Bill Alexander and Bob Ross on television.

Speaking slowly, he said, "I like to paint landscapes, seascapes and all the details of a mountain with oils or acrylics. I like to paint sunshine in the water. I like to paint grass, barns and animals like horses, cows and chickens."

Living in a residential home in North Reading, he plays drums, exercises with a rubber cable and is teaching himself ventriloquism with a glove puppet he has named Fred.

For this show, Russo, 41, is exhibiting an oil painting, "The Artist & His Paintings," a montage of six richly colored scenes including several luminous landscapes with the immediacy of folk art. In the right foreground, he's painted himself painting at his easel with just one hand.

"Painting makes me feel good inside. I use colors to express my emotions. That's a good feeling."

What they might lack in formal style or training, these artists more than compensate in originality and distinctive self-expression.

Advocates president and CEO William Taylor said, "This exhibit really brings home that people with disabilities have a wide range of talents and skills to offer other communities, art being one perhaps not so expected," he said.

Taylor said this year's exhibit is being held in the library to "reflect in another way the value of people with disabilities."

"I think one part of our mission is to help folks in the community understand people receiving our services are also contributing members of society," he said. "It's clear art has a benefit. We're trying to show people with disabilities can communicate in a variety of ways."

That might describe Harrington who began drawing at 6 and "doesn't plan to ever stop."

Speaking through an American Sign Language interpreter, he said, "I've always expressed myself artistically.

"I like art very much and feel a need to draw. My whole life I liked creating pictures," said the 44-year-old Framingham resident who is studying Criminal Justice and hopes to work for the FBI.

Harrington is showing seven varied works ranging in subject matter and style.

A drawing titled "Comedy Stars of Hollywood" contains neat caricatures of Marilyn Monroe, Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin and many other familiar faces. He's exhibiting a detailed portrait of President John Kennedy and a whimsical drawing of a cat preparing to grab fish out of a bowl.

Based on Norman Rockwell's famous "Triple Self-Portrait," Harrington's most striking drawing depicts himself, looking at his reflection in a mirror and painting what he sees on his canvas.

Asked how he hoped viewers regarded his art, Harrington answered through the interpreter, "I hoped they'd be impressed by the beauty and positiveness I tried to portray."

Shortly after the exhibit opened in early May, Framingham resident Grace Fogarty screened a documentary she'd made about her battle with depression.



George Russo, of North Reading, shows his painting at the exhibit sponsored by Advocates, Inc. on Wednesday, May 13, at the Framingham Public Library.

A Framingham resident who graduated from UMass-Amherst, she credited treatment from Advocates with helping her recover from debilitating depression resulting from family and personal crises.

Fogarty described her 19-minute digital video, "History of a Girl," as "my personal story about recovery."

"I wanted to make this because I was very concerned about messages from the community I'd heard about people receiving treatment from Advocates. I wanted to tell my own story as a community member and person who'd received those very services," she said.

Now working for Advocates as a peer specialist, the 29-year-old Fogarty expressed hope her film "explains in a human way" that people receiving treatment for different disabilities "aren't bad people."

Fogarty said the exhibit and her film share similar messages.

"I think if people look into the artwork (in the library) they'll see the people behind it," she said. "They'll see some amazing souls and not just people with mental and physical needs."

To see Fogarty's video, visit <http://vimeo.com>.