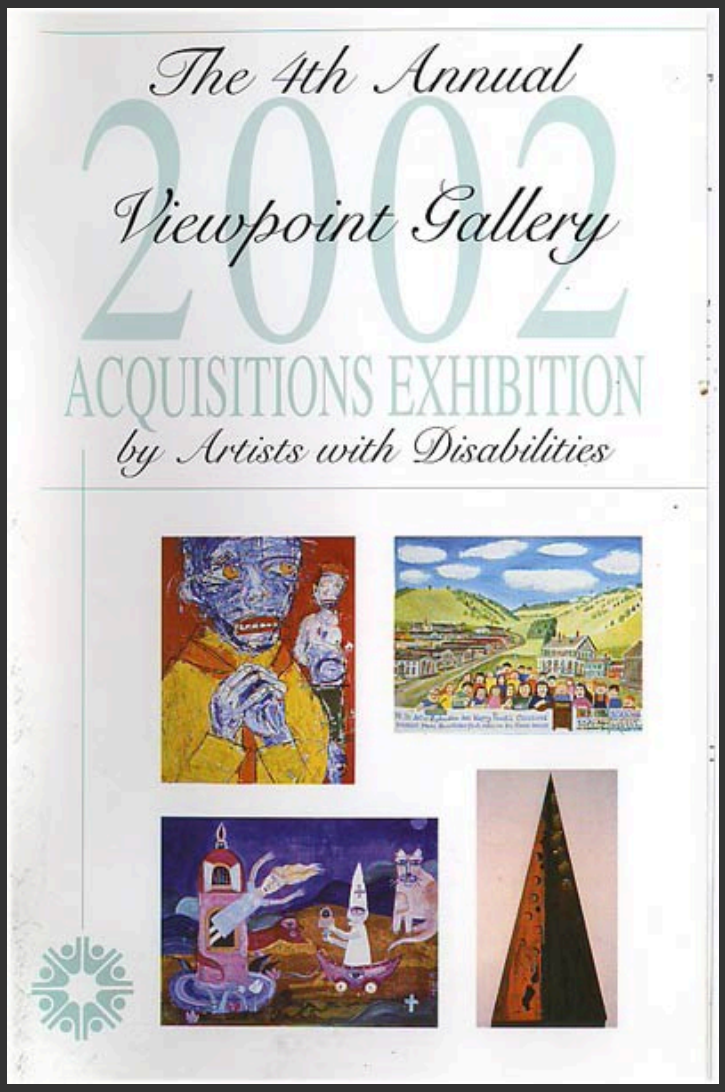
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Sesow wins "Best in Show"

Schenectady, NY
May 2002

Event program:



Awards...

Key Bank 2002 Best of Show Award

Juror's Choice

Matt Sesow

The artist presents us with works of formidable figures that emerge from the depths of a thick painterly ground. The invigorated surface Mr. Sesow sweeps and churns across the canvas take us through the passages and color-soaked highlights of his three painted canvases. Sesow's ***"Before and After"*** confronts physically challenging situations with unflinching directness that is both fresh and honest. Pulling back his brush, Sesow gently pushes forth with unspoken anguish that grows with warmth and compassion. There is vigor and soulfulness in his work that speaks of a passionate embrace of life's struggle.

– Sharon Bates, 2002

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Sunnyview shows art by people with disabilities

By KATHY RICKETTS
Gazette Reporter

SCHENECTADY — Sue Gersten picked up her first camera when she was 4 years old.

Nearly six decades later — despite living with chronic pain and spending several years in a wheelchair because of severe rheumatoid arthritis — Gersten is an accomplished professional photographer.

"What it did was make me more self-confident, more self-assured and more determined that life would be as close to normal as possible," said Gersten, 62.

Her photograph of two sunflowers, titled "Buddies," will be included in the "Fourth Annual Acquisitions Exhibition by Artists With Disabilities." A gala fund-raising event will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday at Sunnyview Hospital. Admission is $75.

The exhibition contains more than 70 pieces in such media as oil and watercolor paintings, sculpture, photography, mixed media, sketches and lithographs. More than 400 works were submitted for consideration.

Other Capital Region artists whose works were selected are Virginia Cantarella of Greenville and Tom McGarithy of Latham.

Matt Sesow of Washington, D.C., took best of show honors while Allison Merriweather of Pearland, Texas, and Gaylene Aiken of Hardwick, Vt., were designated as "jurors' choices."

Jurors were Sharon Bates, curator and director of the art gallery at the Albany International Airport; Amy Williams, director of educational programs at the Arts Center of the Capital Region in Troy; and Jim Richard Wilson, director of the Rathbone Gallery at the Sages Colleges in Albany and Troy.

Hockenberry to speak

Award-winning journalist John Hockenberry will be the keynote speaker. Hockenberry was paralyzed by a spinal cord injury when he was 19.

A correspondent for "Dateline NBC," Hockenberry is a two-time Peabody Award winner, one of the highest honors in journalism. He is also a member of the board of directors of VSA (Very Special Arts), a national organization for people with disabilities that encourages artistic expression.



MARC SCHULTZ *Gazette Photographer*

Ruth Daly, curator of the "Fourth Annual Acquisitions Exhibition by Artists With Disabilities" at Sunnyview Hospital, arranges the paintings of Matt Sesow of Washington, D.C. The center work, titled "Before and After," was named Best in Show by the judges.

Gersten, who gets around with a walker, worked as a third-grade teacher at the Arbor Hill Elementary School in Albany for 22 years. When she retired five years ago, she opened a business selling her photography. She has her own Web site called www.suegersten.com and has displayed her art in several shows.

An avid traveler who has visited 22 countries, Gersten co-authored "Traveling Like Everybody Else," an award-winning guide for disabled travelers, in 1987.

"It's just so important that people with disabilities try to get out there and see the world," said Gersten. "It's taken a long time for this country to make things accessible."

A member of the Schenectady Photographic Society, Gersten said she particularly enjoys taking photographs of her travels.

"People's faces are my favorites," she said. "It's kind of like after a wedding — you don't have anything but the photographs and the memories."

Gersten's close-up photograph of two sunflowers was taken last summer at a friend's home at Burden Lake. She titled it "Buddies" because the flowers appear to be connected.

"I follow the grain or the shape and look for something in or about the flower that people wouldn't automatically notice," she explained.

Gersten said Sunnyview should be commended for encouraging artists with disabilities. "I think self-esteem is probably the most important thing we can have," she said. "If this show in any way helps give someone the feeling that they can do it, you can't ask for anything better."

Another local artist, Tom McGarithy of Latham, had taken a few lessons to learn the basic fundamentals of painting before he sustained a traumatic brain injury in a trucking accident on Nov. 15, 1984.

McGarithy, who was in a coma for two months, spent several months at Sunnyview, where he had to relearn how to walk, talk and dress himself.

McGarithy's oil painting, "Seasonal Progression," which he painted last September, depicts a mountain scene in the summer and in the winter. McGarithy sprinkled glitter in white paint to create snow for the winter scene.

"I feel very privileged to be included in this exhibition," said McGarithy, who volunteers at the hospital four days a week.

More artworks

A few of the other pieces that stand out include:

- A needlepoint tapestry called "Living with Art in the 20th Century: Tribute to Max Beckman and American Jazz Artists," by Gayle Nord Harrison of Surprise, Arizona, selected for the cover of the Sunnyview exhibition invitation.
- A grinning, whimsical, polka-dotted, black-sneakered alligator done by Allison Merriweather of Perland, Texas.
- A painting by Laura Ferguson of New York City done in pencils titled "Crouching Figure," depicting the artist's deteriorating physical condition because of scoliosis — a curvature of the spine.

Creative expression

Ruth Hall Daly, curator of the ViewPoint Gallery, said the mission of the gallery is to serve as a catalyst in efforts to develop ways of incorporating creative expression and all its benefits into the fabric of Sunnyview Hospital and the community it serves.

"Whether a work of art is executed by an artist whose method is to clench a paintbrush between his teeth or shoot a camera from a wheelchair, it is obvious when viewing the exhibition and collection that the substance of creative intent is not diminished by disability," Daly said.

Following Thursday's gala opening, the exhibition will be open for two weeks in the hospital's conference rooms, on the first floor near the main lobby. Ticket information to the gala is available by contacting Ruth Hall Daly at 386-3520 or Wanda Fischer at 382-4503.

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