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Therapeutic art on display at hotel

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Faces, plants, fruits and naked figures line the walls of The Heldrich Hotel's new public gallery, which showcases various painting styles from different artists.

The exhibition held on the second floor of The Heldrich, is by Arts Unbound, a non-profit organization that provides artistic opportunities for individuals from age 10 to adulthood with physical and mental disabilities.

"[Art is therapy] because it's not a part of everyday life," said Kathleen Heron, an Arts Unbound teacher and professional artist. "You can lose yourself in it. You get taken to a different level of thinking. Beyond everyday life."

Professional artists take part in Arts Unbound to teach disabled students various artistic forms that range from painting, assemblage and graphic design.

Nicolena Peteralumbo, an Arts Unbound student, said she used to paint when she was younger but only began again when she became sick with Multiple Sclerosis, a disease that affects the central nervous system.

"I'm having a hard time walking. It hasn't stopped me from being able to paint," she said.

Peteralumbo said her emotions are expressed through her art but she tries to reflect positive emotions in her artwork.

"I try not to focus [on dark things]. [People ask] what were you thinking? After I finish I can't remember. It goes that deep," she said. "You can tell my state by looking at my paintings."

Mary Drylewicz, also an Arts Unbound student, did not have any prior experience with art. But she said she began to explore it after she had a stroke. She said she also tries to paint uplifting images, even when she is depressed.

Justin Canha, an 18-year-old with autism, also finds painting a calming exercise. Justin's mother, Maria Canha, said it is typically difficult to communicate with her son.

"[Justin] is very autistic. His contact with people is limited and on his terms. He freaks out easily and has outbursts. Drawing calms him down. If Justin was here he would be in the corner drawing," she said.

Canha is now represented by the Rico Maresca Gallery in New York City and has sold paintings for over \$4,000.

Arts Unbound students who sell their paintings through the organization's exhibitions receive 50 percent of their earnings with the other 50 given to Arts Unbound itself. This gives students another incentive

for creating more art.

"It's both [the money and the art]. It's nice to sell something. But I like doing it for myself," Peteralumbo admitted.

Cecili Buck, a New Brunswick resident, did not know much about the exhibition before arriving at the Heldrich.

"I did not know what my expectations were," she said. "I just knew I'd be seeing pretty good art. And I think it is very good."

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