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Local artist exhibits in Charleston

Disabled Mountainview Elementary fifth-grader displays nine paintings



Submitted Photo

Nine paintings by Tucker Lewis, a 10-year-old Morgantown resident with cerebral palsy, were displayed this week at the Charleston Civic Center. Tucker, who can't physically hold a paint brush, paints using the Artistic Realization Technologies method.

BY JENNIFER SCOTT

The Dominion Post

Ten-year-old Tucker Lewis communicates with his eyes.

He looks up for yes and shakes his head slightly for no. And while he can't physically paint, he can guide a person, called a "tracker," with his eyes, creating his own works of art without ever lifting a brush.

Tucker has cerebral palsy and has limited mobility and communication skills, but that doesn't stop him from expressing himself through painting.

This week he exhibited nine paintings at the Charleston Civic Center during a PATHS Assistive Technology conference. The exhibit focused on artists with disabilities.

Tucker paints on canvas using acrylic paints. His style is abstract, consisting mostly of geometric designs with a little funk, said his mother, Debi Lewis.

When asked if he wants to paint, Tucker answers with his eyes. He also uses eye gaze to choose the color, shape, location and texture of his paintings, and has a preference for triangles.

He first chooses the length and width of the canvas, then chooses the background color, then whether he wants to start with a line, shape or something more abstract.

If he chooses a line, for example, he would then pick the points for where it would begin and end and the thickness he wants it to be painted. The "tracker" applies the paint the way that Tucker indicates.

"He's always liked the creative arts," Debi Lewis said. "I think it has a lot to do with controlling your environment. Everything in his life is controlled by others."

In the past, Debi Lewis used hand-over-hand assistance to help Tucker with collages and other art projects. It was only recently that she became aware of the Artistic Realization Technologies method, which enables artists with disabilities to make their creations a reality without so much hands-on assistance.

Tucker really took to the method and enjoyed it, Lewis said, and so for his 10th birthday, they converted some space into an art studio for him to work in.

He completed his first two art pieces at a conference in Canaan in April, and has completed seven more since. As an extra bonus, Tucker attended a reception during his exhibit in Charleston to display his work in person.

"He was eating it up. He had a ball," Lewis said. "They would see the painting first, then they would look around for the artist and say, 'who painted them?' And I would say, 'Tucker.'"

It was nice to have his work judged based solely on its merit.

"Just to have somebody appreciate the work before they even see the disability is huge," Lewis said.

Fifteen artists exhibited their work, although Tucker was the only one using the ART method to paint.

They put out a sheet for people to bid on the artwork, and had a bid for \$100 on one piece by Wednesday. But Tucker doesn't mind sharing or selling his pieces.

"He doesn't want to hoard them," Lewis said. "It seems to me that he wants to paint them with the intent of getting them out into the world."

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